Celebrating 30 Years of Innovation into Service #26E02

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The EDINA Edit

Dear Reader

Welcome to the second edition of **The EDINA Edit**. As we continue to celebrate our landmark 30th year of "innovation into service" at the University of Edinburgh, it is a pleasure to share the incredible momentum we have built over the last month.

The standout highlight was undoubtedly **ELM®** being recognised with the **UCISA Transformation Award**. This prestigious win reflects the platform's vital role in providing safe, equitable, and secure access to Generative AI across the University community. Since its launch 18 months ago, adoption has been remarkable, with ELM now surpassing **23,000 active users** at the University of Edinburgh alone. Crucially, we are seeing this technology drive genuine experimentation; we have now issued **over 650 API keys** via ELM to support innovation projects across the institution, providing colleagues with the flexibility to build and experiment using University-supported AI infrastructure.

I am also thrilled to announce the launch of our new **EDINA Consultancy Service** webpage. This dedicated hub showcases our team's deep expertise in geospatial, computational, and AI engineering. Whether it is supporting large research grants or developing bespoke software solutions, we are here to help our partners navigate complex digital challenges with the same trust and expertise that has defined our first three decades.

In a further milestone, the team has recently moved to our new home at **Forrest Hill**. This move feels like a true homecoming, as the building sits at the heart of the University's technological heritage. Originally constructed in 1872 as a Drill Hall for the Queen's City of Edinburgh Volunteer Rifle Brigade, the site has a rich history that includes serving as a 1740s Charity Workhouse and later housing the University's Officer Training Corps. Most significantly for us, it was the pioneering home of the Department of Artificial Intelligence in the mid-1990s—the very place where the legendary **Freddy II** robot was built. Moving into a space with such a storied AI legacy is a fitting backdrop for EDINA as we continue our journey as AI pathfinders.

Beyond our digital platforms, we have been active in the physical world as well. It was fantastic for the team to join the **'Big Dig'** on campus recently—a wonderful opportunity to connect with our local environment. We also continue to champion geographic literacy through our **Digimap for Schools**

scheme in association with **Ordnance Survey**, offering more flexible resources and subscription options to inspire the next generation of data pioneers.

It has also been a busy month for sector engagement. From attending **Digfest** and the **UCISA Leadership** event to the **Geographical Association Annual Conference**, it has been invaluable to discuss the future of EdTech with our peers and reflect on why university-governed technology is more critical now than ever before.

Thank you for being part of our story as we look ahead to another month of innovation.

Best wishes,
Anne Robertson
Director

Check out our new Consultancy website here

The Big Dig - Leaving our mark for generations to come

Katie Self - Geospatial Analyst @ EDINA

As well as EDINA's 30th anniversary, this year marks the 6th year of **The University of Edinburgh's Big Dig Project**. Each year, over the course of three days, volunteers from across the university come together and plant hundreds of trees. More than 3,000 trees across 14 different species have been planted as part of this project in the last five years, helping to shape the landscape at the Easter Bush campus.

This year, the EDINA team took part together. The sun was shining on Easter Bush as we gathered; armed with shovels, wheelbarrows of mulch and a mix of native species seedlings including

hawthorn, goat willow, birch, crab apple and holly.

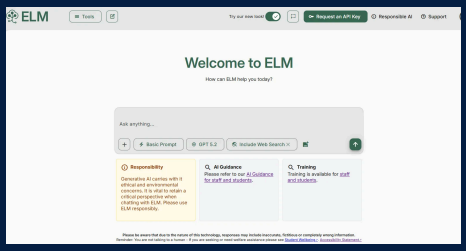
Over the course of two hours we planted hundreds of seedlings, which will now be regularly tended to as they establish their root systems. Once settled, the saplings will grow and develop into an incredible habitat capable of supporting huge biodiversity. One example of this which made itself known was a particularly spritely woodpecker, that could be heard nearby hammering away as we dug.

At EDINA our work with Geospatial data helps us to understand our world and, importantly, how it changes. It will take 100 to 150 years for the woodland planted by our team to develop to maturity. I would recommend logging into **Historic Digimap** and seeing how your local area has changed over the same time period. Planting can be a good opportunity to think on a larger timescale and ask questions such as: what do we want our campuses to look like in 100 years?

