Digital and Data Strategy
2025-2029

University of
Northampton

UON

Introduction

In an era of rapid technological advancement and data-driven innovation, universities must adapt and evolve to thrive in a digitally connected world. The University Digital and Data Strategy outlines a forward-thinking approach to harnessing the power of technology and data to transform education, research and operations. This strategy reflects our commitment to equipping students, staff and stakeholders with the tools and capabilities necessary to excel in a dynamic, global landscape.

By leveraging cutting-edge digital tools, fostering a culture of data literacy and prioritising sustainability and inclusivity, we aim to enhance learning experiences, drive impactful research and streamline institutional processes. This strategy serves as a blueprint for shaping a future-ready university, where technology and data empower every member of our community to achieve their full potential.

Professor Anne Marie Kilday
Vice Chancellor

Foreword

Our Digital and Data Strategy has been developed to support the 'How we work' strand of the University's 2023-27 Strategy.

The University of Northampton has undergone a transformative journey over recent years, navigating significant challenges and seizing opportunities to lay the groundwork for its digital future. These efforts have been guided by the principle of 'getting the basics right', ensuring a solid foundation for innovation and growth.

The strategy sets out an ambitious agenda for the continued investment in digital, data and technology over the next four years to 2029, and was created following extensive consultation in September and October 2024 with colleagues and our student community. Competitive market research was also conducted to ensure alignment with the Higher Education industry where appropriate.

The six themes we have set out provide a focus for delivering the 'How we work' element of the University strategy. What this means in practice is set out in more detail later in this document and will form the basis of regularly reviewed and updated action plans.

These themes are:

DIGITAL AND DATA STRATEGY

- Enhance Staff and Student Experience
- Standardise Service Interactions
- Automate Processes
- Streamline and Secure the Digital Estate
- Make the Most of Data
- Enhance the IT Team's Capability

This strategy has been endorsed by the University Leadership Team. Arrangements for the governance of the Digital and Data Strategy are set out later in this document.

Our vision is to cultivate a digitally empowered and data-driven university experience that prioritises trust, inclusivity and sustainability. By harnessing the full potential of data and technology, we aim to provide personalised learning journeys, streamline collaboration and optimise operations. Through data insights, we will drive the University's innovation, resilience and competitiveness, building a responsive university that continually adapts to the evolving needs of our students, staff and community.

We hope you will embrace these themes and play a part in ensuring we fulfil our commitment to transforming how we work.

Becky Bradshaw
Deputy Vice Chancellor
& Chief Operating Officer

About the University of Northampton

The University of Northampton's Strategy 2023-2027 defines its mission to "support aspiration, create opportunities, deliver impact".

This mission is grounded in four core values:

Inclusivity
Fostering a diverse and inclusive community built on respect and fairness.

Aspiration
Encouraging excellence and supporting the ambitions of staff, students and stakeholders.

Sustainability
Committing to a net-zero carbon future and driving positive environmental and societal impact.

Trust
Strengthening relationships through respect, transparency, reliability and shared purpose.

The strategy identifies four key priorities:

- **Our Staff**
Developing a People Strategy to attract, engage and retain talent while fostering a culture of excellence and wellbeing.

- **Our Students' Experience**
Enhancing student success through collaboration, inclusivity and holistic wellbeing support.

- **Learning and Teaching**
Promoting active learning, digital innovation and interdisciplinary education to equip students with valuable skills.

- **Research**
Advancing a research-driven institution that addresses local, national and global challenges, delivering real-world impact.

At the heart of this strategy is **Social Impact,** ensuring the University empowers students and staff as **socially conscious agents of positive change** addressing global issues.

The strategy is built on three key foundations:

- **Our Campus, Place and Communities**
Strengthening Waterside Campus as a dynamic learning hub and deepening engagement with local businesses and government.

- **How We Work**
Modernising systems and processes to enhance efficiency and align with strategic priorities.

- **Funding and Resourcing**
Ensuring sustainable investment in staff, infrastructure and institutional growth.

This comprehensive strategy underscores the University's ambition to not only educate but also drive meaningful societal change.

