

Queen Margaret University

Outdoor Learning Hub and 'Wee Forest'

Queen Margaret University has created an Outdoor Learning Hub and planted a 'Wee Forest' on the campus to enrich students' experience, connect to communities, and contribute to national and global concerns in education, sustainability, climate, health, and wellbeing.

QMU worked in partnership with Architecture & Design Scotland (A&DS) and NatureScot to develop outdoor learning spaces on the relatively new campus to model environments that a school or community group may have access to within their locality.

The campus was already a 'green space', with significant lawns, a pond, hedging and areas of tree planting. The initial work has been successful in creating an attractive and calming campus, some shelter from weather and attracted some wildlife. There are areas of tree and hedging close to the buildings, lending shade and shelter. The area between the accommodation blocks is most notable for its shelter through hedging creating 'rooms'.

The additional work has therefore been aimed at creating a more diverse set of environments, more focussed on creating spaces to facilitate outdoor learning, increase biodiversity, and prepare for a changing climate. Some of the work has been high profile – the Outdoor Learning Hub shelter, the Wee Forest which has been planted, and the Discovery Trail for example.



However, much of the work has been lower profile – changing the mowing regime and planting wildflowers, enabling access into wooded areas and creation of outdoor STEM resources. Overall, the changes represent a significant increase in on-site carbon capture, significantly greater biodiversity and a more resilient campus environment.

The use of green infrastructure has been matched with gathering spaces, use of existing paths and seating, as well as expanding the food growing area. These practical considerations encourage students to make more use of the space, both personally and as part of their learning and practice with learners.

The QMU Outdoor Learning Hub is having impact on the local community by enhancing campus as a place for community activity, engagement, health and wellbeing. Schools, charities, and voluntary organisations are all active in the outdoor spaces on campus. The work supports the East Lothian Development Plan (MH1) and will connect to the planned Innovation centre & new primary school across the road. This community connection is rooted in QMU's values of social justice, sustainability, health, and wellbeing and making a positive impact on communities.

The development of the first stage of the outdoor learning hub will be completed by September 2023. In the future there will be ongoing opportunities to develop research and curriculum partnerships across the UK and beyond in order to contribute to meeting the climate crisis and Covid recovery.

Learn more about the 'Wee Forest' at qmu.ac.uk or [watch the video](#).

