

School of English Strategic Plan 2020-25

The School's strategy is directed towards world-leading scholarship, creativity and research-led teaching that change the parameters of the discipline and extend what is possible in English studies. We regularly top, or come near the top, in UK league tables: including the Times and Sunday Times Good University rankings, the Guardian, and the Complete University Guide. Our aspiration is to stand in the first rank, globally, in terms of research and teaching quality and to be known internationally for our outward-looking, collaborative, collegial ethos. Our longer-term aim is to maintain and build on an already strong position by ensuring that we continue to recruit, retain and nurture diverse voices amongst our staff and student body with the best and most exciting projects: as part of this, we are passionate about growing an inclusive workplace founded on equality and diversity and highly supportive of all students and researchers in our community.

We plan to sustain our excellent reputation for critical and creative outputs in a range of interdisciplinary fields and specialist areas. The School has broad strengths in areas of research that include: language, community and transmission; women's writing; the literature of war and conflict; poetics and musical reception; creative writing. We will build on these in agile ways, using the collegial ethos of our Research Groups, to explore new initiatives, groupings and questions, and to support the full, diverse range of research our colleagues are undertaking. We are distinguished by the ways in which we span and offer teaching across all chronological areas of the discipline from Old and Middle English through to contemporary poetry, prose, screenwriting, drama and performance. This scope is increasingly rare in UK English departments; it is a valuable teaching strength we will protect, whilst also cultivating our specialist research areas.

Our Aspiration

Our overarching aspiration over the next five years is to advance and diversify the School as a world-class centre for literary research, criticism and creative writing. As such, we plan to reinforce our international reputation for agenda-changing thinking and creativity and to enhance our prestige as one of the best and most socially responsible places to study and research the discipline globally. To fulfil this aspiration over the next five years our key objectives are as follows:

General: reinforcing excellence and developing capacity

- Strengthen and diversify the remarkable range of our teaching and research
- Invest in the highest-quality academic colleagues, including safeguarding and reinforcing our Scottish literature and playwriting/screenwriting provision
- Reorganise our Professional Services, enabling academics to spend more time on research and education whilst improving delivery and career development of Professional Services

Research: supporting individuals and building collaborations

- Invest in and support our research and the collaborations growing from it
- Attract the finest postgraduates through enhanced financial and workplace support
- Increase our post-doctoral population through, e.g., British Academy, AHRC and Leverhulme schemes
- Build upon existing interdisciplinary collaborations with Schools and units across St Andrews
- Create and develop partnerships and initiatives with local, national and international research and educational collaborators
- Increase our international exchanges and renown through globally reaching seminars and conferences (online and in-person), invited lectures, and by exploring the Global Fellowship Scheme
- Support colleagues' research and creative projects to accelerate momentum and nurture new avenues initiated in the wake of the pandemic

Teaching: upholding quality and sustaining innovation

- Maintain and enrich our core small-group research-led teaching whilst appropriately incorporating technological innovation into our pedagogy

Social responsibility: outward-looking and forward-looking

- Communicate even more effectively our scholarship to a burgeoning variety of audiences within academia and beyond
- Rethink, diversify and appoint to the currently unoccupied flagship Berry Chair of English
- Embed and progress equality, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the School
- Nurture environmental awareness and green practices in the life of the School

Research excellence

World-class literary scholarship and research-led teaching are the twin pillars of our identity. We are amongst the most distinguished UK English departments in terms of research publication: academic books, articles and chapters; scholarly editions; poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, and writing for stage and screen. Achievements have been recognised through fellowships and memberships of learned societies and by many prizes and awards. We have a successful track record of diverse Impact and Public Engagement work in the UK and internationally, employing an ever-increasing range of media to execute and disseminate research, such as online resources, radio and TV programmes, podcasts, concert series and performances.

We will maintain our commitment to socially responsible research excellence across the full chronological range of English studies (7th to 21st centuries), while expanding our geographical and methodological range. Our strengths in Scottish Gaelic, Caribbean, South Asian and Pacific literatures and cultures, and in oral history, material culture, performance studies, and war and conflict studies will be supported by recruitment motivated by expanding horizons and decolonising across periods and areas of research.

Our excellence is reflected not only in our leading roles in networks and in institutional and informal partnerships but also in long-standing strands of research relating literature to music, history, philosophy, ecology, and (intrinsically interdisciplinary) medieval studies. Our history of influential Impact and Public Engagement work extends these research collaborations: we will deepen and extend our existing co-working within the University and beyond, with, for example, computer scientists in the generation of online resources on pre-1066 and late medieval texts, early modern Scottish notaries, Victorian grammatical culture, American Civil War monuments, and with school-teachers and the SQA on “Older Scots for Modern Scots”.

