

BITS

MAGAZINE

Issue 22, Autumn 2018

Sharing news and stories across Information Services Group and the University

What is a digital student?



Every student is a digital student

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If you would like to submit an article, or tell us about some news, please email:

BITS@ed.ac.uk

The deadline for submissions for the next issue of **BITS** is **25 January 2019**.

To keep up to date with IS news:
www.ed.ac.uk/is/news

FSC LOGO



Editorial

This issue of our Information Services Group BITS magazine features stories and news from our many projects and services which support students in the University as they live, work and study. We know that our students lead busy lives, and the more we can tailor our services to be accessible to them online as they move around the city, the easier their experience can be.

We recently welcomed the Eleri Connick, President of the Students' Association, to speak to all of our ISG staff about the key challenges students face. You can read more about what she told us in our feature article on page 2.

Students' Association sabbatical officers provide input to ISG by joining committees and boards, such as our Information Technology Committee, Library Committee, University Web Governance Group, Resources List Service Board and Lecture Recording Engagement and Evaluation Group. They also work closely on projects in Library & University Collections to help to diversify the curriculum to facilitate more displays and exhibitions featuring marginalised and underrepresented voices.

The articles in this issue highlight ISG initiatives which directly address students' feedback, such as expanding digital skills, information security awareness, Library Compass, improving navigation in Learn VLE, interlibrary loans and our E-reserve service. You will also find our usual features welcoming new staff to ISG, celebrating our successes, highlighting our exhibitions and events and hearing from our growing group of student interns. Our 60 second interview is with Joe Marshall, celebrating 10 years of the Centre for Research Collections.

If you would like to know more about any of the projects described in this magazine, or about the ways we aim to engage with students to improve their experience, please keep up to date with our news via our websites, social media channels and events across the University.

Melissa Highton
Director of Learning, Teaching & Web

ISG news

New people

Karen Howie



Karen Howie has joined ISG as Technology Enhanced Learning Team Manager in Learning, Teaching, & Web services. Karen was previously IT Manager in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, and has held learning technology roles at Edinburgh, Imperial College and Strathclyde over her career.

“ I’m very excited to join ISG from a school and see the University from another perspective. I’m involved in really exciting projects, including Learn Foundations, where I feel my school perspective will be useful.

Satu Kapiainen



Satu Kapiainen has joined ISG as Digital Skills and Training Team Manager. Satu comes from a training and consultancy background, having worked with a number of global clients delivering training and organisational change projects. More recently, Satu worked at Midlothian Council, running the Digital Services training function.

“ I am thoroughly enjoying working with the talented Digital Skills and Training team. With strategic focus on digital skills development at the University, the team are facing exciting times developing the Digital Skills Programme to reach every student and member of staff.

Aberdeen Breviary digitisation

Joe Marshall

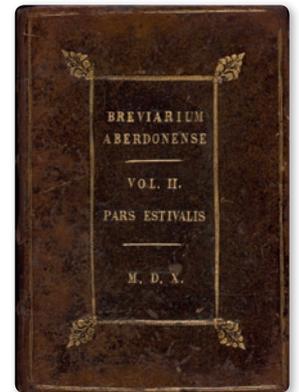
As part of our Digitisation Programme, all of the ‘iconic’ items in Special Collections are scheduled to be digitised by Christmas 2018.

This work has included the Aberdeen Breviary, which is the first substantial book printed in Scotland, published in Edinburgh in

1509-1510. It was commissioned by Bishop William Elphinstone to give Scotland its own books for worship – at the time, most Scottish churches used the liturgy as performed in England. We have one of the finest copies to survive.

View it in its entirety on our online image archive:

edin.ac/breviary



Equality and Diversity in IT Awards

We are proud to have been shortlisted as finalists for two awards: Employer of the Year and Diversity Project of the Year. This follows our recent success as winners of the national Universities HR Excellence Award for Equality and Diversity.

We were finalists in the ‘Employer of the Year’ category in the Scotland Women in Technology Awards 2018, won by J.P. Morgan. We were also shortlisted for ‘Diversity Project of the Year’ in the Women in IT Excellence Awards.

Scotland Women in Technology

Awards 2018 Finalist

Every student is a digital student

Gavin McLachlan

Chief Information Officer and Librarian to the University

One of the key principals of our Digital Transformation Programme is that 'every student is a digital student'.

