



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH



Edinburgh Local:  
**Community Engagement Strategy**

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*The University of Edinburgh seeks to discover, develop and share knowledge; to deliver a positive impact for society; to make a significant, sustainable and socially responsible contribution to the world; and to promote good health, economic growth, cultural understanding and social wellbeing.*

The University of Edinburgh Strategic Plan 2016

# The University in the city

In 1583, the University of Edinburgh opened its doors to its students. It was established by the townspeople which was unusual at a time when most other universities were created primarily as religious foundations. Because of this, we are especially conscious of our role as a civic university and of our relationships with the city and the communities in which we live, study and work.

The University is physically embedded in the centre of the city – a crucial part of the history, geography and culture of Edinburgh. As we have grown over the past four centuries, we have created campuses in other parts of the city: a science and engineering campus at King's Buildings to the south, medicine at Little France and the Western General Hospital in the west of the city and, most recently, our Easter Bush campus in Midlothian which is dedicated to animal health and food security.

Most of our staff and almost all of our students are based in these communities and are proud to be so. They have chosen to stay here or to come here because Edinburgh is a beautiful, historic, safe and vibrant city. The University benefits from that environment and atmosphere, and we also contribute to it through our staff, students, buildings and the knowledge we discover, develop and share. The past, present and future of city and university are deeply intertwined.

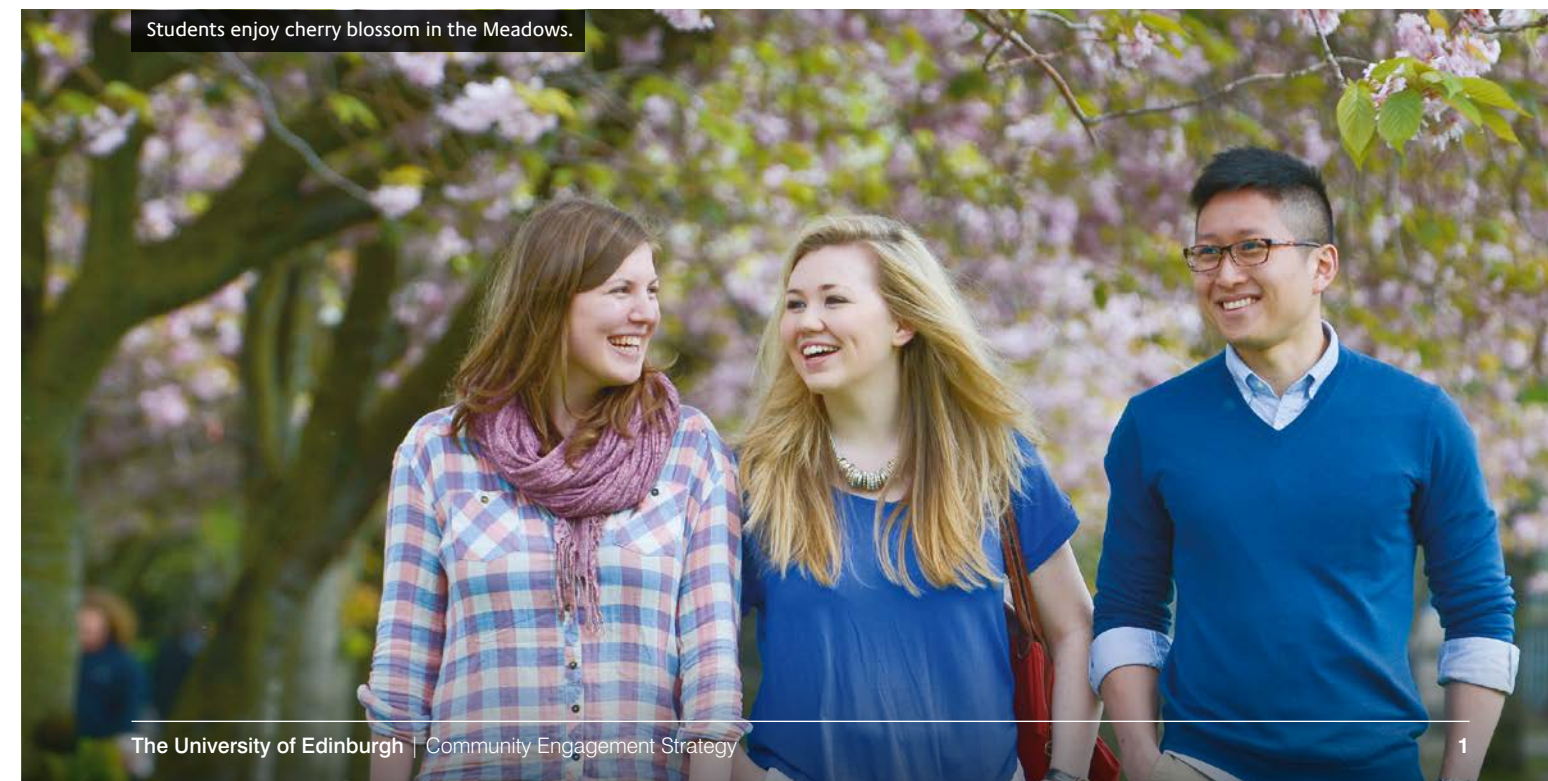
We play a vital role in strengthening and driving the local economy, employing thousands of staff, drawing in businesses to base themselves and invest in the city, generating our own start-up and spin-out companies, buying from local suppliers, spending in shops and theatres, using local and international transport networks and underpinning tourism infrastructure.

