



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Community Plan

2020–2025

Year 3 Report





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Introduction

The University of Edinburgh has a long-standing commitment to delivering positive change in local communities. This means supporting social impact, sharing knowledge and experience, building close connections, providing services to our community and opening our estate.

For the University of Edinburgh, civic engagement is not a 'nice to have'; meaningful relationships with our local communities are fundamental. This legacy means we have a genuine commitment to shape the concept of a civic university in the 21st century.

Playing an active role within our localities is fundamental to our purpose and is a core theme in Strategy 2030. Some of the ways in which we deliver against this purpose are strategic, with wide, cross-University involvement. Our widening participation programmes are a flagship example of this; we want to make sure that local young people thrive and feel a sense of belonging at our University.

Another example is our investment portfolio. Unlike most other universities, we have proactively funded socially positive investments. As we go into 2024, we have committed almost £8million to social causes. Simon Community Scotland have used our investment to provide permanent homes for rough sleepers in Edinburgh.

But it's also true that there are any number of examples of student groups and staff who are self-organising to create and deliver projects that have a positive impact in our local areas. For example, student volunteers are providing music lessons for vulnerable children, and staff providing accessible, science-based climate change education for local children.

This report is just a snapshot of some of the activity that has taken place across the University throughout 2023 that is supporting local communities here in the Edinburgh City Region. As we reflect on the last year, our commitment is unwavering: we want to continue our collaboration with existing community partners and forge new relationships with future friends. Working together, we know we can have even greater impact in Edinburgh's local and surrounding areas.

Gemma Gourlay, Head of Social Impact

Established by the Town Council of Edinburgh in 1583, The University of Edinburgh holds the distinction of being the oldest university in the English-speaking world to be founded on a civic basis.





Supporting social impact: enabling positive social change

Social impact refers to the positive and meaningful contributions made by an organisation to enhance the wellbeing, development, and overall quality of life of the communities it engages with. For The University of Edinburgh, this means working alongside our partners in industry, the public sector, patients and local communities to tackle the major problems facing our world.

Over the past year, we've contributed to positive social impact across the Edinburgh City Region through a range of initiatives.

Scottish Government Social Impact Pledge

In February 2023, the University made its third round of Social Impact Pledges to the Scottish Government. The University identified three themes it could make a difference to local communities over the year:

- 1 extending support to New Scots
- 2 provide free veterinary support to the pets of people experiencing homelessness
- 3 providing space for community engagement projects

➤ [Social Impact Pledge](#)



1 Extending support to New Scots:

The University has made significant strides in building on its University of Sanctuary status, reaffirming its commitment to supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

Three highlights:

- The University hosted two key conferences for University of Sanctuary stakeholders and organised community-building activities, such as social film screenings, to help New Scots build their communities here in Edinburgh.
- The University's Centre for Open Learning launched its Postgraduate English Programme Scholarship for Displaced Persons in 2023. This was awarded to a local Ukrainian mother.
- As of August 2023, 630 New Scots had taken Sanctuary English classes to date, with 270 during the 22/23 academic year. Academic Language and Literacies for In-sessional Studies and the Graduate Writing Centre now have spaces prioritised for At-Risk scholars attending the University.

2 Veterinary support for pets of people experiencing homelessness:

'Dick Vet in the Community' officially opened its doors in autumn 2023. The premises on Nicolson Street are now well-signed and fully-equipped and provide an easily accessible and central location for their All4Paws community project.

All4Paws are a team of dedicated staff and students at the University's Vet School who provide free veterinary services to the pets of people who are homeless or vulnerably housed.

The project has proven extremely popular, with increased interest over recent months, not only from people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, but also from those who are unable to afford veterinary care and from support workers and nurses for the pets of people who are housebound.

3 Providing space for community projects:

Located on the busy thoroughfare of Nicolson Street in Edinburgh's Southside, the new outreach centre officially opened in autumn 2023 and has been used by a range of community projects and partnerships based at the University.

This vibrant space serves as a hub for various initiatives, hosting events, workshops, and collaborative projects with local organisations.

The community space provides an easily accessible and central location for the All4Paws project, as well as a range of other community activities. These have included Gaelic conversation groups, a research project on the links between urban green and blue spaces and health, and a British Sign Language group.



