



**EQUALITY OUTCOMES 2021 – 2025
(PROGRESS REPORT)**

April 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

In developing the equality outcomes for 2021 – 2025, the University took a revised approach to the outcomes, in line with best practice provided by the Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The EHRC, recommends that an institution has no more than 4 – 8 equality outcomes, covering both students and staff, and that these outcomes should be evidence-based, measurable, and achievable within a four-year period. As a result, in April 2021 the University reviewed the format and developed seven new SMART equality outcomes with clear actions and measurable metrics as follows:

1. Improved retention rates for those more likely to withdraw;
2. Increased achievement of Good Honours for students with characteristics with achievement below that of the University average;
3. Increase in the overall satisfaction of students with characteristics who have a satisfaction rate below that of the University average;
4. Increase the proportion of male students who take up a place at the University;
5. Greater flexibility for staff, creating opportunity and maintaining an inclusive working environment;
6. Increased and more purposeful engagement with staff across all equality strands;
7. The number of applications from candidates for senior positions reflect the demographics of the University.

The first four outcomes are focused on students and the student experience while the last three outcomes are focused on improving staff diversity and inclusion experience. The equality outcomes relevant to students have been based on evidence identified through the University's annual equality monitoring process, undertaken as part of annual institutional appraisal and the equality outcomes related to staff were developed based on monitoring staff equality data. The outcomes were then shared with the University's Equality and Diversity Sub-Committee (EDSC) and the Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF) with members of both groups subsequently providing input on the development of a SMART action plan.

The progress of these equality outcomes is continuously monitored and measured with a SMART action plan on an ongoing basis by the EDI Adviser and regular reports updated to the EDSC and EDF as standing agenda item. The equality outcomes action plan would be revisited in the academic year 2023/24 to consider the newly published EHRC & SFC National Equality Outcomes guidance. This report therefore provides an overview of actions and activities the University has undertaken towards achieving each of the seven equality outcomes and the progress made in achieving these since setting the outcomes in 2021.

2. EQUALITY OUTCOMES 2021 – 2025 PROGRESS

2.1 Improved retention rates for those more likely to withdraw

Embedded in the core of the refreshed University strategy is the commitment to provide students with support to excel and succeed that will enable them to thrive and graduate with a positive outcome through the creation of a vibrant and inclusive environment.

As part of its annual appraisal, the University undertakes equality monitoring each year of the student population at an institutional level by the following protected characteristics; age, disability and

detailed disability (where possible), ethnicity, gender identity, religious belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Student achievement rates are then analysed by the protected characteristics.

For the purposes of monitoring retention by protected characteristics, the University uses a measure from its Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) which provides data on the proportion of full-time, first year Scottish-domiciled undergraduate entrants.

The University measures withdrawal from courses as an internal measure for continuation. With this measure, the University is proud that over the past two years, the retention rate for GEM students remains above the University average while the retention rates for female undergraduates continue to remain very high.

Data analysed in 2021, through the University's annual student equality monitoring exercise found several trends for certain groups of students with higher withdrawal rates above the University average. The category of student groups identified to have higher withdrawal rates than the University average includes male students, mature students, and students with a declared disability.

The University has taken proactive steps to improve the student experience through active engagements with students with lived experiences in the past two years. Tracked performance against the student equality outcomes in 2022 revealed improvement in the withdrawals proportion for male students and mature students above the University average. Withdrawal proportion for students with declared disability remains just below the average.

Key actions taken over the past two years to progress on and achieve this equality outcome include the below. It is worthy to note that this is an ongoing area of work and as such the University continues to carry out further work with the aim to ensure that the retention rates are fully improved for the category of students identified by 2025:

2.1.1. Success Programme Support

The University has increased its support to all students through the success programme offered through study skills. This service has been crucial to supporting students and providing targeted support to students registered through the inclusion service, students with MD20 and care experienced backgrounds and all articulating students. The specially developed success programme support provides information and support through regular sessions that support students through academic transition to University. Students registered with the inclusion service have received targeted correspondence with information about the Study Skills service and the availability of weekly self-bookable appointments.