Virtual Learning Environments (like LEARN), powerful library search tools, huge online libraries of digital skills courses (like Lynda.com), classroom technologies such as voting systems and lecture recordings – these are often new territory for our students, and they come with a steep learning curve.

Our Digital Skills and Training team are promoting a new Digital Skills Framework, which defines the recommended digital skills that a student should seek to obtain:

www.digitalskills.ed.ac.uk

A digital student is much more than one who just understands all the educational technology available to them. The ability to seek advice online and seek out educational communities is essential; the ability to understand what digital skills are most appropriate for them is important; the ability to create a professional online profile is vital for networking and advancement; the matching of digital skills to future employment aspirations requires advance planning; and the ability to understand when digital is not the answer is critical to future success.

The journey towards becoming a digital student is an important one. Even after leaving higher education, many will switch entire careers several times, which means a life of continuous learning. The fundamental ability to operate as a digital student will serve students well for their entire lives.



How EUSA and ISG can **work together**

Eleri Connick, EUSA President

For the Students' Association, there are several high priority areas in which working closely with ISG can bring real benefits to the student experience.

We are in a new digital world, and digital innovation at university is the future. We would love to be able to access University services and buildings using student cards on our phones. The times of walking around with your cards are gone.

We are concerned for online safety. We have seen an increase in the number of students who have reported being scammed online. We will work with ISG on a campaign to educate students on what to watch out for online.

There are several UG courses which have core readings that are not available online, and are often not available from the Library due to a limited number of hard copies. Books can be extremely expensive to buy. We would like free access to mandatory books and papers, wherever possible, through online reading lists.

Difficulty finding study space across the University during peak times causes unneeded stress for students. There are numerous rooms and smaller libraries, but students are not necessarily aware of them. We would like to promote these spaces more, and make the rooms easier to access.

Engaging with **digital students**

Welcoming our new students to the Library

Neil Bruce

This year we tried a number of new ideas to get the student experience off to a fun and informal start. We added a new coffee cart and a number of games machines to the ground floor of the Main Library, alongside banners and posters to welcome new students. There were more student helpers across the building and, equipped with their 'Ask Me' lollipop sticks, were fantastic at making new students feel welcome and handling their queries. Alongside this, our traditional events such as card collection, library welcome desk and Get Connected were busier than ever. Everything ran extremely well and the feedback we received from students was extremely encouraging. Students gave us lots of ideas for next year.

Watch a video summary of Welcome Week at the Library:
edin.ac/library-welcome



Expanding online learning with edX

ISG is expanding support for online learning through delivering micromasters programs. This is an important next step in our innovative work and one that is in line with the University's commitment to pioneering online education for all. Building on this success, the University is preparing to offer online masters degrees and micromasters programs with edX in the subject area of business analytics, delivered by the University's Business School. The University of Edinburgh will be the first European university to offer both micromasters programs and masters degree programs on the edX platform.

Peter Mathieson, Principal and Vice Chancellor at the University, commented:



Partnering with edX lets us expand our online learning portfolio to deliver graduate-level education to a wider audience, utilising new and innovative online teaching. By expanding our open educational resources, we are able to reach more students online who are unable or do not wish to attend a traditional campus-based university education.

Digital Skills tools available to students

Christina Hussell & Tracy Steinberg

The Digital Skills and Training service offers a wide range of IT training and online tools to develop students' digital capabilities, including:

- **Digital Skills Framework:** helping you evaluate your digital capability, plan your development and find resources
- **Classroom-based software training courses:** e.g. Adobe Creative Suite, Python, Microsoft Excel and Word, EndNote
- **Lynda.com:** for high quality online video courses
- **Development programmes:** e.g. Data Skills and 23 Things
- Student internship opportunities

www.ed.ac.uk/is/skills

Academic blogging

Karen Howie

In October, we launched the new Academic Blogging Service.



The service brings together a range of technologies and includes the new centrally supported WordPress platform. It supports a wide variety of digital literacies for both students and staff, such as blogging for learning and teaching; to build your professional or academic profile; and for research projects and community building. The service includes new guidance, policies and training.