The Digital and Data Strategy

The University has been on a journey towards digital resilience. The global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 necessitated a rapid expansion of online teaching, learning and working. This period tested the University's digital resilience and underscored the critical importance of scalable, robust and customer-friendly digital platforms. Lessons learned during this period highlighted both strengths and areas for improvement in our digital infrastructure, sparking a renewed focus on digital transformation as a strategic imperative.

In 2021, the University faced a serious cyber-attack that significantly disrupted operations and reinforced the need for robust cybersecurity measures. This event served as a catalyst for change, emphasising the importance of security-by-design and risk mitigation within our digital ecosystem.

Building on the lessons of 2021, the University made substantial investments in cybersecurity throughout 2022. Key initiatives included the implementation of industry standard cybersecurity tools, enhanced monitoring and response capabilities, and targeted training to elevate cyber-awareness across the institution.

These efforts have strengthened our cyber posture, ensuring a safer digital environment for staff and students alike.

In 2023, a catastrophic failure of core infrastructure systems, driven by long-standing technical debt, disrupted University operations. In response, a stabilisation and resilience programme was launched, addressing critical risks in infrastructure and networking. Investments focused on modernising the core infrastructure, improving network reliability, optimising environments and enhancing resilience, creating a robust foundation for future digital initiatives.

Creation

Through conducting 7 workshops across the University's 13 service areas and 3 faculties, as well as interviewing representatives from the student body and the Students' Union, a clear 'Voice of the University' was captured.

Staff and students alike recognised the progress achieved by the University of Northampton's (UON) digital and data initiatives to date, particularly within library and learning technology and the implementation of the new student record system. However, they highlighted challenges with fragmented data and where digital and data improvements could be made to enhance and optimise their use of technology, bringing together IT with the wider University as an enabler.

Key areas identified for improvement include:

- Fragmented Data
- Manual Processes
- Disconnected IT
- Duplication
- Digital Literacy
- Student Experience

A set of six digital objectives were created to tackle the above areas, alongside six strategic principles to guide the implementation of the strategy.

Strategic Objectives

The Strategic Objectives are priority pillars that will enable delivery of the Digital and Data Strategy, providing a framework for decision-making and resource allocation to ensure the Digital and Data Vision is achieved, and to which strategic initiatives are aligned.

The six focus areas are:

Enhance Staff and Student Experience
We will facilitate seamless and personalised digital experiences for our staff and students

Standardise Service Interactions
We will empower our customers with self-service IT opportunities

Automate Processes
We will be responsive to emerging customer needs across the university and actively seek opportunities to automate

Streamline and Secure the Digital Estate
We will optimise our systems to balance value, cost and security

Make the Most of Data
We will implement a master data discipline and a data platform for better decision-making and strategic insights

Enhance the IT Team's Capability
We will ensure that the IT teams have effective governance, processes and capability to effectively deliver value and enhance strategic alignment across the university

Digital and Data Principles

The Digital and Data Principles are the supporting framework placed at the heart of future design decisions and digital delivery. They ensure the delivery of the Digital and Data Strategy aligns with the University's mission and values.

The six Principles are:

Data Driven
Providing staff with access to secure, authoritative and high-quality University data to support key decisions and processes.

Secure by Design
Designing security and data privacy into University digital and data services proactively and continuously improving our security realm.

User-centred Design
Leveraging a user-centred design approach to ensure staff and students are enabled with digital tools that address their needs.

Self-Service
Adopting self-service as the primary channel for staff and students to interact with digital and data services.

Financial Stability
We will achieve cost optimisation of our technology landscape and prioritise digital and data investments by value.

Digital Innovation
Adopting new technologies, driving a culture of continuous learning and aligning with modern digital trends.

Timeline

We've structured our strategic initiatives to build momentum and deliver value throughout the journey.

The timeline provides a clear view of what's happening when, helping everyone stay informed and aligned as we move forward together.

Click **here** to discover more.

Make the Most of Data

Our focus will be on ensuring data integrity, consistency and security across the university. We will uplift data governance and embed processes that deliver on source of truth and cultural change.