Community Grants

£618,476

Total cash awarded

176

Community organisations
have received funding

26,372

Individuals benefitting
(conservative estimate)



Around 1/3 of 157 projects
reported University involvement
during their grant



Impact evaluation completed



Findings of equalities impact
assessment acted on

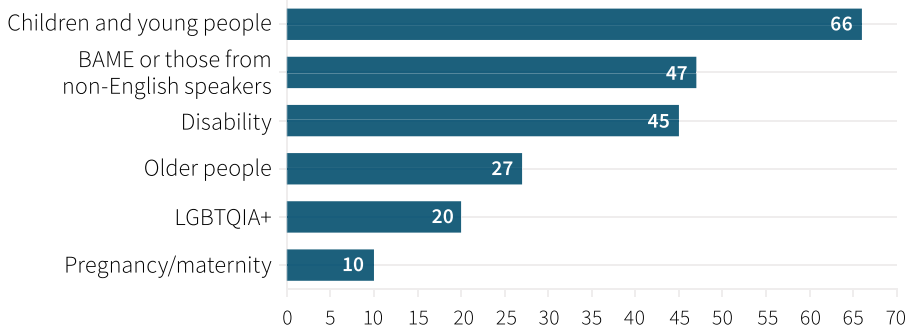
Community Grant Scheme

In 2023, an Impact Evaluation of the Community Grant Scheme was completed, highlighting demographic reach and impact of the scheme between April 2017 and April 2023.

Our analysis confirmed that more organisations have been funded in areas with higher concentrations of households experiencing one or more societal inequalities.

From the data we could obtain, we found that a greater number of children and young people were benefiting from grantee projects when compared to other groups, whereas projects that benefit LGBTQI+ groups are relatively underrepresented. Action taken to engage with the LGBTQI+ community to ensure that their needs are being met by our scheme suggests that their needs may already be met well by other resources.

People benefitting from University's community grants



In a noteworthy update to the University's grant scheme, a project managed by organisation Groundswell has emerged as a shining example of the impact that targeted financial support can have on community initiatives. Groundswell Scotland is a non-profit organisation specialising in Surf Therapy.

This grant has supported grassroots projects focused on environmental sustainability, community resilience, and social inclusion. By highlighting the success of Groundswell, the University showcases its dedication to facilitating positive change at the grassroots level, empowering local communities to address their unique challenges.

[Watch Groundswell Scotland on STV News](#)



“

To have Edinburgh University on board from early on acted as leverage for significant funding from a number of different supporters and we are extremely grateful for the University's early adoption of this project. Funding has now been secured for the project for the current year two and in part for year three.”

Edinburgh Women's Aid

➤ [Community Grant Scheme impact evaluation](#)

➤ [Download the University of Edinburgh Community Grant Scheme: Five year impact evaluation \[PDF 3.8MB\]](#)

Championing Social Investment

In 2023, the University was ranked 5th globally for Innovation and Industry by THE rankings.

By the end of 2023, the £8 million Social Investment Fund had almost been fully committed. The fund supports a wide variety of Scotland and UK-based projects including:

- a housing scheme in the city of Edinburgh
➤ [Social and Sustainable Capital's Social Housing Fund](#)
- a community-owned wind project in North Ayrshire
➤ [Social Investment Scotland's Social Growth Fund](#)
- social entrepreneurs from traditionally marginalised communities
➤ [Big Issue Invest's Growth Impact Fund](#)



➤ [Socially positive investments](#)



Share knowledge and experience: data and wellbeing

Knowledge exchange between schools & communities and experts at the University of Edinburgh have been flourishing in 2023.

Schools sensor network boosts pupils' data skills

Europe's biggest Internet of Things network is on target to provide every school in the south-east of Scotland with advanced environmental sensors.

The network is already giving thousands of students from more than 40 schools in Edinburgh, Fife, the Lothians and Borders access to the latest indoor smart technology, capable of measuring CO₂, humidity, light, air pressure and temperature levels.

The £9.5 million scheme also provides some schools with outdoor air quality monitors, soil moisture sensors and weather stations.

Local school children are being inspired to get interested in science and are using the data to optimise their classrooms. For example, Addiewell Primary School in West Lothian has installed a living wall filled with colourful plants and reduced the lighting to improve the learning environment.



➤ Getting ready for a data driven future

➤ Data education in schools

“

Often as a teacher, kids pose questions that you can't answer and they get shot down. Whereas with this project, they're really able to investigate whatever they want to do. They're learning lots of great skills, really developing their initiative, their creativity, their sense making. They're looking at large data sets that are really quite confusing for an adult but they're able to break it down, [find] exactly what they're looking for and make sense of that.”