2.1.2. Promoting retention and success through inclusive practice:

The University has scoped and developed targeted support for male students through the 2021 Enhancement Theme project focused on promoting retention and success through inclusive practice. Through this project, focus groups with male students have been conducted and meaningful recommendations presented to the EDSC and are presently being implemented through University departments.

2.1.3. Academic and Pastoral Support

The Study Skills team provide advice and guidance on academic writing, study skills, maths and statistics, basic IT support, delivering classes and one-to-one appointments. Personal tutor scheme continues to be rolled out across all schools. Additionally, the student union offer advice and support to students through its advice and support office, and student buddy scheme continue to be offered as a part of welcome and induction for new students.

2.1.4. Support for student parents

The University's dedicated page for student parents provides information and signposts to key resources and support available to student parents during their time at University, such as financial assistance during their time at University. This is further to activities that support the use of facilities for breastfeeding thus making our campus more welcoming and inclusive. In addition to this, RGU:Union has launched a support network for student parents and student carers to engage and find community support.

2.1.5. Inclusion and mental health support

The University introduced free student gym membership for RGU SPORT to all enrolled RGU students in order to reduce the financial barrier to sport and physical activity and has continued to do so to encourage students to stay physically active throughout their time at University which in turn will support their physical, social and mental health. The University continues to provide support for students through the Inclusion team. Additionally, the University works in partnership with RGU:Union 'Peer Support' and 'Nightline' student groups to provide additional support for students through mental health first aid training offered to student group members.

2.1.6. Focus Group to better understand the lived experience and barriers to student success

At this mid-way point of the equality outcomes, the University is currently conducting research into the experience of mature students, students with a disability, and male students. The aim of the research is to understand the lived experience and its impact on the student learning experience, to investigate the barriers to student success, and consider what steps the University could take to improve it. The findings that emerge from these focus groups will be used to better understand the experiences of these cohorts of students, and direct meaningful actions taken from student recommendations.

2.2. Increased achievement of good honours for students with characteristics with achievement below that of the University average

The University identifies that in addition to retention, student achievement is an important part of student success. This is measured through 'Good Honours', which accounts for students achieving a classification of a 1st or an upper 2nd of all those who achieved Honours.

Over the period of the last five years, the University identified a trend for students identified in a group of protected characteristics that have achieved good honours at a proportion below the University average. Identifying this as an ongoing inequality informed this specific outcome in 2021.

The University identified through its annual student equality monitoring exercise that the achievement rate for some protected characteristics groups including students with a declared disability, students aged over 21, Black and Asian students, and for male students fall below the University average.

The University has taken proactive steps and key positive actions to support students towards reducing this inequality with key improvements in the 2022 student equality reports showing improvements in Good Honours proportion for students with declared disability, Black students, and male students but a reduction for Asian students although they all remain below the average.

The following key activities have been undertaken in the past two years:

2.2.1. Focus Group to better understand the lived experience and barriers to student success

The University is currently carrying out research focus groups into the experience of Asian students, Black students, mature students, students with a disability, and male students. The aim of the research is to understand the lived experience and its impact on the student learning experience, to investigate the barriers to student success, and consider what steps the University could take to improve it. Once completed, the findings that emerge from the focus groups will shape the next steps in providing targeted support for these cohorts of students using student recommendations.

2.2.2. More effective use of equality and diversity data:

Through the institutional annual appraisal process the University identified key areas for focus in the School Academic Board appraisals, including the relative performance of groups with certain protected characteristics. All School appraised the data at both course and school level and a summary of those reports were presented to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. Following QAEC, institutional actions have now been added to the school actions and enhancement plans. The University monitors the progress of these actions through regular reporting into QAEC.