We are also an essential part of the educational, social, cultural and international aspects of local life. We offer workshops in schools, *pro bono* services such as legal advice and counselling, venues for hire, museums and galleries, sporting and cultural programmes, and staff and student volunteering and fundraising. Our international students and staff help to make Edinburgh a cosmopolitan city which attracts inward investment and they also act as ambassadors for the city and for Scotland when they return home.

As a great international and civic university, rooted in Scotland's capital city and the best of its intellectual traditions, we are proud to work with partners to make a significant, sustainable and responsible contribution locally and globally. We seek not only to challenge the boundaries of knowledge and research to address global challenges, but also to respond to the needs of civil society, promoting health, economic growth, cultural understanding and social wellbeing. We will continue to be the University not only of the city and in the city, but for the city and our communities.



**Professor Charlie Jeffery CBE**  
Senior Vice Principal



Students enjoy cherry blossom in the Meadows.



# Background

The University of Edinburgh contains and is part of many communities: global, academic, research, student, alumni, local, business and more. We were founded by Edinburgh's Town Council in 1583 as the Tounis College and, as the oldest university in the English-speaking world to be established as a civic foundation, we give special importance to engagement with our city and communities. We are very proud of our position not only as part of the physical and social fabric of the city but also our role as neighbour, educator, advisor, employer and cultural contributor.

Our Strategic Plan 2016 clearly identifies our mission of discovering, developing and sharing knowledge, and our vision of delivering impact for society. We are committed to making a significant, sustainable and socially responsible contribution to the world, and to promoting health, economic growth, cultural understanding and social wellbeing. We are already delivering on this promise at local level but we seek to work with others to play a more strategic role in strengthening the capacity and ability of both city and university to forge a strong and vibrant future.

We know that the University of Edinburgh brings major educational, economic, social, cultural and international benefits to the city and the region. We also know that the setting of our university in a beautiful, vibrant and safe capital city is as important as our academic reputation in attracting undergraduates to study here. With more than 25,000 students, 12,000 staff and many alumni living locally, we form a significant proportion of the community we serve. The fortunes of both town and gown are thus inextricably linked.

A recent survey\* shows that 90 per cent of citizens believe we are an asset to the city, and 77 per cent believe we serve the city as a whole, not only staff and students. However, 66 per cent do not fully understand what we do, and 65 per cent have never used our services or facilities. It is clear, therefore, that there is a significant opportunity to enhance our outreach and engagement with citizens and communities.

The audit of University activity conducted in 2014 outlined the many ways in which we already interact with our communities. This Strategy seeks to build on that foundation by developing a dialogue with the city and partners in our local communities to find ways of working together to strengthen this historic and symbiotic relationship for the benefit of all.

\* Progressive: Perceptions of the University of Edinburgh, October 2015

We educate our students to make a useful contribution to society.



# Engagement at the University of Edinburgh

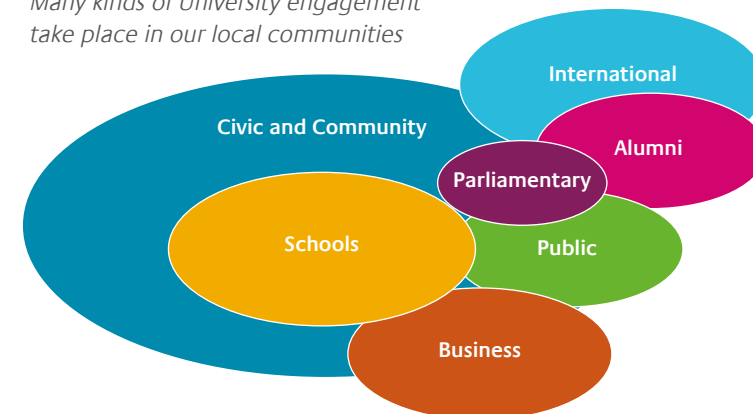
The University, within its Strategic Plan, is committed to and undertakes a wide range of engagement, locally, nationally and globally. Several areas operate within their own agreed strategy and some of these have an impact in the local community. This Community Engagement Strategy seeks to complement existing frameworks:

- **Public engagement** focuses on the dissemination of research findings to a wide range of audiences through channels such as publications, traditional and social media, café discussions, public lectures, policy advice, exhibitions, stand-up comedy, documentary films and festival workshops. Memorandums of Understanding between the University and several national institutions have cemented existing links and fostered new ones. The Beltane project co-ordinates this work across all Edinburgh's universities and there is considerable overlap between public and community engagement.
- **Engagement with schools** is often related to student recruitment, including widening participation, seeking to raise aspiration and attainment in primary and secondary schools. Staff visit schools and pupils and teachers are invited onto campus for Open Days and special events. Additional in-school activities encompass science workshops, student teaching modules, student volunteering (such as sports, languages), study-related work (for example formal teacher-training, music in the community), and staff volunteering (such as giving talks about their discipline or serving on School Parent Councils).
- **Economic and business engagement** spans a wide array of interactions from the Entrepreneurs Club in the Business School to the work of Knowledge Exchange Officers and Business Development Officers within schools and departments to the links the Careers Service has with local, national and international employers. Edinburgh Innovations, with its focus on commercialisation of research, consultancy and science parks, has very strong business and economic links. The University is a member of the Edinburgh Business Forum and is committed to procurement from local suppliers where possible.
- **Engagement with alumni** at home and with individuals and international chapters abroad is managed by the Development and Alumni department through a range of communication tools, including *Edit* magazine and social media. Face-to-face events include biennial meetings in Edinburgh of the General Council, alumni weekends, reunions, talks, receptions and fundraising drives.

- **International engagement** is conducted primarily through Edinburgh Global which not only recruits and looks after more than 14,000 international students, but manages four overseas offices (Beijing, Mumbai, Santiago, New York City), oversees Global Academies, encourages home students to study abroad, and much more. It works to create links between international students and their host community through initiatives such as the Gather Festival and International Hospitality Scheme.
- **Parliamentary engagement** is carried out across the University, with the Principal and senior staff meeting regularly with key Ministers and civil servants at Scottish and UK levels, supported by staff offering briefings for debates, motions, parliamentary questions and responses to enquiries and FOI requests. The University holds debates, seminars, conferences and receptions. Our public engagement and knowledge exchange networks also work with parliamentarians and their staff to ensure that evidence and research inform responsible policy-making.
- **Civic and community engagement** sees extensive local activity, some of which is listed above. University staff work with officials at the City of Edinburgh Council and Midlothian Council on planning issues, and there are many other connections relating to the training of our students, such as teacher training in local schools. More recently, we have been closely involved with six local authorities in the city region in developing the bid for a City Deal.

Staff and students interact with local communities in very many ways, not least as citizens themselves, but also through activities in schools, provision of sports facilities and cultural venues, short courses and summer schools, participation in festivals, volunteering and fundraising, the free legal and veterinary services, and much more.

**Figure 1**  
Many kinds of University engagement take place in our local communities





# Community engagement: setting the scene

The University of Edinburgh is a vitally important part of the communities of Edinburgh and Midlothian.

We are a key driver of their economies, with additional economic impact across Scotland. We are the third largest employer in Edinburgh, with more than 13,000 staff, supporting a further 10,000 jobs and delivering £1.2 billion GVA (gross value added). In Midlothian, we support over 1,000 jobs and £61.6 million GVA. In addition, our research and knowledge exchange activities are important in supporting R&D in businesses in the city, offering facilities such as science parks and business incubators, creating start-up and spin-out companies, enhancing tourism and attracting inward investment.

In educational terms, the University not only delivers undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, but comprehensive lifelong learning opportunities which range from access courses to philosophy, languages, and art and design to Continuous Professional Development and online learning opportunities. This is complemented by outreach and workshops in schools, public events and lectures, and participation by staff and students in the city's many festivals.

Socially and culturally, we make a significant contribution to the quality of life in Edinburgh through staff and student volunteering and fundraising for local good causes; by sharing our museums, galleries and collections through a year-round programme of events, exhibitions, concerts and lectures; through outreach via initiatives such as the Free Legal Advice Clinic and the vets' care for the pets of homeless people; and by sharing our sports, arts and science facilities and expertise. Our international staff and students play a significant role in

