Digital Strategy 2024-2030

(Final draft Dec 2024)

Introduction

UEA Strategy 2030 outlines an ambitious new vision for our future success and sustainability. Our institutional priorities have been captured in our three core strategies: Student Education and Experience; Research and Innovation; and Organisation Development. Under the core priority of Organisation Development, the Digital thematic strategy to 2030 provides further clarity of our aspirations and establishes clear links between our institutional priorities and the digital support for our activities. Much like our Estate Strategy, it also seeks to establish our strategic position on the management and maintenance of our Digital estate and assets.

UEA is operating in capital constrained environment, which will affect the pace at which we can work, and degree to which our ambitions may be realised. In the short term, our activities will need to be pragmatic, focus on the stabilisation and consolidation of our digital estate, and meet our commitments to statutory compliance and risk mitigation. However, this strategy also acknowledges that our landscape may evolve. We have a scalable vision, tending to our foundations, but building on areas where we know we can create opportunity. This strategy sets out the whole-university effort needed to meet our aims and recognises that collaboration and co-creation will be key to its delivery.

Our Strategic Vision

We will ensure everyone in our community is equipped to succeed using efficient, reliable, and secure digital, data and technology services with confidence and creativity.

One of the guiding principles of our Digital Strategy is the recognition that there is ‘Digital in everything we do’. This is reflected in both changing working and social practices and the needs of our students and staff. This is also reflected in our changing environment, our campus, and the changing technologies available to us. Through adopting this principle, we establish a university-wide commitment, to provide a secure, reliable, and rich digital environment for learning, teaching, research and professional services, now and in the future, as technologies and educational needs evolve.

Everyone in our community will be equipped to use digital services, data and technology effectively with confidence, resilience and creativity in their learning, teaching, research and organisational support. The underlying concept of a digitally connected campus, where physical and virtual environments integrate seamlessly to support flexible, accessible and collaborative experiences for all, is critical to the delivery of a digitally hybrid and inclusive approach.

Efforts will continue to ensure the core digital infrastructure is secure, efficient and effective, embracing cloud appropriate and buy over build principles for new products and services, whilst ensuring the highest contribution towards our sustainability strategy and that service excellence is at the core of all that we do.

Building upon core foundational technologies, infrastructure, governance and improvements in delivery, we will ensure consistent service excellence supporting and empowering all areas of university life in the pursuit of the best teaching, research and digitally competent delivery. We will be inclusive and meaningful by design to meet the needs and aspirations of our university

community. Through a new long-term operating model, we will ensure that our processes and systems are simple, automated where appropriate and applied consistently for optimal service excellence.

The digital strategy articulates a whole-university effort. We will strategically prioritise our work and manage the expectations of our service users in an open, honest, and transparent way. Digitally enabled business change is complex and involves dynamic collaboration across the university. We commit to moving through our plans in a collaborative and informed way, considering all stakeholder, school, department, and team efforts in the design and delivery of digital change.

The aims of the thematic Digital Strategy designed to support our core strategies and deliver our UEA vision are:

AIM 1	Enhance learning, teaching, assessment and student experience through digital innovation
AIM 2	Foster digital-enabled research and innovation ecosystems
AIM 3	Cultivate a digitally enabled and fluent community and culture
AIM 4	Optimise organisation development through digital enhancement
AIM 5	Strengthen our digital infrastructure and capabilities to deliver our digital ambitions

AIM 1: Enhance learning, teaching, assessment and student experience through digital innovation

Our Student Education and Experience Strategy highlights the importance of digital innovation in transforming the UEA student experience.

We will optimise digital capabilities to create dynamic and inclusive experiences for our students, that promote engagement and enhance educational outcomes. By exploring work-based, hybrid, remote and global learning environments, we will support innovation and student growth and prepare for the demands of 2030.

Objectives: to enhance learning, teaching, assessment and student experience through digital innovation we will:

a. Provide an outstanding digital experience for all students by developing our digital tools and learning technologies that enable, support and encourage students to achieve.
b. Ensure access to adaptable and enhanced digital tools that support wider participation and inclusivity for all students.
c. Support the University's goal of growing student numbers by offering a digital experience that is both fit for purpose and contributes to an exceptional applicant attraction and student experience.
d. Ensure that our digital tools and capabilities are in place to support the delivery of new and innovative ways of teaching.

Actions designed to deliver on our objectives
i. Develop and refine unified tools and platforms that make it simpler for students to engage and seek timely and appropriate support, as well as receiving effective joined up communications throughout their student journey. ii. Review student feedback periodically, to be mindful of all digital aspects of their student experience and identify and address digital challenges that hinder participation, retention and success. iii. Support the development and implementation of 'UEA Online' projects in targeted subject areas by providing robust digital platforms, capacity and tools. iv. Enhance our Identity and Access Management model to allow secure and straightforward access for partners and collaborators to our learning resources, teaching and assessment processes. v. Explore and support enhanced mechanisms to help students develop digital skills and optimise their learning experience.