We will implement a master data discipline and a data platform for better decision-making and strategic insights.

In consultation on this theme, colleagues communicated that they were not always able to self-serve the data they need when they need it. Staff often do not understand which sources of data are authoritative and often lack the skills required to use the University's multiple reporting tools.

This fragmented data landscape has resulted in lost productivity and inadequate information needed to inform key decisions for the University.

What you will see

- **Data Management**
  We will implement a new platform that will establish a single, accurate, reliable source of truth for essential data entities such as applicants, students, courses, assessments, awards and outcomes.

- **Data Culture**
  We will cultivate a data-driven culture where staff have the necessary skills to effectively use authoritative data for decision-making.

- **Integration Platform**
  We will implement a new integration platform that supports real-time integrations that addresses data quality and integration issues impacting colleagues and students e.g. timetabling.

- **Data Governance and Operating Model**
  We will define the approach to master data management, including governance, quality requirements and roles & responsibilities. We will create a data operating model which defines how the University manages and governs data. It will encompass the strategy, policy, processes, governance and technology that enables data to be collected, stored, processed, analysed and utilised.

- **Reporting Platform**
  We will review and consolidate our reporting platforms and ensure that University colleagues have skills and guidance available to create their own reports and insights, driving self-service reporting where possible from authoritative data.

- **Attendance and Engagement**
  We will commence discovery to understand if MyEngagement and MyDay are fit-for-purpose. This initiative aims to improve attendance and engagement monitoring to accurately track students across all learning environments (virtual and classroom) and provide metrics on use of learning resources and participation.

The University's commitment to leveraging data effectively aligns with its broader goal of fostering informed decision-making and operational excellence. By enhancing **data integrity, governance** and **accessibility,** the Digital and Data Strategy supports the University's ambition to create a **data-driven culture** that empowers staff with the skills and tools needed to utilise authoritative data. The focus on **a unified data platform, robust governance framework and enhanced reporting capabilities** ensures that staff can access reliable, real-time insights when needed. These initiatives will reduce inefficiencies, improve strategic decision-making, and create a more connected, informed and agile University community.
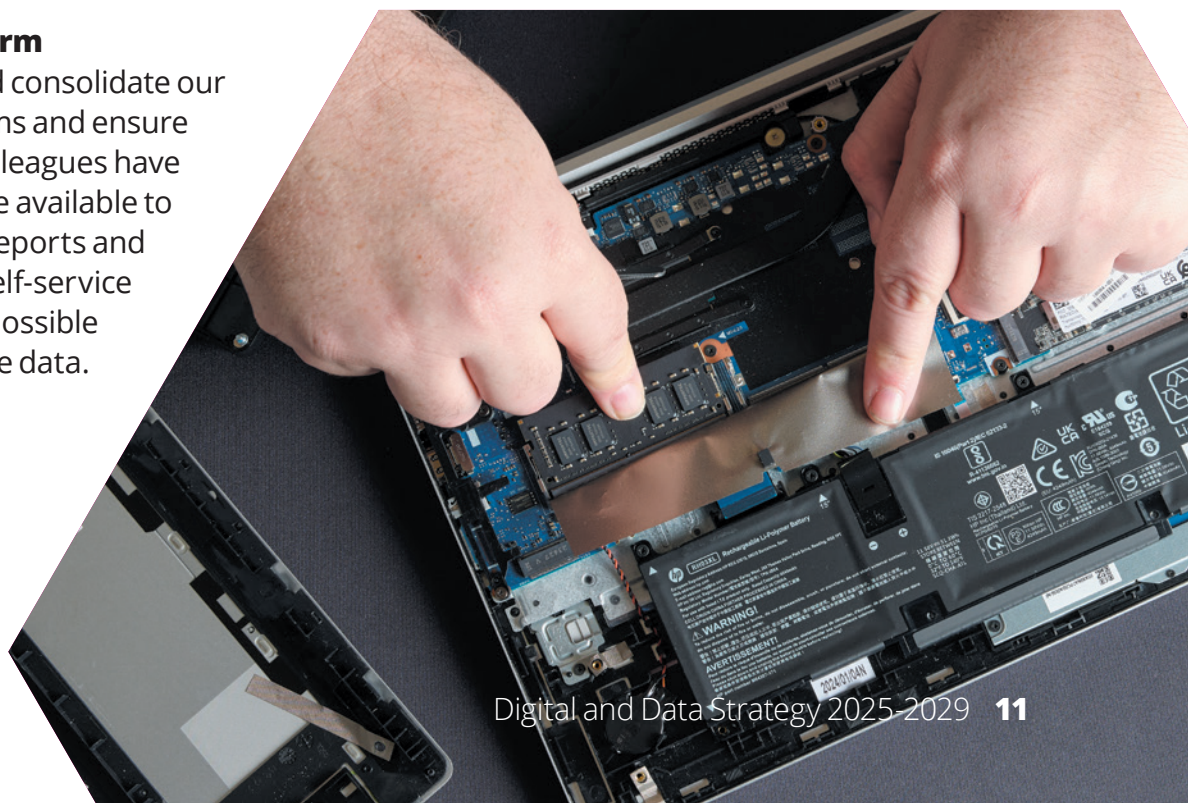
Standardise Service Interactions

