

QM YOU

MAGAZINE

FOR ALUMNI & FRIENDS OF
QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY
Issue 93 | APRIL 2026



Head, Heart and Hand

Ashley Jensen: Reflections on
fame and foundation

Innovation in healthcare: Digital
solutions for practical care

Why kids need dirty play



Queen Margaret
University
EDINBURGH



Principal's Welcome

OVER THIS LAST year, we have relished the opportunity to celebrate and reflect on Queen Margaret University's remarkable 150-year journey. This edition of QMYOU celebrates a theme that has guided us from our earliest days: Acting with Head, Heart and Hand. Long before we became the modern university we are today, this simple motto captured the spirit of our institution – a commitment to intellectual rigour, compassion for others, and purposeful action.

The stories within these pages show just how deeply this triad is woven into our identity and continues to influence our institution today. You will read about how our most recent honorary graduates – actor Ashley Jensen, arts leader Shona McCarthy, forensic scientist Carol Rogers, and food entrepreneur Lucinda Bruce-Gardyne – as well as our alumni, students, and partners, embody these QMU values through creative achievement, pioneering research and knowledge exchange work, community engagement or personal resilience.

'Head' is present in our commitment to critical thinking, innovation and academic excellence – from our physiotherapy research teams creating digital healthcare solutions (p12&13), to educators empowering the next generation of business leaders (p22), and to the scientific insights helping us better understand nutrition (p14), hearing health (p15) and child development (p18).

'Heart' shines through in stories of empathy, humanity and social responsibility. It can be found in the work of our new Chancellor, Patrick Grant, whose values align closely with our own (p5); in international alumni shaping culture and community across the world; and in PhD student MD Rezaur Rahman's inspiring efforts to build bridges across Scotland's communities (p24).

And 'Hand' is at the forefront in our applied learning and real-world impact – whether that's acting and healthcare students collaborating in role play (p19), researchers co-designing life-changing footwear with people with foot-drop (p11), or our entrepreneurs turning ideas into ventures that strengthen local and global communities (p22&23).

This edition of QMYOU also offers a final look back at a memorable anniversary year (p8&9), including the unveiling of a new public artwork, the premiere of a play telling QMU's story, and the many events that brought our community together in celebration of our past, present and future.

Across every page, you will see how our old motto of Head, Heart and Hand still reflects our approach to teaching, research and partnership, whilst also shaping the people who pass through our university.

I hope you enjoy this edition of QMYOU, and that you feel inspired by the exceptional individuals and initiatives that reflect the very best of our university. Please continue to stay connected with QMU's work as we continue our exciting journey.

With best wishes

Sir Paul Grice, FRSE, FAcSS

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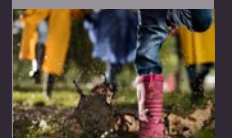
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QMYOU digital magazine.**

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Acting with Head, Heart and Hand: A legacy of purpose at QMU

Looking back on our history as part of our QMU150 celebrations has led to us revisiting on an old motto of our institution: “**Head, Heart and Hand**”. Though not actively used for many years, that motto seems to have captured the imagination of the alumni, students and staff in our anniversary year, reflecting our holistic approach to education – combining intellectual rigour, compassion, and practical action.

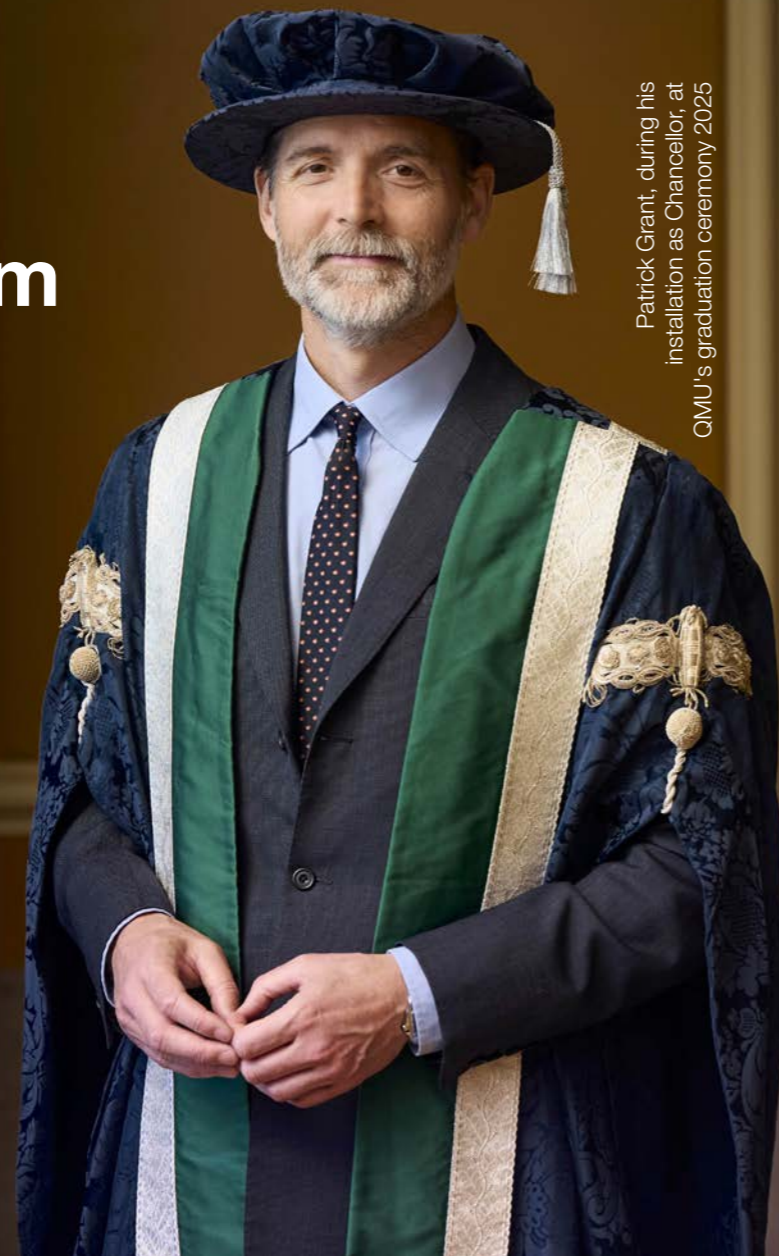
Head: Represents intellectual development, critical thinking and academic excellence. It emphasises the importance of knowledge and reason in education.

Heart: Symbolises empathy, compassion and ethical values. It reflects the University’s commitment to social justice, care, and community wellbeing.

Hand: Stands for practical skills, action and service. It highlights the University’s focus on applying education, research and knowledge exchange to real-world challenges and making a tangible difference. ▶▶▶

Patrick Grant joins QMU as Chancellor: Weaving wisdom into education

We have been delighted to welcome Patrick Grant – fashion designer, entrepreneur, and TV judge – as the new Chancellor of the University. Patrick took up the role in July, building on the excellent work of his predecessor, Dame Prue Leith CBE, who served in the role from 2017-2024.



Patrick Grant, during his installation as Chancellor, at QMU's graduation ceremony 2025

▶▶▶ This triad reflects QMU’s mission to educate individuals who are not only knowledgeable, but also emotionally intelligent and socially responsible.

Historical and cultural roots

This old motto is deeply connected to the University’s namesake, Queen Margaret of Scotland (d. 1093), who was known for her piety, compassion, and practical reforms. From the pioneering women who first brought domestic science to life through our founding institution (Edinburgh School of Cookery), to the nurses we trained who saved lives during the Second World War, and the researchers who address global injustices and create digital solutions to healthcare challenges today, our story is built on the meaningful contributions of those who make the world a better place.

Why it matters

Throughout our history and still today, this old Head, Heart and Hand motto guides the University’s approach to teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement that creates meaningful change. The principles of Head, Heart and Hand continue to support our students, staff and alumni to drive progress, improve lives and shape the world in remarkable ways.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of the QMYOU magazine, with our stories and initiatives which demonstrate how the Head, Heart and Hand motto is as relevant to our work today, as it was when it was adopted over 75 years ago. □

PATRICK WAS MET with much excitement from staff, students and guests when he presided over his first QMU graduation ceremony in Edinburgh’s Usher Hall last summer. Known best for his role as a judge on the BBC’s hit TV show, ‘The Great British Sewing Bee’, his involvement in graduation was the perfect opportunity for the QMU community to learn more about his entrepreneurial experience, passion for creating sustainable communities, and his recipe for successful careers.

HEART: Compassion and community

At the core of Patrick’s work is a deep concern for people and communities. As founder of Community Clothing, a social enterprise that supports UK textile workers by creating jobs and producing affordable, high-quality garments, he has shown how business can be a force for good. His advocacy for ethical production and local manufacturing reflects the ‘Heart’ of QMU’s mission – empathy, social justice, and care for community wellbeing.

