



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Community Plan 2025–30



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Images: Andrew Perry; Ayooluwa Kolawole; Chris Scott; Chunky Monkey Photography; Jenny Capon Draws; Paul Maguire; Sam Ingram-Sills/Whitedog Photography; Simon Community Scotland

Published by: Communications and Marketing, The University of Edinburgh

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Craigmillar Community Science Festival

Foreword

I am immensely proud of the work undertaken to support and enhance the lives of our local communities through the University's Community Plan. The University has been a pioneer in higher education as the first Scottish university to have a strategy aimed at nurturing our relationship with communities and working in partnership for the benefit of local residents. We continue to be committed to this work, supporting our neighbours so that they can lead the changes they want to see.



This is the University's third Community Plan. It builds on the insights and progress of previous years. We have clear examples of communities developing from our support to grow positive social impact:

- Community Grantees have attracted further funding to scale up their projects;
- Beneficiaries of our social investments have grown their businesses;
- Through funds we contribute to, people with experience of homelessness have maintained long-term tenancies;
- Within research projects, some of the leadership has shifted, with community researchers now driving agendas;
- Some of our summer high school paid interns from underrepresented backgrounds have subsequently won places to study medicine with us.

These examples of progress have been achieved through partnership and we remain committed to partnering in a way that ensures positive change has a lasting impact.

This Community Plan sets out our goals for engaging with local residents from 2025 to 2030. For the purposes of this plan, 'local' refers chiefly to Edinburgh, the Lothians, Fife and the Scottish Borders, aligning with the UK and Scottish Governments' Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal, in which the University is a key partner. This Plan also provides more information about how part of the social and civic responsibility focus of our Strategy 2030 will be realised.

We have also aligned this plan with other key priorities for the University, including our People and Procurement strategies, as well as ensuring that our focus addresses the key challenges facing society today. Data, Digital and AI; Future Health and Care; and Climate and Environment are identified as the core missions of our Research and Innovation strategy and our thematic approach sees them embedded throughout this plan.

The University's civic mission – its purpose in relation to local towns, cities and villages – dates to its very foundation in 1583, when it was formed by the town council.



The Community Team sharing the University's work with local residents at the 2025 Meadows Festival

Through all our Community Plans, we have sought to maximise the positive contributions of staff, students and alumni through collaboration with our local communities. Our new Plan does this by setting clear goals for our shared work, led by what we have learned through ongoing engagement with key stakeholders. We look forward to further joint working with our existing partners and to developing new connections.

In addition to building on the insights gained from both the delivery of two previous Community Plans and the University's long history of civic engagement, this Plan also incorporates learning from almost 600 interactions with local residents, civic partners and third sector organisations,

as well as many conversations with members of our University community. What follows provides a direction of travel for the next phase of this work. While the ambitions and priorities will remain consistent, we will respond to emerging opportunities and needs as they arise, and evolve our activity as required. We are committed to listening to local people, being as transparent as we can, and acting on feedback where possible.

While the Plan is for the period 2025–30, the University's dedication to local communities is long-term.

Professor Sir Peter Mathieson
Principal and Vice-Chancellor,
The University of Edinburgh

Our priorities for action

1. Partnering for positive social impact

We will support communities to create the change that matters to them.

Our work so far

We have an established practice of working collaboratively and collectively within research. In some of our projects, communities set the questions and work with the academics on the investigation, interpretation and implementation of findings. Our students already work in local communities by volunteering, creating charities and social enterprises, or working on challenges set by local residents. They also carry out community work placements and get involved with work-based learning such as the Free Legal Advice Centre, which is run by our law students together with staff and local solicitors.

We have developed ways of working that prioritise partnering locally to support people into employment and welcome members of the public onto the University's estate.

CASE STUDY

Creating collective ownership of research

The Binks Hub is a partnership between communities, artists and academic staff. By working with community organisations it empowers residents to lead research in their own communities, tackling important issues such as poverty, dementia and social wellbeing.

