

INFORMATION STRATEGY

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Information is all data and recorded knowledge, which enables the University to carry out its business. Information can be in any format or medium. It therefore includes learning and teaching, research and enterprise data, as well as operational or administrative data.

The University's mission is to provide high-quality education, research and enterprise for international, national, regional and local communities. In summary, its objectives are to enhance learning and teaching and foster student success; to equip students for employment; to expand opportunities for students and staff; to develop partnerships which help students progress through higher education; to undertake enterprise and research; and to promote good management and effective solutions.

The Information Strategy forms part of a series of strategies which sets out the way the University aims to achieve its objectives, and supports the University's mission and key objectives. It is about managing information, both print based and digital, that is internally generated, such as business data, committee records, other documents produced in order to carry out University business; and about managing published information used for the purposes of teaching, learning, and research. It aims to promote a culture in which all members of the University understand the importance of information, and which allows the University to work effectively.

The University recognises that information is a resource as strategically important as people and the physical estate. The University's business is to develop and transmit knowledge and to a great extent, this depends on using information effectively. It is therefore necessary to apply the same principles of good management to information as to other resources.

The University's information and communications systems need both to provide the information users need, and to support a multitude of relationships which are interactive and evolving. This strategy therefore aims to put in place processes to identify people's needs and match them with the best solutions. Solutions will include the effective use of information technology; training and development to help people use information effectively and to exploit opportunities and be creative.

The Information Strategy is based on key principles which define the University's attitude towards information, its use and its availability. The overriding principle is that the University seeks to organise information resources so that information meets the needs of users, is of high quality, is openly and easily accessible to those who need it, and meets external requirements. Those who wish to access information should be able to find what they are looking for quickly and easily. Information should be appropriate, fit for purpose, available in an accessible and appropriate format, produced in the most cost effective way and supported by technical systems and trained staff. Information systems should be integrated; data should be

shared across systems in order to provide seamless access to related information.

PRINCIPLES

The key principles governing the strategy are:

- the University aims to provide high quality information that is accurate, clear, relevant, reliable and in an appropriate format
- information should be relevant, fit for purpose, accessible, produced in the most cost effective way, and supported by appropriate technical systems and trained staff, and thereby contribute to the effectiveness of the University
- information systems should be integrated to facilitate data sharing and reuse across systems, with appropriate security to protect the rights of data subjects and owners and to prevent unauthorised access
- the range and quality of published information should be fit for purpose and organised and deployed to the benefit of the users
- information should be available to all unless there is a good reason for it not to be
- changes in the information needs of the University will be continuously monitored and staff will be encouraged to investigate and exploit new opportunities for use of information resources
- ownership of and responsibility for University information will be clearly defined, and the authoritative source for key data will be drawn upon by any systems that require to use that data
- the University will provide a staff development programme which will enable staff to manage information resources confidently and effectively, acquire necessary new skills, and comply with obligations
- all information to be secure, reliable, resilient and be operated in accordance with the UK legal framework.

CONTEXT

In the current financial uncertainty, the University's dependence on the effective management of information will be increasingly important. All sources of income are under threat and it will therefore be more important than ever to ensure that resources are used to best advantage. The pace of change in information and communication technology is fast. We need to be agile and technologically advanced to ensure the correct decisions are made about when to invest, and in what.

The principles outlined above are based on user experience of our current systems, a broad overview of existing strengths and weaknesses, and the desire to make daily life better for staff and students.

USER EXPERIENCE

Understanding the needs of individuals within the University, the needs of the University as an organisation, and the way information is communicated is key

to improving the management of information. A recent audit indicated that staff members:

- expect greater flexibility in gaining access to information
- can be relatively unaware of the information resources within the University
- are often overwhelmed by the amount of information available
- are often under skilled at using the information technologies and systems that we make available
- find information on the web difficult to access
- are critical of the quality of communications
- expect high standards of data quality.

COMMUNICATIONS

The introduction of the portal has started to yield real benefits particularly for students. In recent national student surveys there has been great improvement in their response to questions about the quality of communication and IT services. We need to maintain this improvement in an area which is so important to students.

Although the portal has had less of an impact on staff, future developments will promote its use as a primary means of accessing information resources. Alongside this, the information and presentation of our web pages is being improved and enhanced.

The information audit informed us that the growth of email across the University and from external sources often makes it difficult to distinguish the important from the merely interesting. We will review communication channels within the University with a view to creating a more effective means of communicating important messages.

INFORMATION SKILLS

The growth of the use of the internet for information content and communications is changing the pattern of teaching, of academic publishing, of ideas of copyright, and indeed what constitutes valid knowledge. Students are increasingly making use of social networking tools outside the University to communicate with one another, work together in self defined groups that do not necessarily fit the groupings that the University uses to define its communities, and yet they are often ignorant of the wealth of high quality resources that exist for the higher education community.

Some staff are already well versed in using these techniques and are using them to good effect for teaching, and for communicating with their students. However other staff are less well informed and are yet to appreciate the full benefits of these tools. We need to develop methods of raising awareness of new methods of using electronic resources and helping staff to evaluate their use for their own purposes.

We will ensure that staff and students are able to develop the confidence to manage information resources confidently and effectively, acquire necessary new skills, and comply with obligations.

IMPLEMENTATION

The University has a highly devolved structure, which provides challenges to ensure that those services which are maintained centrally are responsive to the users in the Schools and Administrative Offices. For Schools to be successful, and for Offices to be able to provide a successful service, they need to be supported by an appropriate corporate information and communication infrastructure. With potentially reduced resources and more demands placed upon those resources, more focus on a manageable set of priorities will be necessary. Decisions about setting priorities and remaining focussed upon achieving them will need to be supported across the University.

The attached implementation plan is built around four goals derived from the principles outlined above. These are

- to provide a high quality information environment to support the University's objectives
- to ensure that everyone can get information and communicate with each other quickly and easily through information systems and services which meet their needs
- to encourage a culture of sharing ideas and knowledge and promote expertise in finding and managing information
- to have integrated, robust and cost effective information systems in place which reflect lean processes and are planned and implemented using best practice to ensure optimum utilisation.

An Information Strategy Group will be established as a sub group of Resources Sub Committee to set priorities for developments in this area. An Information Management Group will be established to manage the structured organisation of the University's information and to monitor the implementation of the strategy.

The implementation of the strategy should result in

- clear and regular communication within the University and between the University and its external audiences
- more effective use of the information assets of the University
- improved quality of information
- improved planning of information services developments
- integrated and robust information systems
- better understanding of where to find information.