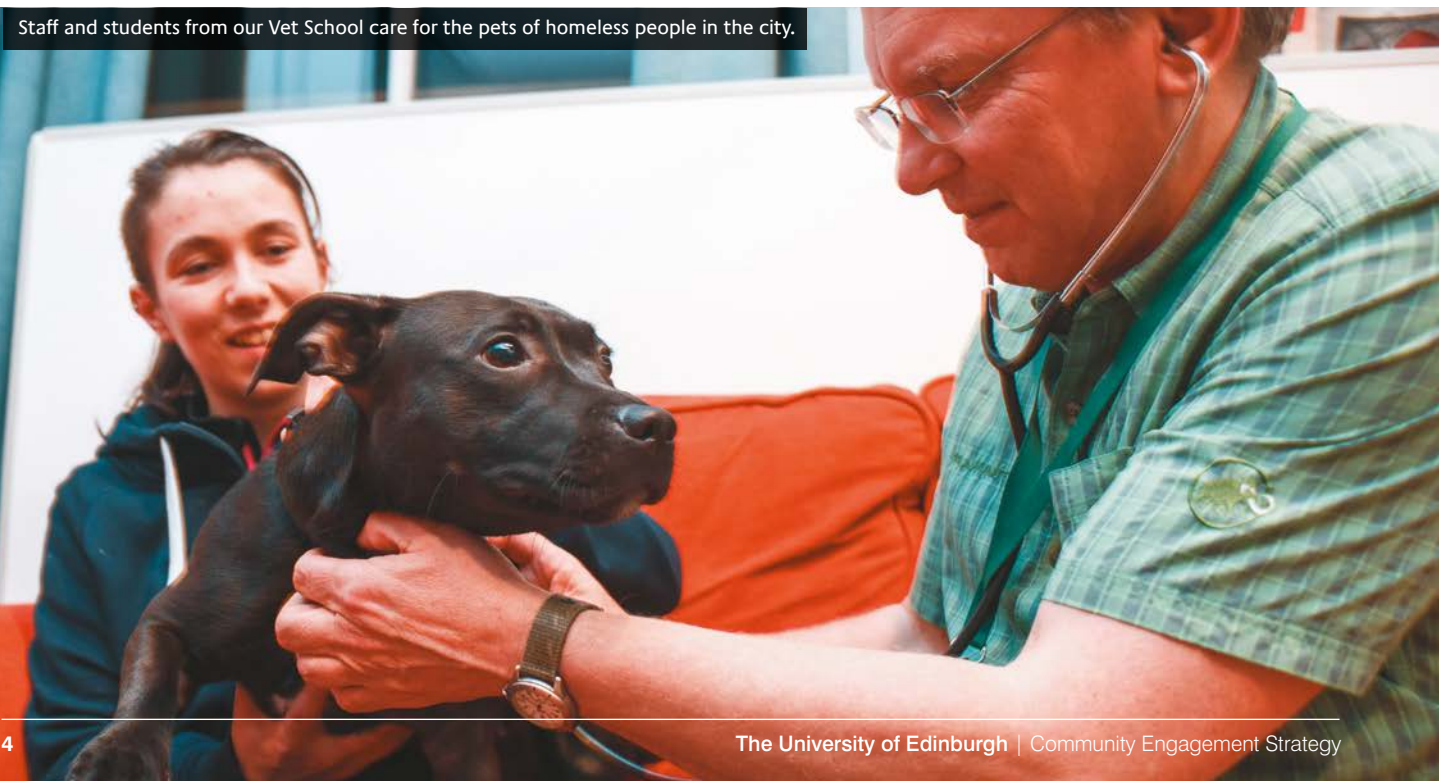
much of this enrichment activity and their presence in the city augments its diversity, its cosmopolitan feel and global outlook.

While it is incontrovertible that the city's prosperity is important in attracting new students and staff as well as inward investors and employers, and imperative that Edinburgh should remain a safe and attractive place in which to study, work, live and visit, we must also recognise that measuring success in terms of economic metrics only does not capture the whole picture. The value of community goodwill towards the University is incalculable.

Around 58,000 students from four universities live in the city of Edinburgh, approximately half of whom attend the University of Edinburgh. The way in which students and residents interact, as good neighbours and responsible citizens, is of great importance in ensuring community safety and cohesion. The University is supportive of the need to maintain balanced and sustainable communities in the city and will seek to build stronger links and a deeper understanding of the needs and concerns of all parties.

On a more strategic level, civic relationships between the University of Edinburgh and the Council which founded it deserve to be strengthened through more regular dialogue at senior level. Good relationships between individuals and departments at the University and in local authorities are valued and valuable, but there is an opportunity to build a stronger partnership which could offer a more co-ordinated approach to address wider and bigger issues in our communities such as education or health and wellbeing. Ensuring that all partners are aware of and supportive of each other's activities and ambitions will offer a firmer foundation for planning and progress.

Staff and students from our Vet School care for the pets of homeless people in the city.



Our outreach programmes to local schools help raise aspiration and attainment.





# Developing, harnessing and strengthening relationships

Good relationships between the University and external bodies, including local authorities, communities, businesses and voluntary groups, are crucial to engendering trust and creating mutual understanding.