Many thanks to Amanda and Sean, part of the Active Lives team at the University, for organising the Big Dig event and having the EDINA team along to take part. It's a great opportunity for staff to come together, give back to the community and shape the local landscape while doing something active.

Find out more about our 30th Anniversary celebrations here

Latest News



ELM®

ELM®: Giving You the Power of Choice

As ELM® continues to grow—now serving over 23,000 active users—we are focused on making generative AI sustainable for the long term.

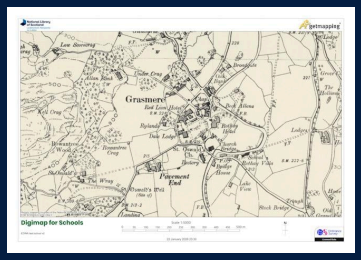
One of the biggest hurdles for institutions is managing rising costs. To help with this, we are

Noteable®

We are gearing up for Summer

The Noteable® service team is pushing forward with development work for the scheduled summer 2026 update cycle.

We have a vital reminder for our university partners: the **1**



Digimap for Schools

Inspiring New Geographers

In a major milestone for our 15-year collaboration with **Ordnance Survey**, we are launching a new scheme to provide free access to 1,800 primary and secondary schools in the most deprived areas of Great Britain.

developing new tools that allow our users and partners to set clear, firm limits on their usage spend.

Another significant step in this journey has been the creation of our own API proxy, which provides users with genuine transparency and better control over their usage costs.

With over 600 API keys already issued across the University, this infrastructure allows colleagues to experiment and build with the confidence that innovation remains within budget.

We have also dedicated several months to researching the most appropriate and effective models to bring to the platform.

We will soon be offering a new locally hosted and commercial models. Whether you prefer a familiar commercial model or a university-supported alternative, you will have the right tool for the job.

These developments ensure that as the technology advances, we continue to provide the AI literacy and support needed for our community to innovate safely and effectively.

May deadline is fast approaching for lecturers to request any new software packages for the upcoming academic year.

This lead time is essential, allowing our team to review, prepare, and ensure full support for these environments in time for the autumn term.

This year has been particularly busy, with a surge in requests for RStudio and various other specialist packages to support diverse teaching and research needs. Alongside this, we are excited to invite users to test our latest platform enhancements. These include an improved startup page, providing more transparent information on notebook server processes as they launch, as well as significant upgrades to our assignment features and user interface.

These refinements aim to make the platform even more intuitive for managing computational coursework.

Noteable® continues to support education across a growing range of contexts, from Scottish schools via GLOW to our latest international partnerships.

For the first time, this ongoing initiative extends eligibility to include schools in **Scotland and Wales**, reaching over one million additional schoolchildren.

The aim is to inspire budding geographers by removing financial barriers to high-quality digital mapping tools.

Digimap for Schools allows pupils to explore modern maps, historical imagery, and aerial photography, fostering essential digital and GIS skills.

As geography's popularity grows as a subject for addressing global challenges like climate change, these tools are invaluable; schools already using the service have seen increased engagement and a rise in students pursuing the subject at GCSE.

This expansion ensures that digital mapping—and the critical thinking skills it develops—is accessible to everyone, regardless of their background, supporting the next generation of geospatial experts as we celebrate our 30th year.

Click here for more on ELM®

Book your free trial today

For more details click here

Meet the EDINA Talent - Emma Diffley

1) Who are you and what do you do here?
My name is Emma Diffley and I am the Geospatial Services Manager at EDINA. This means I look after Digimap, Digimap for Schools and DataNation, setting priorities for fixes, amendments and developments. I also get involved with support, usually on the intricacies of licensing, appropriate use, publications and the like - the grey areas of licensing that nobody really likes to talk about because they are awkward!

2) Describe a "day-in-the-life" at EDINA?
This is very difficult! I could go into the daily minutiae of "office style" life, but that doesn't make EDINA sound like much fun. From the inside it can sometimes feel as though we are swans gliding peacefully, while there is high energy paddling going on below the surface! EDINA is always a hive of activity, with meetings, discussions, plans and actions ongoing all the time. Emails ping backwards and forwards. The little red dot on Teams is a regular feature too. Connecting to this, creating documents for that, answering questions from all corners of the world, there is never a dull moment and no two days are the same. We endeavour to secure the best outcomes for any and every project or problem, drawing on expertise across the whole organisation and beyond and are lucky to have superstar colleagues who are always willing to engage for the greater good. Punctuated with coffee, the odd lunch, a post-work pizza too, it's easy to see why so many EDINA staff have stuck around for many years.

