

## School of History Strategic Statement 2020-2025

Our goal is to consolidate our position as **one of the pre-eminent History schools in the UK**, with an outstanding reputation for both teaching and research. According to the most recent league tables we rank **top 5 in the UK** lists (Guardian, Times, Complete, NSS); and **top 50** in the most prominent international lists (QS, THE). The School's core ambition is to maintain and improve on this reputation. Our current position is built on active fostering of a collegial, friendly and inclusive atmosphere that enables undergraduates, postgraduates and staff to do their best work.

Our most distinctive quality is our strength in depth over an enormous **geographical and chronological range**, from the fourth century to the twenty-first, and from the Atlantic World via Europe (East and West), the Mediterranean and the Middle East to the Indian Ocean and East Asia. At the same time, we are conscious of being anchored in a historic town and in historic buildings which are thoroughly enmeshed in local, European and global histories. The international diversity of our teaching and our people, married to the historic setting in which we work, is what forms the School's unique identity.

History as a discipline is defined by the shared approaches and methodologies of its practitioners, which are common across the full range of topics and interests we cover. In St Andrews we are well known for our **distinctive strengths in certain areas**: a recent external teaching report identified 'well-established strengths including Scottish, Medieval, and Early Modern History'; an external research report mentioned 'world leading' strengths in Intellectual History; Medieval and Early Modern History; Middle Eastern History; and Scottish History.

However, our overarching distinction compared to other History departments is the '**unusually broad and varied portfolio** of teaching across numerous distinct chronological and geographical areas of the discipline' identified by the 2019 URLT report. In recent years we have extended our range of expertise, especially in Modern History and so-called Global (non-European) topics. We aspire to extend further when the opportunity arises, to open up new areas that we currently don't cover (especially in the 'Global South'). We aim to do this carefully, in ways that create overlaps with existing strengths so that our core areas are not weakened.

These strengths and ambitions have clear implications for **undergraduate students**. We teach around 600 students FTE and we invest our teaching resources (staff time and expertise) into providing two things:

- an unparalleled range of student choice, particularly in third and fourth year
- small class sizes that enable teaching through research, discussion and argument, and that foster a friendly and collegial atmosphere in which teachers and students get to know each other throughout the year

At subhonours level we offer 8 distinct introductory/overview modules, 4 each at 1000 and 2000 level. At honours level we invite students to choose from around 80 research-led modules per year at 3000 level, and 30 at 4000 level (the full-year 'Special Subject'). In fourth year they also write a dissertation on any topic they choose. This degree of choice and model of teaching is virtually unique in the UK, and probably the world.

Undergraduate teaching is organised via **the School's 4 departments** (Medieval, Middle East, Modern and Scottish), which help articulate students' sense of belonging. We have an Undergraduate Skills Officer who coordinates a programme of seminars and resources to assist students with generic research and writing skills and help them transition between different stages of their degree. The success of this strategy is reflected in our NSS student satisfaction rate and our completion rate, both of which are over 90% in all recent surveys. The 2019 URLT review praised our 'commitment to equality of opportunity and inclusion', and our provision of 'a welcoming, tolerant and inclusive study environment'. A core ambition is to maintain these practices and values.

At **postgraduate** level we have a large and international community of c.70 PhD and c.60 MLitt students. The School runs or takes the leading role in c.15 Masters programmes. The breadth of options is attractive to applicants, and we achieve efficiencies by sharing teaching between programmes where possible. Several of these programmes involve other Schools. The School aspires to actively integrate our postgraduates into our research culture through routine involvement in seminars, centres and institutes. All PhD students receive a research allowance and the opportunity to apply for funding to organise conferences. We set aside shared office space for the use of advanced PhD students. We run a generic skills/career training programme for all postgraduates; and organise language training to support postgraduate research. We use some of our budget to pay for part-scholarships for PhDs and MLitts. One of the School's objectives is to maintain this level of support and integration for postgraduates in the face of likely budgetary challenges.

We aim to develop the School as a vibrant and diverse community of innovative historical researchers, who are supported in their shared vocation for producing and sharing excellent **research**. In REF 2014 about 70% of all outputs were judged to be 'internationally excellent or world-leading', and it was noted that these were evenly spread across all areas of the School's research. We do have clusters of expertise which can be defined chronologically, geographically or thematically, and which overlap each other. This range of expertise is articulated in the activities of over a dozen Centres and Institutes, again overlapping. Many of these involve colleagues from other Schools and are therefore valued as vehicles for interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching and research. Our six series of research seminars, our numerous international workshops and conferences, and our hospitality to visiting scholars from around the world all testify to the high level of research engagement amongst our staff and postgraduates.