Through the Binks Hub and our wider networks, which includes more than 150 staff in our Participatory Research Network, we are making it easier for researchers and communities to work together on issues that matter to them. Our Participatory Research Resource library and a wide range of public involvement initiatives across the University further support this collaborative approach.



What we will do by 2030

Collectively-owned research

- We will continue to partner with communities to undertake research on topics of mutual interest.
- We will further improve the ways we respond to opportunities to collaborate on research that matters to local residents, communities, third sector and civic partners, particularly where it could benefit underrepresented groups.

Accessing and developing knowledge and skills

- Ensuring mutual benefit, we will make it even easier for local community groups to partner with Edinburgh University Students' Association Volunteering Services.
- We will build on current activities where students undertake work commissioned by and for the benefit of community partners.
- We aim to make in-person and online lifelong learning even more accessible for local residents.
- We will improve the promotion of University opportunities like apprenticeships, mentoring, work experience and paid internships.

Student volunteering

In 2023/24, 265 University of Edinburgh students received a Saltire Award for youth volunteering and another 462 students signed up to take part. Image shows the Dirty Weekenders student society volunteering at Lauriston Farm, planting trees and making fences



How we work

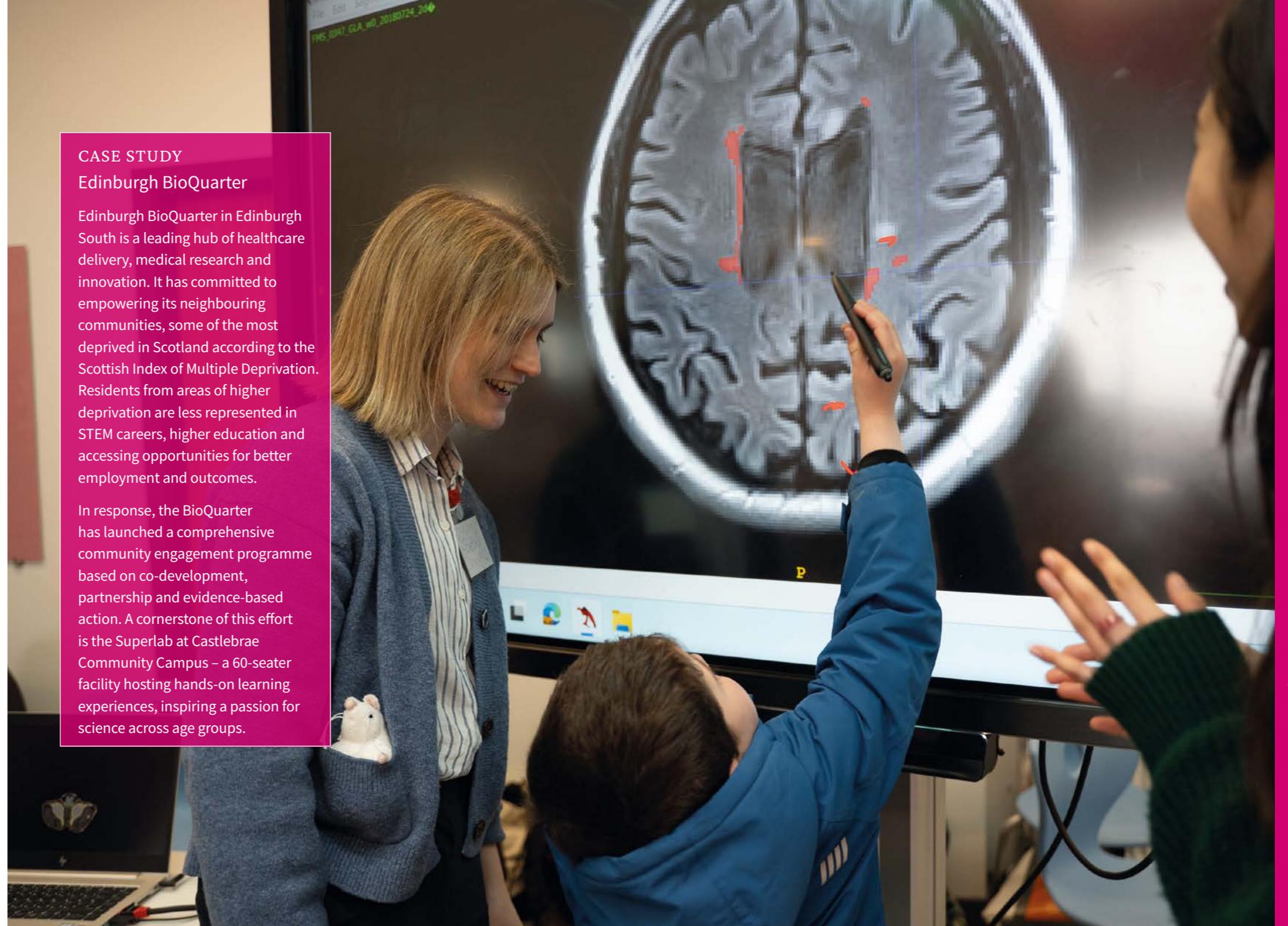
We will continue to support staff volunteering through our policies and will develop support for skills-based volunteering. We will provide a clearer contact point for any local resident who needs to reach a specific part of the University. We will participate in citywide and regional initiatives to support inclusive growth in our area, including as a member of the Edinburgh Partnership Board and with representation on the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal and any successor.

