News Release

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University to play pivotal role in creating Data Capital of Europe

The University of Edinburgh will be a key partner in a major initiative that seeks to make Edinburgh and its surrounding region the European leader for applying data science to products and services.

The move to transform the region into a digital powerhouse is a key strand of the recently announced Edinburgh and South-East Scotland City Deal.

Under the agreement, significant investment from the UK and Scottish Governments will be provided for major infrastructure projects in Edinburgh, the Lothians, Fife and the Borders.

The University's role in City Deal will be unique, challenging and far-reaching. It will work with partners in government, industry and other universities to create and nurture a vibrant cluster of activity based on data science – the collecting, organising and interpreting of large sets of digital information.

The University will partner with local authorities, schools and employers across the region to create the workforce of the future by supporting a massive increase in the provision of data skills.

It will also develop and encourage new entrepreneurs to form high growth companies, and engage with existing companies and the public sector to apply data expertise to help deliver high quality products and services.

Professor Charlie Jeffery, Senior Vice-Principal said: "The City Deal is a major vote of confidence in the economic strengths and further potential of Edinburgh and South East Scotland. We are delighted to be working with our partners to grow the region's digital economy and to open up new opportunities for our businesses and communities to flourish."

The vital, emerging discipline of data science impacts on many areas of life, including health and social care, agriculture and robotics, as well as public services, finance, tourism and the creative industries.

Examples of programme activity could include enhancing the experience of visitors to city festivals, and improving the local environment by capturing real-time data relating to air and water quality, noise and congestion.

It could also support new high growth areas of the economy – such as the Fintech sector – through our latest research, and improve the wellbeing and care of those with long-term health problems.

With the University at its centre, the City Deal's data driven innovation (DDI) programme will give businesses and people in Edinburgh and its surrounding areas maximum advantage in the data revolution.

It will seek to equip young people from all backgrounds to succeed in the digital economy, to enable them to develop the skills to better use and apply data in their personal and working lives.

Over 10 years, the University and its partners will train 100,000 people in the application of data across the region's major industry sectors. It will work with the private and public sectors to grow awareness of data science's implications. As it takes effect, the programme will enable both established and start-up businesses to capture these opportunities.

The DDI programme will also help people in the wider community to understand the benefits and challenges associated with the use of data, enabling them to make use of novel public and commercial services.

Data has become an increasingly valuable asset and a key driver of the 21st century economy. It has the potential to transform public and private organisations and drive developments that improve lives. The technologies and services behind data science could be worth $2.7 trillion by 2020, according to the International Data Corporation.

In Scotland, data analysis has already driven improvements in care for patients with diabetes, resulting in a 40 per cent reduction in amputation rates and blindness. In the Edinburgh city region, companies have adopted data-driven innovation to great effect, creating the third-highest density of high value technology start-up firms in the world.

In the UK, the digital and data economy is growing two to three times faster than the economy as a whole. Early adoption of data driven innovation offers huge opportunities and may help offset the decline in some traditional sectors of the economy.

A recent Science and Innovation Audit commissioned by the UK Government recommended that with the right funding, the Edinburgh City region could become the global destination of choice for organisations that power services through the application of data science.

The audit highlighted the area's world-class strengths in digital industries and its ability to grow high-value digital companies, such as Skyscanner and FanDuel, as a strong basis for growth.

Professor Jonathan Seckl, Vice-Principal Planning, Resources and Research Policy at the University, said: "The University is working from a strong base. For 50 years, we have led advances that have shaped the computer age. Our research in new data technologies and the skills of our outstanding graduates have helped establish Edinburgh as a leading player in the global digital economy. We will seek to build on these strengths, to help turn the data science opportunity into new skills, jobs and companies for the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region."

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