We have now started phase 2 of the project, looking at expanded functionality within WordPress and a student-focused Domain-Of-One's-Own pilot. edin.ac/academic-blogging

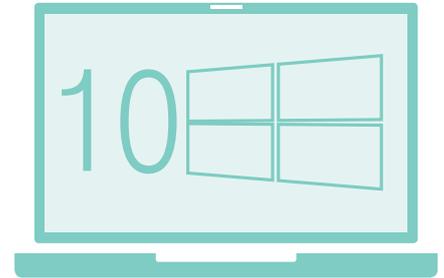
Data storage migration success

Research Services

To support our students and staff who use data in their work, we have now replaced all of our storage related to the Datastore platform. To put this in perspective, that is 12 Petabytes of storage, 20 storage arrays with a total of 1200 spinning disks. This involved installing new kit, migrating live data and metadata and retiring the redundant hardware – all on a live environment with live users. This was successfully achieved with no negative user impact and no related outages.

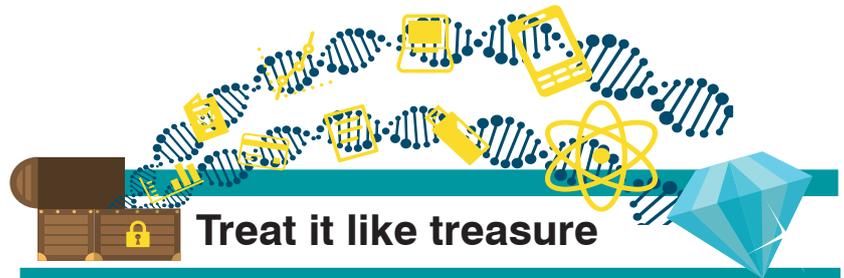
Upgrade to Windows 10

When using a PC in Teaching Spaces and Labs, you may notice some changes thanks to an upgrade to Windows 10. This is to make our devices faster, more secure and more compatible with modern applications and devices.



Upgrades will continue into early 2019 across staff PCs and laptops using the supported desktop.

For information, training and guidance: www.ed.ac.uk/is/windows10



Information Security Awareness Week

David Creighton-Offord

The digital safety of our staff and students is a top priority for the University. During Information Security Awareness Week, the Information Security team worked across the University to give talks on Mobile Security, Ransomware, Encryption and staying safe online.

Our keynote session included talks from the Scottish Business Resilience Centre and Dan Stewart of Secarma, bringing the knowledge and experience of penetration testers to the fore and emphasising just how much internet security can be enhanced by taking simple actions. Over the course of the week, the team facilitated 18 sessions in six locations ranging from Appleton Tower to the Vet School, and St Leonard's Land to Little France. These sessions will continue to run throughout the year.



It has been pleasing to see people from a wider variety of areas attending the sessions this year. It really shows that Information Security is becoming recognised more widely as an important issue.

Garry Scobie, Deputy Chief Information Security Officer

Digimap covers **the globe**

Ian Holmes

EDINA continues to add new functionality and data to Digimap, the online mapping and data delivery service. The most recent addition to the platform is Global Digimap which provides data sourced from OpenStreetMap and Natural Earth. The new data opens up the service to users carrying out fieldwork in remote locations where OpenStreetMap data is often the most detailed data available.



IT procurements focus on **accessibility**

Viki Galt, Iain Fiddes & Dave Berry

For those of you not directly involved in IT procurements, you may be unaware of how much the impact of these procurements on disabled users is now being taken into consideration. Over the last nine years, we have come a long way. We now have a set of standard accessibility questions which form part of each procurement tender, based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. If a supplier fails to meet an adequate level of accessibility, they are excluded from the tender.

We are constantly updating and improving this process, but this combined with the legal requirement of Equality Impact Assessments for changes (including procurements) means we are better at checking our software for ease of use by disabled users than ever before.

Library Compass **Innovation Project**

Guy McGarva

In response to feedback and demand, we have been looking into how to help students find library and study spaces in the Main Library and surrounding areas.

The Library Compass Innovation Project aimed to create a 3D Geographic Information System (GIS) model of the Main Library and surrounding area as a test-bed for integrating services that could be useful to staff and students, such as route-finding and occupancy information.

The base data was created from CAD drawings and other sources to provide a highly detailed representation of the library environment, including study spaces and meeting rooms. This enables assets to be located in their true 3D positions and navigating through the building, including via stairs and lifts to other floors. Additionally, real-time information can be integrated, analysed and displayed in 3D. This can include information from IoT sensors or other real-time feeds.



Featured **thesis**

Gavin Willshaw

Mona Geddes was an influential Scottish physician and head of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps during and after the First World War.