It is particularly important that civic engagement between the University and local authorities is embraced by their respective senior management teams in order that regular meetings can take into account the wishes, needs and concerns of the city and communities within which we are located when considering how best to achieve our strategic aims. These meetings could also review strategic issues where there might be mutual benefit in formulating deliverable solutions.

The University is also home to an immense knowledge base which could be of value in addressing many of the challenges which face cities and communities. An example of this is the work of the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation, which is working with the City of Edinburgh Council on low carbon initiatives, and the work of the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine which supports the National Health Service in improving the health and wellbeing of local people and their animals and pets.

At present, relationships are often generated and owned by individuals. This is both a strength and a weakness: individuals are empowered to make links unencumbered by bureaucracy but, as far as the University is concerned, these relationships and their history may be lost when the individual moves on.

In order to build a more sustainable network of association, we wish to put in place a user-friendly database which regularly maps and captures this web of connections. The aim is not to manage relationships but to gain a wider perspective on institutional interactions so that synergies and gaps can be identified and opportunities optimised. In particular, as experiential learning becomes an integral feature of curricula, an appropriately tailored database will prove to be a very valuable resource.

It is also crucial to work closely with the Edinburgh University Students' Association, its societies and the Students Union to understand more fully how our students engage externally and to seek to include, where appropriate, their data. Joint working is reputationally important because many of those not directly involved with the University do not distinguish between the 'official' institution of the University and the student body, seeing them both as 'the University of Edinburgh'.

Increased understanding of current and proposed activity would also allow identification of opportunities to coordinate certain types of initiative in order to provide greater support for staff and students involved in delivering them, for example engagement with schools. It would also supply an evidence base for developing discussions with key partners about delivery of projects and initiatives on a more strategic and sustainable basis.

There is enormous potential in the University harnessing and strengthening its current relationships and in developing new ones. It would yield opportunities to listen, consult, inform and partner as well as to ask for help and cross-fertilise opportunity. Key to successful relationships is communication and, with a better knowledge of our network and reach, we could ensure that appropriate channels of communication are established, targeted and evaluated (see Aim 3, page 11).

We are increasingly aware that, as the University has grown in recent years, its impact on its environs and communities has also intensified. Pressures of space within a small city which is also a World Heritage Site present special challenges, particularly in the sphere of estate development and student accommodation where both city and University agree that maintaining sustainable and balanced communities is necessary for personal wellbeing and social cohesion. Students seek affordable accommodation of a decent standard and communities, while welcoming students, do not wish to feel overwhelmed by them.

In order to build stronger relationships between students and their communities, we will seek to enhance Good Neighbour initiatives, supporting students living in the community to play productive roles as citizens and neighbours. We will seek to build on the successful Community Guide, jointly produced by staff and students, and to work with Edinburgh University Students' Association, the Council and the police to develop better education for students about community and personal safety, the obligations of communal and tenement living, waste disposal and recycling, opportunities to take an active part in community life and all-round citizenship.

It is important that the University's relations with Councillors and communities do not become defined by planning and 'studentification' issues. In order to broaden out the range of interactions, we will work to support programmes which reach out to the community by assisting and recognising staff volunteering, by strengthening our Friends initiatives, by supporting community fundraising schemes and outreach, and investigating ways in which we can develop more opportunities to share our facilities.

The University has also signed up to a number of socially responsible schemes, including the Social Impact Pledge, the Scottish Business Pledge and the Edinburgh Guarantee, all of which commit us to helping local people. The University has established a small grants scheme specifically for community projects, which demonstrates our commitment to joint working.

Student volunteers care about local people and places.



## Aim 1 To build and strengthen relationships between the university, the city and our communities

### How we will achieve our aim:

- hold regular high-level meetings between the University of Edinburgh and the City of Edinburgh and Midlothian Councils to explore issues of common strategic interest and mutual benefit;
- meet regularly with local Councillors and neighbourhood and community groups to build positive relationships;
- enhance support for students' awareness of positive practice as good neighbours and citizens;
- strengthen relationships with external partners by developing an improved mechanism for capturing and collating engagement between them and the University and the Edinburgh University Students' Association/Edinburgh University Students' Union, including outreach through volunteering and student societies;
- identify opportunities to share facilities with the community eg sports facilities, meeting rooms, green space, equipment;
- establish and promote a small grants scheme to support local community projects;
- support staff volunteering: identify, collate, publicise opportunities;
- support the Edinburgh Guarantee scheme (hiring local school leavers as apprentices, technicians, clerical support);
- explore the potential for greater community support for the Centre for Research Collections and further 'Friends' schemes.



# Working with communities through research, teaching and learning

Many of our staff, both academic and professional, and our students work and study within local communities whether on teaching or research projects, or through processes such as planning and procurement.