Liam Airle, Primary 7 teacher, Addiewell School, West Lothian

Accessible education

5,588

enrolments in Short Courses
by people living locally

113

City of Edinburgh S5 and S6
students attended Language
Immersion Day at the University

270

New Scots took English
classes taught by staff
(in 22/23 academic year)

630

New Scots have participated
since these classes started

*“Thank you so much... This
program has helped me, and
many people and your work
cannot be overestimated.”*

Learner, July 2023



Compassionate mental health research at Wester Hailes, Edinburgh

Mental Health – Imagining Beyond is a collaborative project between the Community Wellbeing Collective, Wester Hailes and Mental Health Data Scientists at the University of Edinburgh. Funded by Research Data Scotland.

The Community Wellbeing Collective is an established community of over 30 people from, and connected to, Wester Hailes. As a community and registered charity, they run their own space, which engages in active agency for community members, expanding public imagination and activities that move us towards a more just world.

The ongoing research is shaped on individual and collective lived experiences of mental health and placed in conversation. In 2023, several workshops took place, including one demystifying healthcare, where health data privacy and access were explored, concluding that “healthcare data should ultimately be used for helping and healing others.”

“

We practise deep listening; we share and relate through questions, anecdotes, and emotions to connect across differences and through needs and desires. As a collective we create a space where we can meet and dialogue as equals, caring with each other to make everyone feel seen and heard, believed, respected and safe.”

Mental Health – Imagining Beyond blog

➤ [Mental Health - Imagining Beyond project blog](#)

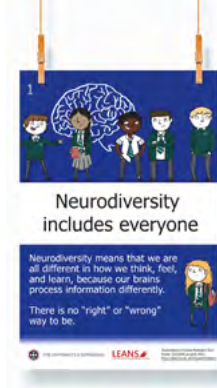
➤ [Community Wellbeing Collective](#)



Scottish schools receive training for neurodiversity

The Learning About Neurodiversity at School programme is free for mainstream primary schools to introduce pupils aged 8-11 years to the concept of neurodiversity, and how it impacts experiences at school. For this programme, neurodiversity means that we are all different in how we think, feel, and learn, because our brains process information differently.

In 2023, in-person training was given to additional support needs service staff and head teachers in the Scottish Borders and Midlothian. Digital resources include a teacher handbook, videos, posters and templates that are available to everyone to give students and teachers knowledge and confidence.



“

Individual children felt and explained that they recognised themselves as neurodivergent (in different ways) and they appeared to have a ‘penny drop’ moment... I think it helped children to have a better understanding of the way others are/feel, and also why learning can be different and is delivered differently to them.”

Teacher diary

✦ Learning About Neurodiversity at School

✦ Middletown Centre for Autism podcast interview with Dr Alyssa Alcorn



Exactly 1,000 students signed up for Saltire Award May 2023 - November 2023

✦ Saltire Awards



Centre for Open Learning donated 40 boxes of English Language Education teaching materials to local charities & The City of Edinburgh Council



Our Sport and Exercise team loaned out their vehicles and generators to help local communities affected by severe weather



Building close connections: getting back into community events

In 2023, the University has emerged with a renewed commitment to getting out and about, working in collaboration with communities across the city.

We've been delighted to participate in prominent local events like the Meadows Festival and Doors Open Days. These events highlight our dedication to building close connections with communities and residents of Edinburgh, the Lothians, Fife and Borders, a central theme in our five-year Community Plan.

“

We are delighted to support and participate in community events, big and small, because we believe that true growth is achieved when the roots of education extend deep into the heart of the communities we call home.”

**Gemma Gourlay, Head of Social Impact,
University of Edinburgh**

➤ [Our commitments](#)

Meadows Festival 2023

The Meadows Festival in Edinburgh serves as a vibrant platform for building community bonds and celebrating the diversity and creativity that defines the city. In 2023, the University's Centre for Open Learning, our Community Team, and Edinburgh Futures Institute staff hosted a stall with badge-makers, bubbles and science-based activities to create interest and excitement. We spoke to so many of you and formed some great connections for future collaboration.



Doors Open Days 2023

Doors Open Days, a popular event that allows members of the public to explore significant buildings and spaces, took place in September. The University's participation this year was bigger than ever: we opened the doors of 16 iconic buildings including McEwan Hall and the Playfair Library, offering people an opportunity to explore our shared cultural heritage. Among the new additions were the Nucleus at Kings Buildings and buildings on our Holyrood campus, providing fresh and exciting experiences for visitors.