She was the first woman to receive an MD from the University of Edinburgh, basing her thesis on her experiences working at Peter's Maternity Institute in Plaistow, London.

Read her thesis at: edin.ac/geddes-thesis

Image credit: By Walton, Edward Arthur & Walton, Cecile - media.iwm.org.uk/iwm/mediaLib/161/media-161488/large.jpg



Edinburgh Futures Institute



Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) aims to attract students who want to work across disciplinary boundaries to address real problems, think deeply about the social implications of technological change and learn in new and creative ways. The Institute will offer interdisciplinary programmes designed to address critical aspects of our shared social and technological futures. We are working closely with the studio teams to develop a unique hybrid teaching supported by new kinds of vibrant study and interaction spaces in the EFI building. For more information, contact Euan Murray or Stuart Nicol in Learning, Teaching & Web services.

Supporting student recruitment

Dave Berry

Prospective students looking to apply to study at the University will soon benefit from new projects to rationalise the information on the University website to make relevant information easier to find.

We are also working to procure, configure and launch an enquiry management system, enabling improved responses and enhancing the applicant experience. Streamlined administration processes will ensure good ongoing service and allow the student recruitment teams to keep improving the information on the website, based on data about actual requests.

UoE suffragettes, postcards and engagement at the Rector's installation

Rachel Hosker

The Centre for Research Collections was delighted to be invited by Ann Henderson to be a part of her installation ceremony. We'd been discussing with Ann about how the collections represent



people's rights and lives and that they are a great source of reflection. Our pop-up exhibition on the University of Edinburgh women who took the fight for the vote to the House of Lords and the University's oldest record of its students drew many people over for a chat. Our postcards played an important role, as Ann called for everyone to send a postcard to someone they cared about, to make a connection and communicate. The Postcard Society were thrilled at our selection, as they had undertaken a campaign to send postcards to students on year abroad courses, to try and help with the loneliness that students can sometimes feel when they're away. A great event of reflection and communication.

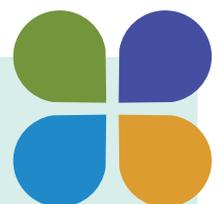
PebblePocket

Steph Hay

PebblePocket - a mobile app which allows PebblePad users to access its templates on the go - has recently been piloted at the Medical School. The app was used as part of the peer practice project, which focuses on improving students' skills at history taking and examination, while allowing two or more students to practise these skills together.

Once downloaded, PebblePocket's templates can be used fully offline. This allowed students to use the app in the wards when appropriate.

After the successful pilot phase, the 'mobile PebblePad templates' approach is being rolled out further across the School.



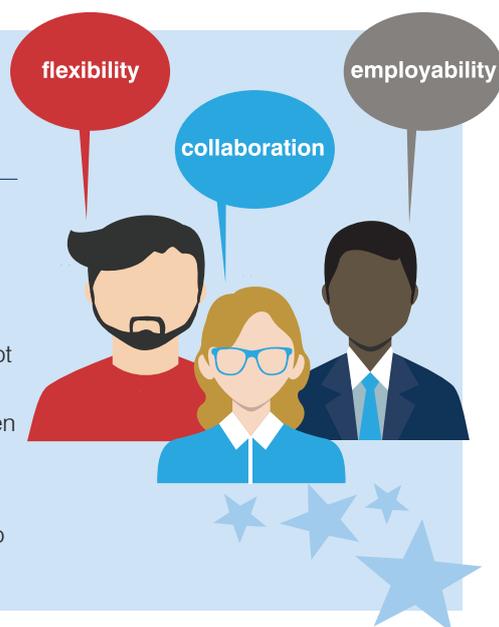
Student engagement through employment

Pauline Ward

Our PhD intern Clarissa wrote a blogpost about her excellent experience surveying Research Data Service (RDS) users (edin.ac/rds-intern).

Through her School contacts, the RDS team learned about the needs of students and got the opportunity to deliver training for students in the School of Health in Social Science. The survey generated new insights about staff and student users' needs, as well as seven promotional and educational films (featuring another PhD student): the 'Research Data Service use cases'.

To read the blog posts accompanying the videos and the written use cases, subscribe to the Research Data Blog: datablog.is.ed.ac.uk



Meet the IS Relationship Management Team

The IT Consultancy team has a fresh remit with a new name, IS Relationship Management.

The team adds value by strengthening relationships between IS and the University community through continuous engagement and promoting high quality service for all staff, students and visitors.