Our focus will be on ensuring our staff and students have the option of self-service IT solutions, reducing the dependency on IT, and improving response times. Our IT team's capacity will focus on more complex, strategic projects.

We will empower our staff and students with self-service IT opportunities.

In consultation on this theme, colleagues have communicated that there are multiple staff and student portals in use, leading to confusion and a suboptimal customer experience.

What you will see

- **University Service Management Platform**
  A customer-friendly single interface for staff and students to access services efficiently, reducing frustration and duplication which in turn leads to an enhanced student and staff experience.

- **Integrated Service Desk**
  We will provide a single place for staff and students to request help. Improving the end user experience by implementation of an integrated service desk that allows staff and students to interact with services in a single consistent way, improving efficiency and consistency across the University.

- **Digital Front Door**
  Staff and students will each have access to a consolidated digital front door for interactions with University services, with single-sign-on and seamless navigation to other core University platforms such as NILE.

The University's commitment to enhancing digital and data capabilities aligns with its broader goal of creating a seamless and efficient working and learning environment. By **standardising service interactions, streamlining access to IT support** and empowering staff and students with **self-service solutions,** the Digital and Data Strategy supports the University's ambition to improve customer experience and operational effectiveness. The focus on a **unified service platform, integrated service desk** and a **digital front door** ensures that staff and students can access the tools and support they need with ease, reducing frustration and fostering a more connected and digitally enabled University community.
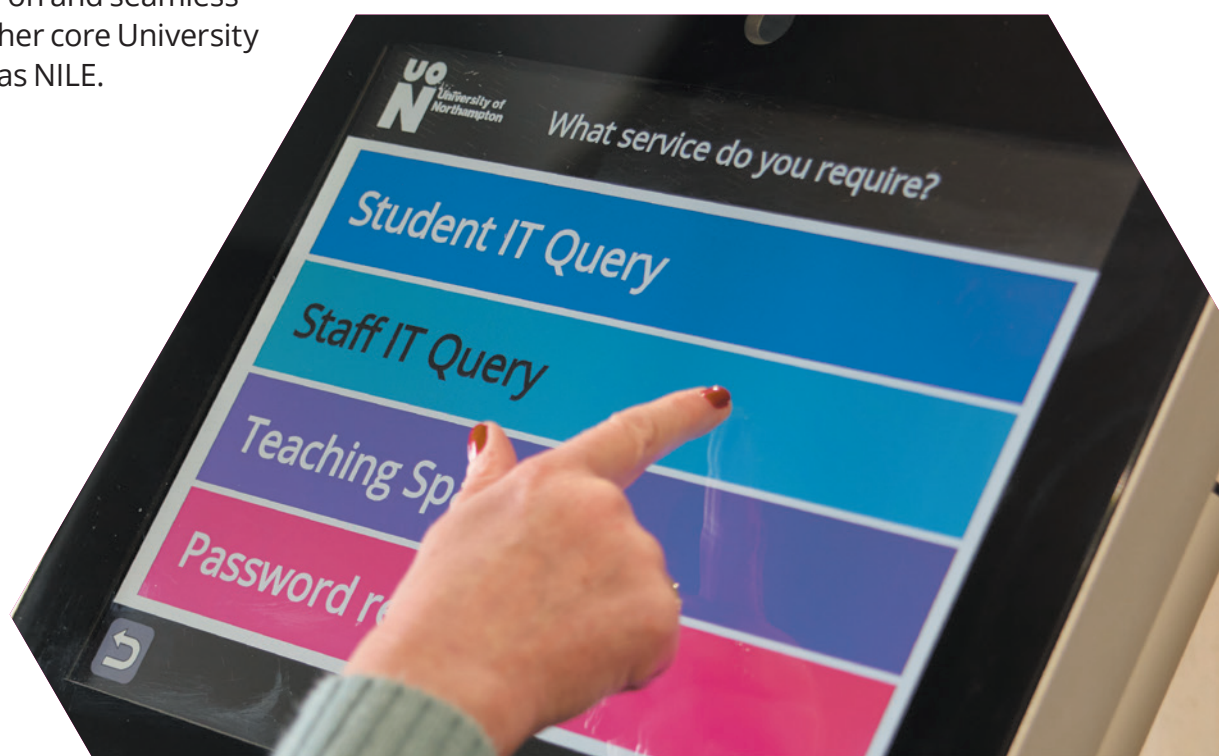
⬡ Enhance Staff and Student Experience