Particularly among academic staff involved in community engagement, there is support for establishing a community of practice which would allow them to share knowledge, experience and contacts, with provision of training, mentoring and a database of case studies. This might be done in association with the existing Beltane Threshold network for public engagement and with the Institute for Academic Development, making use of the proposed database outlined under Aim 1. In this way, the value of community engagement work and its practitioners will be better recognised, supported and valued.

Involving the community in the University's research programmes is already a feature in some Schools of the University where citizens participate in research into medicine, neuroscience, bilingualism, law, constitutional affairs, veterinary medicine and many other areas, helping to find new treatments for disease as well as insights into social problems. Public engagement with research has been increasing in profile and scope for the past several years and it is hoped that the synergies between public and community engagement can be maximised.

In addition, the University's capacity to address local challenges of all kinds through its extensive knowledge resources and its research and consultancy services is perhaps insufficiently well-known and there is scope to work more closely with statutory and voluntary bodies and businesses to increase awareness of these valuable assets.

Increasingly, students are learning in community settings. This is perhaps most evident with students learning to be doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers and community educators, architects, musicians and so on. Further opportunities are now in place for students of other disciplines, for example geosciences and informatics, through programmes such as education modules and Living Labs. Students value these opportunities for interaction beyond the walls of the classroom and can be rewarded through credit for study, through the Edinburgh Award or can simply take pride and pleasure in learning from and helping others. In order to enhance the experiential learning agenda within the Learning and Teaching Strategy, we will investigate the possibilities for developing more openings which would benefit both students and community.

As part of this outreach, and in consultation with local authorities, we wish to examine the potential of developing a more strategic and coordinated approach to our many and varied engagements with local schools which currently embrace recruitment and widening participation activities; science, art and music workshops; CPD and virtual resources for teachers; sports activities; language volunteering; staff volunteering on School Parent Councils, and much more. Appropriately resourced, this Learning City initiative could assist in providing a wider spread of relevant expertise and activity; help develop high-quality practice and support among our staff in delivering experiences which enrich staff, students, teachers and pupils; and gauge the extent to which this type of outreach raises pupils' aspiration and attainment.

Student learning in the community and schools outreach which succeeds in raising attainment can be complemented by strengthening our provision of lifelong learning opportunities, for example through the remit of the Centre for Open Learning and our Community Education programmes, and the ever-growing scope of digital and online education in forms such as MOOCs, the Digital Ambassadors programme and the proposed Virtual Edinburgh project. Consultation with communities on what content would be most useful and relevant and which methods would be most welcomed should form part of the preparation for delivery, in which students and staff can participate as appropriate.

There is enormous potential within the exciting vision for a Learning City to create a transformation in our educational engagement with individuals, schools, communities, our students and the knowledge economy which could deliver significant benefits. In tandem and where appropriate, we would seek to cooperate with and support other engagement programmes within the community, such as public engagement and the social enterprise agenda emerging within the Social Responsibility and Sustainability Department.

Our year-round participation in festivals helps inspire young people.



## Aim 2 To enhance community relations through research, teaching and learning

### How we will achieve our aim:

- build a community of practice for staff already involved in or interested in developing community engagement activities to build capacity to enhance the student experience and benefit the community;
- scope and, where possible, expand the capacity to offer students an opportunity to work, volunteer or study within a community setting during the course of their studies at the University in order to enrich their experiential learning and benefit the community;
- develop and implement a vision for Edinburgh as a Learning City:
  - a) work with local authorities to develop a more strategic and coordinated approach to our current and potential engagement with schools and identify resources required to achieve this;
  - b) scope, harness and develop opportunities for engaging with lifelong learners;
- support the University's public engagement activities by developing a directory of those willing to speak to community and interest groups;
- support knowledge exchange activities within the city and communities;
- support the University's emerging social enterprise agenda.



# Raising awareness and understanding between the University and the community

While recent research shows that 78 per cent of those surveyed think the University is world class and 72 per cent agree that we make them proud to live in Edinburgh, 66 per cent have no knowledge of what we do, 65 per cent have never used our services or facilities, ie never visited our campus, and only 22 per cent have visited our website.

Improving two-way communication between city and University is therefore essential if we are to understand each other better, live together and work for a brighter future for our city and communities.

One direct way in which the University can raise awareness and understanding among communities of our purpose, activities and achievements is to improve our collation within the University of news stories relevant to local people, partly through using the database mentioned in Aim 1. We will create a new section of the website to highlight these stories, attracting visitors to the site by establishing a new regular e-newsletter and using our existing social media accounts. This could also host information about upcoming events and opportunities for engagement.

An annual stakeholder forum or conference could provide a further opportunity to get to know partners new and old, to showcase our contribution to the wellbeing of the communities within which we are located, and to hear from, discuss and work with others on issues and themes of current concern.