2.3. Increase in the overall satisfaction of students with characteristics who have a satisfaction rate below that of the University average:

As the University continued to emerge stronger from the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, a commitment to ensuring a high-quality student experience remained vital to the University's mission to transform people and communities while forming this outcome in 2021.

One of our core strategic focus as a University is on creating a vibrant and inclusive environment, to design a broad, relevant, and engaging curriculum, and to provide excellent academic and personal support as proactive steps to enrich the overall student experience.

A continued focus on a student-centred approach to deliver an inclusive and welcoming learning environment is reflected in the continuous achievement of excellent student experience results as evidenced in the NSS. The University measures overall satisfaction through the National Student Survey which provides a split by age, disability, ethnicity and sex. Ethnicity is aggregated in the NSS to: Asian, Black, Other and White.

Following the NSS results, it was identified that the overall satisfaction for some groups of students were below the average and proactive steps are being taken to address inequalities for identified groups which includes those with a disability excluding a specific learning disability, Black students, Asian students, and students with a declared ethnicity of 'other'.

The University has continued to monitor and measure progress of achieving this action through the NSS and SEQ results, course appraisal process, and annual equality monitoring. Continuous monitoring, measuring and key actions towards improving the student experience has contributed to positive improvements of overall satisfaction for the specific protected characteristics groups of students in the NSS and SEQ results. Overall satisfaction for Black and Asian students, and students with declared ethnicity of 'other' has risen but remain below the University average while overall satisfaction for students with a declared disability (excluding a specific learning disability) has risen and exceeds the University average. The University's target is to achieve this outcome by 2025 and

over the last two years continues to improve the student experience and work towards achieving this outcome:

2.3.1. Review of student feedback mechanisms

The University carries out substantial review of student feedback mechanisms. Previous SEQ's have been replaced by 'Student Voice' surveys and the questions included consider the experiences of the diversity of the student population. The University has taken proactive steps to minimise any satisfaction gaps by ensuring that equality, diversity, and inclusion is not only considered with full analysis of protected characteristics during analysis of all feedback surveys but presented to enable a clear view of where experiences may differ and allow points of focus for development areas.

2.3.2. Include Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in annual appraisal report of institutional student feedback mechanisms

The University reports insights from student feedback questionnaires which includes summaries of both respondent and delivery characteristics, and they are considered by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) and complements the detailed breakdown of indicators for protected characteristics. All Insights from student feedback questionnaires present summaries of both respondent and delivery characteristics so they can be viewed and considered across various University committees and working groups. The University continues to enhance the provision of annual institutional monitoring of enrolled student performance by protected characteristic through dedicated analysis.

2.3.3. Working in partnership: bi-annual school dialogue sessions on institutional feedback mechanisms extended to include analysis of equality, diversity, and inclusion

The University continues to embed equality, diversity, and inclusion further across the community to with the aim to improve the overall student experience through student feedback. Dialogue sessions at school level continue to be made available (where requested) with institutional support to gather student feedback with specific consideration for respondent characteristics. The University has clear mechanisms to capture institutional feedback including 'Partnership at RGU' and 'Student Voice' feedback survey mechanisms. Along with a series of student feedback questionnaires, the University works closely with the RGU:Union Student Voice forums, presidents and vice-presidents, school officers, student equality Champions, with a wide and consistent consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion <https://www.rgu.ac.uk/student-representation-and-partnership>

2.3.4. Student representative characteristics are reflective of the University's student communities

The University works in partnership with RGU:Union and regularly monitors the characteristics of its course representatives through the RGU insight workbook, using best practice guidance from the sector. The University aims to improve the diversity of the student representatives to be reflective of its student demographic and have included 'Articulation', 'SIMD', 'Age on Entry', 'Disability', 'Ethnicity', 'Gender' characteristics to its insights workbook to present a clearer picture of the diversity of the representatives.