Our focus will be on ensuring that customer experience is at the core of all technology initiatives, driving decisions that enhance ease of use, accessibility and satisfaction for staff and students, while fostering innovation and improving overall digital engagement.

We will facilitate seamless and personalised digital experiences for our staff and students.

Staff and student experience is a strategic priority for the University. Whilst colleagues highlighted the positive changes seen recently with the digital capability, there are still areas for improvement. Colleagues highlighted issues regarding multiple systems for the same purpose, lack of self-service and manual processes. Students have consistently highlighted frustrations with the Wi-Fi, particularly within the Halls of Residences.

What you will see

- **Expanded Student Records System**
  We will expand the student records system where appropriate to provide an intuitive student record system that is integrated across core university services. There will be an improved customer experience as there is one central place to access key student records, empowering staff to adopt self-service where possible.

- **University Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System**
  We will create a strategy for the CRM approach across the University to ensure consistency and a clear future path. We will also invest in a system to improve and personalise the student experience, as colleagues will have a seamless view of the student from applicant to alumni. There will be centralised data management with all student, alumni, staff and third party data consolidated, allowing improved tracking of interactions and engagement and streamlining administrative processes, reducing cost for multiple disparate systems.

- **Identity Management Platform**
  We will review how our customers access University systems to make it quicker and easier for visitors, applicants, external stakeholders, staff and students to get the right access when they join, move roles or leave.

- **Student Halls Network Uplift**
  We will define and implement improved networks to the remaining student Halls of Residences, replacing legacy networking technology. This will improve student experience by providing a modern connectivity in accommodation.

The University's commitment to enhancing the staff and student experience aligns with its broader goal of fostering a personalised, accessible and engaging digital environment. By prioritising customer experience in all technology initiatives, the Digital and Data Strategy supports the University's ambition to improve ease of use, accessibility and innovation. The focus on an **expanded student records system, enhanced CRM platform, streamlined identity management** and **modernised student halls network** ensures that staff and students benefit from integrated, customer-friendly systems that support their academic and professional journeys.

Automate Processes

Our focus will be on adopting automation in a way that is responsive to the needs of our customers and the University. By reducing manual, repetitive tasks, we aim to free up time for colleagues to focus on more meaningful and high-value work. We will continue to work closely with colleagues and actively scan for new opportunities where automation can enhance services and support the University's goals.

We will be responsive to emerging customer needs and seek automation opportunities that make work more efficient and rewarding for staff.

