

A Stirling effort vital to shape the future

Transforming information services is of prime importance to high-flying University, finds **Graeme Andrews**

IF 2014 WAS a good year for the University of Stirling then 2015 and beyond seems set to eclipse an academic, commercial and corporate performance acclaimed by students and independent research assessments.

Kathy McCabe, Librarian and Director of Information Services, explains: "The University of Stirling will reach its 50th year anniversary in 2017 and looking to the next 50 years, we do so from a position of confidence, strength and success. Its new strategic plan will set out its direction through to 2021.

"In 2014 we graduated more than 3,500 students from more than 100 countries, exceeded a £10m research income for the third year running and were once again ranked in the top five per cent of universities

"In the UK-wide assessment of university research – the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) – we moved into the top 40 in the UK and into fifth place in Scotland for research intensity. Almost three quarters of this activity and also our academic staff were rated either world-leading or internationally excellent. We excelled across a

breadth of disciplines. Highlights include being ranked fourth in the UK for Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science, first in Scotland (12th in the UK) for Health Sciences and third in Scotland (18th in the UK) for Psychology.

"We were also in the top 25 UK institutions for Business and Management, out of 101 business schools in the UK."

Capping those achievements, the University also received the prestigious Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education – the UK's highest form of national acknowledgement open to academic institutions. This was in recognition of ground-breaking research into the effects of tobacco, alcohol and food marketing on the health of young people, conducted by its Institute of Social Marketing.

It's not difficult to understand why McCabe might be bullish about prospects for the future – her directorate will play a central role in developing that forward plan while on the cusp of transforming information services to meet the evolving needs an ambitious institution and its students.

The first phase of development

calls for three new posts critical to a broader reconfiguration of Information Services, helping to shape and deliver fully integrated IT, library and e-learning services. Head of function leaders will be required for Customer Service, Systems and Support Services and Service Transformation. One of the post holders will be appointed to take on the additional role of Deputy Director of Information Services.

The Head of Customer Service will be responsible for up to five teams offering frontline IT and library services to a range of customers comprising students, staff, applicants, and members of the public.

That person's new colleague in Systems and Support Services will deal with all back office systems, processes, system enhancements and developments. The selected candidate for Service Transformation will work in conjunction with the two other service heads and their teams to lead a review process and change-management programme.

The fresh recruits will be impressed by investments already made. For example, another milestone from last year can be found in the new £11m

Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre in its Innovation Park. Its purpose is to find solutions which will drive economic growth in Scotland's aquaculture sector.

McCabe also contends: "As Scotland's University for Sporting Excellence, we are delivering the best for Scottish sport – supporting elite athletes, undertaking innovative research and enhancing sport participation.

"We manage the national sports scholarships programme – Winning Students – on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council and the Complete University Guide ranks us as one of the top 10 places in the UK to study sport.

"The recent REF2014 results are evidence that the University is a research-led institution attractive to all of our students, from the UK and internationally. However, we also have a strong reputation for teaching and all round student experience – our achievement in REF was matched by an equally impressive result in the National Student Survey."

Collaborative partnerships across the world and exchange programmes spanning four continents further

bolster this higher education centre's credentials.

"We admit around 175 'study abroad' and exchange students each semester," says its Director of Information Services. "Around half come as part of organised exchange programmes with partner universities around the world. Others apply directly themselves, or through a study abroad provider.

"The University has a number of transnational partnership agreements – some of which have been in place for a long period of time, – such as our partnership in Singapore specialising in Retail Marketing, which has been operating for almost 30 years.

"In August 2014, the first cohort of Singapore-based students graduated from Stirling's internationally renowned Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Retail Marketing, delivered in partnership with the Singapore Institute of Management Global Education.

"There are partnerships with Muscat in Oman and Tongji in China, and last year we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Yamana Gakuin University, adding to a number of existing partnerships with Japanese universities."



STRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS: A bold and innovative forward plan at the University of Stirling was central to an acclaimed academic performance in 2014.

GLOBAL SUCCESS

IN SNAPSHOT, the University of Stirling's statistics show it to be a compact yet cosmopolitan, global university:

- 11,000+ students overall
- 8,200+ undergraduate students
- 3,400+ postgraduate students
- 1,400+ staff
- 122 nationalities represented on campus
- 23 per cent of students are from overseas