2.4. Increase the proportion of male students who take up a place at the University.

The University has a long tradition of widening access to higher education with an approach firmly rooted in delivering credible, high-quality interventions which work by inspiring, supporting and enabling people and their families to be confident, and to engage in higher education.

Our commitment to widening access has seen an increasing proportion over the past five years (and year on year) of undergraduate students who declare a disability, who come from BAME communities, and who are over the age of 26. Additionally, over the past five years the University has seen year on year an increasing proportion of students who identify themselves as LGBT+.

A significant portion of the University's activity has been in association with efforts to widen access to individuals from the poorest socio-economic backgrounds, for articulating students, for care-experience and for estranged students, however for the purposes of this report, the focus will be on activity to widen access in relation to the protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

In 2021, the University completed an internal review of widening access definitions with the aim to provide support across a greater range of characteristics, more in line with the provision that the University has for those groups listed above.

The University is proud of its progress in widening access to individuals with protected characteristics but recognises that this remains an ongoing issue, particularly in relation to addressing racism in our society and to break down gender stereotypes and imbalances. In recognition of the ongoing participation gap between male and female undergraduates and the need to address it, the University developed this specific equality outcome for 2021 – 2025 to address this.

Over the past two years, the University has undertaken the key steps towards breaking barriers and although the applications and offer rates between male and female undergraduates have improved close to being gender balanced, the University is committed to continuous improvements until the end of the current outcomes:

2.4.1. Work with primary and secondary schools within the region to challenge gender stereotyping in curriculum choices

The University has proactively engaged in a variety of school and community outreach initiatives which seek to breakdown gender stereotypes and to promote higher education study opportunities to the widest possible audience. A range of Science, Technology, Engineering and Computing subject-related outreach initiatives are delivered across the academic year in regional partner primary and secondary schools. Additionally, similar engagement initiatives are delivered in subject areas such as nursing and applied health sciences, law, architecture and art where historically gender imbalances are present. The primary objectives of the outreach work undertaken by the University to widen access are to promote University study to underrepresented and disadvantaged groups in higher education, but also to address gender imbalances for a more inclusive and representative future.

2.4.2. Promote initiatives that support and encourage gender balance on University courses and in employment through working with professional bodies

The University continues to encourage inclusion through promoting inclusive events and activities on its employability hub (e-hub), open days, and liaison with professional bodies.

Initiatives that challenge gender stereotypes such as International Women's Day in Engineering (InWED) which was celebrated in 2021 and 2022 in the school of engineering are continuously promoted and supported across the University.

Additionally, student equality champions and networks arrange regular safe space discussions and initiatives such as 'Chat Comment Change' and 'Thinking Out Loud' that challenge the wider community through engaging forum discussions.

2.4.3. Inclusive admissions applications process through regular admissions policy review

University admissions policies are regularly reviewed and updated every two years to reflect the inclusive culture of the University. The 'Terms and Conditions of Admission and Enrolment' and 'Recruitment and Admissions to Higher Education' policies are updated and available on the University's policy webpages. Assessment of portfolios are carried out by academic staff who are guided by university policy and guidance. Applications are reviewed based on their portfolio and performance at selection events including interview.

2.4.4. Eliminate all forms of gender stereotyping on promotional materials and recruitment activities

The University continues to take proactive steps to embed equality, diversity, and inclusion across its marketing activities with a clear aim to eliminate all forms of bias and gender stereotyping on promotional materials. The staff equality, diversity, and inclusion training educate staff at the University on unconscious bias, what it looks like and possible impact on the wider society. In addition, the University continues to support staff and departments to further embed and mainstream equality and diversity across its community through the EDI Adviser.

2.4.5. Provide support to individual students applying to gender imbalanced subjects

The University works directly to support and guide applicants from underrepresented backgrounds to higher education as defined by SFC Outcome Agreement and internal measures. A holistic, University-wide approach to develop a programme to support all applicants applying to a minority gender programme is required to ensure full coverage and a systematic approach is taken. Widening Access will continue to engage and share resource with a consortium of University stakeholders to support minority gender applicants to programmes where gender imbalances exist.

