# Note of main outcomes of first meeting of meeting of the Regional Strategic Committee held on 5th May 2020.

This note is being sent to all academic partner chairs, their principals and members of Court so that the leaders of the whole partnership are aware of the discussions. We are happy if recipients copy it to board members or other UHI and partner staff for their interest. We will circulate a note like this after every meeting of the committee. The committee will of course agree a full minute and report that to the university court as normal. This summary note is intended to let everyone who might be involved in taking forward the issues the committee discussed what the actions agreed and planned next steps are. It is also important that we are transparent across the partnership. If you would like more detail on any particular item, you can access the papers in Admin Control.

If there are items you would like the committee to consider in the future, please contact the chair, Garry Coutts.

The main items discussed were:

## Adapting the business

The principal and members of the senior team presented on the ways that the partnership will need to respond to the Covid-19 crisis in three phases, dealing with the immediate issues, the preparations for academic year 2020-21, and the issues beyond then.

The committee asked the executive:

* for a collective effort across the partnership to address the very significant challenges. This will need pace and leadership.
* that the priority for our curriculum for the moment should be core provision that serves our region.

The committee recognised:

* the importance of delivery by distance and blended learning for the next academic year, but also recognised that connectivity and digital poverty issues would also need to be considered.
* The balance between part time and full time students might change in the short term.
* that the actions needed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic overlapped significantly with the curriculum review it discussed later on the agenda.
* the importance of clear branding of our tertiary offer and the criticality of raising our profile with key stakeholder groups.

The committee asked the executive to pull together the actions it was already taking or formulating to adapt the business and the actions they had presented to the committee into a clear action plan linked to timelines and resource allocation. This plan is being developed now by the partnership council and will be complete by 29th May.

## Finance service

The committee discussed a paper – which had been asked for by the further education regional board – proposing that the university executive work with the partnership to develop and consult on an aligned common finance service and to have an agreed model and service level agreement in place by the end of July. The executive acknowledged that progress on this had been slower than anticipated.

The committee:

* supported the recommendation that we develop the option agreed and ask the non-executives to ensure their principals/senior execs supported the development of the model and engaged with the process.
* asked the principal to identify the capacity to take forward this project with urgency and report on progress to the chair and vice chairs of the committee periodically.

## Partnership Agreements

The committee considered a draft of the revised partnership agreements between the university and the academic partners. The committee noted several areas where further detail would need to be finalised. The final version will be circulated to partners in the near future. These agreements have not been revised for some time. Our intention is that the new ones will be updated more regularly – in particular in response to many of the changes we will need to make as we implement the change programme related to the Assembly actions and our response to the coronavirus pandemic.

## Review of curriculum and resource allocation methods

This review of our curriculum and the way that we allocate funding within the partnership began before the coronavirus pandemic in order to ensure we had an attractive offer to students and the region and a way of funding it that was fair and efficient. The committee agreed that it was now even more urgent and should be progressed without delay.

The review will cover both higher and further education. On the resource allocation method the committee agreed that the executive would develop detailed modelling of the impact of three possible methods of funding which combined simplified funding for learning with an institutional element – or block grant – that supported a proportion of non-teaching costs.

The committee agreed the approach in the paper and the executive will be consulting with partners soon on these proposals. On the RAM, detailed modelling should be complete by mid June and consultation on a preferred model will take place in the autumn. On the curriculum review we intend to decide urgent changes to the curriculum for academic year 2020-21 within the next four to six weeks and changes for 2021-22 in the autumn of 2020.

## Reporting and assurance

The committee also considered a number of papers that were there to give assurance on our finances and our funding and agreed that:

* In future that will be done with a single dashboard that summarises the key data and signals where there are issues the committee needs to be aware of or consider action.
* this needed to be populated with consistent data from across the partnership.
* prior to coming to committee, there needed to be executive scrutiny of both the data and any proposed mitigations to provide an element of assurance to the committee about the veracity and potential impact of any proposals.

The committee considered a paper on our funding from SFC for 2020-21. While there is an increase in funding in both further and higher education, the committee was concerned that the funding for further education contained an increase in credits with no related increase in funding. This is related to SFC wanting to return to a price times volume funding method. The executive will continue to make the case to SFC that doing it in this way is unfair to our region where the costs created by national bargaining need to be supported in the long term.

The committee also discussed papers on the financial position of the partnership. As there was a deficit across the incorporated colleges in FY 19-20, there is a risk that SFC may reduce funding. The committee agreed the university will make a case against this. We agreed that we needed more active monitoring of the emerging financial issues and agreed the partnership council should take an active role in this.