Championing values through leadership

Patrick is much more than a celebrated designer and television personality. He is a visionary whose work aligns seamlessly with QMU’s enduring motto: Head, Heart and Hand. This triad – representing intellectual rigour, compassion, and practical action – very much reflects our Chancellor’s own ethos and career.

HAND: Craftsmanship and practical impact

Patrick’s passion for traditional craftsmanship and his role as a TV judge on The Great British Sewing Bee together highlight his dedication to practical skills and hands-on learning. He champions the value of making – whether it’s tailoring a garment or building a business – resonating strongly with QMU’s emphasis on applied learning and real-world impact.

HEAD: Thoughtful innovation and intellectual leadership

Patrick’s academic background in engineering and business, combined with his deep understanding of design and manufacturing, exemplifies the ‘Head’ component of QMU’s motto. His thoughtful approach to fashion – emphasising quality, longevity, and sustainability – demonstrates intellectual leadership in an industry often driven by fast trends. His book ‘Less’, a Sunday Times bestseller, challenges consumerism and promotes mindful living, echoing QMU’s commitment to critical thinking and academic excellence.

A Chancellor who lives out QMU’s values

Raised in Edinburgh, Patrick’s return to the Scottish capital to serve as Chancellor is both symbolic and inspiring. In his ambassadorial role at QMU, he helps bring increased visibility to the University’s mission of educating individuals who are intellectually capable, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible.

As QMU continues to shape future leaders, Patrick stands as a living example of what it means to lead with Head, Heart and Hand. His work reminds us that education is not just about acquiring knowledge – it’s about using that knowledge to uplift others and create lasting change. □

Patrick – Quick facts!

- His mum studied with QMU in the 1960s
- Loves a walk up Arthur’s Seat and the views from the number 23 bus
- Worked with global brands - Cartier, Rolls-Royce, BMW, Barbour, and Alexander McQueen
- 2015 – rescued the historic Blackburn-based clothing factory Cookson & Clegg from closure
- 2016 – launched Community Clothing, a pioneering initiative that has earned him widespread recognition for revitalising the UK garment industry
- 2022 – won BBC One’s ‘Celebrity Mastermind’
- 2023 – presented the award-winning BBC Two documentary ‘Coronation Tailors: Fit for a King’
- 2023 – became Ambassador for The King’s Foundation Future Textiles Programme

Get the inside track on Patrick. Check out his biography and Q&A on the QMU website.

www.qmu.ac.uk/about-our-staff/chancellor/patrick-grant

NEWS IN BRIEF

QMU crowned Higher Education Institute of the Year



ONE OF THE standout moments of our 150th anniversary year was QMU being crowned 'Higher Education Institute of the Year' at the Herald Higher Education Awards 2025 - a celebration that added extra sparkle to an already special year. The honour recognised our long-standing commitment to academic excellence, community engagement, inclusion, innovation and student support, with judges praising QMU's impressive performance across multiple award categories and our forward-thinking, holistic approach to higher education.

QMU also picked up two additional awards. Podiatry lecturer Evelyn Weir was honoured for her 'Outstanding Contribution from a Staff Member' thanks to her decades-long dedication to supporting Scotland's homeless community. Meanwhile, our pioneering Wooden Spoon Frame Running Equipment Hub, the first of its kind in Scotland, was recognised for its 'Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community'. Add in several shortlistings across the board, and it's fair to say QMU made quite an impression at the 2025 Awards. □

Empowering neurodiversity at QMU

BRIDGING ON-THE-GROUND action with national expertise, QMU continues to advance meaningful support for autistic people both on campus and across Scotland.

This commitment is reflected in our Autism&Uni Toolkit, created with autistic students and staff to help neurodivergent learners navigate university life with confidence. The toolkit offers practical guidance on wellbeing, learning support and campus life, helping reduce barriers to success.

More widely, Scotland's National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT) has been hosted at QMU since 2019. This mixed-team partners with professionals and neurodivergent people across Scotland to encourage more understanding and supportive approaches, through shared learning, national networks and research.

View the Autism&Uni Toolkit and find out more about the work of NAIT at www.thirdspace.scot/nait □

From QMU to prime-time: Matt shines on The Traitors

IT'S ALWAYS A proud moment for QMU when one of our graduates appears on national television - but seeing Matt Hyndman on the smash-hit BBC series 'The Traitors' brought a special buzz to the QMU community during the long winter evenings.

A graduate of our BA (Hons) Film and Media course, Matt quickly became a standout contestant in a programme known for its psychological twists, shifting alliances and high-stakes drama. His appearance didn't just entertain - he captured the attention of viewers across the country and became one of the season's most memorable faces.

Although Matt didn't quite make it to the final, his time on the show showcased far more than strategy. His thoughtful gameplay and genuine warmth (and not to mention his exquisite knitwear) gained him a loyal fanbase. Whether navigating tense roundtable debates or forging connections in the atmospheric Scottish Highlands, Matt's authenticity consistently shone through.

Matt's journey is a reminder of where talent, perseverance, and the courage to seize unexpected opportunities can lead. And if The Traitors is any measure, Matt's journey into TV is only just getting started. □

QMU's encore of support for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe

QMU PROUDLY MARKED the second consecutive year of supporting the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, strengthening our role as a champion of Scotland's creative industries. Building on the success of our 2024 partnership, we once again delivered a vibrant Festival Village and continued our sponsorship of the Fringe First Awards, reinforcing our commitment to nurturing emerging talent.

The 2025 Festival Village, hosted on QMU's campus, offered performers, students, and local communities a welcoming space to connect, collaborate, and recharge. The initiative provided rehearsal areas, wellbeing activities, and opportunities for artists to engage with industry professionals - further embedding QMU as a hub for creativity during the world's largest arts festival.

We also renewed our sponsorship of the prestigious Fringe First Awards, celebrating innovation, inclusivity, and artistic excellence. By supporting these accolades, we highlighted our institution's long-standing dedication to performance, arts management, and cultural leadership.

Thomas Kelly, Head of Development and Alumni Relations, said: "The second year of partnership underscored QMU's belief in the power of the arts to inspire, challenge, and bring people together. As the Fringe celebrated another successful year, our ongoing support stood as a testament to our aim in championing creativity, empowering new voices, and enriching Scotland's cultural landscape. This commitment reflects our deep-rooted role in shaping and sustaining Scotland's creative industries." □

Celebrating QMU's international students

WE LOVE TO hear how our international students are achieving their goals and making an impact on the world.

Chef-entrepreneur Sanjyot Keer, who graduated from Institute of Technology and Management (ITM), QMU's partner institution in India, in 2014, has been named an 'Achiever' in the Business & Entrepreneurship category of the India-UK Achievers Honours Class of 2026. Selected from an outstanding pool of nominees, Sanjyot's recognition highlights his significant influence and innovation in the food media and culinary sector. He was honoured at a series of celebrations in London in February 2026, bringing together leaders shaping the future of India-UK collaboration.

Meanwhile, in Indonesia, Dinda Intan Pramesti Putri, who graduated from QMU with an MA Arts, Festivals and Cultural Management in 2018, has been announced as the national winner of the Study UK Alumni Award in Culture, Creativity and Sport. Dinda's pioneering work as Director of Jogja Festivals - including uniting more than 40 festivals, leading major Southeast Asian cultural research, and helping shape Yogyakarta's development as a "City of Festivals" - demonstrates the transformative power of creative leadership. She was formally recognised at the British Council's awards ceremony in Jakarta, Indonesia in February 2026.

These achievements showcase the global impact of QMU alumni and the diverse ways they are shaping cultural, creative and entrepreneurial landscapes around the world. □

Peggy's VE Day memories shine in QMU's 150th anniversary year

JUST AS QMU marked a milestone (150th anniversary in 2025, Edinburgh College of Domestic Science (AKA Atholl Crescent) alumna, Peggy Nichols, also celebrated a special anniversary. Her tenth birthday fell on the historic 8th May 1945 - Victory in Europe Day (VE) Day.

Peggy marked her 90th birthday by attending commemorative events honouring the 80th anniversary of VE Day. Her birthday activities began with the service at Westminster Abbey, followed by the evening concert at the Royal Albert Hall. During the concert, Peggy shared memories of her tenth birthday, and then the audience joined together to sing her 'Happy Birthday'. □



Ashley Jensen and Patrick Grant enjoy a moment together during the graduation photocall

Celebrating our new honorary graduates

QMU WAS DELIGHTED to award honorary degrees to a new group of inspirational individuals from the world of science, entrepreneurship and the creative industries at our 2025 graduation ceremonies.

The acclaimed Scottish actress **Ashley Jensen**, whose distinguished career spans television, film and narration, and who is widely admired for her recent leading role in the BBC drama 'Shetland', was recognised for her exceptional contributions to the arts. Ashley joined **Shona McCarthy**, former Chief Executive of the Edinburgh Fringe Society, who was commended for her leadership of the world's largest arts festival and her championing of creative communities.