AIM 2: Foster digital-enabled research and innovation ecosystems

Our Research and Innovation Strategy seeks to deliver ambitious, high quality and high integrity research and innovation, strengthening collaboration and gaining global recognition. To deliver this vision, the strategy highlights our close partnerships with the Norwich Research Park (NRP), key international partnerships and our strategic research themes, including ClimateUEA, CreativeUEA and HealthUEA.

Integration and collaboration are key principles and we will establish a robust digital approach that enables advanced research capabilities, facilitates seamless collaboration and drives innovative research opportunities. Local, national and global reach are key enablers for our researchers and innovators. We will ensure that the digital support mechanisms are in place to deliver this securely and contribute to the success of our continued partnerships.

Objectives: to foster digital-enabled research and innovation ecosystems we will:
a. Enhance and maintain the research and innovation digital estate. b. Ensure that our digital infrastructure, tools and capabilities support and add value to the University's collaboration with local, national and global partners, including partnerships with the NRP. c. Improve our digital channels to help boost the visibility of our research, nationally and internationally. d. Ensure that our digital architecture is robust and can support the delivery of innovative and advanced research. e. Provide sector-leading tools to support open research and data preservation.
Actions designed to deliver on our objectives
i. Invest in scalable computing power and data storage to support the increasing size and complexity of research data sets. ii. Implement digital solutions to improve document and data collaboration amongst researchers within the University and with external partners and collaborators, while also meeting funder and Research Excellence Framework (REF) requirements for open research, data sharing and long-term data preservation.

iii. Develop mechanisms to enhance sharing of technologies, facilities, infrastructure and datacentres across the NRP, including support for multicentre grant applications.
iv. Ensure digital solutions meet funder and REF requirements including for open research.
v. Safeguard our research data and researcher freedoms via the application of appropriate security measures.

AIM 3: Cultivate a digitally enabled and fluent community and culture

Our People Strategy sets out our ambition to support new ways of working, enabling a shared understanding of what it means to work in a more agile way. It seeks to ensure skills and capabilities are deployed and utilised in the most effective way to push forward our strategic agenda. This includes improving our collective digital skills and capabilities.

In collaboration with the delivery of our People Strategy aims and objectives, this strategy will support a digitally fluent and skilled community equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. We will empower our community to embrace digital technology to enrich the service user experience be it, enhancing research practices, improving the student journey experience and enabling organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

Our environment will support the development of digital skills and inspire the exploration of new ways to optimise digital tools across all areas of the university.

Objectives: to cultivate a digitally enabled and fluent community and culture we will:

a. Embed the concept of 'Digital Agility' into our Operating Model and mindset, promoting improved skills to deliver stronger capabilities flexibly across traditional learning and teaching, research and operational boundaries.
b. Support the development and launch of digital leadership programmes empowering staff to lead in the digital age.
c. Utilise digital tools to promote continuous professional growth and specifically enhance digital skills development for all staff to guarantee their digital competence and confidence.
d. Support staff and students in developing their digital literacy to exploit digital technologies, enhancing research capabilities, improving teaching practices, enriching the student experience and strengthening the overall efficiency of the organisation.
e. Encourage a university-wide culture that actively seeks out and embraces technological innovations to continuously improve operational efficiency.

Actions designed to deliver on our objectives

i. Understand the minimum digital skills and digital literacy that all staff should be equipped with and offer targeted upskilling programmes to support those with identified gaps to equip them with the necessary skills to work effectively in a more automated and integrated digital environment, fostering a culture of continuous learning.
ii. Review current training opportunities available to staff for digital tools and systems provided and used by the University and ensure that these are relevant and fit for purpose.

iii. Review digital literacy opportunities for our students, from admission through to graduation, and seek ways to improve equity of opportunity to maximise the learning experience and achieve successful outcomes.
iv. Understand and address current blockers of the use of digital technology to improve confidence and encourage better ways of working.
v. Assess existing digital tools for wider adoption across the University, prioritising those that can enhance administrative processes, support research and contribute to improved student outcomes.
vi. Establish innovation and training facilities to explore and integrate advanced technologies, offering richer hybrid learning experiences, teaching and engagement tools.

AIM 4: Optimise organisation development through digital enhancement

We will enhance the efficiency and impact of university operations by understanding, simplifying, automating and integrating processes, systems and workflows. We will optimise our use of data and knowledge to ensure the success of organisational transformation, strategic investment and risk management. Our focus on digital change will create new opportunities for communication, service improvement and a greatly enhanced user experience, whilst maximising economies of scale. We will develop and improve University-wide services, emphasising self-service options and the safe and appropriate use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools.