3) EDINA launched in 1996. So, where were you and what were you doing 30 years ago?
Studying hard, partying hard, enjoying the blissful oblivion of youth without a care for any of the challenges that "adulting" would throw my way!

4) If you could build one dream tool or service, with no limits, what would it be?

A teleporter. Sometimes, one just can't get there quick enough.

5) When you aren't busy innovating, what is the one hobby or interest that takes up far too much of your time?
Hobbies and interests cannot take up "too much time"! There are not enough hours in the day to do all the things I would love to do, but the one thing that could easily take over would be travelling.

🚀 EMPOWERING SCOTLAND'S AI FUTURE

Scotland's AI Strategy 2026–2031 echoes the commitment to secure, inclusive, and university-governed technology that has been at the heart of **EDINA** since 1996.

How EDINA and ELM® are Delivering on the 2026–2031 Strategy

The Scottish Government has recently published **Scotland's AI Strategy 2026–2031**, outlining an ambitious roadmap to harness AI responsibly for the benefit of everyone. Reading through the newly introduced **"AI Stack"**—the framework guiding this national response—it is incredibly validating to see the core tenets of the strategy mirror the exact principles we champion every day here at EDINA.

For those of us in the higher education and public sectors, the message is clear: we can no longer afford to rely solely on commercial "black box" providers. Scotland's vision demands transparency, trust, and accountability. Here is how EDINA, through our safe, secure, and equitable AI platform **ELM®**, is delivering on that ambition.

💡 Access is Just the Beginning: Fostering Mindful AI Use

Simply handing students and staff an AI tool is not a strategy; it is a liability. The new national strategy validates this in **Layer 1 of the AI Stack**, which focuses heavily on users and skills.

- **Inclusive AI Literacy:** We are actively addressing digital exclusion by ensuring people of all backgrounds know how to engage with AI.
- **Prepared Young People:** Our focus remains on equipping students to thrive in an AI-enabled world.

Through ELM®, we go beyond mere access. Our significant focus on training ensures we are creating mindful, informed, and supported users who understand how to use technology critically.

🛡️ Digital Sovereignty & Provider Agnosticism

A standout element of the strategy is its firm stance on **sovereign capability**. The ability to control compute, data, and models is now a strategic necessity for national competitiveness.

ELM was built to be provider-agnostic for this very reason. We do not lock institutions into a single commercial giant's ecosystem. By offering an alternative that prioritises digital sovereignty—evidenced by the **600+ API keys** we've issued for local innovation—we ensure that universities retain absolute control over their data, maintaining the "chain of trust" the strategy demands.

🌎 Sustainable Innovation: Mitigating the Environmental Cost

The commercial AI boom has often obscured the staggering environmental impact of widespread adoption. The Scottish Government is addressing this head-on, aiming to make Scotland a leader in sustainable, renewable-powered data centres. At EDINA, we are committed to transparency. Unlike many commercial providers, ELM supports sustainable access by enabling institutions to make conscious, measured choices about their Generative AI usage.

🤝 Responsive Governance: Listening to Our Community

As a university-led service, our greatest strength is our sensitivity to the values of our staff and students. Recently, we received an **open letter from 500 representatives** across the University of Edinburgh community, asking questions about our partnership with OpenAI.

We hear these concerns clearly. We have already begun engaging directly with this group to ensure their voices shape our path forward. This dialogue is driving our commitment to **choice and transparency**. We are actively expanding our **locally hosted model offerings** (such as our Llama infrastructure) to provide robust, high-performance alternatives to commercial models. For us, innovation is not just about the technology we provide, but the responsibility with which we provide it.

Delivering the Vision Together

Scotland's ambition is to secure the benefits of AI for everyone, demonstrating that progress and safeguards can go hand in hand. The 2026-2031 strategy is a fantastic foundation; now, it is about execution. Through ELM®, EDINA is already proving that we can drive innovation without compromising our values.

EDINA | 30 years of innovation into service

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