Carol Rogers, National Lead Forensic Scientist for Sexual Offences with the Scottish Police Authority's Forensic Services, was honoured for advancing forensic practice and supporting justice for survivors of sexual violence. Carol was recently interviewed on the BBC Scotland crime documentary 'The Hunt for Peter Tobin', where she discussed the painstaking investigation of the serial killer's crime scene - work which led to his successful conviction.

The University is keen to champion female entrepreneurship, and we were therefore delighted to recognise **Lucinda Bruce-Gardyne**. As founder of Genius Foods, Lucinda was celebrated for her innovations in gluten-free production, which have transformed the landscape of allergen-friendly eating in the UK and beyond. □

You can read more about our honorary graduates, and how they embody the values at the heart of QMU, by visiting our website. www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/honorary-graduates



Pictured L-R: Lucinda Bruce-Gardyne, Ashley Jensen, Patrick Grant and Shona McCarthy

A year to remember: Celebrating QMU's 150th anniversary

Throughout 2025, the QMU campus was buzzing with creativity, history, connection and celebration as we marked 150 years since the founding of our institution, and what a year it was!

FROM ALUMNI REUNIONS and public talks to exhibitions, an artwork unveiling and a theatre production inspired by QMU's story, our anniversary programme offered something for everyone, and brought our community together in unforgettable ways.

We were able to reflect on QMU's history, while also looking ahead to the future. Events in Edinburgh and London reconnected past students with current ones, while our 150 stories of QMU, and public talks, explored topics ranging from research breakthroughs to the trailblazing individuals who first established our institution in 1875.



Public artwork installation on the QMU campus

The art that tells our story

One of the most talked-about highlights of our anniversary year was the unveiling of our striking new public art piece, which now takes centre stage in our campus grounds.

Made possible by donations from the QMU community, the art installation celebrates the people and activities which make up Queen Margaret University.

The piece was created by Martha Ellis, a Musselburgh-based visual artist, whose signature laser-cut sheet metal style has been used to represent the stories of all who have shaped our institution through the decades.

But what makes it feel truly special is the research and engagement behind it. Martha spent months speaking with members of the QMU community, attending local events and gathering stories, to carefully craft a piece that truly encapsulates the University and what we stand for. The piece was officially unveiled in August to excited guests, made up of students, staff, alumni, donors and friends. The artwork is now a permanent feature for all to enjoy.

Building a legacy

Our 150th anniversary encouraged us to celebrate our history, but also to think about where we're headed next. With projects that touched on creativity, research, community engagement and student experience, the legacy of this special year will live on far beyond 2025.

So, as we look ahead to the next 150 years, let's keep telling our stories, bringing our ideas to life, and building a university that's proud of where it came from and excited about where it's going. □

Watch our film which follows the installation's journey from initial sketches to finished steel.





Playing it back: Stef Smith reimagines QMU's history

When audiences took their seats at the Traverse Theatre earlier this year, they were taken on a journey through Queen Margaret University's history, reframed through the lens of award-winning playwright and QMU graduate Stef Smith.

A PLAY COMMISSIONED as part of our 150th anniversary programme, 'Head. Heart. Hand.' delivered a heart-warming and often surprising look at the institution's evolution – from its origins as a cookery school for women to the modern university it is today.

Playwright Stef Smith spent months researching QMU's archives, uncovering stories and moments that shaped the script. The result was a tightly structured piece that blended factual detail with contemporary commentary. Scenes shifted from early domestic science classes to student activism, public health innovations, and the more recent challenges of the pandemic.

Students at the centre

The play was performed by our very own final year Acting and Performance students, who were given the incredible opportunity to work with a living playwright on a new piece of theatre.

Other students, staff and alumni from across our Media, Communication and Performing Arts Division also helped bring the play to life – from costume design to stage dressing. Bruce Strachan, Lecturer in Drama and Performance at QMU and Director of Head. Heart. Hand. said: "It's a powerful example of how we prepare our students and engage consistently with today's creative industries."

A significant homecoming

Stef, who graduated from QMU in 2009 with a BA (Hons) in Drama and Theatre Arts, has gone on to build a remarkable

career as a writer for both stage and screen, being described by the Scotsman as "one of Scotland's most gifted playwrights." Her acclaimed plays include 'Nora: A Doll's House, Swallow and Enough', while her screen work includes the BBC Scotland drama 'Float'. She has received numerous awards, including an Olivier Award for 'Roadkill' and Best Writer at the 2022 Royal Television Society Awards.

Stef described her return to QMU, as a "little surreal". She said: "I can hardly believe how much time has passed since I graduated, yet in many ways it feels like no time at all! Much of Scotland's theatre scene is built on new writing, so it's vital that students gain experience working directly with a living playwright. I hope this opportunity gives them a real sense of the professional world they're about to enter. It has been brilliant to see the next generation of students bringing such energy and creativity to the project. They should be so proud of their performance."

Standing ovations

The play, which ran for three days in February, drew audiences of fellow students, staff, performing arts alumni, friends and family, along with arts journalists, agents, and casting directors. The atmosphere throughout the run was one of connection and shared experience, as many viewers recognised elements of their own time at QMU in the stories on stage. The production now stands as a memorable milestone in QMU's drama and performing arts journey. □



Jeanette Russell shows how her walking has been transformed

Marching forward: How a nurse's life has been transformed by a pair of shoes

FOR JEANETTE RUSSELL, a former military nurse from Edinburgh, walking had become a daily struggle. Diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in 2014, she developed foot-drop – a debilitating condition that made each step a calculated effort and every outing a potential hazard. But thanks to QMU's ground-breaking research, Jeanette's story has taken a remarkable turn.

The impact of foot-drop

Foot-drop affects the ability to lift the front part of the foot, often causing people to trip or fall. It tends to affect people with MS, stroke, MND and cerebral palsy. For Jeanette, it meant losing confidence, independence, and the joy of simple pleasures like hillwalking. "In my normal boots, I fell down on flat surfaces with no obstacles," she recalled. "It was frustrating and frightening."

Like many with MS, Jeanette found herself adapting her life around her condition. The rolling gait she developed while trying to walk, and the mental effort involved in walking without falling, was exhausting.

Jeanette explained: "Simple things that I used to take for granted, like shopping and driving, became really challenging.

"It was embarrassing to go out, because people thought I was drunk. I lost my confidence and I stopped going to social events. My world started closing in!"

A step toward hope

That all changed when Jeanette became one of the first people to trial a new footwear prototype developed by QMU's Health Design Collective – a research team made up of physiotherapists and podiatrists. The researchers spent years co-designing the shoe with people living with foot-drop. Their goal was simple yet ambitious: create a low-tech, affordable, and stylish shoe that could restore mobility, dignity and confidence.

Jeanette became a central part of the team – ensuring the design of the shoe was properly tested by someone with foot-drop. But she didn't just test them, she really challenged the different designs of footwear that the team produced. "Initially, I wore them in and out of the house and whilst driving," she said. "My mobility, speed of walking, gait and confidence improved immensely, and I knew the team was onto a real winner!"

Back to the hills of Glencoe

For Jeanette, the true test came during a trip to her beloved Glencoe, in the Scottish Highlands. Her new-found walking ability saw her venture out onto the hills once more. Navigating steep gradients and slippery rocks, she pushed the shoes to the limit – and they delivered!

"The difference in my walking ability is mind-blowing," she said. "Using the footwear, I can walk up and down steep pathways and traverse rocks, rough ground and slippery slopes without falling."

This wasn't just a return to walking – it was a return to living!

Marching with pride

But the most exhilarating moment for Jeanette came in November 2025, when the shoes allowed her to march with a renewed confidence and pride, past the Cenotaph, at the Remembrance Day Parade in London.

She says: "As a veteran, this meant the world to me. These shoes have given me back my life, and I am immensely proud to be part of the multi-disciplinary research team that has developed these simple but clever shoes. The researchers have definitely created a game-changing solution for people with foot-drop."

A simple solution with global opportunities

With an estimate of over 3.8 million people globally affected by foot-drop due to stroke or MS, the potential of this research is enormous. Thanks to funding from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), the team is now working with manufacturers to bring the shoes to market. □

Scan the QR code to see Jeanette's walking transformed by the shoes.

Read more about the Health Design Collective's exciting research at www.healthdesigncollective.co.uk





From smartwatches to surgery apps: How research is creating smarter healthcare

Shaping the future of healthcare

Both projects, described in this feature, highlight QMU's commitment to developing digital solutions that put patients at the centre of their care while addressing the challenges of an overstretched health system. By combining physiotherapy expertise with cutting-edge technology, our academic teams are creating a future where healthcare is more proactive, personalised, and accessible.



The app guides patients through tailored exercise programmes at home

QMU is at the forefront of pioneering physiotherapy research that harnesses digital technology to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing healthcare today.