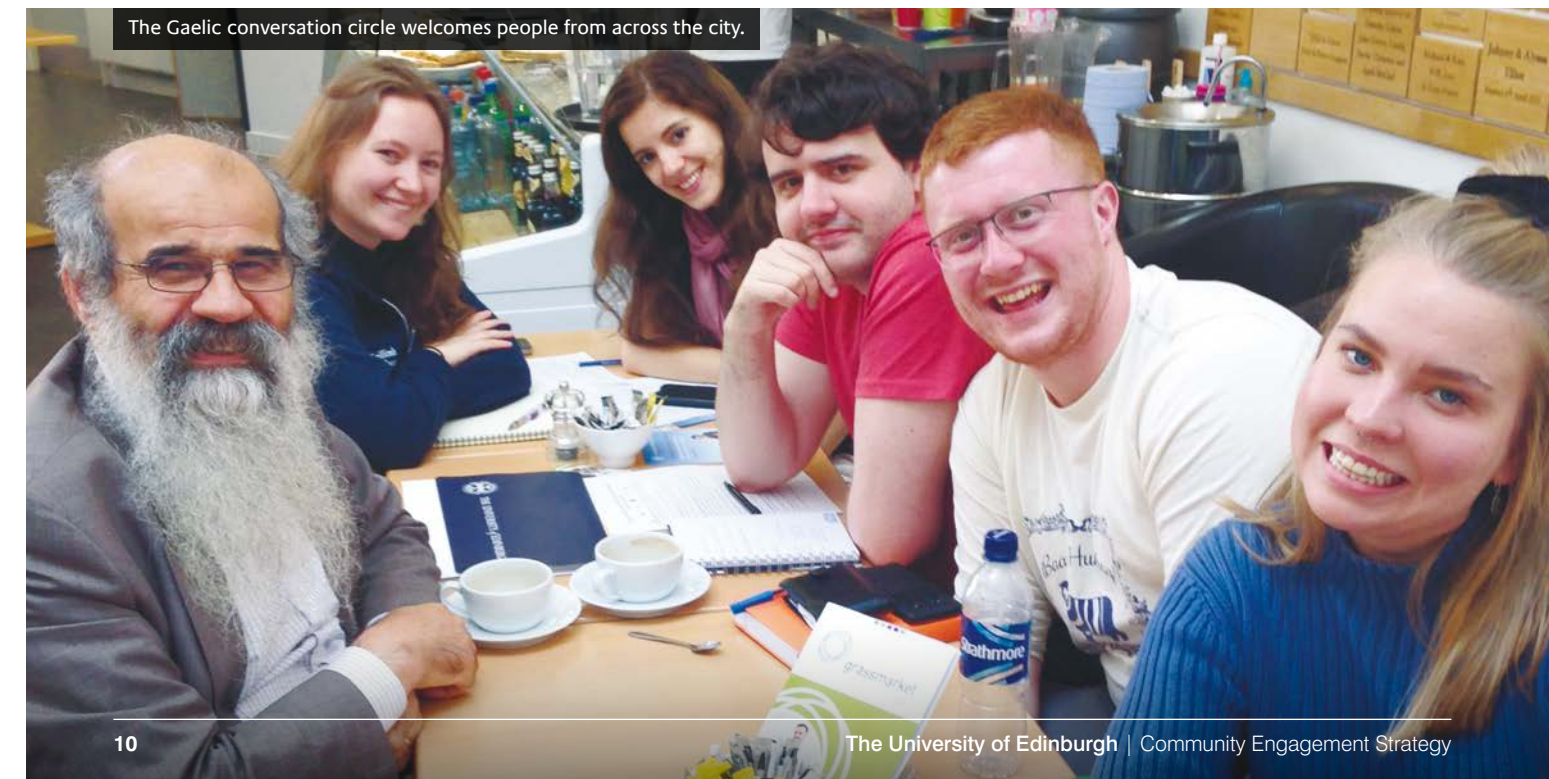
The value of keeping local communities informed about and supportive of the University's activities and aspirations should not be underestimated. Further opportunities for meaningful engagement exist in arenas such as estates consultations, Open Days, festivals and public engagement events where visitors can learn more about wider aspects of the University's work, just as we may wish to hear their views about us. A short promotional leaflet, widely distributed, would be very effective.

Creating more opportunities for the community not only to understand us but also to interact with us, and have a genuine dialogue, will be a vital part of this approach. A virtual 'front door' within the institutional website will make the University more comprehensible, more accessible and more welcoming of approaches from civic, voluntary and business groups and associations. In order not to duplicate effort, and where appropriate and possible, we will identify synergies with other parts of the University engaged in external engagement and outreach.



Our museums and galleries delight tourists as well as school children.

The Gaelic conversation circle welcomes people from across the city.