Our buildings attracted an impressive 10,375 individual visits. We like to think that this substantial footfall demonstrates local communities' eagerness to connect with the University and explore its diverse offerings and resources we have available for residents.

🔗 [Doors Open Days](#)

The first recipient of the Centre for Open Learning's Post Graduate Pre-Sessional English Programme (PGPEP) Scholarship (launched in 2023) was a Ukrainian national living locally in Edinburgh. She is a mature student, who is also a single parent, and the scholarship will help her to meet the English language requirements of the MSc in Economics at the University of Edinburgh.

🔗 [Post Graduate Pre-Sessional English Programme \(PGPEP\) Scholarship](#)



“

It's so important for a global university to be active in its local community.”

**Andrew Gardiner, Senior Lecturer,
Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies**

New collaborations

The University's active involvement in community events supports our aim to build close connections with the city and continues to foster a sense of shared identity.

Through supporting and participating in community activities throughout the year, we hope to open up avenues for dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas. We want to make sure that the University remains an integral part of the community fabric and are always looking for events we can take part in or collaborate on.

🔗 [Our Community Plan 2020-2025](#)



Provide services to our communities

Young people bring a wealth of talent, creativity and enthusiasm to the university environment and we want to make sure that local people can benefit from University resources and opportunities.

We have made an ongoing commitment to youth employment, acknowledging the critical impact it has on meeting the University's strategic aims and objectives, including our Strategy 2030, Community Plan and People Strategy.

Young Person's Guarantee and Modern Apprentice Scheme

The University is a Young Person's Guarantee employer and offers its Modern Apprentices an award-winning development and coaching programme.

Modern apprenticeships offer benefits to both the University and the people who take part, bridging the gap between academic learning and practical skills. The opportunity to earn while learning provides an insight into what it's like to work in a university, and gain and-on experience of their chosen field and enhance their employability.

“

I think that the opportunities and experience the University offers are invaluable. Getting my foot in the door at the University has been the best thing I have ever done.”

**Administrative Assistant (HR) Modern Apprentice,
Centre for Open Learning**



Hear from a 2023 Modern Apprentice

Jenna Bogan is a Modern Apprentice in Digital Marketing and has been working within the Communications and Marketing Department. She is embedded within the team and supports work that relates to community engagement and external affairs alongside studying for the Digital Marketing course. During her time with us, she has become a valuable member of the team.



“Hi, I’m Jenna, and I’m a Digital Marketing Modern Apprentice.

I’m completing my apprenticeship here at the University of Edinburgh in the Communication and Marketing department for 18 months.

I was interested in doing a Modern Apprenticeship because it’s a great alternative to college or university as you’re gaining a qualification whilst earning money, and it’s a good stepping stone into the industry you’re interested in.

My experience so far has been really positive. I am surrounded by lots of people who are always willing to help me and give advice. I enjoy my Digital Marketing course because it’s a mix of knowledge and practical study, and I can apply what I’ve learnt into my job role.”

➤ [Hear from previous modern apprentices](#)

Student Social Enterprises

The University has actively supported student-led social enterprises, as we recognise the potential for impactful change driven by the passion and innovation of our students.

Prosper Social Finance is the UK’s first student-run investment fund, providing University of Edinburgh students with the opportunity to learn and practice socially responsible investment.

In addition to investing in ventures that drive social good, Prosper’s profits are given as grants to Edinburgh-based social enterprises. Among these is Invisible Cities – a social enterprise that trains people that have experienced homelessness to become walking tour guides of their own cities.



My most rewarding experience so far with Prosper has been being able to work with Invisible Cities and see how the decisions we made in pitching stocks can impact and help support the Edinburgh community. Prosper has undoubtedly been the highlight of my time at the University.”

Aaron Jiminez, Director of Tracking, Prosper Social Finance

£50,000

University investment to support Prosper Social Finance

➤ [Prosper Social Finance](#)



Opening our estate: community room use and social impact through construction

Local communities are benefitting from the University's civic approach to its buildings, old and new.

Community access to rooms

Since September 2022, community groups and local organisations have been gathering in University rooms for free on weekday evenings. Local people have been busy rehearsing plays, learning languages and boosting mental health.