In consultation on this theme, colleagues highlighted that automation is not currently widely used across the University. Colleagues find that processes are highly manual and require intervention because of fragmented data and gaps in process documentation. This results in lost time and productivity, as well as increased risk of human error.

What you will see

- **Intelligent Process Automation**
  We will intelligently automate repetitive tasks and existing University processes such as manual data entry, information transfer between systems and in-system workflows, as well as incorporate AI discovery. We will establish an Automation Factory that will identify and implement specific automation use cases based on institutional needs and priorities, as well as working with service areas and faculties to assess AI use cases and identify value-added opportunities for the implementation of AI within process automation.

- **Staff Applicant Tracking System**
  We will enhance our process and systems for recruitment of staff to the University, creating a user centric and consistent recruitment experience for our applicants.

- **Implement Docusign**
  We will extend the Docusign application across the University to reduce the manual administrative task of signing physical documents and improve contract and document management. This will increase accessibility, allowing for staff to approve documents irrespective of location.

Embracing automation is key to enhancing efficiency, reducing manual workloads, and improving service delivery. Our focus on **intelligent process automation, AI-driven opportunities** and **streamlined workflows** supports the University's ambition to create a more agile and responsive digital environment. By establishing an **Automation Factory, modernising staff recruitment systems** and expanding **digital document signing,** we will reduce administrative burden, improve accuracy and free staff to focus on higher-value activities. This strategy ensures that automation supports academic and professional services, driving innovation, improving customer experience and enabling the University to remain adaptive and forward-thinking.

Streamline and Secure the Digital Estate

Our focus will be on simplifying our digital and data estate, exploring opportunities for consolidation to enhance operational efficiency, reduce costs, while also managing technology risks to ensure stability and security.

We will optimise our systems to balance value, cost and security.

In consultation on this theme, colleagues communicated that the University has multiple applications in use that provide similar functionality. Some of our systems are underutilised and there are performance issues with some of the equipment colleagues use to work.

What you will see

- **End User Compute Service Design**
  We will review our current device options and vendor to ensure cost and performance optimisation, both from a staff and student perspective. Devices available to staff will be tiered to meet diverse needs as appropriate and may include a Lightweight Device, Standard Device and Power User Device. We will also plan for proactive refresh cycles every 4-5 years for standard devices to avoid poor performing equipment.

- **3 Year Cyber Security Strategy**
  We will build on the work achieved to date and define a plan for the next 3 years on how the University will protect its information, system and networks from cyber threats.

- **Trusted Research**
  We will align to the National Protective Security Authority and National Cyber Security Centre's principle of Trusted Research which supports the integrity of the system of international research collaboration.

- **University Asset Management**
  We will review and deliver a consolidated Asset Management platform for a clear, updated and comprehensive view of all University assets, enabling better planning, operational efficiency and strategic decision-making.

- **Audio Visual Control System Replacement**
  We will replace the legacy system which will enhance the University's AV capabilities by adopting a modern control system that improves user experience, simplifies management and integrates seamlessly with existing University technologies.

- **Servers Review and Strategy**
  We will define a strategy for server deployment and management including principles and processes for infrastructure selection, provisioning, scalability, security, compliance, monitoring and backup. This will provide enhanced governance to support processes and ensure Service Level Agreements are met.

Simplifying and securing the University's digital estate is key to enhancing efficiency, reducing costs and managing technology risks. Our focus on **end user computing design, cyber security strategy and technology asset optimisation** supports the University's ambition to create a stable, secure and cost-effective digital environment. By investing in **tiered device options, a 3 year cybersecurity strategy, trusted research principles and improved technology asset management,** we will ensure better planning, operational efficiency and risk management. Additionally, **modernised AV controls and a strategic server review** will improve system performance and governance, ensuring the University remains resilient, secure and future-ready.

Enhance the IT Team's Capability

Our focus is on investing in the right capabilities to empower the IT teams, supporting the University's objectives through efficiency and informed decision-making. We will ensure agility, standardised processes and robust governance to deliver courses, maintain quality and drive University growth.

We will ensure that the IT teams have effective governance, processes and capability to effectively deliver value and enhance strategic alignment across the university.

