



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Edinburgh Futures Institute

Annual Report 2024/25



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Edinburgh Futures Institute
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Director's Foreword

It's my pleasure to introduce you to this short report on Edinburgh Futures Institute's work over the past year. A mere few pages can't begin to capture the range and variety of what we're doing within our new building and far beyond, but we hope that this report gives you a sense of the Institute's activities as an inspiring space within the University for groundbreaking collaboration and innovation.

With a focus on responding to the challenges of our times, Edinburgh Futures Institute recognises that our responses require disciplinary-neutral spaces where colleagues can come together in fresh configurations around new ideas and spaces where researchers and external partners mix, meet, and work together on a daily basis. The Futures Institute understands the challenges of today as human and social challenges as much as they are scientific and technical problems – and it is through commitment to this expansive, collaborative, vision that the research teams we support are at the leading edge of global thinking. It is the University's brilliant researchers and teachers who are at the heart of all our successes.

Our second cohort of undergraduate students joined us on MA (Hons) Interdisciplinary Futures, a programme designed to develop key employability skills, focused on global and local challenges, and linked to cutting-edge research. We've celebrated the graduation of almost 200 students from our Masters' Programmes, aimed at students who want an education that helps shape a better future for our world. These programmes are all interdisciplinary and co-owned across multiple Schools, attracting brilliant students (who often bring a wealth of expertise with them) who would, in many cases, not otherwise have come to this University.

We've also seen enormously consequential strides forward in the Innovation space at the Futures Institute, with major success stories such as our weekly 'e-corner' gathering for entrepreneurs and our new Innovation Fellowships. We have welcomed more than 300 people from 50 organisations into our building as tenants and partners, enriching our ecosystem and creating the conditions for new partnerships and projects to emerge.

Finally, we were delighted to welcome the University's Chancellor, the Princess Royal, to open our building formally in April 2025, just under a year since we opened our doors fully. The collective efforts of all of those who work with us have resulted in a vibrant and energised ecosystem at the Institute. We're proud of what we've achieved in such a short space of time and look forward to working with many more of you over the next year.



Marion Thain
Director, Edinburgh Futures Institute

Innovation

Edinburgh Futures Institute aims to ensure that the next generation of technologies are developed and used with social good and human flourishing at their core. We do this by combining technical expertise with a deep understanding of culture and society, building cross-sector partnerships and fostering spaces where new ideas are developed and put into practice.

The [Cohorts for Change](#) programme with The Data Lab equips data science students to co-design solutions for real-world issues. The [Data for Children Collaborative](#) project has mapped healthcare access across all African nations to support UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The [Scottish Prevention Hub](#), launched in 2023, is shaping the narrative and direction of Scotland's broader reform ambitions, from public health and justice to digital and data, with a major conference held in September 2025. Our [Traveltech Innovation Hub](#) is a space where traveltech companies grow through AI-driven research and multi-sector collaboration.

The [Centre for Data, Culture & Society](#) supports creative digital upskilling, this year hosting a digital research sandpit with Edinburgh's festivals and offering over 60 digital skills courses, training around 600 researchers in data-led methods annually.

We launched the [Compassion in Financial Services](#) hub in February 2025 to help develop a more inclusive, sustainable, and compassionate financial system. The hub has partnered with Young Scot to re-imagine and redesign financial products and services for young people.



April 2025: The Principal Professor Sir Peter Mathieson welcomed Police Scotland's Chief Constable Jo Farrell to Edinburgh Futures Institute when she visited the Scottish Prevention Hub



Compassion in Financial Services Hub and Young Scot partnership launch

Coming next year... we'll be developing a plan for a new incubator programme to support and accelerate Data Driven Innovation and the contribution of the University's research to economic development and social good.

Research

A central focus of our research portfolio at Edinburgh Futures Institute is understanding the complex relationship between digital technology and society, illustrated by some recent examples below:

In May 2025, we welcomed the UKRI-funded **Centre for Net-Zero High Density Buildings**, directed by Professor Sean Smith (School of Engineering). The project brings together experts from across Scottish universities and BE-ST, Scotland's construction innovation centre, to develop innovative, cost-effective green technologies that reduce energy use and carbon emissions in urban and social housing.

In the summer of 2025, the **Lothian Birth Cohorts** (LBC) co-located in the Futures Institute. This world-famous group in Psychology (School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences) aims to understand how our brain and thinking skills change throughout life. LBC Senior Research Fellow Dr Sarah Harris was recently awarded a large grant from the US National Institutes of Health to facilitate research into biomarkers for neurocognitive decline prior to dementia onset, an international collaboration with The University of Texas at Austin, The University of Colorado at Boulder, and The US National Institute on Aging.

