



Strategic Plan 2021-2026



School of Psychology & Neuroscience

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Our School has long been regarded as a world leader in the field of Psychology. More recently, we have extended our reputation to include excellence in Neuroscience; a natural extension given our history of pioneering work at the interface between the disciplines of psychology and neuroscience.
- 1.2 A particularly unique strength of our School is that we genuinely bridge the disciplines of psychology and neuroscience; from cells to minds to groups.
- 1.3 We are known for our excellence in research conducted across four main foci: Social and Group Processes; Perception, Cognition and Action; Origins of Mind; and Cellular and Behavioural Neuroscience (Figure 1).
- 1.4 Our excellence in research and teaching is facilitated by our unique combination of resources, which includes local *in vivo* and *in vitro* neuroscience laboratories for studying individual neurons and neural circuits across a range of species, facilities for human participant-based social, perception and cognition research, the St Andrews Baby and Child Lab, and Origins of Mind research sites at Edinburgh Zoo as well as field sites around the globe (e.g. Budongo Forest Reserve, Uganda).
- 1.5 We are recognised for our excellence in teaching and learning, as evidenced by our position at the head of league tables, our excellent national student survey results and the substantial and sustained growth of all of our degrees.
- 1.6 Our research has significant and broad societal impact in areas including the care of Alzheimer's patients, world leading expertise in how to manage crowds and populations (including in emergencies), leading UN efforts to manage conservation of endangered animals based on their cultural heritage, and promoting public health.
- 1.7 We pride ourselves on sustaining a diverse, inclusive and fair working environment for all of our staff and students so that they can thrive unhindered, contribute equally to all School activities, and enjoy doing so. Our success in this regard is evidenced by our current Silver Athena SWAN award.

2. Aspirations

- 2.1 Maintain our position as one of the most highly regarded Schools of Psychology & Neuroscience in the UK, for research, teaching and student experience.
- 2.2 Increase our visibility and recognition nationally and internationally as a leader in the integration of the fields of Psychology and Neuroscience (e.g., by focussing future appointments at the interface of our disciplines).
- 2.3 Build greater strength within, and stronger connections between, our four strategic research foci (Figure 1): Social and Group Processes; Perception, Cognition and Action; Origins of Mind; and Cellular and Behavioural Neuroscience (e.g., through future recruitment across the School).
- 2.4 Increase interdisciplinary links that connect our current research strengths with local, national and international colleagues in cognate disciplines.
- 2.5 Support staff to increase the societal and economic impact of their research (e.g., by increasing impact related funding as well as administrative and technical support for research and impact activities).

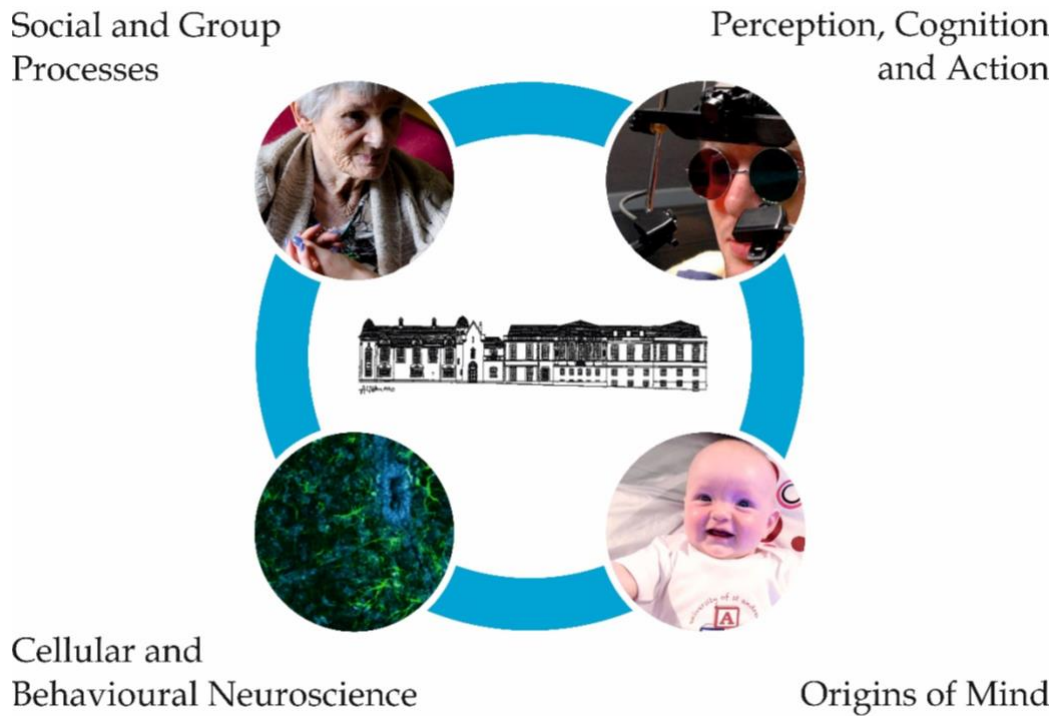


Figure 1. Cross-disciplinary, inter-linked research foci of the School of Psychology & Neuroscience.