Objectives: to optimise organisation development through digital enhancement we will

a. Invest in a modern and secure digital infrastructure that keeps our data, staff and students digitally secure and links intrinsically with the development of our physical estate to provide a digitally enabled and connected campus.
b. Deliver digitally empowered service excellence, optimising technological change to increase productivity and user experience, improve operational efficiency and establish long term sustainability in our systems and processes to provide value for money and return on investment.
c. Increase productivity across the University by standardising workflows and processes where possible, incorporating feedback from students and staff and driving continuous improvement and change.
d. Maximise the value and use of our digital tools by prioritising those that remove unnecessary barriers, support research and improve student outcomes.
e. Strengthen external engagement and partnerships through modern and dynamic interactions that deliver optimal value and mutual benefits.
f. Integrate environmental sustainability into our digital approach, from procurement, through run to decommission, reducing the carbon emissions from our digital estate and maximising the use of digital tools to ensure the right information and tools are available to manage our physical and digital estate efficiently

Actions designed to deliver on our objectives

i. Balance business continuity in a hybrid learning and working environment by providing reliable data and streamlined systems, along with improved user-facing applications.
ii. Plan and deliver end-to-end business-value and process-mapping to identify risks and opportunities, simplifying complexities to maximise the university's digital investments.

iii. Establish a one-stop student hub that combines physical and digital options, offering state-of-the-art technologies and optimising the student and staff experience.
iv. Enhance CRM systems on a single platform to deliver personalised and dynamic interactions for the optimal student journey from application to graduation.
v. Revamp the university's research webpages to improve user experience, international accessibility and search engine optimisation.
vi. Identify and map all digital opportunities to support environmental sustainability, from the use of cloud services through to using technology and data to run our estate effectively, to inform and develop a blueprint for the future strategic estate.
vii. Implement user-centred design principles to digital tools and services, using feedback from usability testing and surveys.

AIM 5: Strengthen our digital infrastructure and capabilities to deliver our digital ambitions

We will develop a strategic enterprise blueprint which supports our digital strategy and aligns our digital infrastructure with the University's goals. This blueprint will streamline our digital capabilities covering processes, data management, applications and technology, while ensuring effective governance and cybersecurity across the organisation. By taking a holistic view of University enterprise level requirements and linking them to digital capabilities, we will enable effective decision-making, optimise resources and adapt to change. Our goal is to build a resilient, fit for purpose and secure by default and design digital infrastructure that enables seamless data exchange and communication across the University.

Objectives: to strengthen our digital infrastructure and capabilities to deliver our digital ambitions we will:

a. Map our current business, digital and data estate to enable a shared understanding to optimise the use of existing capabilities, maximise return on investment, improve system interoperability, remove duplication and promote reuse wherever possible.
b. Ensure that all operations are compliant and secure by default and design, protecting university data and digital assets and adopting proactive measures to enhance our cybersecurity procedures.
c. Deliver the business outcomes required to meet the university's strategic ambitions within an appropriate investment portfolio.
d. Deliver affordable, incremental, efficient change by ensuring university governance guides our investment in digital to ensure scalable and sustainable digital infrastructure considerate of commercial and cloud-based solutions that will be capable of supporting long-term growth and evolving business needs.
e. Ensure accuracy at the point of entry, consistent and reliable data in order to foster trust in data-driven decision-making processes, and a culture where data is seen as a strategic asset and is used confidently and consistently across all levels of decision-making.

Actions designed to deliver on our objectives

i. Understand and map the current state of the university, across business processes, data, applications, technology, cybersecurity and system integration to identify strategic opportunities and faster delivery of business outcomes.

ii. Increase levels of cybersecurity awareness across the university and actively manage risks through protocols like “Cyber Essentials” and “Disaster Recovery” frameworks adhering to national and sector standards.
iii. Strengthen internal collaboration and business partnerships to enhance agility and ensure that digital initiatives are aligned with strategic goals and support business objectives.
iv. Create an enterprise architecture governance board composed of senior leadership, digital specialists, and key stakeholders to oversee the alignment of digital initiatives with the university’s strategic goals and ensure effective governance and allocation of resources.
v. Establish clear, structured and open approaches to data management, from collection to reporting, ensuring students and staff are central to our strategic and operational planning.

Measures of success: key performance indicators

A set of key performance indicators (KPIs) will be developed for the digital thematic strategy as we work through our planned activity. These indicators and the targets set will also iterate and be revised as we develop other thematic strategy underpinning workplans to sequence and prioritise strategic initiatives, which will all have a bearing on the Digital strategy.