In consultation on this theme, colleagues highlighted that the current IT governance structure is working well in some areas, but not others, resulting in a lack of visibility and quality issues. Documentation is a concern and there are inconsistencies. Colleagues also highlighted further improvement is required for IT project delivery to ensure benefits are fully realised and change is effectively adopted.

What you will see

- **IT Knowledge Management**
  We will assess and review the existing SharePoint structures, including Policy Management to ensure documentation is accessible across the University and version control processes are in place. This will improve document management with centralised repositories. We will also focus on enhancing the skillset of the IT team to ensure they are equipped to manage, maintain and fully leverage the strategic initiatives and support the delivery of this strategy.

- **IT Governance Uplift**
  We will build upon existing IT Governance to make it more effective, efficient and robust. The new structure will be clear and provide efficiencies, with the appropriate stakeholders on the right committee, improving decision-making and allowing informed decisions to drive transformation across the University.

- **Portfolio and Project Management**
  To support the Transformation Office and proposed governance structure, the IT project management team will require standardised processes and tools to ensure consistency and accuracy across projects.

- **Infrastructure Automation**
  We will assess current processes and automate provision of networks, servers and other infrastructure which will reduce set up times and minimise opportunities for human error.

- **IT Capability Assessment and Design**
  We will review the current IT capability to establish a clear understanding of the University's current IT strengths and weaknesses, identifying critical capability gaps that must be addressed to align IT initiatives with University objectives, drive transformation effectively and maximise the value from IT investments. Upskilling of the IT team will be a key part of closing these gaps and building the capabilities needed for future success.

Investing in the right capabilities is essential to empowering our IT department and aligning technology with the University's strategic goals. Our focus on **governance, standardised processes and capability development** supports the University's ambition to enhance efficiency, decision-making and service delivery. By implementing **improved IT knowledge management, strengthened governance, portfolio and project management processes, and infrastructure automation,** we will create a more agile and effective IT function. Additionally, an **IT capability assessment** will identify key gaps and opportunities, ensuring the University maximises the value of its IT investments and remains adaptable to future needs.

Building Digital Skills

Digital transformation thrives on people, not just technology. To achieve our Digital and Data Strategy, we must empower staff and students with the confidence, skills and tools to excel with digital technologies, prioritising accessibility to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all. These initiatives are being primarily driven by the People Strategy and Learning and Teaching Strategy but will also be supported by the Digital and Data Strategy.

Digital Skills Objectives

These objectives align with the University's People Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Strategy by fostering digital skills to attract and retain talent, promote inclusivity through accessible practices and support wellbeing with flexible, technology-enabled learning. By prioritising these areas, we aim to create an inclusive community where staff and students can thrive and perform at their best.

The six key areas are:

- Embed Digital Literacy Across Roles and Curriculum
- Create Tailored Learning Pathways
- Enhance Digital Accessibility
- Promote Continuous Learning
- Leverage Data-Driven Insights
- Embed Digital Transformation

Key Initiatives

By embedding these initiatives within the overarching goals of the People Strategy, the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the Digital and Data Strategy, we aim to create a digitally skilled, inclusive and high-performing community of staff and students that contributes to the University's strategic priorities and enhances the overall experience for both staff and students.

The six initiatives are:

- Foundational Digital Skills Programme
- Advanced Teaching Technologies Training
- Digital Accessibility and Inclusion Training
- Digital Transformation Skills
- Learning Technology Champions
- Embedding Digital Literacy Across Roles and Curriculum

Measuring Impact and Success

We will adopt a mindset of continuous improvement, using this framework to guide, govern and monitor the progress and impact of our digital and data initiatives. All departments and communities that enable digital and data capabilities – including academic and professional colleagues – will align with and respond to this strategy.

The IT Strategy Board will maintain a comprehensive register of all digital and data initiatives, prioritising and tracking their delivery. It will also oversee institutional health indicators aligned to each strategic theme. Where indicators fall below expected standards, the Board will take action to address underlying issues and drive improvement.

Your feedback is always welcome. Should you wish to speak about this strategy, please contact Alex Vujcich, Director of IT.

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