“ We look forward to working and meeting with you soon. In the meantime, if you would like to talk to us, please get in touch. Abdul Majothi

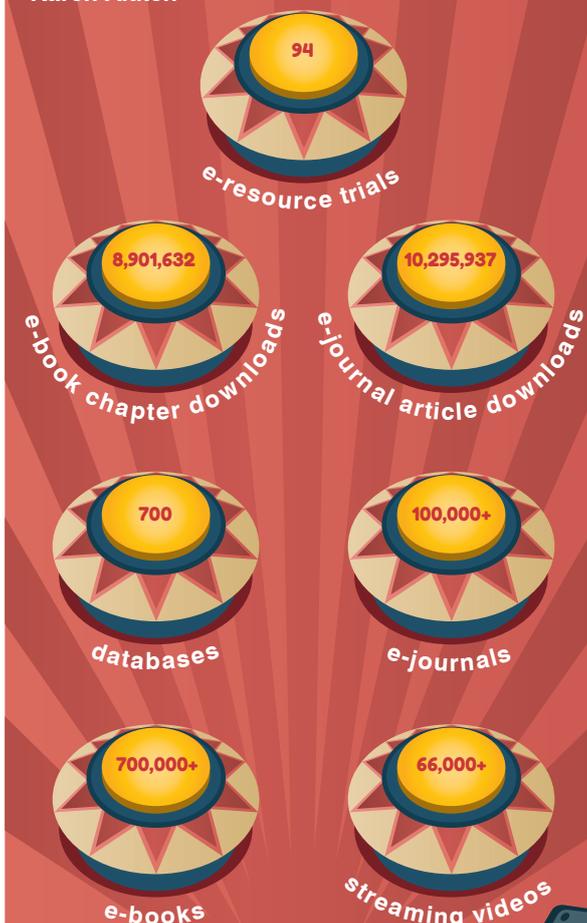


Left to right: Fiona Vine, Chris Kant, Mike Holmes, Myles Ewen, Angus Rae, Abdul Majothi (Team Leader), David Williamson

www.ed.ac.uk/is/rmt

E-resources in 2017-18

Karen Aitken



Improving the consistency of Learn courses

Stuart Nicol

The University is investing in enhancing the student experience through a project to improve the use of Learn.

The Learn Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) currently hosts more than 5,000 courses a year and provides access to course materials, assignments, grades, feedback and much more.

This project has been identified as part of our institutional response to provide the Quality Assurance Agency with evidence of enhancing and improving the student experience.

More information about the initiative and how you can get involved is available at: edin.ac/learn-foundations

Media Hopper Create in Learn

Sean Sweeney



Teaching staff can now choose to embed video quizzes directly into their Learn courses, adding to

the tools already available to support interactive learning experiences. The improved tool also allows teaching staff to generate reports and analytics based upon both the quiz and users taking it. In order to enhance support for an increasingly diverse curriculum, we have also made improvements to how the plugin handles video assessment submissions to Media Hopper Create. The workflow has been greatly simplified and ties the two services together to provide a seamless experience for both student and teacher.

The ISG intern experience: read all about it

This summer's ISG interns wrote a series of fantastic, entertaining blog posts about their time working with us. Their posts cover everything from the interesting projects they were involved in to:

Making friends with fellow ISG interns:

In no other circumstance would a group of such different people have been assembled, and in very few circumstances would such a blend work so well.



Lila Pitcher, Academic Blogging Intern

Advice for future interns:

Be sociable. Be creative. Be willing to find and exploit less usual opportunities that come with working in a great place like IS.



Cecily Plascott, Open Content Curator Intern

Discovering the perks of the 9-5 office lifestyle:

From student surveys to focus groups, producing my own videos and delving into the mysterious world of editing, this internship completely changed my opinion of the stereotypical 'tedious office job'.



Jordana Black, Digital Skills Advisor Intern



Read the blogs at:
thinking.is.ed.ac.uk/intern

You can find our internships and other student jobs on MyCareerHub:
mycareerhub.ed.ac.uk



RESOURCE LISTS

Angela Laurins

Resource Lists provide students with online reading lists which they can access via their course on Learn or Moodle or from: resourcelists.ed.ac.uk

Resource Lists make it easy for students to find and read the key materials for their courses. Increasingly the Library provides key reading materials in digital formats: as e-books or as scans of essential chapters, all of which can be linked to directly from the course Resource List.