From transforming everyday smartwatches into powerful health monitors to developing interactive apps that guide patients through surgery preparation and recovery, our researchers are finding innovative solutions to reshape patient care and ease the burden on the NHS.

Get more detail on these two innovative research projects by scanning the QR code.



Revolutionising surgical care with digital apps

QMU PHYSIOTHERAPY RESEARCHERS are also breaking new ground in surgical care with the development of an interactive app designed to prepare patients physically and mentally for surgery, and to support their recovery afterwards. Developed in collaboration with Scottish tech company asensei, the app combines clinical expertise with motion recognition software to deliver personalised, expert-led support directly to patients' mobile devices.

Dr Lisa Salisbury, a physiotherapy expert at QMU, explained: "Patients who are in the best possible health at the time of surgery are far more likely to experience a smooth and successful recovery. However, providing pre-operative consultations is costly and resource-intensive for the NHS. Our app can deliver consistent, high-quality care remotely."

The app guides patients through tailored exercise programmes, nutritional counselling, mental wellbeing tools, and clinical advice. Motion-sensing technology ensures exercises are performed correctly, with real-time feedback, and alerts to healthcare professionals if intervention is needed. This approach not only improves patient outcomes but also reduces the strain on NHS services by cutting down on face-to-face consultations.

Physiotherapist Alison Kelly, who has worked alongside Dr Salisbury on the project, emphasised the importance of combining 'prehab' and 'rehab': "Preparation for surgery is so important, but we also wanted to improve the rehabilitation process. The combination of effective prehab and rehab has significant benefits, helping patients return to a healthy way of life as quickly as possible." □

By detecting early signs of physical decline, the smartwatch-based system enables timely interventions, helping prevent unnoticed deterioration and reducing the risk of disability.

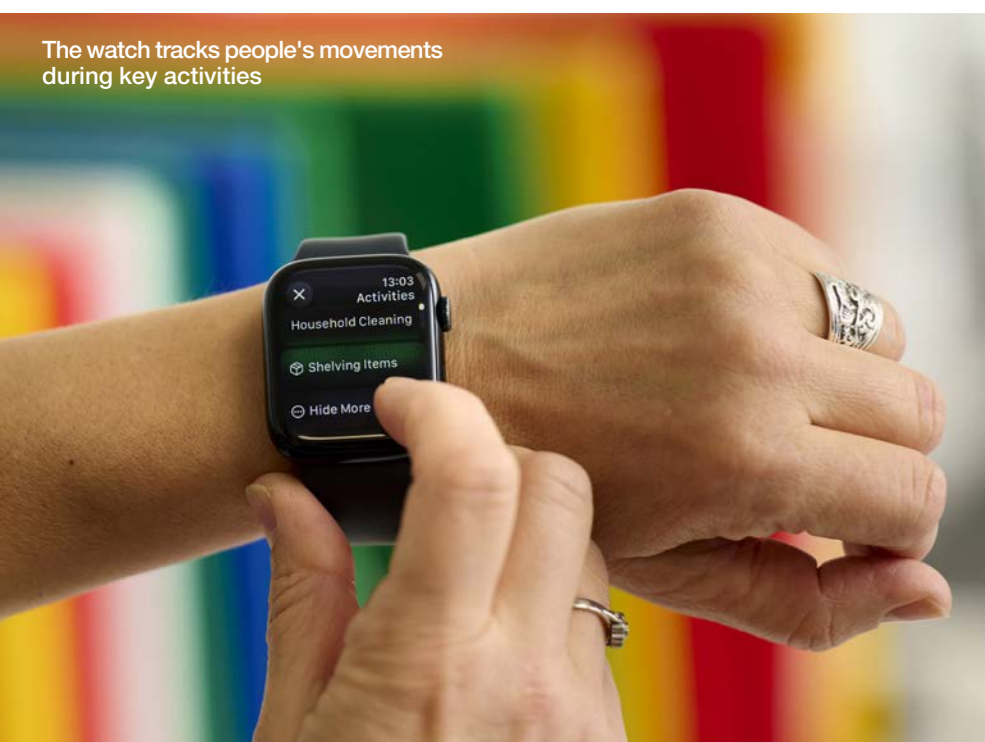
Research student Mustafa Ahmed, who has been conducting the project as part of his PhD, highlighted Apple's support through its Investigator Support Programme, which provided grants for Apple Watch devices and other hardware to support health research. He said: "By monitoring people's activities in their own homes, this wearable technology will provide more objective data than ever before. It can alert clinicians to emerging issues early, allowing tailored support to be put in place."

This innovation could potentially reduce NHS costs while enhancing patient-centred care for older and frail individuals living in the community. □

Turning smartwatches into health monitors

A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM of exercise and rehabilitation specialists at QMU, working with engineering experts from Edinburgh Napier University, is exploring how wearable tech, such as the Apple Watch, can monitor people's daily activities at home. By tracking Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) – like walking, brushing teeth, washing dishes or vacuuming – the tech could provide clinicians with objective data and real-world insights into how individuals are coping with independent living.

Pelagia Koufaki, Professor of Clinical Exercise Physiology & Rehabilitation at QMU, explained: "Millions of people are now wearing technology on their wrists. We wanted to take advantage of that tech to better track people's movements whilst they were going about their lives at home. This tool could be particularly useful for healthcare professionals working with people who may struggle to communicate how well they are functioning in their own homes."



The watch tracks people's movements during key activities

The watch tracks movement during activities of daily living





Eat your way to a better day: Q&A with Dr Catherine Tsang

From berry-powered brain boosts to food swaps that can make everyday life feel a bit brighter, what we eat can play a bigger role in our emotional wellbeing than most of us realise. Dr Catherine Tsang, nutrition expert at QMU, discusses how what we eat shapes how we feel. Whether you're feeling stressed, are a serial meal-skipper, or just someone who loves to snack, Dr Tsang's top tips offer plenty of food for thought.

How closely are mood and diet connected?

The two are closely linked and are the focus of recent scientific interest due to the increasing prevalence of mood disorders such as depression, cognitive dysfunction and anxiety. Globally, mental health conditions are a major public health concern, with an estimated 280 million people suffering from depression and 970 million affected by mental illness, according to the World Health Organization¹.

The brain requires optimal nutrient intake to maintain cognitive function and psychological wellbeing. What we eat influences our blood sugar, gut health, and the nutrients available to our brain – all of which impact mood and energy. Eating well most of the time, even around 80%, can make a noticeable difference.

Can what we eat make us happier?

Yes! Foods that are rich in polyphenols have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that may help lower the stress hormone, cortisol. Polyphenols are plant compounds that enhance brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) expression, which is essential for neuroplasticity (brain's ability to reorganise and rewire its neural connections) and resilience to stress².

A healthy gut is important for maintaining good immune function and metabolic

regulation, which can have a significant impact on mental health and emotional wellbeing. Fibre-rich foods (eg berries and broccoli), bioactive compounds found in plants such as polyphenols (eg onions, fruit, green tea), fermented foods (eg kefir, kimchi, sourdough bread), and a varied diet, all promote the growth of beneficial bacteria in the gut. This helps improve the production of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) and serotonin, both of which are key neurotransmitters that regulate mood and stress responses.

What common foods can boost your mood and why?

Scottish berries, oats, leafy greens, nuts, and oily fish such as salmon, are brilliant options. They're packed with polyphenols, micronutrients, fibre, and healthy fats that support brain health – and they're locally sourced and often more affordable.

If you are a chocolate lover, opt for dark chocolate, and if you enjoy alcohol, red wine is the better option. Both are full of antioxidants, but moderation is key!

Reaching for sugary snacks when stressed or tired – can it make us more stressed?

Sugar gives a quick energy spike due to rises in blood glucose, so it feels instantly rewarding, but that crash afterwards can worsen your mood. Diets high in processed foods, refined carbohydrates, and unhealthy fats such as trans fats, enhance

inflammation, which can negatively influence mood. Whereas, consuming mostly whole grains, vegetables, fruits and healthy fats such as monounsaturates, common to the Mediterranean diet, are anti-inflammatory and may help to reduce depression.³

Skipping meals - does this affect mood and energy levels?

Skipping meals during dieting or busy periods often leads to low blood sugar, which can make you irritable, tired, and unfocused. Eating regularly helps stabilise energy and improves resilience throughout the day.

Caffeine - helpful or harmful for emotional wellbeing?

Caffeine stimulates the central nervous system, so it can boost alertness and mood. Too much can increase anxiety and disrupt sleep, negatively impacting emotional wellbeing. However, coffee and tea contain high levels of polyphenols and are major dietary sources of polyphenol intake in the UK diet. However, due to their caffeine content, pay attention to how your body responds and adjust accordingly. □

Eating for a happier mind: Dr Tsang's three top tips

- Keep it simple – aim to consume mostly whole foods, plant-based, and locally sourced produce.
- Eating well 80% of the time is more than enough to support both physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Small, sustainable tweaks can be more effective than drastic overhauls.