We also wish to be known for our commitment to sharing our research with a wide range of **audiences** and helping to make history relevant and useful to them. Our researchers have been particularly successful in reaching out to broader audiences. All of our impact case studies in 2014 were considered to be either outstanding or very considerable, and the School's approach to impact and research support was judged 'exemplary'. With the help of the university's Public Engagement team, we are in the process of developing a more wide-ranging strategy to encourage and support staff at all career levels who wish to pursue opportunities in this area. We have made preliminary steps (interrupted by Covid-19) to address these issues, for example by assembling an advisory board, and working to bring opportunities to the attention of individual staff members. But as a School (and a University) we need to work out how to free up staff time, and to build public engagement into our working practices. As well as having potential benefits

for our own research, this aim reflects the University's commitment to social responsibility. A related area of work is our intention to develop potential for **Summer School** initiatives, which have public engagement, educational and entrepreneurial benefits. A first proposal (for an archaeological/historical programme in Scottish/Irish history) has been submitted, and others are at a preliminary discussion stage.

**International collaborations** are integral to the School's identity and strategy. We collaborate with a wide range of universities and research institutes internationally, on joint research projects, staff and student exchanges, and co-tutelles for PhD students. In Europe, our international partners include in France, the Universities of Caen and Paris Nanterre; in Germany, Free University Berlin, Bonn, Tübingen and Potsdam; in Italy the Universities of Padua, Milan and Roma Tre; in Belgium, Ghent and KU Leuven, as well as the Universities of Oslo (Norway) and Geneva (Switzerland), the Institute of Iranian Studies of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Spanish Centre for Human and Social Sciences. We also have relationships with Boğaziçi University (Istanbul), Tel Aviv University, Keio University, Trinity College Dublin, and the College of William and Mary (USA). We regularly host international scholars as visiting fellows, and recent visitors have come from Italy, France, Denmark, the USA, Canada, Germany, Brazil, Iran, Uzbekistan, Japan, and China. Our aim is to maintain and expand this range of partners to open up fruitful research collaborations and opportunities for students across Europe and the world.

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** are embedded in all areas of the School's work. The School's achievement of an Athena Swan Bronze award for the period 2018-23 reflects our commitment to the values of diversity, inclusion and community. We are working towards an application for Silver in the next phase. We also continue working to ensure that these values are reflected not only in our day-to-day interactions but also in our curriculum. Athena Swan has been a helpful tool for promoting diversity and inclusion in the School, as well as a signal to the outside world of our commitment to these values.

Initiatives here include a rolling programme of annual events to mark Black History Month, Disability History Month, and LGBTQ+ History Month. We have established an Annual Lecture in the History of Women, Gender and Sexuality. A School EDI survey in 2019 indicated that the vast majority of our students and colleagues think the School is a welcoming environment in which to work and study (91% of students and 87% of staff), that both staff and students agree that they have strong role models in the School, and that most staff and students agree that EDI is a priority in the School (87% of staff and 60% of students, albeit there was some gender disparity in students' answers to this question). These results are encouraging, but also indicate that there remains much work to be done.

With respect to the diversity of our student body, we have a gender balance between female and male students at UG level (56% female in 2018-9) that is broadly in line with national disciplinary ratio of 55:45 but we would like to assist the university to encourage more students of diverse ethnicities and backgrounds to study with us. Colleagues in the School have participated in University Admissions-led outreach activities in East and South-east Asia, aimed at diversifying our student population and have contributed to widening participation, for example through talks to local schools; we will continue to explore ways in which colleagues can

do more to encourage greater diversity, including among 'Home' students, and including social diversity. Obviously, structural inequalities in accessing higher education also require sustained measures to be implemented at a university and regulatory level if they are to be meaningfully addressed.

In all of these areas, the role played by our team of **support staff**, together with our **IT Officer and Academic Support Officer** cannot be overstated. They are crucial to the smooth operation of the School and the welcoming atmosphere we provide. The long experience of all our support staff is an important underpinning factor in creating and perpetuating the School's culture, and we aim to ensure that this remains the case.