A project within the **Centre for Digital Education's Children and Technology** research strand, funded by UKRI's Cross-Council Responsive scheme and led by Professor Andrew Manches (Moray House School of Education and Sport), explores perceptions about children and their personal data through the creation of cutting-edge, child-centred tools and teaching practices. In partnership with Edinburgh Zoo, Glasgow Science Centre, and the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre, this project works with children to help them understand their own personal data.

The Generative AI Laboratory (GAIL), led by Professor Ram Ramamoorthy (School of Informatics), took up residency in the Futures Institute in September 2024, co-located with the Centre for Technomoral Futures and the UKRI Centre for Doctoral Training in Responsible Natural Language Processing. The GAIL Fellowship scheme recruited more than 60 GAIL Fellows from across all three colleges of the University. In partnership with the GAIL Fellows, four seminars, three workshops, and one showcase were hosted in the Institute.

The Binks Hub, directed by colleagues in the School of Social and Political Science and School of Health in Social Science, partnered with the University Library and Poverty Truth Community to co-create a "digital quilt" as part of an online archive of images and oral histories, preserving and creating a tangible legacy from the last two decades.

Coming next year... we'll be working on helping our successful research projects scale for greater impact and developing new SHAPE-STEMM collaborations to provide solutions to intractable technological problems.

Education

Edinburgh Futures Institute delivers education with a difference – a deeply interdisciplinary curriculum, featuring innovation and data-driven collaboration with a focus on complex global and social challenges. Our education portfolio brings together disciplines from across the University of Edinburgh, with opportunities in undergraduate, postgraduate, executive education and beyond.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students at the Futures Institute work directly with practitioners on live projects focused on the great global challenges. They range widely across sectors and applications:

“In one module alone, the work I’ve submitted has ranged from an academic essay on teaching biodiversity in schools, to a creative writing piece from the perspective of an indigenous girl in the Ngorongoro National Park in Tanzania, to a presentation on how to implement a biodiversity festival in Scottish cities.” – Caitlin Hall, MA Interdisciplinary Futures Student

Our alumni prove there are no limits to where their curiosity and ambition can take them. Brigid McCormack, a graduate of the *Narrative Futures: Art, Data, and Society* postgraduate programme, created ‘*Pods and Prose*’, a podcast challenging dominant narratives in the Appalachian region of the United States. Today, she develops learning content for organisations worldwide and is preparing to launch her own industry podcast.

Eloise Gabadou, an MSc *Future Governance* graduate, has built an international career in civic technology and AI governance, from designing participatory democratic processes with the European Commission and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, to leading a student assembly on the ethical use of AI—presented at the Paris AI Summit in February 2025. She now works independently on projects including community-led AI audits and strategies to counter techno-authoritarianism.

Three of our postgraduate students worked on projects with NESTA, the UK’s Innovation Agency for Social Good. Their innovative projects ranged from co-designing an ethics framework to assess the risks and opportunities of AI across NESTA’s key missions, establishing participatory methods for policy analysis, to ensuring that heat-pump innovations are sustainably designed.

Our open and bespoke Executive Education opportunities equip professionals at all stages of their careers with skills and understanding across technical capabilities, ethical considerations, and practical applications. Highlights include a collaboration with Pinsent Masons on AI legal and regulatory risks for financial services professionals, a custom Data Ethics and AI programme for a major bank, and a “Rising Stars” leadership series launched in partnership with the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce.

Coming next year... we’ll be developing a futures-focused professional education portfolio in human-centred and socially responsible technology which aims, crucially, to broaden the audiences we reach and make our education offering more accessible.

Convening

Co-location and convening are central to Edinburgh Futures Institute’s mission. With more than 300 people from over 50 organisations working in the building alongside students, researchers and academic colleagues, we convene and catalyse cross-sector conversations and collaboration to enable newly integrated solutions.

External Partners located in Edinburgh Futures Institute		
46% Private Sector	31% Public Sector	23% Third Sector

We engage the public in our work through a programme of events. We convened the [International Digital Futures Network](#) summer symposium, co-hosted with Bristol Digital Futures Institute, a dynamic day of public talks on the impact of AI. We also hosted the fourth [CreativeTech Scotland](#) Gathering, with over 140 professionals connecting, showcasing their work, and exploring innovation in creative technology.



Novelist Jeanette Winterson speaks with Amecca, the most advanced humanoid robot.



Celebrating the Edinburgh Seven Tapestry Event, bringing together the artist Christine Borland and Dovecot Studios Master Weaver Naomi Robertson.