Research areas and engagement: moving outwards

Over the next five years, we will continue to invest in and promote (but not be restricted to) world-leading collaboratively focused research fields where core intellectual imperatives inform initiatives reaching out beyond academia. The School encourages and promotes the independent research of colleagues across a wide and diverse range of periods and academic and creative fields, through tailored individual advice and through the activities of 5 Research Groups: Medieval and Renaissance; 18th Century, Romantic and Victorian; Modern and Contemporary; Creative Writing; Playwriting and Screenwriting. These provide a robust basis for ambitious collaborative research projects that cut across the activities of these groups, through focuses on particular themes and questions, with current attention, for example, on ‘Scholarly Editing’, discussing editorial practices across the centuries. As intellectual interests shift, we will always be looking for new ways to recombine and redescribe our focal points, remaining receptive to new formations and alliances. These will all inform outreach and Impact work across multiple media, connecting with wider audiences with diverse interests. In so doing we will develop relationships that will inform our reflective, critical and creative practice.

Research support

We aim to continue to provide, with equality of opportunity regardless of grade or specialism, substantial individual research support – including a 1-in-6 semester pattern of research leave for

all academic staff, targeted collaborative peer-support, seed-corn funding and tailored support and advice (including on grant applications) – so that:

- We can develop new international collaborations and include more colleagues in existing partnerships, enhancing the School's and University's reputation and global reach.
- Staff can continue to produce truly world-leading research with significant Impact.
- Staff are supported to seek grant funding ambitiously and competitively to enhance the scope, scale and reach of their research, and its paradigm-changing impact. We aspire, as part of this, to develop opportunities for post-doctoral researchers within the school.
- Our research promotes creativity, innovation, diversity and social responsibility.

Connections: from local to international

We are a partner of choice for the most prestigious of collaborations. The School is, for example, one of only two non-North American members of the institute of advanced study attached to the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC and in 2022 will host the Folger Symposium 'Reading Scotland Before 1707'. This event, won against stiff competition, and uniquely representing the Folger 'on tour' beyond the USA, will provide the impetus for rethinking Scotland's literary culture before the Act of Union. We will continue to support and develop impactful partnerships of this kind, including:

- Deepening our collaboration with StAnza, Scotland's International Poetry Festival, sharing research and creative outputs more widely and in new formats, and formulating with StAnza a major AHRC project-bid under the theme of 'festivals as interventions'.
- Inviting more speakers from, and developing academic collaborations with, regions other than Europe, North America and Australasia, in particular through links with the global South. Our UKIERI-funded Narratives of Migration and Exchange project with Presidency University, Kolkata and GCRF-funded work with Sāmoan musicians exemplify our direction of travel.
- Taking forward our leading role in the international medieval self-commentary project (English, Scots, French, Italian, Czech, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Sanskrit, Latin, Jewish, Byzantine, Hungarian) in partnership with Syddansk Universiteit, Odense.
- Fortifying productive research relationships, including those with the following Universities: Padua, The Sorbonne, Karlova University Prague, Lisbon, Lausanne, Bergen, William and Mary, Princeton and Granada.
- Encouraging colleagues' international links through their disciplinary leadership as members of research consortia, learned societies or as general editors of, or members of, editorial boards of scholarly journals, major book series and editorial projects.
- Taking advantage of the University's Global Fellowship and PhD scholarship schemes.
- Forging productive Heritage alliances with museums, libraries, organisations and other partners for the pursuit of new research and collaborative doctoral supervision.

We will work with the University's Global Office to help us develop existing links and forge more partnerships with institutions across the world.

Postgraduate Experience

The School boasts a remarkably energetic international community of PGRs. Our dedicated PG Administrator provides the highest-quality professional and personal support to students. We are in regular receipt of AHRC block-funding and our PGRs have been supported by a range of internal and external sources including the Wolfson Foundation, World-leading, Bonnyman, Ewan and Christine Brown, and Carnegie scholarships. The School also funds scholarships from its operations budget. While maintaining competitiveness in such funding schemes, we will also work closely with Development to identify ways to create more fully funded scholarships for our PGs, and with Careers to set up a series of strategic funded annual/semestral internships for PGs supporting academic, editorial, creative, and proto-publishing activities within the School, while also competing for the University's Global St Leonard's scholarships.

