



COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING IN ACTION

East Lothian Council and Queen Margaret University Lead the Way



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Context

East Lothian Council (ELC) have spearheaded Community Wealth Building (CWB) in the county, recognising its role in delivering its Council Plan goal for sustainable, inclusive economic growth. The authority established the East Lothian CWB Charter and subsequent Working Group which comprises signatories of the Charter and supporting partners. Communicating the CWB vision has inspired anchor organisations, who are exploring how CWB aligns with their own activities and how they can contribute to embedding it in their settings.

Queen Margaret University (QMU) is one such anchor. The council and university's shared commitment to CWB is reflected in two major strategies:

- East Lothian Local Economy Strategy – 2024–2034 (ELLES)
- QMU's Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund (KEIF) Strategy -- 2025–2030



These long-term plans aim to spark local innovation, drive inclusive growth, and align with national priorities such as the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and the National Innovation Strategy.

Project/Collaboration

CWB principles are deeply embedded in both strategies. ELC became one of the first councils to embed CWB in the region's new economic strategy. At QMU, the concept resonated strongly with institutional values, prompting a university-wide embrace of CWB. Entrepreneurship is already woven into QMU's diverse curriculum, from allied health, care and wellbeing to the arts, making the integration of Inclusive Democratic Business Models (IDBMs) a natural evolution. These models now form a key pillar of the KEIF and further strengthen ties to the ELLES.

Outcome/Impact

Though still in the early stages, the partnership is already delivering tangible outcomes:

- **Business Gateway East Lothian Collaboration and Bright Red Triangle Launch:** Building on the success of Business Gateway East Lothian's long-standing presence at QMU, the university has become a vibrant hub for entrepreneurial activity. The launch of Bright Red Triangle, a joint initiative with Edinburgh College and Edinburgh Napier University, extends this impact by enhancing the support available for student and graduate-led ventures across the region. It contributes to the ELLES and ELP, encouraging young innovators across the county. Local enterprises are also encouraged to access QMU's facilities, with mentoring and incubation support being explored. This strengthens the role of QMU as a regional anchor for inclusive economic development and deepens its contribution to the East Lothian entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- **Edinburgh Innovation Hub Integration:** The recently launched Edinburgh Innovation Hub, adjacent to QMU's campus, will offer state-of-the-art facilities and collaborative spaces for research, enterprise, and workforce development. This joint venture between the university and council and part of the Edinburgh and South East Scotland (ESES) City Region Deal, is poised to unlock new CWB opportunities, supporting local businesses and fostering inclusive innovation.
- **Business School Engagement:** QMU's Business School is actively championing CWB and supporting the East Lothian Social Enterprise Network. Plans are underway for a comprehensive evaluation of CWB's regional impact.
- **Social Care Innovation Pilot:** A cross-anchor group is piloting new approaches to social care, focusing on career progression and home-based delivery through local carer-led enterprises. This aligns with QMU's expertise in health and social care innovation.
- **Wallyford Learning Campus Collaboration:** Discussions are ongoing to maximise use of this cutting-edge ELC facility, enhancing opportunities in science, technology, arts, performance and food innovation.



- **National Leadership:** QMU is setting the pace for other Scottish Higher Education Institutes (HEI)s, many of which are now seeking guidance on developing CWB strategies.

Learnings

Key insights from the journey so far include:

- Cross-anchor collaboration requires time and refinement before scaling.
- Strategy and practice don't always align, and ongoing adjustment is essential.
- CWB implementation is gradual, and legislative reform (e.g. in procurement) is needed to unlock its full potential.

Sustainability/Next Steps

With 5- and 10-year horizons, the KEIF Strategy and ELLES are designed to sustain momentum. Their shared focus on CWB, innovation, and entrepreneurship promises inclusive, resilient growth for East Lothian which will be further reinforced by the upcoming CWB Bill.

Kim Stuart, Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange at QMU: "As QMU marks its 150th anniversary, we're proud of our role as an anchor institution in East Lothian's economy. The collaboration between the university and ELC with CWB at its heart builds on previous partnership working and is helping deliver shared ambitions for sustainable economic growth."

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East Lothian Council: "East Lothian Council is delighted to continue its relationship with the region's university and to welcome QMU as an anchor organisation on the CWB Forum and a strategic partner in the delivery of the East Lothian Local Economy Strategy. Our links go back to the first proposals to locate the university here and have continued and evolved over the years with a significant partnership seeing Business Gateway East Lothian having office space on campus and the joint venture to deliver the Edinburgh Innovation Hub. Community Wealth Building benefits local people, businesses and economies which is why we're proud to champion this approach in our area together with our partners. We look forward to exciting times ahead and to accelerating East Lothian's potential."