In 2024, the [Edinburgh International Book Festival](#) moved into the Futures Institute, welcoming over 70,000 in-person ticket holders and online viewers from 55 countries.

Generous philanthropic support this year included the launch of the [Anthea Bond Exhibition Space](#) within the building, alongside scholarships to enable global access to our learning, and support for events such as the Edinburgh Futures Conversations.

Coming next year... we’ll be working with our sister innovation hubs in the University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt University to bring sectors together to develop new ways of thinking and working.

Edinburgh Futures Institute in numbers

Innovation

- **188** new companies have been started with support from the Institute and related projects since the start of 2020 – more than **twice** the target number for the full DDI programme by 2032.
- Altogether these new companies have secured follow-on funding of more than **£41m**.
- The *Creative Informatics* programme alone created or secured over **450** jobs.
- The Institute supported the development of **75** ‘adoption’ projects, where research insights generated within the University inform new products and services, supporting the wider economy and improving public services. These have collectively generated **over £25m** in income.
- Our DeepTech AI scaleup pilot programme *AI Discovery*, developed in partnership with Code Base and the University of Glasgow, delivered a **9-week programme for 30 postgraduate researchers**.

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Research

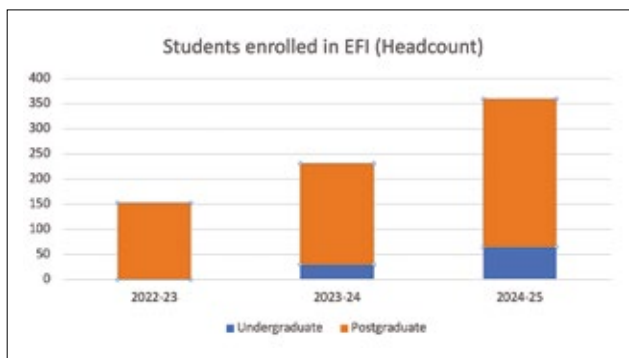
£3,883,250
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- EFI supported the submission of **32** research grant proposals in AY 24/25 involving researchers based in **19** different schools across all **3** Colleges in the University. Successful applications have secured more than **£4.25m** in external funding to date.
- About **350** people across **5** continents have downloaded the **first** episode of the “*Futures Conversations*” podcast within three weeks from its launch.
- In AY 24/25, **690** researchers attended our training courses, from **21** schools across **3** colleges.
- Over the last **3** years, **23** successful grant applications were led by staff who had taken a training course with us: the amount awarded to those projects totals **£3,883,250**. Of the funding bids that are currently pending, **35** are led by PIs who have attended our training, and associated potential income is **£10,138,360**.
- The research technology team has supported the delivery of technical outputs for **3** funded projects, with a combined total value of over **£3,000,000**.
- More than **60** courses run at the Institute train around **600** researchers in data-led methods annually.

Education

- In 2024/25, EFI delivered **12** taught postgraduate programmes and **1** undergraduate programme, taught by academic colleagues from **20** schools and departments across the University.
- **300** taught postgraduate students from around the world enrolled on our programmes in 2024/25: **175** students on campus in our brand-new building in Edinburgh and **125** students online. This is **more than double** the number of students who began their studies with us in September 2022.
- **14** postgraduate students graduated in July 2025, joining **over 190** who graduated in November 2024.
- Our second cohort of **35** undergraduate students enrolled in our MA (Hons) in Interdisciplinary Futures, joining the **35** already on our inaugural cohort, who will now progress into their Honours years.
- The Data Ethics, AI and Responsible Innovation MOOC (massive open online course), developed initially by our sister innovation hub The Bayes Centre, totalled **68,900 completions** since its launch.



Convening

- We have welcomed more than **300 individuals from over 50 companies** into our building since September 2024, based in the original hospital wards and creating clusters in our key industry sectors of Creative Industries, Travel Tech & Festivals, Financial Services and Public Sector.
- **Over 10,000 people** signed up to our events in total across Autumn 2024 and Spring 2025.
- We welcomed **3,000 visitors** for Doors Open Day 2024 over **two** days. Visitors explored the building at their leisure, took tours and participated in **16** drop-in activities around the building.
- Over **140** professionals attended the CreativeTech Scotland Gathering in EFI; Festival Data Education: **250+** students engaged with festivals data in 24-25 through Design Informatics, SPS and EFI courses.
- Travel Tech Meetups: **4** consecutive meetups with approximately **180** attendees in total (45+ per event).
- Over **300** participants across Travel Tech Futures series, AI for Destinations workshops, and tourism innovation sessions throughout 2024/25.