Students using Resource Lists can be confident that the Library has checked current holdings and purchased new or additional print copies based on class size and priority. Resource Lists also display real-time location and availability information for print books.



Vinyl music catalogued

Jane Furness & Alasdair MacDonald

Over 100 diverse and unusual vinyl music recordings from the Reid Music Library collection at the Main Library have now been fully catalogued, making the collections more accessible for students and staff. They are discoverable using DiscoverEd: discovered.ed.ac.uk

The Library holds an extensive collection of around 5000 vinyl album recordings, covering world, jazz and classical music, which has been built up since 1967. The entire collection is available for borrowing, and there is also a music listening room on Floor 2 of the Main Library where a high quality Numark turntable can be used, with headphones, to play the albums.

Until everything in the vinyl collection is added to DiscoverEd, you can access them here: edin.ac/av-catalogue



Interlibrary Loans

Flora Fisher

Hundreds of items from around the world are sourced for students and staff each year by the Interlibrary Loans Team. Providing a digital service is at the heart of what we do, particularly for distance learners: those on field research, PhD candidates writing up their theses remotely and international and UK students taking one of the University's many online courses.

Through ILLiad, distance learners can request articles and chapters of books from the millions of books and journals held by the University, as well as from institutions around the world, ensuring that they are always connected to the Edinburgh community.

www.ed.ac.uk/is/ill



E-reserve

Stuart Scarles & Hannah Mateer

As part of improving and expanding digital services to students, the Library's E-reserve service creates copyright compliant scans of essential book chapters and journal articles to provide secure links to content for teaching and learning. Links are made available in Learn and through the Resource Lists service, providing ease of access to digital content for students 24 hours a day, wherever they are located.

Find out more about how the Library can support teaching and learning through providing access to course resources at:

www.ed.ac.uk/is/resource-lists



New lecture recording policy

Neil McCormick

Following wide stakeholder consultation earlier this year, the University will implement our new lecture recording policy from 1 January 2019.

The new policy supports staff in delivering an improved, consistent student experience, and provides clarity on the rights of those involved in each recording and the conditions under which lectures should and should not be recorded, released to students or released publicly. The policy has been developed by a Senate Learning and Teaching Committee working group and considerably improved by the many excellent responses.



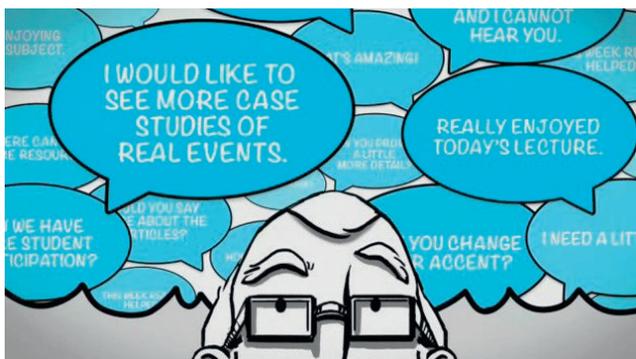
“ The new lecture recording policy demonstrates a real commitment from the University to supporting the learning and welfare of all students. We know how much students value the availability of lecture recordings to support their learning, especially those who have additional learning needs or don’t have English as a first language.

Diva Mukherji, EUSA VP Education

Bluepulse for feedback

Sean Sweeney

As part of an ongoing Business School pilot, Learning, Teaching & Web services have integrated the Bluepulse tool with the Learn VLE. Bluepulse enables a continuous two-way, anonymous and confidential feedback mechanism between students and their course organiser. This can assist in identifying and addressing any issues or concerns and has the potential to help maximise students’ experience of their course. The impact of using Bluepulse within specific courses is being evaluated by colleagues in CAHSS.



Student insights to improve MyEd

Mary Elder

As we continue to improve the student experience of MyEd, we’ve been running a number of activities to ensure that our work is steered by user research as we develop a new MyEd which is simpler and easier to use.

Working alongside the UX Service team, these activities have included:

- card sort workshops for information about priorities, vocabulary and task-groupings
- pop-up workshops to validate initial prototypes
- a large-scale online card sort exercise to check these initial findings

These insights are allowing us to work towards a new UI that will make accessing information and services easier.