To maintain and strengthen our PGR community, we will, in collaboration with the Provost and Space Planning, seek to develop appropriate high-quality personalisable study and social space for our PGR community: this will foster creativity, collaboration, peer support and a vibrant PG research environment. The School will also continue to provide a research expenditure allowance to all PGs and connect PGR and PGT students with our Research Groups.

Teaching excellence

The School of English, as numerous league tables and the recent University Review of Learning and Teaching warmly attest, is a centre of excellence for the undergraduate teaching of English Literature and Creative Writing. Our undergraduate cohort is international – from Scotland, RUK and worldwide – attracted by our communal ethos and commitment to research-led small-group teaching, by our internationally distinguished teaching staff, and by our ambitious and comprehensive coverage of literature from Old English and Older Scots through the early modern, Enlightenment, Romantic and Victorian periods and the 1900s to 21st-century poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, drama and performance. Unlike the majority of UK English departments, all academic staff – including Professors – teach at pre-Honours, Honours and taught PG levels. We will also continue to explore our capabilities in suitable technology-enhanced learning, using digital texts and sources, high-quality recorded material, and interactive technology to deliver accessible and innovative teaching.

The School is committed to diversifying our curriculum. In consultation with students, staff have reflected critically on how the study of literature can shed light on the histories of colonialism and racism, and have updated the undergraduate curriculum accordingly, introducing texts on emancipation and slavery, including a selection by African American writers, to our first-year 17th- to 19th-century module EN1004, and creating new Honours modules on Black American writing and Black and Asian British writing. Informed by the cutting-edge research of staff members, we plan to introduce further Honours modules on the diversity of global Englishes and on the decolonisation of English Literature as a subject. Diversification will also be promoted through the launch in 2021 of a Vertically Integrated Project in which students from across the University will work together to document the contentious history of Civil War monuments in the USA, and of a Summer Team Enterprise Programme project using Renaissance literary texts to interrogate Scotland's colonial past. These initiatives reflect our commitment to innovative pedagogy and assessment, and to helping our students develop transferable skills of teamwork, critical thinking, independent research and communication. The School plans to embed these skills more fully than ever before in its curriculum in the future, through dedicated lectures in first and second-year modules and through our PGR-led 'Writing Lab' series of workshops.

We plan academic appointments to fortify existing strengths. In particular, as Scotland's oldest university, it is vital that we retain a specialism in post-medieval Scottish literature, so that our teaching and research continue to explore the specifically Scottish literary and cultural debates of significant interest both to home and international students.

To realise our UG goals over the next 5 years, the School of English will:

- Continue to recruit exceptional UGs from Scotland, RUK, North America and across the world, including our collaboration with William and Mary on the BA (International Honours).
- Widen participation in our UG programmes by updating our Combined Studies MA curriculum, and by continuing our participation in the Gateway to Arts and FE-HE Pathway to Arts schemes.
- Continue to deliver exceptional teaching combining our traditional focus on in-person lectures and small-group teaching with appropriate technology-enhanced learning, whilst exploiting the unique resources of Special Collections for teaching literary history.

- Increase student choice by expanding the range of joint Honours degrees, research-led Honours modules, and Virtually Integrated Projects, supported by the University through investment in staffing, and particularly the recruitment of a specialist in post-medieval Scottish literature.
- Diversify our curriculum, whilst incorporating more focused skills-based education.

At PGT level we have developed an attractive suite of 8 taught MLitt programmes fully covering English literature from the earliest surviving Old English poems to contemporary and creative writing. These allow students to engage with, for example, ecocriticism, medievalism and postcolonial writing, or to learn the craft of the modern poet, novelist, playwright or screenwriter. We continue to enrich our extraordinary array of intellectual and creative offerings by the current ambitious reshaping of our MLitts to ensure that they are appealing and sector-leading. Recruitment is robust: we have had success in diversifying our PG base beyond areas of historic strength such as North America, and we will strive to recruit more extensively in such markets as India, China and Japan, as well as Europe.