The initiative ensures that University rooms in the heart of Edinburgh are used to their fullest, and that cost is not a barrier to good quality meeting space, allowing for collaboration and creativity.

The University of Edinburgh is the first university in the UK to offer free community access to rooms at this scale.



Without it, I honestly do not know what we would have done. The cost of rent is flying up in Edinburgh and we wouldn't be able to operate without this fantastic scheme.

Not only has this enabled us to further help New Scots learn English and begin to integrate in their new city by making new friends, building self-confidence (often after very testing times) and eventually finding employment and a sense of belonging, but the very fact that they are literally attending classes at the University of Edinburgh is inspiring to our service users."

The Welcoming Association

➤ [Community Access to Rooms scheme](#)

➤ [Find out who can use the scheme and how](#)

Access to Rooms scheme impact

40

Unique community organisations

c.£16,500

Saved for local groups
(based on what they typically pay for spaces)

846

Requests fulfilled

c.£110,000

Donation in-kind social value
(based on corporate rates for hiring out spaces)

2,077

Hours of space used

- A useful indication of the scheme's social value is the estimated commercial hire cost of similar space, which stands at **£110,000**.
 - The estimated cost saving to community groups, based on local community venue hire rates is **£16,500** so far.
- This expense can present a significant cost barrier to groups and their users.
- The spaces have seen over **2,077 hours** of community use to date, from rehearsals to teaching spaces.



Training and experience for Ukrainian construction workers

Members of the Ukrainian community, resettled in our region, have completed a construction academy, designed and delivered by the City Region Deal and Balfour Beatty, lead contractor for the Edinburgh Futures Institute.

The programme supported 13 people to obtain the required UK industry qualifications which led to them securing sustainable employment and additional further education opportunities.

“

After the course, I had three interviews and then I got a job as a plumber. The construction academy gave me a chance to come back to work and I am now very happy. I'm still working in my favourite job.”

Mykola – secured a job with Parker Technical



► [City Region Deal Ukrainian Construction Academy](#)



As of September 2023, Coffee Conscience has planted 1,593 apple trees locally as a result of the University's custom



Collaboration with UoE supplier Coffee Conscience working with Boroughmuir High School on hospitality project; 30 pupils are participating. They can achieve a Prince's Trust Award and SQA Barista qualification



We received 45 user groups to use our Sports and Exercise facilities from community groups and individuals. That works out at almost 100 hours per week

Social impact at the new Usher Institute site

A new research, teaching and innovation building on the Edinburgh BioQuarter campus will host a mix of occupants across three storeys. These include the University of Edinburgh's Usher Institute, along with a community of partners from the public, private and third sectors working on the shared purpose of transforming health in society working with people, populations and data.

The construction company, McLaughlin & Harvey, is committed to sharing prosperity with the communities where it operates. By autumn 2023 their community benefits activities, agreed through university procurement, its work at the Usher site had:

- Spent 59% of project costs with suppliers who are within 20 miles of the Edinburgh BioQuarter campus
- Used a labour force of which 40% of workers reside within 20 miles of the Edinburgh BioQuarter campus



McLaughlin & Harvey is also committed to supporting people in reaching their full career potential. In May 2023, company staff contributed to Meaningful May at Castlebrae Community Campus in Craigmillar. Meaningful May is a programme of activities aimed at young people who are not sitting exams before leaving school. The programme is designed to help young people move on to positive destinations. McLaughlin & Harvey staff shared insights into the construction industry, ran activities to develop team working skills and helped to conduct mock job interviews.

McLaughlin & Harvey also helped local charity DadsRock with a move from temporary accommodation in Granton to new premises in Gorgie. The charity's temporary accommodation, required after a flood, did not have the facilities to hold the events that are a key part of the charity's work. The move to more suitable premises has benefitted service users and charity staff.

McLaughlin & Harvey volunteers have made 2023 a year to support young readers. Facilitated by UK charity Chapter One, corporate volunteers have worked with Castlevue Primary School in Craigmillar to provide pupils with 1:1 reading support. As well as improving reading skills, the programme boost confidence in and enjoyment of reading.

“

We have been able to move up a reading level which is an amazing achievement in such a short space of time.”

Jane Elder, Social Value Manager, McLaughlin & Harvey

Through its employee volunteering initiatives, McLaughlin & Harvey has supported local community organisations that have changed lives this year. Company staff have made up starter pack, food packs and sorted donations at Fresh Start. Fresh Start is an Edinburgh-based charity that helps people with experience of homelessness to get set up in their new homes.