CASE STUDY

Edinburgh BioQuarter

Edinburgh BioQuarter in Edinburgh South is a leading hub of healthcare delivery, medical research and innovation. It has committed to empowering its neighbouring communities, some of the most deprived in Scotland according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Residents from areas of higher deprivation are less represented in STEM careers, higher education and accessing opportunities for better employment and outcomes.

In response, the BioQuarter has launched a comprehensive community engagement programme based on co-development, partnership and evidence-based action. A cornerstone of this effort is the Superlab at Castlebrae Community Campus – a 60-seater facility hosting hands-on learning experiences, inspiring a passion for science across age groups.



2. Promoting equalities, now and in the future

We will advance the social, economic and digital inclusion of local residents and work to improve the life chances of those in need.

Our work so far

The University's research in health and prevention of illness is world leading. There are numerous ways local patients and members of the public are involved with this, whether it is through our Edinburgh Clinical Trials Unit, the Edinburgh Clinical Research Facility or the many programmes run by our medical institutes.

The University's research in homelessness and preventing inequalities in housing is informing both local policy development and national decision-making.

The University is reducing inequalities in access to knowledge and skills through its strong commitment to widening participation in education for under-represented groups. With civic partners, we are a hub for digital and data skills development. Our current teaching includes learning related to the prevention of future inequalities.

Across our work, we add value to inclusive economic growth, through our social investment portfolio and by embedding community benefits as part of our procurement processes.

We promote digital inclusion by redistributing our surplus computing equipment through local community partners.

Access to our sport facilities by residents enables them to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.

Digital inclusion and opportunities for learning

Through our IT re-use project and community initiatives aligned to our Digital Skills Framework, we contribute to digital inclusion and online community building. In the first 10 years of our IT re-use project, 5,253 pieces of our old computing equipment were redistributed to external organisations, including local community groups and social enterprises.



What we will do by 2030

Collectively owned research

- With our partners, we will continue research that helps prevent future health problems, widens educational opportunities, supports pathways out of homelessness, and addresses other social and economic disadvantages for local residents.
- We will increase research-linked outreach that promotes healthy behaviours, such as vaccine uptake.

Accessing and developing knowledge and skills

- Recognising that from pre-birth to age five is a pivotal time for determining future life chances, such as access to education, we will continue to undertake a range of activity targeting this age group: through University-funded community grants; our teaching and research partnerships with local nurseries; our social investments; and more.
- We will maintain teaching that can help prevent future health, social and economic challenges for local residents, such as the support our students offer to young people through our Centre for Psychological Therapies, and will ensure that fairness in society continues to feature in our curriculum.
- We will continue our teaching of inclusion health with reference to our local area, such as through our Centre for Homelessness and Inclusion Health.
- We will continue to provide digital skills training to support access to employment across our region.