The Byre and our strategy for playwriting, screenwriting, drama and performance

St Andrews has a long and distinguished tradition of student theatre. In addition to being one of the top academic Schools of English in the UK we also employ world-class multi-award-winning playwrights/screenwriters, and our playwriting graduates are increasingly commissioned by theatres. We shall extend our thriving collaboration with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where our PG screenwriting students have access to actors, produce scripts and collaborate at the BBC Studios (with videos of performances to be released online). We are particularly well-equipped in enjoying The Byre Theatre as our drama and performance hub and – in alliance with the Byre Artistic Directors and the VP for Collections, Music and Digital Content and her team – we plan to make more extensive use of The Byre, involving students in community engagement and assuring the thriving of student drama. In line with the University’s entrepreneurial strategy, we plan to explore joint possibilities in developing, for example, the teaching of applied theatre, movement and dance, theatre production, venue management, thereby connecting and developing various strands of the dramatic arts within and beyond the School. We shall also be enterprising in developing eye-catching online Byre events developed from pandemic technology, such as hybrid in-person and online storytelling events in collaboration with external partners.

We also plan to make the staffing resilience of our hugely thriving UG and PG playwriting/screenwriting/drama/performance courses more robust by appointing another distinguished screenwriter/playwright to reinforce the team, funded by PGT recruitment. This will be supported by reinstating our rolling writer-in-residence at the Byre, to share an office with permanent CW colleagues and exploit diversified global links for recruitment purposes. We shall also maintain our immensely successful and popular policy of engaging regular prominent guest teachers to foster links with industry and create pathways to employment for our students. We are additionally looking at bringing together existing UG drama and performance offerings to create a joint English, Drama and Performance degree pathway: this will be an appealing selling point for the School.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The values of equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of the University’s mission play a key role in the School’s workplace culture, pedagogy and research. We aim, over the next five years, to strengthen a milieu where all colleagues and students participate without fear or favour in an environment evolving through an ever-sharpening awareness of the historical legacies of inequality and exclusion that structure our present moment. To these ends, and reflecting our Athena-SWAN bronze award (extended till 2025), we have achieved and will sustain the following:

- A balanced gender profile in academic staffing (including at professorial level).
- Diversification of the range of author images in teaching spaces.
- A new Honours essay prize in ‘Decolonising Literary Studies’.

- Focus groups of male students questioning why we have far more female than male UGs.
- Marking circuses to continue to avoid gender bias in marking.
- Promptness in addressing diversity through the research-led exploration across our courses of the origins and workings of racism, sexism and social injustice.

Ongoing and future strategic actions will also include:

- Exploring renaming teaching spaces.
- Developing our 'Diversity in the English Curriculum' webpages (<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/english/about/equality-diversity/diversity-english-curriculum/undergraduate/>). These pages promote our teaching of women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic writers, especially to highlight diversity in our Honours modules. Later versions will extend to other levels of teaching, incentivising continuous improvements.
- Our Working Group on pre-Honours modules bringing in for 2021–22 additional new teaching on women and writers of colour, thereby moving us towards our Athena Swan target of 30% female authors across these modules.
- Continuous monitoring of fair workload distribution according to a renovated University-wide transparent workload allocation model.
- Inviting applications on a gender-aware basis for key School roles (rather than relying exclusively on approaches initiated by the Head of School).
- Working on improving accessibility to School buildings, especially continuing to work with Space Planning on the installation of a disabled lift in the historic Kennedy Hall building.

Wellbeing

The School is elaborating its approach to Wellbeing in accordance with University-wide policy, drawing on the skills, training and Wellbeing experience of its academic and, distinctively, its Creative Writing staff (thereby taking a lead unique in the institution) and continuing to support our Directors of Student Wellbeing (female and male). A Working Group encompassing staff and students is currently developing strategies to implement and support Wellbeing across the School. Colleagues involved in Wellbeing have their training funded by the School (and partly by the University).

Sustainability

As well as running academic offerings on Literature and Ecology and research on literature and food, the School supports ongoing communal projects in School and town, such as its own beehives and an increasingly eco-diverse food-producing garden.

Enhancement of Professional Services

The School has a small but skilled, generous and immensely experienced team of administrators. With service extending from 10 to 27 years, this unit has unparalleled institutional memory and expertise which staff and students appreciate daily. Following a 2020-21 University review's findings that the PS team required extra capacity, a School Manager is being appointed to enhance their managerial repertoire, whilst appropriately moving academic administrative burdens to PS. This will enable the School to offer a better quality of learning experience for students and to invest more time in research. The School Manager will also provide expertise to the Head of School on strategy and financial planning as well as new clarity and continuity in managing the School. These developments will link PS colleagues more powerfully into University communities of practice, mentoring and coaching, and they will enjoy greater clarity, ownership, interest and enhanced career development in their working lives.