



A partnership between SSE and the University of Highlands and Islands

Purpose

The Highlands and Islands region of Scotland plays a key role in delivering a cleaner, secure, and more homegrown energy system for Scotland, the UK, and beyond. By harnessing Scotland's vast energy resources and potential, the Highlands and Islands region lies at the heart of an accelerated transition to net zero and delivering lasting economic benefits across the region.

Through its Net Zero Acceleration Plan Plus (NZAP+), SSE is planning on investing £40 billion into the energy transition over the next decade until 2031/32. £20 billion of this planned investment will be in Scotland, with much of that coming across the Highlands and Islands in renewable energy generation and the electricity networks to integrate it into the energy system.

The University of Highlands and Islands (UHI), a unique University in Scotland with a place based tertiary approach, exists to have a transformational impact on the people, communities and economy of its regions. UHI's founders recognised that having a university of and for the Highlands and Islands, creating choice and opportunity for our young people to stay and contribute to vibrant businesses and communities, and supporting them to do so, was vital to the future economic, societal and environmental sustainability of the region.

In rural, dispersed regions, population matters. It matters for ensuring communities flourish, it matters for businesses having staff and customers. It matters for confidence and self-belief. And it matters for the renewable energy sector where the success of projects depends not only on access to natural resources, but on access to skills, directly and through the supply chain. As such, there is a natural fit for SSE and UHI to identify common ground and the ways in which they will work together.

To ensure that investments and initiatives create the right legacies and benefit local communities and ecosystems, SSE and UHI recognise the importance of building a mutually beneficial partnership. As such, this partnership seeks to have a lasting and positive impact on the prospects of the region, its economy, its people and communities and its ecosystems.

Common aspirations

As key stakeholders in the Highlands and Islands region, both SSE and the UHI are committed to working together and building a close partnership. Within this partnership agreement, SSE and UHI are setting out common aspirations for mutually beneficial engagements built on the delivery of targeted local research, education, and employability initiatives.

While the partnership is dynamic and will evolve over the next years, SSE and UHI both recognise the relevance of collaborating across their respective priorities.



Key Collaboration Areas



Island Decarbonisation



Networks for Net Zero



Power from the Glens



Maximising Wind

For SSE these include four key areas: (i) driving island decarbonisation, (ii) building networks for net zero, (iii) harnessing power from the glens; and (iv) maximising opportunities from wind energy - which sit alongside the cross-cutting themes in SSE's upcoming investment plans: Skills development; Economic opportunities; Net nature gains; Boosting research excellence; and Heritage & legacy.

UHI's new 2030 strategy takes its ambition forward across five key strategic themes: teaching, learning and student support; research and innovation impact; enterprise and growth; environmental sustainability; and operational excellence.

SSE and UHI have worked closely with one another over a number of years, with SSE Renewables providing significant philanthropic support through its Highland Sustainable Development Fund, and more recently through its Ossian and Coire Glas projects. Ossian, a joint venture floating offshore wind project has a separate Memorandum of Understanding in place with UHI, as well as a Corporate Donor Gift Agreement focussed on supporting UHI's STEM outreach programme to 2026.

This strategic partnership agreement is intended to formalise, co-ordinate and expand the full range of our work together. The overall objective is to ensure that as many of the job and economic opportunities in the Highlands and islands will benefit its people and communities, supporting environmentally sustainable economic development, whilst protecting some of the most important, globally significant ecosystems.

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