CASE STUDY

Affordable local homes for the future

As part of its £8 million Social Investment Fund, the University has invested £2 million in Social and Sustainable Capital's social housing funds. These funds offer flexible financing to charities and social enterprises across the UK that address housing issues.

In Edinburgh, this investment has helped Simon Community Scotland to expand supported housing schemes, offering safe and affordable accommodation for vulnerable adults at risk of homelessness. Paul (pictured right) moved into an SCS Homes property in 2024 and — with the help of his support worker Charlie (pictured left) — has been able to rebuild his confidence and connect with his community.

The University's Centre for Future Infrastructure is leading the way in finding solutions to climate change pressures on housing. Projects like the Edinburgh Home Demonstrator and its retrofit roadmap are helping to create affordable, net zero homes — including social housing — for local communities.



How we work

- We are committed to our socially positive investments and will evaluate the impact of those we make.
- We will deliver our commitments contained in the Edinburgh and South East Scotland Community Wealth Building Pledge and any successor programme. This will help to ensure we support fair employment for local residents, drive the development of local small and medium-sized businesses, and promote the long-term financial security of people from all parts of society.
- We will pursue a more systematic and progressive approach to procurement community benefits, informed by dialogue with local communities, to maximise the additional value our purchasing brings to our region.
- We will continue to support the local circular economy and digital inclusion by, for example, distributing our used computing equipment to local communities with support from our partner organisations.
- We will further promote physical health and wellbeing for local residents by continuing to offer access to our sport facilities and to our social and cultural activities.

CASE STUDY

Data and AI literacies and skills for young leaders

The Data Education in Schools programme is part of an eight-year City Region Deal-funded initiative to support access to high-quality education in data science and related emerging technologies for Edinburgh and South East Scotland's citizens. The programme is part of the Centre for Research in Digital Education and the Data Driven Innovation Skills Gateway and works with teachers and learners to build confidence, knowledge and learning opportunities for school-aged learners in data and artificial intelligence literacies.

It includes professional learning programmes for teachers, online and face-to-face learner activities and high-quality teaching materials. In the past six years, we have had more than 60,000 engagements with our face-to-face and online activities from 800 schools globally, 2,000 attendees at professional learning events and 16,000 downloads of our creative commons resources.



3. Thriving communities

We will help to promote the many factors that ensure people thrive in local places.

Our work so far

The University currently plays an active role in the civic life of our region, including using our convening power to support multi-sector work.

Our local area is made up of a diverse range of environments, from the urban centre of Edinburgh to rural communities, towns and villages. According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, the University has buildings and land in both the least and most deprived of Edinburgh's neighbourhoods. We believe it is our responsibility to share our resources with communities in all of these areas.

We have maintained our University of Sanctuary status and created the Education Beyond Borders programme, ensuring migrants and refugees arriving in our region can continue their education locally. Many of our students and staff originate from outside the UK and become involved with community partners, bringing local and global together.

We currently undertake community engagement that increases the personal connection our neighbours feel to the research and cultural heritage on their doorstep, and we support volunteering and teaching that build community connections.

We recognise that living near to us may sometimes bring challenges. We continue to operate on a 'no surprises' basis with all neighbours about developments of our estate which could impact them. We listen to issues raised and work collaboratively to address them.

CASE STUDY

Nature for shared enjoyment at Rullion Green Wood

Rullion Green Wood in the Pentland Hills Regional Park is a 30-hectare site owned by the University through its Forest and Peatland programme, which is removing carbon from the atmosphere.

Through consultation with neighbouring communities, it will enhance biodiversity and improve public access and recreation opportunities. Livestock no longer grazes on the site. Instead, picnic spots are being maintained, a new community activity area offers outdoor education, and volunteer activities are taking place on site supported by a community ranger. The wood is used for learning, teaching and research opportunities for University staff and students.

Rullion Green's cultural heritage will also be honoured through onsite interpretation of the historic Battle of Rullion Green (1666) and nearby Martyrs' Monument.

