

COLLABORATING WITH BUSINESS

by academics in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

The architecture researcher shaping the future of Scottish social housing

A collaboration with Scotland's largest housing association started Dr Kate Carter on a journey to influence the country's social housing strategy for the next 20 years.

Imagining the home of the future has been a popular occupation among designers, architects and science fiction writers for decades. Visualising how these uniquely intimate spaces might change in the next 20, 30 or 50 years offers infinite possibilities for creativity. It also serves a valuable purpose.

"Homes shape our lives, so ensuring they evolve to match our changing needs and aspirations is essential. That means building enough quality homes at the right prices and in the right places to meet demand today and tomorrow", says Dr Kate Carter. "It also means designing houses that can cope with the challenges to come, such as the effects of an ageing population and the global climate emergency."

The Senior Lecturer in Architecture Environment and Technology at the Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (ESALA) is part of an interdisciplinary team of



academics and industry collaborators to deliver a touring exhibition about the future of housing in Scotland. Involving ESALA colleague Dr Iain Scott, Peak-15 design studio, Gaia Research and architecture practice Collective Architecture, the Scottish Government-funded project coincides with a public consultation on the government's vision for housing during the next 20 years. 'Present Voices - Future Lives' asks audiences from Orkney to Galashiels to share what home means to them. We're asking people to tell us what they think of housing today and what they would like to see improved in the future", explains Kate. "It provides a unique insight into the way people in Scotland's towns, cities and rural areas think their homes and communities should look and feel in 2040."

The exhibition is Kate's most recent contribution to Scottish housing and a return to a personal passion she first explored during her PhD on sustainability and social housing. In 2018 she and Professor Remo Pedreschi led a collaboration with the country's largest social landlord, Wheatley Group, to develop the organisation's future technical and property strategy.



“Wheatley Group manages more than 80,000 homes across the country. The project gave us a great opportunity to show the innovative use of technology can make housing more sustainable”, explains Kate.

During the following 12-months, the team conducted an extensive review of the most innovative examples of technology-driven sustainable design and building in social housing around the world. The researchers then worked with Wheatley Group leaders to develop new ideas based on these best practice examples.

Personnel changes at the company led the project’s scope and objectives to shift mid-way through the collaboration. However, Kate remains pleased with the work’s outcome. “The timescale and focus of the partnership may have moved, but by being responsive to the organisation’s needs, we were still able to produce a robust report. Our recommendations are going to have a significant impact on the leading housing association’s approach to technology and sustainability in the coming years,” she says.

The collaboration with Wheatley Group also created invaluable links for Kate with its funders, The Construction Scotland Innovation Centre, one of eight industry-led Innovation Centres supported by the Scottish Funding Council. “It opened doors for us and created a connection with an important and emerging authority in the construction sector in Scotland. This relationship has given us a seat at the table in key conversations around social housing.”

Kate and Dr Ella Tallyn are now working on an Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) - funded pilot partnership with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) and Cairn, Castle Rock Edinvar and Scottish Borders housing associations. The research explores how to use data to reduce fuel poverty - the situation where people on low incomes find themselves in homes which cannot be kept warm at a reasonable cost.

“You never know where engagement activities will take you. My link with the SFHA came about when one of the Wheatley team moved to the federation. The relationship led to regular meetings between like-minded people across the sector and ultimately brought us to experiment with new ways of addressing this significant social issue”, she notes.

Kate believes industry engagement and impact activities are essential to her role as an academic. “As an architect, your world is constantly evolving. Industry partnerships are an essential source of knowledge. I continually apply what I learn through engagement activities to teaching and research. It’s a virtuous cycle.”



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