Interested in a career in nutrition?

Check out QMU's undergraduate Master of Nutrition - www.qmu.ac.uk

More about the science

Need more explanation about the science and reports discussed in Dr Tsang's article? Scan the QR code for more details.



Hear for life: Smart habits to protect your hearing

Whether you're working in a noisy environment, enjoying live music, or entering later life, your hearing deserves care and attention.

Why hearing health matters

Hearing loss can affect communication, mental wellbeing, and performance at work or university. While some causes are genetic or age-related, much hearing damage is preventable. Noise-induced hearing loss is especially common among young adults due to prolonged exposure to loud environments or personal audio devices.

Age-related hearing loss affects around one-third of adults over 65 and typically develops gradually. It can impact self-esteem, independence, and social engagement. Significant hearing loss may lead to isolation, anxiety, and cognitive decline, with individuals unable to fully engage in conversations with friends, family, and community. Protecting your ears isn't just about sound - it's about staying connected to the world around you. □

Dr Christine Johnson, Senior Lecturer in Audiology at QMU, teaches on our the MSc Audiology (Pre-Registration) and our Higher Education Diploma in Hearing Aid Audiology. She shares some top tips to support hearing health.



Proactive steps

Taking action to protect your hearing can enhance your quality of life. Whether through technology, lifestyle changes or specialist support, you can continue to enjoy the sounds of life.

- **Use headphones wisely:-** Keep the volume as low as comfortable, ideally under 60% on most devices. Take listening breaks to give your ears recovery time. If others can hear your headphones, it's too loud.
- **Choose noise-cancelling headphones:-** These block ambient noise, allowing lower volumes ideal for busy workspaces or commutes.
- **Wear ear protection at loud events and sports events:-** Sound can reach dangerous decibel levels. Reusable earplugs reduce sound intensity without muffling quality.
- **Take listening breaks:-** Give your ears time to recover after loud exposure. Even short quiet periods help prevent cumulative damage.
- **Be mindful of your sound environment:-** Avoid standing close to speakers or machinery. Remember the '3 D's' of sound safety: Decibels, Duration, and Distance.
- **Get regular hearing checks:-** Early detection is key. If you notice ringing (tinnitus), muffled sounds, or difficulty following conversations, consult an audiologist.
- **Don't ignore hearing loss:-** If you or someone you care for is experiencing changes, act now. We should not just "accept" hearing loss as an inevitable part of ageing. Help is available. Your GP can refer you to an audiologist, and free NHS hearing aids are available.
- **Use hearing aids or assistive devices:-** Modern hearing aids are discreet and effective. Devices like amplified phones, TV listening systems, and vibrating alarms can enhance daily life.
- **Maintain overall health:-** Conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and smoking can affect hearing. A healthy lifestyle supports ear health.
- **Stay socially engaged:-** Hearing loss can lead to isolation. Stay connected through community groups, hobbies, and regular interaction.

QMU Empower

What is QMUEmpower?

QMUEmpower is what Queen Margaret University offers students beyond their studies. It's the extra layer that helps students thrive – through scholarships, bursaries, mentoring and other opportunities like global exchanges and widening access trips. These experiences build confidence, networks and skills that complement academic learning.

Scan the QR code to get the detail on QMUEmpower.



Alumni and donors making an impact

AT QMU, WE believe every student should have access to the career-enhancing opportunities that prepare them to succeed and make a difference in the world. QMUEmpower is how we deliver on that belief - providing scholarships, mentoring, and experiences that complement academic study and build confidence, networks, and skills. Many of these opportunities are possible thanks to the generosity of our donors and alumni, who share our commitment to supporting students beyond the classroom. Together, we ensure that talent and ambition – not financial circumstance – shape the future. □

Neil Dunn: From army boots to school books

AFTER MILITARY SERVICE, Neil Dunn discovered a passion for teaching while homeschooling his children during lockdown. With donor-funded support, including the Santander Universities Scholars Programme and the Baillie Gifford fund, Neil graduated in Primary Education and is now beginning his career in the classroom.

A standout moment? A behind-the-scenes visit to Ferrari HQ with fellow scholars, learning about teamwork, innovation and performance at the highest level. Neil said: "Graduating from QMU is a huge milestone for me and my family. The support I received through the Santander Scholars Programme and the Baillie Gifford fund made it possible for me to retrain and pursue a career in teaching." □

Scan the QR code to read Neil's full story.



Neil Dunn at graduation 2025

Join our community of supporters

Give to scholarships and student opportunity funds.



Volunteer as a mentor

Share your expertise with the next generation.

Contact E: alumni@qmu.ac.uk to get involved.

Made possible by you

Every scholarship awarded, every mentoring hour shared, and every international opportunity taken is powered by QMU's community of donors, partners and alumni. Thank you for opening doors and changing lives.

Apex Hotels Scholarships: building hospitality careers



FIVE QMU STUDENTS in International Hospitality, Tourism and Events Management received £3,000 Apex Hotels Scholarships – plus exclusive networking, insight days and routes to paid roles. This donor-partnered programme eases financial pressure and builds real-world connections that turn ambition into employability.

Viktoriia Hirenko, a QMU student from Ukraine, believes she is about to embark on a transformative experience. She explained: "The Apex scholarship is an incredible opportunity to immerse myself in the world of hospitality and see firsthand how a level of service is created that genuinely touches people and leaves a lasting impression. It is a priceless chance to learn, grow and gain knowledge from professionals who have already achieved real success in this industry." □

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Apex Scholarships.



Widening access, wider horizons: Greece study experience

TEN WIDENING-ACCESS students travelled to Greece for a culturally rich academic experience – broadening horizons and building confidence. For many, it was their first time abroad, highlighting how our widening-access initiatives can open doors to international learning opportunities that might otherwise feel out of reach. □



Students Cooper MacDonald and Rachel Cunningham enjoying their visit to Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center in Greece

LPS scholars: Transforming lives through global education

THANKS TO THE Lisa Persdotter Simonyi Scholarship, five QMU students received £5,000 each to study overseas across Australia, Hong Kong, the USA and Germany – working towards their degree while gaining independence, confidence and a global outlook. Students report sharper academic skills, richer cultural awareness and clearer career direction.

One scholar, a Business Management student who spent the second semester of her second year on exchange at Hong Kong Baptist University, said: "This experience has been incredibly enriching and rewarding. I am endlessly grateful for everyone who supported me and allowed me to fully embrace this opportunity." □

Scan the QR code to hear more from our students who have studied abroad.



Mentoring matters: Alumni at the heart of QMUEmpower

MENTORING SITS AT the core of QMUEmpower, with many of our mentors drawn from our alumni community. Their time and insight helps build students' confidence, polish job applications, open networks and demystify first steps into industry. □

Would you like to become a mentor? We'd love to hear from you at E: alumni@qmu.ac.uk.

Lison Chaillou: grasping opportunities

BEHIND EVERY QMUEmpower opportunity is a student with ambition. For Lison Chaillou, support ranging from scholarships to international study opened doors she never thought possible, shaping her confidence, skills and career direction. Her journey with QMU captures what QMUEmpower is all about. □

Scan the QR code to hear more about Lison's journey.



Lison Chaillou at graduation 2025



Mud, microbes, and magic: Why kids need dirty play

In a world increasingly obsessed with cleanliness, the idea of encouraging children to play in the mud might raise a few hackles. But emerging science suggests that getting dirty might be one of the healthiest things a child can do.

WELCOME TO THE world of “dirty play” – the joyful, unstructured interaction with soil, plants, and the microbial life that surrounds us. While “risky play”, such as balancing on logs and hanging off trees, has long been celebrated for building resilience and confidence, dirty play, a new term coined by Barrable and Robinson, is now stepping into the spotlight as a vital, complementary force in child development.

But what is dirty play?

Splashing about in dirty puddles, mixing up mud pies and rolling around in the wet grass, is not about being overly boisterous, naughty or neglecting hygiene – it’s about embracing nature in its raw, biodiverse form. Poking around the soil and examining wiggly worms, or building dens with sticks and piles of autumn leaves for jumping in, provide embodied learning experiences for children, stimulating their senses at every turn. It helps them connect with nature and exposes them to rich microbial ecosystems that modern urban life often filters out.

Dr Alexia Barrable, a Senior Lecturer in Social Science at QMU, argues that these kind of interactions in nature can build strong immune systems – reducing allergies and inflammatory diseases, and nurturing emotional wellbeing. She explained: “Children raised in rural environments, where exposure to soil and natural elements is more common, tend to have more diverse gut microbiomes and lower rates of immune-related conditions than their urban counterparts.”

Recent studies in environmental microbiology and public health show that interaction with biodiverse materials, including soil, change the skin and gut microbiome and activate immunoregulatory pathways, helping children’s bodies learn

to distinguish between harmful and harmless microbes. This immune education is crucial in preventing chronic conditions such as asthma, eczema, and even anxiety.