2.5. Greater flexibility for staff, creating opportunity and maintaining an inclusive working environment.

At the point of setting its current equality outcomes, the effects of the coronavirus pandemic were identified to have had a nationally disproportionate effect on the working habits of staff. Additionally, increased instances of mental health issues as a result of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic nationally necessitated a review of working models to ensure that the University was supporting staff work life balance.

Recognising the impacts of covid-19, the University engaged with staff through the annual staff survey and although the survey does not have specific equality focus, it focused on the wellbeing of staff. The 2021 annual staff survey results demonstrated that 86% of staff valued working from home, 88% of staff appreciated the flexible working arrangements, 86% of staff agreed that the additional annual leave supported their mental wellbeing, and 86% of staff were confident that line managers were committed to supporting their mental wellbeing.

The University is committed to ensuring an inclusive work and study environment, creating opportunities and support for its richly diverse staff community.

This is an ongoing work for the University and proactive steps have been taken to support staff in the last two years up to this mid-way point. As a university, we are committed to continue to support staff through our key actions and developing new actions where possible:

2.5.1. To review all working patterns with a view to maximizing staff work-life balance and flexible, home working opportunities

Central to the strategic aims of the University is a commitment to emerge stronger from the impacts of the pandemic and proactively fostering wellbeing and a healthy work-life balance. The University has taken proactive steps over the past two years to enhance its total reward package including changes aimed at improving the work-life balance of staff and maximizing staff retention.

In February 2022, the University published its hybrid working policy and 50% universal hybrid working. This harmonised working hours, increased and harmonised leave entitlement for all staff.

Furthermore, the University provided ring-fenced time on Wednesday afternoons to allow all staff uninterrupted time to focus, awarded a one-off payment to all staff as support with regards to the cost-of-living crisis, and continuously engaged with the staff community through the annual staff survey providing more opportunity for staff to influence decisions that affect them.

2.5.2. To review reward and recognition for Professional & Support staff

The University is committed to fostering a sense of community through developing and rewarding talent. This has been commenced with the administration job-family to review core roles within schools to ensure that job titles and descriptions are up to date for clearer transparency and to create clearer progression routes and pathways for staff development.

2.6 Increased and more purposeful engagement with staff across all equality strands:

Although the University had in place several mechanisms to engage with staff on equality & diversity matters, it was identified at the beginning of the current equality outcomes that not all equality strands were equally represented and involved in the decision-making process. In 2021, the University had some staff equality champions with some vacant positions. The RGU Women's Network, RGU Rainbow Network, and the staff Race Equality Network were available for staff to engage with. These networks varied in size, scope and purpose, and the central support for each network differed, which impacted on activities and reach of each of the staff networks. It further impacted on the representation of all the protected characteristics at the Equality and Diversity Forum.

The University is strategically committed to fostering a sense of University for all staff through nurturing staff and student sense of community, engagement, and empowerment.

The University sought to increase engagement with staff across all equality strands and identified opportunities to increase these engagements through set key actions and activities that have been undertaken in the past two years.

It is indeed worthy to note that while some of these actions have been completed, others are still ongoing with timeline for completion before the 2025 updates.

2.6.1. Dedicated staff resource

The University has appointed an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Adviser who provide advice to staff, support groups and networks, and work to ensure that the University's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion objectives are met. This role sits across the Human Resources and Student Life departments

with specific and institutional responsibilities that includes increasing purposeful engagements with staff groups, networks, champions to ensure wider participation in equality, diversity, and inclusion for the staff community.

2.6.2. Staff Engagement – Representation

The University has appointed equality champions for each of the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. These roles are open to all staff so that staff from different backgrounds and with varied experiences can contribute.

These roles are opportunities for staff to get involved and represent the views of staff in addressing equality issues specific to an equality strand.

