News Release

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Royal visit gives seal of approval to data science and AI centre

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal has officially opened a world-leading centre of expertise in data science and artificial intelligence (AI).

The University of Edinburgh's Bayes Centre aims to develop and apply data science and AI – drawing meaningful insights from vast amounts of information – for the benefit of society.

Some 600 experts from research and industry will seek to make use of large datasets and a high-speed analytics facility to improve people's lives.

These might include identifying trends from healthcare data to improve disease management, analysing traffic data to improve transport, or enabling businesses to improve products or services.

The £45 million Bayes Centre building houses about 600 researchers, students, and entrepreneurs over five floors. Its architecture, featuring open spaces, a central atrium and open terraces, is intended to foster collaboration among occupants.

The Bayes Centre is the first of five data-driven innovation hubs being created as part of the recently-announced Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal.

The new hubs will help business and public sector organisations improve products and services through collaboration with researchers and data analysts. They will embed their research and development teams in the University environment to facilitate collaboration. The initiative is supported by Scottish Enterprise, which has part-funded the Bayes Innovation Programme to help encourage this collaboration.

The City Region Deal's Data-Driven Innovation initiative includes the University's Easter Bush Campus, the Bayes Centre, Edinburgh Futures Institute, Usher Institute, and the National Robotarium – a partnership with Heriot-Watt University.

The Bayes Centre shares a courtyard and walkways with the University's Informatics Forum – home to some 500 computer scientists – and the Dugald Stewart Building, which houses Edinburgh's language sciences experts. It was designed by architects Bennetts Associates.

The building takes its name from the Reverend Thomas Bayes, who studied logic and theology at the University of Edinburgh from 1719 until 1722.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

He is best known for devising Bayesian statistics, the mathematical foundation for reliable forecasting. It is widely used today, for example in the financial markets, the weather, or to filter email spam.

Dr Michael Rovatsos, Director of the Bayes Centre, said: "We look forward to bringing together experts from research and industry in this collaborative space, to apply data science and AI to some of society's most interesting challenges and opportunities."

David Mundell, Secretary of State for Scotland, said: "It's great to see this exciting project – backed by £30 million of UK Government funding – officially opened. The Bayes Centre will support the development of world leading technology, attract further investment to the region and support high value jobs for the future.

"It is a superb example of why data-driven innovation is at the heart of the UK Industrial Strategy, and one of many exciting projects being delivered as part of the £1.3 billion City Region Deal."

Michael Matheson, the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, said: "I am delighted to see the Bayes Centre officially opened, the first project to do so from the £1.3 billion Edinburgh and South-East Scotland City Region Deal. The opportunities that this building will create for both the University and the wider city region are considerable and I appreciate the role that the University of Edinburgh is playing in ensuring that Scotland will continue to be seen across the world at the forefront of data science."

Councillor Adam McVey, Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, speaking on behalf of the Deal partners, said: "The Bayes Centre provided the perfect backdrop for the signing of the transformative £1.3 billion City Region Deal in August and it is fitting now that it should be first of the projects to be officially opened.

"The £45 million facility is the first of five data-driven innovation hubs included in the Deal, all of which will help the region to become the data capital of Europe – as well as delivering significant skills, employment and economic benefits to the region.

"The Universities' world-leading data science capabilities are already helping to provide new and better services to people across the South East Scotland City Region and these fantastic new facilities will only enhance these further."

Earlier in her visit to the University, the Chancellor, The Princess Royal also visited the newly refurbished Lister Learning and Teaching Centre, where she met staff and students.

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