Dick Vet Student Union website

Stewart Lamb Cromar

Former Dick Vet Student Union (DVSU) president Faolain Barrett worked closely with the Interactive Content team to help develop their new online presence. Crucially, Faolain secured funding and co-ordinated student participation for this website development project.

The newly launched DVSU website has information on all the different class representatives, clubs, societies and events associated with the Dick Vet.



The DVSU held a student competition to design a logo for their website. Fourth-year veterinary studies student Melissa Zigler's entry was the chosen winner. See how her design was incorporated into the final website:

dvsu.vet.ed.ac.uk

UG data management skills training

Bob Sanders

The Undergraduate Data Management Skills Project, which has been funded by the 2018/19 Innovation Programme, will employ a PhD student to engage with key stakeholders - including UG Programme Directors and Academic Support Librarians - to develop and deliver a programme of data management skills training aimed specifically at undergraduate audiences.

The project will help improve the undergraduate student experience, providing an introduction to key data management terms, concepts and real-world skills which can be directly applied to final year dissertation projects, and carried forward and developed throughout future research and research-related careers.

Until now, there has been no current dedicated training provision geared towards the needs of the University's undergraduate students in this area, many of whom will become the professional researchers of tomorrow. As such, the Research Data Service team is keen to provide a programme of advocacy and outreach seeking to extend awareness of the benefits of good data management among the University's research community.

Automated permanent digital preservation

Hrafn Malmquist

By linking together three different open-source systems – Archivematica, DSpace and ArchivesSpace – we have created an automated workflow to achieve viable long-term preservation of digital material.

Archive management has been disrupted by digital technologies. Before the ubiquitous internet and cheap digital storage, it was relatively easy to designate the original copy and physically store it; today content is born digital. Digital archivists are faced with issues such as ensuring retrievability by keeping independent backups and cataloguing and indexing properly to ensure rediscoverability.

Our hope is that this new piece of technology we have created will benefit organisations all over the world.

uCreate Studio

Dan Mills

The uCreate Studio is the University's free-to-use community makerspace, offering equipment, advice, training and support to help you make anything you can think of. We are open to anyone looking to build parts for experiments, prototypes for inventions, props for performances or even presents for friends and family.

We offer:

- 3D-printing, scanning and carving technologies
- virtual and augmented reality tools
- Raspberry Pis, Arduinos and other electronics

There is nothing you can't build. Sign up for an induction online and you can get started straight away:

www.ucreatestudio.is.ed.ac.uk

IS Healthy Working Lives

Kathryn Mackay & Ellie Dora

Following on from the Healthy University Project, we are pleased to announce that we have been approved funds to run a similar programme this coming year. Activities planned so far include mindfulness, yoga, a pedometer challenge and much more. Full details to be announced shortly.

In September, we hosted the ISG Macmillan Coffee Morning. Thanks to all colleagues who helped to raise a fantastic £328.44. We have some talented ISG bakers who made goodies which sold out in record time!

Congratulations to the IS Bake Off Star Baker Natasha Aburrow-Jones and runner-up David Bonas, shown here receiving their prizes from Jo Craiglee and judge, Great British Bake Off alumna Marie Campbell.

The IS Photography Competition selected 12 winners, who had their photos collated to create an ISG 2019 Calendar that will be on sale at the end of this year.

The group has also been running several competitions, including pumpkin carving and a caption competition. A survey of the favourite ISG films was collated, with 'The Shawshank Redemption' being voted the most popular.



Healthy Working Lives



Wellbeing Week

Ewan McAndrew & Vicki Madden

For Wellbeing Week in November, the 'Facts and Fallacies: Cultural Representations of Mental Health' event took place to improve the information available online with a Mental Health Wikipedia editathon and open up discussion on mental health in a safe environment. Talks comprised of neuroscience perspectives on mental wellbeing, complex mental illness in the media, BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) mental health in the UK, mental health representations in the Lothian Health Services Archive and gendered aspects of mental health. The event concluded with a panel discussion chaired by film lecturer David Sorfa, 'Screening the Inner World: Mental Health and Emotion in Film and Television'.

Take what you need, when you need it

Many of you will have seen the new £5 million scheme introduced by the Scottish Government to fight period poverty. We're pleased that the University is participating in this fantastic initiative.