Dr Barrable adds: “It is not just about the microbes. Dirty play stimulates curiosity, sensory development, and ecological empathy. It encourages children to explore, ask questions, and form lasting bonds with the natural world, something that we know is good for us, and for our planet.”

Dirty doesn’t mean dangerous

In this modern world, one of the biggest barriers to embracing Dirty Play is the misconception that dirt equals danger. Dr Barrable explained: “Being dirty isn’t the same as being unhygienic. Targeted hygiene, like washing hands after toilet use and before eating can coexist with mucky fingernails and muddy boots after outdoor play”.

Educators and policy makers play a vital role in reframing Dirty Play. By designing outdoor spaces that encourage interaction with nature and by modelling positive attitudes toward soil and microbes, they can help children and parents view dirt as an opportunity to learn and grow, rather than a threat.

Dr Barrable concluded: “We need to start integrating the Dirty Play concept into schools, urban play areas and community initiatives to improve learning, ecology and public health. As we move beyond the hand sanitiser mindset, we can encourage our young people to embrace the messy, microbial world of nature.

“To develop our younger generation as the custodians of our natural world, we must accept the fact that sometimes the healthiest places for children aren’t necessarily the cleanest, they’re often the dirtiest!” □

Dr Barrable is the author of over 30 peer-reviewed articles on human-nature interactions, and three popular books on the same topic. Her fourth book, *Dirty Play*, is expected in 2026. Her work explores how we interact with the natural world and how we build relationships with nature, for our own and our planet’s wellbeing.

Scan the QR code to read more about Dr Barrable.



Making a big drama out of healthcare: Learning together through role play

Innovation in education at QMU often means mixing things up in unexpected ways. Recently, two very different groups of students – dietetics and acting – came together for an interprofessional education (IPE) session that proved eye-opening and inspiring.

Dietetics meets drama

The project, ‘Developing Dietetic Conversations’, was designed to help dietetics students practice patient-centred communication while acting students stepped into the role of patients. But this wasn’t about reading case notes or rehearsing lines. Instead, acting students were given detailed character briefs – such as an older adult coping with bereavement and weight loss, or a refugee with type 1 diabetes adjusting to life in the UK.

Dietetics students then conducted 15-minute consultations, focusing on empathy, active listening, and professionalism. Afterwards, the acting students gave feedback from the patient’s perspective, helping their peers understand how communication felt on the receiving end.

Marion Scott, Senior Lecturer in Drama and Performance, explained: “Traditionally, interprofessional role play brings together healthcare disciplines where physical embodiment is required. But this collaboration focuses on gathering information from the character. Acting students benefit from researching and creating a rounded character to the brief provided and improvising during the session. Dietetics students develop confidence in motivational interviewing and counselling. By working together, both groups gained insights they wouldn’t have found in their own classrooms.”

Overwhelmingly positive feedback

Students reported improvements in communication, teamwork, and understanding of each other’s roles. One dietetics student summed it up: “It felt like a safe space to make mistakes and learn, but still realistic enough to feel the pressure of a real consultation.”

This collaboration highlighted that healthcare education doesn’t have to stay within its own walls. By inviting the performing arts into the mix, QMU is helping future professionals to communicate with empathy, adaptability and confidence.

Drama meets trauma: Paramedics, nursing and radiography take centre stage

In another interdisciplinary session, paramedic science, nursing, radiography and acting students joined forces for a joint simulation exercise. The scenario involved a cyclist lodged under a car, an intoxicated teenager, a gang of lively youths, and an ambulance crew.

As the paramedics worked to safely treat and extract the patient, they also had to control the chaotic energy of the crowd – all brought vividly to life by acting students. Once the paramedic students had managed the scene, the simulation continued in the clinical skills centre, where nursing and radiography students took over patient care. The whole simulation was relayed back to a lecture theatre where remaining students, from all disciplines, discussed in real time the problems and outcomes unfolding.

Shared learning and skills development

Sean Cullen, Lecturer in Nursing, who helped develop the immersive joint healthcare exercise, concluded: “Both healthcare and acting students discovered that while their disciplines may seem worlds apart, their willingness to collaborate created exciting new ways to hone professional skills, build confidence and connect with people.” □



Paramedic students navigate a roadside collision during a role play session

Leading with heart: Ashley Jensen's message to the Class of 2025

From Annan to Hollywood, Ashley Jensen's journey reminds us that success isn't instant – it's built on resilience, authenticity, and the courage to lead with heart.

“If the doors don't open, build your own door and walk through it with your head held high.”

Credit: BBC/Silverprint Films/Jamie Simpson



When Ashley Jensen returned to Queen Margaret University to address the Class of 2025 at the graduation ceremony, her words carried more than nostalgia - they pulsed with resilience, authenticity, and the courage to lead with heart. Her story, rooted in humble beginnings in Annan, but which later blossoming into an international acting career, is a testament to the enduring power of passion and perseverance.

ASHLEY BEGAN BY reminding graduates of a truth often overlooked in a world obsessed with instant success: “You don't need to have it all figured out from the beginning.” For her, the path from school plays to Hollywood was anything but linear. It was a journey marked by rejection, uncertainty, and countless small steps - proof that success rarely arrives overnight. Instead, it grows quietly, nourished by resilience and an unwavering belief in oneself.

Strength in vulnerability

Ashley's candid reflections on rejection were striking. Told she wasn't “tall enough, posh enough, thin enough - just not enough!” she could have given up early on in her career. Instead, she chose to rise again and again. “I got knocked down, and I got back up,” she said, quoting from the 1990's anthem of persistence ‘Tubthumping’ by British rock band Chumbawamba.

This resilience - bending without breaking, learning to rest rather than quit - is the essence of heart. It's not about being unbreakable; it's about staying in the fight, even when the odds seem stacked against you. For today's graduates, Ashley's message resonates deeply: the world may test you, but your heart will carry you through.

Connection over perfection

In an era dominated by screens and instant gratification, Ashley urged graduates to embrace genuine connection. “While technology connects us, it can also disconnect us - from each other, from ourselves, from the present moment.” Her advice? Stay curious. Show up. Talk to people. Because heart thrives in relationships - in laughter shared over late-night essays, in friendships forged on campus, and in the courage to ask for help when life feels overwhelming.

QMU has always championed this ethos. Our 1950's motto - Head, Hand and Heart - speaks to a holistic education that values intellect, practical skill, and emotional depth. Ashley's words remind us that while knowledge and ability open doors, it is heart that gives life meaning and purpose.

Building your own door

Ashley's journey wasn't just about waiting for opportunities; it was about creating them. “If the doors don't open, build your own door and walk through it with your head held high,” she urged. This boldness, coupled with vulnerability, is where heart truly shines. It's the willingness to take risks, to fail, and to try again - echoing Samuel Beckett's timeless wisdom: “Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”

A call to the Class of 2025

As Ashley closed her speech, her words were a rallying cry: “Go light it up. Go make noise. Go be the spark in someone's day.” For our graduates, this is more than advice - it's an invitation to lead with heart in every sphere of life. Whether in hospitals, classrooms, arts venues, boardrooms, or places yet to be imagined, the world needs individuals who are unapologetically themselves - radiant, resourceful, and resilient.

So, here is a message to our Class of 2025: life isn't a rehearsal. Embrace the detours, cherish the connections, and let your heart guide you. And to all our alumni, this reminder still rings true. As Ashley says, she didn't “become Ashley Jensen off the telly” until she was 38 years old - a powerful reminder that success takes time, resilience, and heart. □



Credit: BBC/Silverprint Films/Jamie Simpson/Anne Binckebanck

Ashley Jensen: From QMU to global screens

Class of 1989 alumna, Ashley Jensen studied acting at Queen Margaret University (then Queen Margaret College) before embarking on a career that has spanned theatre, television, and film. From early performances at Glasgow's Citizens Theatre and Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre to her breakout role in the BBC comedy ‘Extras’ - which earned her two British Comedy Awards and a BAFTA nomination - Ashley has become one of Scotland's most beloved actors. She later starred in ‘Ugly Betty’, where producers famously adapted her character to suit her Scottish accent, and continues to captivate audiences in acclaimed roles, including DI Ruth Calder in the much-loved BBC One British crime drama series ‘Shetland’.

In July 2025, Ashley was awarded an Honorary Doctor of the University by QMU in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the arts.

Scan the QR code to watch Ashley's full speech at our 2025 graduation ceremony.



QMU Means Business: Empowering young innovators through community wealth building

In a bold move to strengthen economic development and community resilience across East Lothian, we have empowered secondary pupils to become innovators in their local areas through a pioneering initiative led by our Business School.



'QMU MEANS BUSINESS' launched as a dynamic programme that embedded the principles of Community Wealth Building directly into local schools. Over the course of four weeks, pupils participated in a series of two-hour workshops delivered by staff and students from the Queen Margaret Business School. These sessions equipped young people with essential commercial and social innovation skills, enabling them to tackle real-world challenges with sustainable, community-rooted solutions.