Looking ahead, the wood will be used for local communities too, through activities like citizen science.



What we will do by 2030

Collectively owned research

- We will continue to contribute to research on biodiversity and wildlife in local parks and woodlands.
- Other research will continue to support local people of all ages, genders and abilities to be more active outdoors.
- We will be involved with even more research that preserves and promotes local cultural heritage.
- Through more than 200 staff and student volunteers involved with Edinburgh BioQuarter's community impact work, and through the Easter Bush Science Outreach Centre, we will further enhance everyday engagement in science by nearby residents.

Accessing and developing knowledge and skills

- We will continue to develop community volunteering that promotes social connection, such as our students sharing their knowledge of languages other than English, or their digital skills.
- Through our curriculum, we will create more chances for experiential learning where students focus on local places and, where appropriate, involve residents directly.
- We will continue our Education Beyond Borders programme of funding, support, and collaborative and community-led initiatives, and maintain our University of Sanctuary status, ensuring more New Scots can access the skills they need.



Education Beyond Borders. Student members of STAR (Student Action for Refugees) with University staff member Nadin Akta (pictured centre)

How we work

- We will continue to respect cultural heritage in the development of our estate and consider the impact of these developments on local communities.
- We will learn from the recommendations of the University's Race Review.
- We will award at least 20 community grants per year. We will continue to award these grants directly to groups and organisations because we recognise that local knowledge best supports a community's ambitions. Our allocation of funds will prioritise the ongoing financial sustainability of these groups, strengthening social change and developing community leaders.
- We will increase the use of our public outdoor spaces and heritage and cultural assets for health and wellbeing purposes, including our site at Rullion Green Wood in the Pentland Hills Regional Park.
- We will provide greater support to community-driven events and will improve access for local residents to festival events in our buildings.
- We will maintain free-of-charge community use of our designated buildings.



CASE STUDY

Supporting community ambitions with grants

Between 2017 and early 2025, the University's Community Grant Scheme awarded more than 300 grants – totalling more than £770,000 – to projects benefiting Edinburgh, Lothians, Scottish Borders and Fife communities.

Grants of up to £5,000 go directly to local community organisations. Funding decisions are made by a panel that includes a representative from a local charity.

The grant-funded Edinburgh Giants Wheelchair Rugby League was founded in 2020. The grant helped the group expand its reach and University's Pleasance Sports Complex became a primary training venue, offering affordable access and vital wheelchair storage.

Looking ahead, with grant topics being driven by communities, our community grants will continue to support local residents to thrive.

Implementation and monitoring

This Community Plan requires the whole University to contribute in order to achieve our goals.

The Community Board will have oversight of the implementation of this Plan. Chaired by the Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability, the Community Board is made up of representatives from the academic and professional services staff of the University, the Edinburgh University Students' Association, and representatives external to the University.

The Community Board reports on progress to the Social and Civic Responsibility Committee (or the appropriate successor committee) on an annual basis, or as requested.

To achieve the aims of this Plan, the Board will ensure that adequate resource and funding is in place to meet its ambitions. The Board will monitor and promote the ambitions of this Plan and be accountable to our local residents.

The University's Community Team is a small group of staff from the University's Social Responsibility and Communications and Marketing departments. In order to achieve the Plan's implementation and monitoring aims, the Community Team will:

- continually engage with local communities to ensure the Plan's implementation remains relevant;
- publicise the Plan among staff, students, alumni and local partners;
- develop more detailed implementation plans and measures of success, with input from Board members and those with roles in delivery. They will be reviewed for monitoring purposes each time the Community Board meets and updated annually or as required;
- review the membership of the Community Board to ensure representation from key stakeholders in the delivery of the Plan. Information and contact details of the members of the Community Board will be published;
- highlight our activity and progress to local residents, University staff, alumni and students through an annual public report.



Theatre company Necessary Cat rehearsing in a University space free of charge through our Access to Rooms initiative

Be part of our Community Plan



edin.ac/community-plan

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