**SCHOOL OF INFORMATICS**

**School Strategy and Plan 2019-22**

**INTRODUCTION**

The School of Informatics is faced with unprecedented opportunities, being at the Centre of the University's Data-Driven Innovation agenda. The School Strategy and Plan reflect that context, whilst maintaining key priorities that have been developed over the last three years.

This document should be read in conjunction with the School's more detailed and operational planning submission to the College of Science and Engineering which, in turn, informed the College's contribution to the University's planning process.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

The School's strategic objectives are:
- Further enhance our international leadership role in Informatics, including retaining the leading position in the UK.
- Provide world class high quality education in Informatics for a broad constituency of learners.
- Engage broadly with stakeholders in pursuit of our objectives.

**STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

Our Strategic Framework is based on four strategic priorities and three key enablers. The strategic priorities are Research Excellence, Teaching Excellence, Knowledge Transfer and Organisational Development. These align with the University's Strategic Plan.

The three key enablers are: `People', `Financial Sustainability and `Strategic Engagement and Collaboration'. The School has continued to grow with respect to People and income (contributing to Financial Sustainability), and has a wealth of opportunities for Strategic Engagement and Collaboration.

**Strategic priority: Research Excellence**

Informatics at Edinburgh has international leaders in many areas of research. Our priority is to further develop the breadth and depth our research, and to consolidate the areas where we are already strong. In particular we will seek to:
- strengthen our links with other Schools across all three Colleges where specific opportunities for collaboration and funding arise. In the immediate future this will include Biological Sciences and Medicine, Engineering, Geosciences and EPCC, but in the longer term will encompass the Edinburgh Futures Institute and associated Schools;
- take advantage of funding opportunities arising in AI, Data-Driven Innovation and the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund to attract world class researchers at all levels to the School;
- continue to ensure a good stream of high quality PhD students to underpin the

research within the School.

To support this we will work to ensure that all researchers develop to their full potential, through support in their route to research leadership and in the continuance of their leadership roles, once achieved, through induction, training and mentorship.

**Strategic priority: Teaching Excellence**

The programmes offered by the School are highly attractive to students from around the world. A key strength is our academic breadth, which allows us to offer a variety of multi-disciplinary programmes of study. Recent sharp rises in student numbers combined with the large number of courses offered has led to a substantial increase in teaching load which is inequitably distributed. In order to sustain high quality teaching it is essential that we re-examine how our programmes are structured and how our teaching is delivered. This will lead to:

- a systematic review of our curriculum to better match student demand to teaching resource;
- alternative career paths to support excellent teaching and student experience including University Teachers and Student Support Officers;
- continued support for student induction and transitions and improved mechanisms for student engagement and community building;
- development of on-line approaches to delivery for distance learning but also to address large scale on campus learning – the blended learning approach.

Within the context of Bayes and the City Region Deal, the School will explore opportunities in the area of Continuing Professional Development to foster our interaction with local industry.

**Strategic priority: Knowledge Transfer**

The School has the leading research position in the UK and an international reputation for Informatics knowledge exchange and industry engagement.

We produce extraordinary science, scientists, and knowledge that is the source of disruptive change. Through our research, education, knowledge exchange and public engagement activities the knowledge that we create impacts upon the international academic community, upon policy and society, upon industry and businesses, upon our local community and upon individuals. The opening of the Bayes Centre offers further opportunities to strengthen these impacts, particularly through working with companies and local and national governments. We foster a professional approach to maintaining relationships with all our stakeholders.

The Bayes Centre now houses our entrepreneurial education programme which is both inward and outward facing. Whilst the Wayra Incubator programme attracts start-ups from across Europe to work in close proximity with the School, we are also seeking to strengthen the entrepreneurial opportunities offered to staff and students to generate more start-ups and spin-outs.

We will continue to capture our impact and reflect it back to Informatics people, funders and industry, to promote a stronger understanding of the substance and impact of our research. A consequence will be greater preparedness for the impact component of the next Research Evaluation Framework.

**Strategic priority: Organisational Development**

The substantial growth that the School has experienced over recent years, has led to unprecedented numbers of staff and students. This has brought challenges with respect to how we organise ourselves. We have recently restructured the professional services team to better support the increased volume of activity within the School. We will now address the academic management structure to ensure that there is adequate development support for all academic staff to fulfil our duty of care. This will allow a more planned approach to staff development.

**Key enabler: Financial Sustainability**

The School's strategic objectives and priorities can only be achieved from a position of financial strength. The School will continue to leverage its position as the UK leader in Informatics research and knowledge exchange to secure funding from public funders whilst seeking to further develop other sources, including funding from industry, charities and alumni. Student fees are a major source of income for the School. After a period of substantial growth in taught student intakes, we foresee a period of consolidation, with more modest future growth, better planned and managed, and targeted at areas of existing or new capacity.

**Key enabler: People**

We will continue to invest in additional academic staff and postgraduate research studentships. Further investment in support services will ensure that research and teaching staff are relieved of administrative functions which are more appropriately undertaken by staff employed to undertake those duties. Only by recruiting, supporting, developing and retaining the best academics, research staff and support staff can the School maintain and build upon its UK leading position and international reputation.

The School holds an Athena SWAN Silver Award for its contribution to gender equality amongst academic staff, researchers and students. The Silver Award was successfully renewed in 2016. We will build upon this success to further embed all aspects of equality and diversity into our policies and practices. We will increase support for career development for all staff, academic, research and support. We will celebrate diversity amongst staff and students and implement our Athena SWAN action plan, to further address issues of gender imbalance within the School and our discipline.

**Key enabler: Strategic Engagement and Collaboration**

Information pervades the modern world, so opportunities for collaborative inter-disciplinary research abound. We will prioritise those interactions that have the capacity to contribute to our strategic objectives through generating the highest quality research and educational opportunities, and the greatest impact. A new dimension to this will be the opportunities presented by the City and South East Scotland Regional Deal and associated Key Performance Indicators.

**TARGETS**

The School has set the following high level targets:

| Target | Progress at 2018/19 |
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| Maintain UK leadership in Informatics and Computer Science Research in REF2021. | The School is progressing preparations for REF 2021 and anticipates submitting a significantly greater number of researchers as well as enhancing its impact and environment submissions. |
| Maintain Athena SWAN Silver Award at next renewal in 2020 as part of the School's commitment to equality and diversity. | The School is following its Athena SWAN implementation plan which will underpin its application for renewal of its Silver Award. |
| Achieve results higher than the overall University of Edinburgh average in student surveys. | The School's 2018 National Student Survey results showed distinct improvement over previous years.  Results in other surveys of postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students were less positive.  The School is taking actions that are expected to have a positive impact on all survey results. |
| Achieve student recruitment projections detailed in the School Plan. | The School exceeded its 2018 student intake targets across all cohorts, placing unsustainable strain on the School. Application numbers continue to rise. Therefore it is essential that we adhere to the more stringent application/selection procedures in order to avoid unconstrained growth, which would have severe negative consequences. |
| Increase research funding whilst also increasing the diversity of funding, so that no one funder accounts for more than one third over a three-year rolling average. | Research grant success increased by approximately 35% in value year-on-year in 2017/18. |
| Increase the number and scope of strategic engagements with academic collaborators, industry, third sector and public sector bodies. | A number of new industry partnerships were established or extended, including with Huawei and IOHK (Hong Kong), and this is now fostered by our work within the Bayes Centre. |