- 2.6 Lead the advancement of pedagogy, as relevant to our immediate disciplines and beyond, at local, national and international levels (e.g. through increasing HEA fellowships and pedagogical research within the school).
- 2.7 Deliver bespoke, innovative technical and administrative solutions for teaching and research in psychology, neuroscience and related disciplines, by developing the expertise of our professional services team and expanding their networks across our institution and beyond.
- 2.8 Continue to lead the investigation, implementation and championing of best practice with regards to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion both within the University and beyond (e.g., by developing research into *research culture* and continuing work on decolonising curricula).
- 2.9 Provide an environment for research and teaching that is welcoming to all, with role models reflective of the full diversity of society (e.g., by attracting more BAME staff, and supporting more women and BAME colleagues to reach positions of leadership).

Given the current global COVID-19 crisis, we aim to achieve our vision by utilising two strategic phases as outlined below.

3. First strategic phase: maintenance and consolidation

- 3.1 Position ourselves to emerge from the current global COVID-19 pandemic in the place of strength from which we entered the crisis. This will require investment in facilities, resources and people, some of which will be required to enable new ways of working in our disciplines (e.g., increasing our engagement with online and computational approaches to research and teaching).

- 3.2 Maintain the strengths of our four research foci and the critical links across them by providing sufficient time (including research and impact leave) and resources to re-establish and ramp-up research activities and by preserving research capacity at the key interfaces between our priority research areas (e.g. through appointment strategies). We aim to provide targeted support to areas of research most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, most notably those that require face-to-face testing of human participants.
- 3.3 Increase staff capacity to ensure the continued strength and value of our two undergraduate and multiple postgraduate degrees by maintaining our ability to provide a unique St Andrews experience, which includes accessibility to academic staff, small group teaching and 'hands-on' research experiences for all students.
- 3.4 Consolidate our progress in the areas of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and make further improvements to our working/learning environments so that they are inclusive and welcoming to all. Immediate efforts will focus on decolonising curricula, improving the accessibility of our teaching and research, understanding research culture and providing staff and students with role models and exemplars that reflect the full diversity of society.

4. Second strategic phase: enhancement and development

This phase must begin as soon as is practically possible and is expected to overlap with our initial maintenance and consolidation phase.

- 4.1 During our second strategic phase we will focus on building upon and advancing our world leading position in our four current research foci. This will include increasing their interrelatedness, creating further links to cognate areas outside our immediate disciplines (e.g. economics, sustainability and public health), and investing further in our critical and unique research facilities (e.g. neuroscience imaging facilities and Living Links research centre at Edinburgh Zoo). We must also position ourselves so that we are ready to nimbly respond to emerging opportunities and new developments across our disciplines (e.g. the recent realisation that behavioural sciences must be integrated with physical sciences in order to address global challenges).
- 4.2 Develop research both within and beyond our four current research foci to address critical global challenges such as mental health, wellbeing, forced migration and climate change. This will be facilitated by future appointment strategies.
- 4.3 Place greater emphasis on impact activities that lead to innovation, value creation, and tangible benefits to society by providing staff with the support needed (financial, administrative, research and impact leave) to develop and advance impact activities. Whilst we must continue to advance existing areas of impact, we must also look forward, to identify and nurture future impact initiatives.
- 4.4 Maintain and expand our international networks in research and teaching so that we can realise the widest possible global impact. This will require significant engagement with colleagues around the globe. Although some of this will occur online, in-person activities will also be essential, necessitating carefully considered inward and outward travel.
- 4.5 Contribute to pedagogical advancements in our fields and beyond. This will be facilitated by continuing to build and support a strong team of education-focussed staff who are involved in and utilise a research-based approach to inform and help develop best practice and new policies, which ensure the delivery of enhancements to teaching

and learning locally, nationally, and internationally. Areas of continued focus will include: the student experience, student transitions, student wellbeing and resilience.

- 4.6 Make further improvements to our facilities and resources to facilitate enhancements and developments noted above and to ensure resilience to future challenges. This will include planning for the replacement of aging equipment, updating and improving aging laboratories used for both teaching and research, building capacity to manage recent growth in student numbers and ensuring support for 'new ways of working' in our fields, such as increases in online and computational approaches to research and teaching.
- 4.7 We will continue to engage with the University's 'Technicians Commitment' initiative to raise the profile of our technical staff and ensure they have access to the training needed to maintain their high level of support for research and teaching.
- 4.8 Utilise and build upon the academic strengths, including research expertise, that enable us to increase knowledge and innovation in the areas of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This must involve dissemination, tangible action and leadership to affect positive change across the higher education sector. Notable examples of this include a new textbook on decolonising psychology curricula and other EDI-themed materials that are being prepared by members of staff and will be widely disseminated across the UK and beyond.

5. Alignment with University Strategy

World leading St Andrews

- 5.1 Our four research foci align with and contribute to at least five of the six priority areas outlined in the University Strategic plan: Peace, Conflict and Security; Cultural Understanding; Evolution, Behaviour and Environment; Health, Infectious Disease and Wellbeing; and Sustainability. We aim to continue to build strength within and between our research foci, whilst also increasing our interdisciplinary connections with cognate research areas.

Diverse St Andrews

- 5.2 The principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are built into all School activities. We aim to be leaders of change in this area through our EDI-related research and continual improvements in our own practices.

Global St Andrews

- 5.3 An important strategic aim of the School is to increase our global links in research and teaching and improve our international visibility and reputation.

Entrepreneurial St Andrews

- 5.4 We recognise the important responsibility we have to ensure our research and teaching has the greatest positive societal and economic impact. As staff-capacity allows, we therefore aim to place a greater emphasis on impact activities, which lead to innovation and value creation.