Each workshop introduced practical tools used in business innovation - from identifying local issues and generating creative responses, to developing viable business models and mastering the art of persuasive pitching. The initiative culminated in a celebratory showcase event held at QMU, where student teams presented their projects to an audience of educators, peers, and community stakeholders.

Professor Thomas Peschken-Holt, Head of the Queen Margaret Business School, reflected on the programme's impact: "QMU Means Business was more than a workshop series - it became a platform for young people to step into the role of changemakers. By encouraging creative thinking, strengthening problem-solving abilities, and nurturing entrepreneurial mindsets, we helped build the foundations for resilient, economically vibrant communities - one idea at a time."

Callum Maguire, Head of Widening Participation and Outreach, added: "This Community Wealth Building initiative allowed us

to harness the creative energy of young people from across the county. It encouraged them to think critically about their communities' needs and to collaborate on solutions that could help those communities thrive. We saw students challenge conventional thinking and embrace bold ideas. The enthusiasm they brought to QMU Means Business was inspiring, and we were thrilled to witness the emergence of innovative concepts, focusing on topics such as cliff safety and river pollution, which offered real potential to deliver lasting impact."

The project also proved to be a transformational experience for three Queen Margaret Business School students who delivered four weeks of business enterprise workshops in both Dunbar and Musselburgh Grammar schools. One of them, Rachel Cunningham, 3rd year BA (Hons) Business Management student, said: "We were really encouraged by the enthusiasm and creativity that the pupils brought to the project, and it was extremely rewarding to see them grown in confidence as they developed their ideas and delivered their impressive final pitches. Our involvement in QMU Means Business has been invaluable, as it's confirmed our desire to pursue a PGDE at QMU, so we can secure careers as business studies teachers in secondary schools."

QMU Means Business really does place young people and QMU students at the heart of change, and empowers them to promote Community Wealth Building. □

QMU students, Cooper, Rachel and Emma, delivered entrepreneurial workshops in local schools

A community of creators: entrepreneurship at QMU

AT QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY, we've always believed that big ideas can come from anywhere - and that with the right support, they can grow into something remarkable. That's exactly what the Startup Studio is all about. It brings together everything our budding entrepreneurs might need: advice, skills development, a supportive community and access to funding.

Through Bright Red Triangle (BRT), Business Gateway and a range of enterprise partners, we help students, staff and alumni take their ideas from early sparks to fully fledged ventures.

Importantly, QMU-led businesses can tap into a variety of funding opportunities - such as Santander Universities support, the QMU Microfinance Enterprise Fund and the Merchants Company Enterprise Fund - helping entrepreneurs test, launch and grow their ideas.

Take Betsy King, a postgraduate student on the MA Arts, Festivals and Cultural Management programme. Her venture, Raw Acts/Creative Connect Scotland, is making space for

emerging artists in the Highlands to test new work and build connections. With support from BRT and £1,550 from the Santander Universities Enterprise Fund, Betsy brought her scratch night (theatre event where artists test out new or experimental work in front of a live audience) to Eden Court in Inverness - an event that's already attracting attention locally. She's also taken part in SHIFT 2025, an entrepreneurial skills programme for students and graduates in the creative and cultural industries, and completed the Converge Performing and Production Arts Challenge training.

Another inspiring example is Renate Kriegler Edwards (MA Applied Arts and Social Practice). Her project, Mak-Mind, uses creative practice to support people in recovery. With funding from the QMU Microfinance Enterprise Fund and Santander, Renate piloted her programme with Maggie's Forth Valley in 2025, helping working-age cancer survivors create unique silver charms to symbolise their goals and resilience.

We're also excited to see Ashwani Singh's ideas taking shape. Ashwani, a BA Business Management graduate, is refining his influencer-marketing concept Kollabsy.

Together, these stories capture what makes QMU's entrepreneurial community so special: creativity, courage and the confidence to start something new. □

Scan the QR code to read more about QMU's Startup Studio.





MD Rezaur Rahman's work helps connect communities

From strangers to neighbours: Building inclusive communities in Scotland

MD Rezaur Rahman's work has been shaped by experiences of exclusion and resilience. As an Asian, gay, Muslim migrant, he faced rejection from family, society and country. Facing these challenges became his motivation to build bridges across difference and create spaces where trust and respect can flourish. The following article shows how the PhD student's work is strengthening communities across Scotland.

WHEN AISHA WALKED into a community hall in West Lothian, she expected the polite distance that often greets newcomers: nods, smiles, and the invisible barrier that keeps lives running in parallel. What she found instead was a table of people debating whose stew recipe was best, a teenager showing an older man how to use a smartphone, and a volunteer sorting childcare so parents could join in. That ordinary scene is the kind of encounter that MD Rezaur Rahman set out to create, and to measure, in his research on social mixing between migrants and long-term residents.

MD believes academic researchers and policymakers should pay more attention to the experiences of individuals residing outside major Scottish cities. With the support of Police Scotland, West Lothian Community Race Forum, West Lothian Hub, Edinburgh & Lothian Regional Equality Council (ELREC), and West Lothian Council, he used mixed methods to answer his research questions.

His research reads like a love letter to community life. He didn't rely on feel-good festivals or photo opportunities. Instead, he built a careful, three-phase study: (1) listen to concerns, (2) pilot a six-week programme of structured activities, (3) follow up to see what actually changed. The result is a tested blueprint for turning strangers into neighbours.

MD said: "I wanted to show how social activities can enhance social cohesion between migrants and non-migrants. I provided practical solutions to local authorities and policymakers that can help foster social cohesion, reduce racial discrimination and alleviate structural inequalities."

Fear of judgement, cultural misunderstandings, time pressures and the corrosive effect of hostile public rhetoric, all have a part to play. People described practical barriers such as childcare, inconvenient timings and transport that make it easier to stay in one's own circle. But they also pointed to simple connectors that work including shared hobbies, cooking together, trusted local spaces such as community centres, and activities that give everyone an equal role.

The pilot was modest but revealing. By designing events that removed small but decisive obstacles organisers saw more than people simply turning up. They witnessed meaningful contact with neighbours swapping phone numbers, volunteers helping, and people agreeing to meet again.

"Those small acts of mutual help are the building blocks of trust," says MD. "Cohesion is not a slogan, it's a design problem. When interactions are structured so that everyone has equal status and a common goal, suspicion loosens and conversation begins."

MD concluded: "Social mixing activities can foster genuine connectedness and shift hostile attitudes into mutual respect."

Back in the community hall, Aisha left with a recipe card, a phone number and an invitation to a walking group. MD's study shows how a thousand small things add up. With careful design, modest resources and a willingness to listen, neighbourhoods can become places where strangers become neighbours, and where the ordinary business of life can stitch a community together. □

MD Rezaur Rahman is a PhD student with QMU and a Community Relationship Specialist with Police Scotland. Scan the QR code to find out more about MD and to read the full article.



"QMU stays with us. It becomes part of who we are."

Thomas Kelly
Head of Development & Alumni

Alumni events and reunions

As a member of the QMU family myself, it was amazing to see so many of our graduates come together throughout our 150th anniversary year. Your enthusiasm, stories, and the pride you continue to carry for QMU made 2025 a truly unforgettable milestone in our shared history.

Alumni events

One of the real highlights of the year was meeting graduates at our celebration and networking events in London and Edinburgh. Whether we were speaking for the first time or reconnecting after many years, every conversation reminded me why QMU is such a special community.

Hearing what shaped your time here - friendships forged, passions discovered, confidence gained - reinforced something I feel deeply as a graduate: QMU stays with us. It becomes part of who we are.

These events weren't just gatherings; they were moments of warm reflection and optimism, offering the chance to celebrate 150 years of QMU while imagining what the next chapter will bring.

We're already planning more events for 2026, and I would be delighted to see you there. If you'd like to receive updates, please get in touch at E: alumni@qmu.ac.uk.

Alumni campus visits

Another highlight of the year was welcoming alumni back to campus as guest speakers. We were fortunate to hear from Susan Black, former Director of Communications at Liverpool FC (you may remember Susan from last year's magazine); Sally Gray MBE, founder of Presenters Inc; and Professor Alex McMahon OBE, former Chief Nursing Officer for Scotland.

Their willingness to share their experience, wisdom and reflections enriched our students, staff and fellow alumni. Their generosity captures the essence of the QMU spirit - a commitment to supporting, inspiring and uplifting one another.

I also had the pleasure of welcoming two of our former Students' Union Presidents back to campus in August. Timothy Hammond-Evans (1999/2000 and 2000/01) and Erica Russell-Hensen (2004/05) joined us for the unveiling of our QMU150 public artwork. They also enjoyed sharing their memories and passing on their wisdom to our current SU Presidents.

Class reunions

It was heartwarming to see so many of you organising reunions throughout our 150th anniversary year - celebrating friendships, sharing treasured memories and continuing the QMU story in your own special ways.