## Aim 3 To enhance interaction and understanding between the University and its communities

### How we will achieve our aim:

- enhance communication of our community engagement activities and achievements;
- scope and develop more opportunities and methods by which the community can understand and interact with the University, and vice versa;
- investigate establishing an annual forum at which the University of Edinburgh hosts a dialogue with key partners in the community and beyond to address issues of common interest;
- strengthen the University's engagement activity, where appropriate, by finding synergies between our various external interactions;
- recognise more fully the impact of the University's built environment on the community, enhancing good practice in consultation and communication.



# Summary

The University has a symbiotic relationship with the city of Edinburgh. The city created the University and the attractiveness of the city is a major lure for students and staff. Our fortunes are closely intertwined.

Our international reputation for excellence in teaching, learning and research enhances the capacity of the city to attract inward investment and tourists, to prosper, and to support many economic, social and cultural activities. In turn, the beauty, history and quality of life of the city are undeniably powerful factors in enticing students and staff from across the world to study and work at the University. For more than four hundred years the University has been an indivisible part of Edinburgh, accessible to the community and an asset to the city. We seek to be a good neighbour and to foster an environment where city and University work in partnership for mutual benefit.

Located securely alongside the global and other contexts in which we engage, a Community Engagement Strategy necessarily has a local focus on the mutual benefit to be derived through positive interaction between the University and the city and its communities. In the spirit of Patrick Geddes, international town planner, ecologist and one of our former lecturers, 'think globally, act locally'.

In order to identify and deliver this mutual benefit, a strong network of relationships with key partners in and across the city and our communities must be strengthened and maintained. The opportunities to work with partners to advance research, learning and other agendas which are of value to the University and local people, organisations and businesses, hold immense potential.

It is clear that activities already generated by the University at many levels go some way to meet all five of the city's key strategic aims: developing the economy of the city region, improving the quality of life for all, improving health and wellbeing, supporting educational excellence and promoting environmental sustainability. Citizens benefit not only from the research and services offered by University staff, students and facilities, but also from the academic, economic, social, cultural and international advantages that accrue from having a world-class university in their midst.

However, evidence of activity is not always evidence of engagement or outcomes of mutual benefit. It is not always apparent to what extent the community contributes to and participates in our activity, to what extent they are aware of it or our role in it, or how much they value it or benefit from it. Recent benchmark research indicates that our community is proud to have a world-class university in its midst, while not fully comprehending what we are and what we do. Therefore, enhanced opportunities for an exchange of information and dialogue will help bridge this gap in understanding, increase awareness and appreciation of our work, and build support.

The University's Community Engagement Strategy with its agreed objectives seeks to advance our core purpose of research, teaching and learning, to build stronger relationships with our partners, to inform and enhance a dialogue with our communities for the benefit of all, and to build the goodwill of our fellow-citizens towards the University. In particular, we hope that our vision for a Learning City will be shared by our partners.

The University of Edinburgh benefits hugely from being located within a beautiful European capital and a thriving metropolis which is not only home to most of our staff and students, but also provides a safe and welcoming space for our international community, a prosperous economy, an engaged citizenry and business base, and a unique and highly-valued quality of life. The interplay of these elements is of incalculable value and the University must do all it can to ensure that it plays its part in sustaining the important relationship between town and gown for the benefit and wellbeing of all.

We host exhibitions and events to which we welcome visitors.



## Measures of success

- More opportunities for interaction at senior level between the University and its partners and for wider interaction at neighbourhood and community level
- More opportunities for students to interact with the community as part of research, study, work or volunteering programmes supported by a community of practice
- More coordinated engagement with local schools leading to increased enrichment of pupils' experiences and, where possible and appropriate, their attainment
- More citizens involved with Learning City initiatives
- A database containing relationship information
- Establishment of Good Neighbour support for students and enhancement of good practice in estates consultations
- Establishment of a small grants fund for community projects, and evaluation
- Increased support for joint University-community outreach and projects eg Edinburgh Guarantee, social enterprise schemes, Friends schemes
- Creation of a virtual 'front door' and web pages to support two-way interaction between University and community, supported by other communications channels and working with colleagues involved in other forms of external engagement
- An annual audit and reporting of community engagement activities across the University
- Survey of community perceptions shows increased awareness, knowledge and appreciation of the University and its activities.



**Published by:**

Communications and Marketing  
The University of Edinburgh  
[www.ed.ac.uk](http://www.ed.ac.uk)

This publication is available in alternative formats on request.  
Please contact: [communications.office@ed.ac.uk](mailto:communications.office@ed.ac.uk)

**Printed by:**

21 Colour Ltd  
[www.21colour.co.uk](http://www.21colour.co.uk)

**Photography by:**

Allan Shedlock  
Paul Dodds  
Callum Bennetts – Maverick Photo Agency  
Chris Close  
Douglas Robertson  
Bria Mason  
Jim Stephenson  
David Cheskin

This publication can be viewed online and downloaded as a PDF.  
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