Free sanitary products for students are now available in five of our libraries distributed throughout gender neutral and ladies toilets.

edin.ac/sanitary-products

Free sanitary products for students



60 seconds with **Joe Marshall**

Head of Special Collections and the Centre for Research Collections

10 years of the CRC

The Centre for Research Collections in the Main Library is the hub for access to the University's heritage collections. CRC was created in 2008 to bring together Museums (including art and musical instruments), Lothian Health Services Archive, University Archives and Special Collections (rare books and manuscripts). It now manages other sites, including St Cecilia's Hall and Scottish Studies Archives. CRC provides services to students, researchers and the wider community, including digitisation, teaching support, conservation and exhibitions.

Tell us about your role.

As Head of Special Collections and the Centre for Research Collections, I am responsible for one of the world's great collections of written material, and for the staff and services which make those collections available. We have around 38 staff in Special Collections (of whom only a handful are on full-time, open-ended contracts) who work across a range of professional areas including archives, library, conservation and customer service. My job is to manage the team, their budgets and work within Library & University Collections/ISG to develop projects and grow the business.

What are the challenges of your job?

The greatest challenge is getting people to understand what we are and what we do. CRC is a very small part of a large IT-focused support group and are not based in Argyle House with the majority of ISG staff. We have to work really hard to keep the CRC profile high, and to explain to people that what we offer is a core service to support teaching and research. Sometimes the phrase 'Special Collections' suggests we are some kind of elitist retro outfit – however, what we're about is making our users feel special by giving them access to stuff you can't get in any other university.

What do you find most exciting about it?

Because the University's collections are so large (c.100km) and diverse, we are constantly making discoveries – there is a weekly thrill when a reader or a cataloguer opens a box that has been undisturbed for a century and finds treasure inside. There is also the excitement when we receive an unexpected donation or purchase a rare item for stock – we are one of the very few research libraries in the UK that grows its heritage collections so actively. We are constantly surprised both by the amazing things we already have and by what is out there waiting to be brought into the public domain.

How would you like to see students using the collections?

We love to see the collections being used by our students – that is why we have them! The collections are open to all students, and we are trying to encourage more undergraduate use – by the time students start postgraduate study they will have a strongly defined track which may not include any archival research. As more material is digitised through the Digitisation Strategy, students will have quick access to our unique content through our Images website and through the Resource Lists service. However, we are passionate in our belief that actually handling original objects makes a huge difference to the learning experience, and we want all our students to have the opportunity to touch the real thing.

Tell us about your professional background.

I first came to Edinburgh in 1996 to do a PhD on the writings of King James VI of Scotland, in whose reign the University of Edinburgh was founded. After completing my thesis, I worked as a cataloguer and then curator at the Rare Books division of the National Library of Scotland. It was only after I moved to the University of Edinburgh as Rare Books Librarian in 2008 that I actually qualified as a librarian. I became Head of Special Collections and CRC in 2014.

What do you like to do outside work?

I work all the time... Seriously though, I enjoy spending time with my three sons and tending to my greenhouse full of cacti.

Ada Lovelace Day: 'The best queens fix each other's crowns'

Ewan McAndrew

ISG held a Contemporary Women in STEM Wikipedia editathon to celebrate Ada Lovelace Day 2018. The day is an international celebration of the achievements of women in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

The event was hosted at King's Buildings with a range of student guest speakers from the Women in STEM Society, Physics Society and Wellcomm Kings in the morning, followed by fun STEM activities in the afternoon. The day ended with an evening networking event sponsored by the Royal Society of Chemistry.

findingada.com



Olivia Jackson of the Physics Society speaking at the event

Accessing our film and digital art

Liv Laumenech

The Art Collection and Museums Collections Access teams have been piloting a way to make digital works easily accessible using the existing Media Hopper system.

In recent years, the University's Art Collection has acquired some significant film and digital work. Including work from student degree shows, the art collection now includes Rachel Mclean's 'Spite Your Face', shown at Venice Biennale 2017, as well as 'The Common Sense' by Melanie Gilligan and 'Charity' by Kate Davis, winner of the Margaret Tait Award 2016.

As with all the works in our collection, these were acquired for research and teaching, and are a rich resource for our students, staff and the wider public. However, we also need to care for them. Along with being under copyright, we also need to prevent copying or downloading of the original files and this means regulating access.

Working with colleagues in Library Digital Development, we have also been figuring out ways the development of the University's digital preservation systems can also feed into the care and preservation of the films' master files for the future.



Image credit: 'Spite Your Face', (Still) Rachel Maclean, 2017 © The Artist.