Although I wasn't able to attend these reunions myself, I was genuinely delighted to hear all about them from my colleagues. The wider alumni team had the joy of being there on the day, and they spoke so warmly of the laughter, reminiscence and connection that filled each gathering. I'm grateful to them for representing our department with such care and enthusiasm.

A particularly special moment was welcoming back a group of former Atholl Crescent students who returned to campus to celebrate more than 60 years since beginning their studies at the Edinburgh School of Domestic Science in 1963. Even hearing about it from afar, the warmth and pride of the group was unmistakable.

The 'Great 150 Lunch', hosted by the Queen Margaret University Association, brought together over 130 graduates - the largest gathering of former QMU students last year. It's clear how joyful, nostalgic and energising the day was for everyone involved (Read more about this on page 27).

If you're thinking of reconnecting with classmates, friends or your year group, the alumni team and I would be delighted to support you. Simply reach out at E: alumni@qmu.ac.uk.

From one graduate to another: thank you.

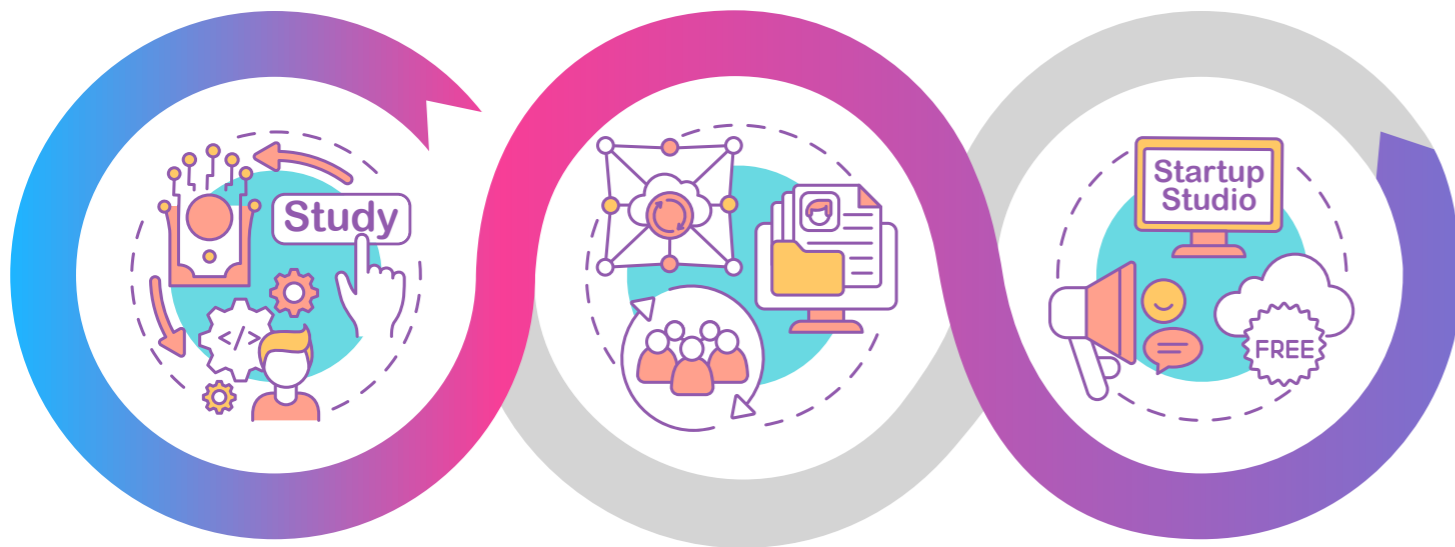
Warmest wishes,
Thomas Kelly
Head of Development & Alumni
and QMU graduate



(L-R) Current and former Students' Union presidents: Silvia Cardinale, Timothy Hammond-Evans, Zoë MacCallum, Erica Russell-Hensen

Alumni benefits - QMMU for life

As a QMU alum, you've got lifelong access to a range of great benefits to help you along - whether that's in your career, personal life, or next creative project.



Thinking about your next move?

If you've been considering a return to study, don't forget that QMU graduates can get an Alumni Discount. It offers reduced fees on a variety of postgraduate courses. It's a great way to gain new skills, change direction, or become an expert in your field with a university you already know and trust.

Grow your network

We host annual alumni get-togethers in Edinburgh and London. These are great, informal opportunities to see old friends, make new professional contacts, and keep your ties to QMU strong.

Are you a QMU international student or graduate? Do you know someone in your home country who would like to study at QMU? If you refer them and if they go on to become a QMU student, you could receive £150.

Meet the entrepreneurs

Turn to page 23 to read about the alumni and students currently building their businesses with us in the QMU's Startup Studio.

Whatever comes next

Whether you're looking for a promotion, starting a business, or just want to stay in touch, the QMU family is here to support you.

You can also enjoy a range of other perks - from using campus facilities to accessing our career services. You'll find all the details at www.qmu.ac.uk/alumni. Please do get in touch via E: alumni@qmu.ac.uk if you have any questions.

Turning ideas into action with the QMU Startup Studio

Have you got a business idea but aren't quite sure where to start? The QMU Startup Studio is our dedicated hub for entrepreneurs, and as a graduate, you're invited to use it.

Through our partnership with Bright Red Triangle, we offer a full suite of support to help you turn an idea into a reality:

- **Free Workspace:** You can access free hot-desking on campus from Monday to Friday (9 am – 5 pm). It's a friendly, professional environment where you can work alongside other founders.
- **Expert Mentoring:** Book one-to-one appointments with business advisors for impartial advice on everything from branding and marketing to finance.
- **Workshops & Events:** Join a regular calendar of free webinars and training sessions designed to sharpen your business skills.
- **Funding & Resources:** Get help finding the right funding opportunities and access a bank of resources to help your venture grow.

The Association maintains links, friendship and networking between former students and staff of the University.

QMU Association Report: A sparkling year in our 150th anniversary celebrations

The highlight of our anniversary year was undoubtedly The Great 150 Lunch. The event, held in September at the Royal Scots Club was a joyous, buzzing celebration that brought together alumni from all four iterations of Queen Margaret's history – Edinburgh College of Domestic Science, Queen Margaret College, Queen Margaret University College and Queen Margaret University. Guests travelled from across the UK, and as far away as Australia to join the festivities.

The atmosphere was buzzing with conversation and energy – so much so that we had to coax the final guests out at the end of the afternoon. A special mention goes to our Minute Secretary, Cecilia Young, whose beautiful decorations and irresistible cakes added a personal touch that made the event feel truly special.

A year of activity, community and renewal

The year began with a hands-on burst of energy during our 'Clean It, Fix It' week at Madras Lodge, the QMU Association holiday home in Gullane, East Lothian. Volunteers transformed the garage into a fresh games and social space, a locally crafted recycling unit was installed, and later in the year, the front chimney stack was rebuilt.

Dining, learning and laughing together

Our much-loved Spring Dinner, hosted by QMU's Hospitality, Tourism and Events Management students at the Edinburgh New Town Cookery School, embraced a delightful 'Bridgerton' theme. From the elegant room décor to the imaginative menu, the students delivered an evening that would have made Lady Whistledown proud.

The AGM in June brought new energy to the committee, with Carol Brennan stepping into the role of Social Co-ordinator and Gemma Blackledge-Foughali becoming Membership Secretary. We look forward to welcoming members to the 2026 AGM on 5 June at QMU.

Coffee, conversation and campus memories

Our regular coffee meet-ups continued to thrive, welcoming both familiar faces and new members. These gatherings often grew into mini-adventures, including a nostalgic and laughter-filled tour of the former Atholl Crescent site, led by alumni who once studied there. A similar visit to the Corstorphine campus is planned for 2026.

In November, members enjoyed a special guided tour of Newhailes House and Gardens in Musselburgh. We rounded off the year in festive style with our fully booked Christmas Lunch at the Royal Scots Club, where conversation and good cheer flowed easily.

Looking ahead

We were saddened to learn of the closure of the Edinburgh University Graduates' Association - a reminder of how important it is to keep our own community vibrant and well supported. If you know someone who would enjoy reconnecting with QMU or helping, as part of our committee, please encourage them to join us.

Your involvement - whether attending events, spreading the word, or volunteering - all helps ensure the QMU Association continues to flourish in the years ahead. □

Find out more about our organisation and future events at: www.qmugraduateassociation.com

Lindesay Irvine
QMU Association President



Members of the QMU Association enjoyed a guided tour of Newhailes House and Gardens, Musselburgh

*An invitation to
your Head, Heart
and Hand*



**Leave a gift in your Will and help shape tomorrow's carers,
innovators and changemakers.**

Find out more at www.qmu.ac.uk/legacy
or contact Thomas Kelly, Head of Development & Alumni Relations
E: tkelly@qmu.ac.uk | T: 0131 474 0119

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