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✦ [Usher Building at Edinburgh BioQuarter](#)

✦ [Usher Institute community benefit](#)

✦ [McLaughlin & Harvey's commitments](#)

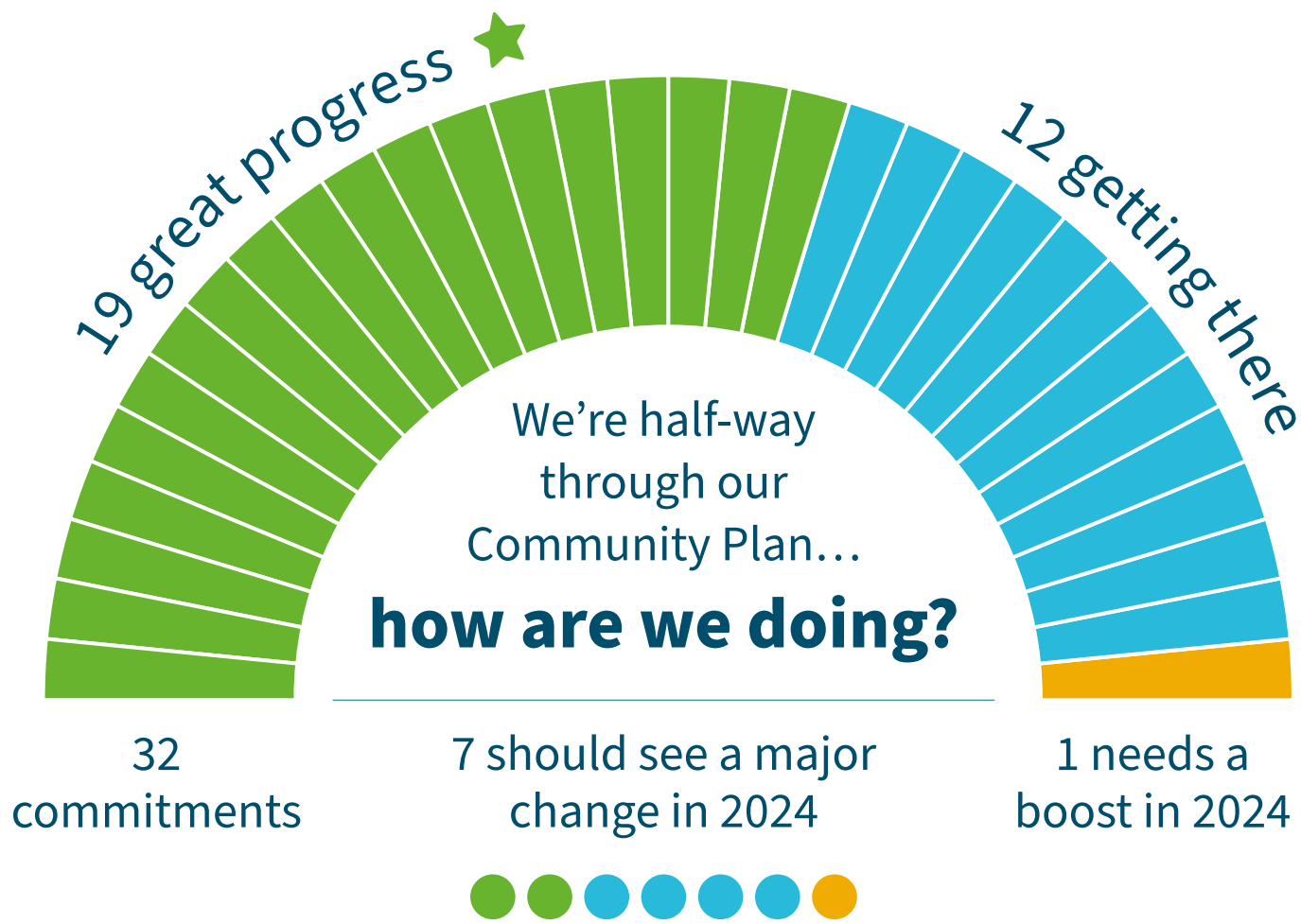
“

Jane and her colleague engaged the pupils really well and settled any nerves. The feedback from the pupils was incredibly positive.”

**James Donald, Future Improvements
Community High School**



Progress to date





THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Social Responsibility & Sustainability

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www.ed.ac.uk/local/our-community-plan

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