

Informatics International Strategy – proposal

The following plan is in pursuit of the aim of promoting Informatics@Edinburgh globally, in line with the University's strategy, taking better advantage of existing University mechanisms. We seek to increase our influence and impact in important places around the world and to lower risks relating to student recruitment in the face of Brexit and government restrictions on immigration. Also in line with the University's strategy, we seek to give our own students an increased range of international opportunities and to increase diversity in our student recruitment.

The bulk of this proposal assumes that Informatics does not wish to significantly increase international undergraduate student numbers at present and so effort is targeted elsewhere – for example, to increasing the average *quality* of our international intake. If Strategy Committee decides that an increase in numbers is required, then additional effort and resource will be required – see the final section.

International student recruitment

We are currently doing well on international recruitment, especially in China, despite low effort. Additional effort should focus on increasing quality of applicants from China, and both quality and numbers from elsewhere, including at least: USA, South/Central America, Europe, India, Southeast Asia, Middle East, taking advantage of the University's existing offices/efforts in these regions and our existing links with top-tier universities in some of these countries.

The aim would be to significantly increase the number of high-quality UG and TPG applicants from these countries, and to increase the overall diversity of our applicant pool. This will allow us to select students who are better on average than the ones we are selecting now, without increasing student numbers. Dealing with an increased flow of applications will require more work in filtering out the best ones. A job for the recruitment team - since this applies to all applicants, not just international applicants - is to provide better information to potential applicants so that those who are clearly not good enough do not apply.

This contributes to the “Influencing Globally” development theme of the University's Strategic Plan – see Appendix - under headings 3 (improve access) and 4 (extend our international profile).

International student exchanges

There is currently a significant imbalance in international student exchanges, with many more students from abroad wanting to come to Edinburgh than vice versa. Unless there is a balance, payment of fees or some other substantial quid pro quo is required. In general, we should be encouraging more of our students to take advantage of opportunities to spend time abroad. Some (many?) of our international peers are far ahead of us on this.

We will introduce a new MInf degree programme that includes “international” in its title and requires a year abroad, in an attempt to increase the number of students who require placements abroad. If this attracts substantial numbers of good students, we will be able to increase the number of incoming students, and this will be used as a component of partnerships with top-tier universities abroad. We should also take advantage of our international alumni to host our students who are looking for internships abroad.

This contributes to the “Influencing Globally” development theme under headings 2 (increase opportunities for our students abroad) and 3 (improve access).

Double degrees and existing partnerships

We currently have undergraduate 2+2 and 2+3 double-degree agreements with Peking University and, via Engineering, with Dalian University of Technology and South China University of Technology, which bring small numbers of students per year. These will be maintained, especially the agreement with Peking University because of its prestige value, where we will attempt to increase numbers, and add a Design Informatics strand, in order to ensure its viability. No further double-degree agreements will be created unless there is a good reason to do so as part of a wider relationship with the partner university that offers important benefits.

Informatics currently has a relationship with the British University of Dubai. We will attempt to transfer ownership for this and responsibilities away from Informatics to elsewhere in the University, probably together with the £25k/annum income. Any proposed new initiatives with BUiD will be treated with caution.

This continues our contribution to the “Influencing Globally” development theme under heading 3 (improve access).

New partnerships

It is desirable to develop relationships that go beyond undergraduate degrees and exchanges to include collaborative research links. But these need to be developed through contacts between individuals, as they are done now. Visits to potential partners abroad can only yield hints about opportunities on both sides.

Existing collaborative research links can be strengthened with the addition of arrangements for jointly-supervised PhD students. These could be formal joint PhD programmes, like the one we have now with Beihang University, or a lighter-weight Cotutelle arrangement.

There is intense interest from potential international partners in some areas in which we have special initiatives, for instance Data Science (Bayes Centre) and Cyber Security. Visits abroad could include communication of our “pitch”: what are we offering, what do we need in return, how much does it cost. Promising prospects could then be put in touch with the relevant people in Edinburgh to take things further.

Funding from GCRF requires good links with beneficiaries in developing countries, which we lack. A possible route to such beneficiaries is via NGOs, e.g. WHO, OECD, UN DESA, plus British Council and ENISA. We could use any existing connections in these organisations to find out what they regard as issues we can address, and ask them for help in making links with beneficiaries.

This contributes to the “Influencing Globally” development theme under headings 1 (global partnerships) and 4 (extend our international profile).

Online learning

The “Influencing Globally” development theme includes a proposal to expand online learning (heading 5). Once an adequate portfolio of online courses is available, marketing them abroad could be included in our international strategy, but this would be premature at this point.

Targets and resource required

Targets: improved quality of UG and TPG applicants; increase in UG international exchange activity; maintenance of our standing within the university

Resource required:

- Director of International Relations (Don Sannella). With a seat on Strategy Committee??
- Somebody to assist with China, low level of involvement (Maria Wolters)
- Others to help on an ad hoc basis with other countries in which they have existing connections - should not require an admin role, just travel funding, e.g. Leonid Libkin (Chile), Michael Rovatsos (BUiD)
- Somebody to track alumni abroad and keep in touch
- Budget to cover travel and hospitality in Edinburgh for visitors: based on past expenditure, estimating £8500/annum.

General points

The above takes into account our existing internationalisation activities and what appear to be current near-term opportunities.

In general, development of relationships leading to agreements requires multiple visits and patience. In countries like China where approval from the Ministry of Education and/or higher levels of the university is required for new degrees, policy changes can dramatically change perspectives for new agreements.

Some participation in delegations abroad or participation in meetings with visitors in Edinburgh are speculative and may not bear fruit but will benefit our standing within the

university, help with alumni relations, etc. Such activity will be kept within sensible limits to avoid waste of time and resources.

If Informatics wants more international undergraduate students

In addition to the strategy proposed above, we will attempt to add and promote new undergraduate 2+2 and 2+3 double-degree agreements with highly-ranked universities, starting in the following countries:

- China
- South Korea
- Singapore

Other countries/regions will be added as opportunities develop. India is probably worth some effort although past efforts have not been encouraging.

We are currently dependent on Christine Sinclair in Engineering for a lot of the admin work associated with the double-degree programmes, and that cannot be expected to continue unchanged if we grow in that area. Admin assistance in Informatics needs to be provided by a single identified person, so they can build a personal relationship with Christine and with their counterparts in partner universities.

Additional target: 30 2+2/2+3 students in 2020/21

Additional resource required:

- Higher level of involvement of China assistant and additional travel funding
- Initially, average of 1 day/week admin assistance from a single identified person
- Later, budget and admin assistance increasing in line with increases in 2+2/2+3 numbers

Appendix: “Influencing globally” theme of the University’s 2016 Strategic Plan

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/governance-strategic-planning/strategic-planning/strategic-plan/development-themes/influencing-globally>

“To advance our global engagement we will:

1. deliver transformational global partnerships across business, industry and academia;
2. increase the range of opportunities and support for our students to work, study and volunteer abroad through Erasmus+ and other schemes;
3. improve access to an Edinburgh degree for the world’s brightest and best, irrespective of their background;
4. extend our profile and reputation across key regions of the world by promoting our excellent research, student experience and facilities and the opportunities offered by the city of Edinburgh;
5. expand our online learning portfolio, building our international community of learners and creating opportunities to engage with an Edinburgh experience.”