For a number of years, the University has had staff equality champions across a range of protected characteristics and since setting the current equality outcomes, the roles have been reviewed and open to all staff, recalibrated to reflect the protected characteristics according to the equality act and promote intersectionality through championing equality.

The University currently has twelve equality champions appointed across the nine protected characteristics and are further supported by the HR team during the duration of their appointment.

2.6.3. Staff Engagement - Action Groups

The University has further taken proactive steps to create opportunities to involve staff in decisions that affects them by developing equality action groups across all equality strands. These groups are created with the intention to bring together staff from across the University and give staff the opportunity to contribute, inform, and challenge the University in its decisions and commitments to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Each group primarily consist of the Equality Champion, HR Champion, EDI Adviser, and wider staff.

More information about the Equality Champions and Action Groups can be found here -

<https://www.rgu.ac.uk/about/governance/equality-diversity/equality-action-groups-champions>

Since formation, Action Groups have engaged with the University and wider staff community through informing University policies and processes such as the staff EDI training, raising awareness of equality, diversity, and inclusion through the vibrant campus events.

2.6.4. Supporting Networks

The University continues to support the staff networks through representation at the Equality and Diversity Forum, engagements with the EDI Adviser, support, and participation at annual celebrations activities such as Black History Month, Pride Month, International Women’s Day, amongst others every year.

2.7. The number of applications from candidates for senior positions reflect the demographics of the University.

The University is committed to treating individuals equitably, fairly, and with respect. Equality, diversity, and inclusion is embedded in how the University operates and in the refreshed University strategy is a commitment to attracting, developing, and rewarding talents.

At the beginning of this 2021 – 2025 equality outcomes, the University identified the gap in representation of BAME staff across senior positions and set actions that include taking steps to close this gap and ensure that the senior roles are reflective of its diverse staff demographic. Key activities continue to be undertaken since the beginning of the current equality outcomes cycle to contribute towards the achievement of this outcome:

2.7.1. Occupational segregation

In April 2021, the University published a set of Equality Outcomes and committed to publishing Occupational Segregation information across all equality areas by 2025. The University continues to work towards achieving this through a working group and have highlighted this in this mid-cycle review as an on-going action.

2.7.2. Senior level representation

Unconscious bias training has been embedded in training provided to staff involved in recruitment activities. Recruitment specialists based in the HR department provide training on unconscious bias during recruitment, how to mitigate the effects of it to ensure a fair and equal recruitment process, diversity awareness introduced as one of the assessment points when selecting suppliers and refreshed all outward points of contact for potential candidates to reflect values and inclusivity – including, RGU jobs pages, myjobscotland pages, brochure material, careers fair info, social media pages.

All quotes for senior recruitment now include assessment of agencies actions in support of diversity and history on placements. University demographic data and senior management group staff and recruitment data analysed with priority areas for action identified.

Reviews and consultations with staff aimed at improving diversity of the senior management group to be more reflective of the staff demographic, succession planning, and staff progression is currently ongoing at this stage.

2.7.3. Inclusive recruitment and job advertising

The University is currently reviewing current branding, advertising, application process of the current attraction and selection process through its recruitment specialists in HR with the aim to ensure that the branding, language, and recruitment process is reflective of the inclusive culture and values of the University.

Recruitment diversity evaluation and reviews across recruitment application process and wider University is currently ongoing at this stage.

3. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

The University's equality outcomes between 2021 – 2025 can be considered as strategic aims to embed and mainstream equality across the University demonstrating that noteworthy progress have been achieved so far in the last two years.

Reflecting on the steps so far, the University stays committed to being an inclusive and welcoming institution for students and staff and continue to take proactive steps towards positive improvements.

The University is delighted to showcase the efforts towards the equality outcomes in the last two years and is committed to making continuous progress in achieving the equality outcomes and addressing specific inequalities that have been identified.

The progress of these equality outcomes will be monitored and measured on an ongoing basis by the University's Equality & Diversity Sub-Committee.