

# Edinburgh Reporter chats – Eleanor Cunningham



Eleanor Cunningham, owner of the [Edinburgh Larder](#), tells us about her business experiences.

## **Who are you and where did you come from?**

My name is Eleanor Cunningham – I’m originally from Fife, but it was always my dream to set up a food-related business in Edinburgh. I opened the Edinburgh Larder – my cafe and deli, which specialises in locally sourced produce, around a year ago. It’s proved very popular and I have plans to expand – I’m just looking for the right location at the moment.

## **What is a typical day for you?**

I’m in the deli every day, but I’m also out on the road a lot of the time, travelling to meet new producers, to find the next delicious, locally sourced foods for us to stock and cook with. I also meet with lots of different food-oriented groups in the city and was recently invited onto the committee of the local Slow Food Society. Their ethos, of linking the pleasure of food to a commitment to community and the environment is our ethos too and I am really looking forward to working with them.

## **What do you think are your business strengths and weaknesses?**

My main strength is my genuine passion for food – I’ve always loved cooking and visiting farmer’s markets and food shows. Before I opened the Edinburgh Larder, I travelled all over Scotland sourcing the best local produce, which I continue to do on an ongoing basis. Finding new producers is really exciting.

It's a huge pleasure to be able to run a business based on a lifelong interest and I enjoy introducing customers to the delicious foods I've found on my travels.

My weakness is that I have more ideas than I have time to develop them!

**What is the defining moment on your career path that got you to where you are now?**

I worked in project management for a bank before I set up my own business, which provided very helpful commercial training. I always knew I wanted to work for myself and to have my own deli, but what really gave me the motivation was when I saw some of the fantastic delis opening in Glasgow, such as Heart Buchanan and Delizique. Edinburgh didn't have anything like that and I wanted to provide it, so I knew it was time to take the plunge.

**Who, if anyone, is your mentor and what is your relationship with them like?**

I don't have a mentor as such, but I have met some very inspiring people along the way, including Erica Moore of Eteaket; Amanda Cayley and Denise and Chris Walton at Peelham Farm and Pete Ritchie and Heather Anderson at Whitmuir Organics.

**Which networking groups in Edinburgh have you found particularly helpful?**

I recently went along to an Edinburgh Businesswomen's Club (ESBC) event, which I enjoyed and found very useful. I like that they support a charity too.

**Who are your business heroes?**

Jamie Oliver – he has done so much for the food scene in the UK. He's revolutionised the way people think about food; he cooks simply, with heart and he's been extremely successful.

I also recently attended a very inspiring and thought-provoking lecture at the National Galleries – ‘Food and Cities’, by architect, lecturer and writer Carolyn Steel. It reinforced my belief that there’s a change in the way we’re approaching food and I’m happy to be playing a small part in that.

**What are your business goals for the next year?**

I’m focusing on expansion plans at the moment and continuing to implement as many new ideas as possible. While most of our customers come in for breakfast, lunch or for an afternoon coffee and cake break, the catering side of the business is also keeping us busy. We’re supplying everything from sandwiches for boardroom lunches, through to wedding cakes.

**What is the business book that you recommend everyone should read?**

Michael Gerber’s ‘The E-Myth’ is a helpful read for anyone starting a business, but you’ll more often find me reading books by food writers, chefs and restaurateurs for inspiration. I particularly admire London based chef, author and deli owner Yotam Ottolenghi for his approach to food.

**Do you think you achieve a good work/life balance?**

I didn’t in the first year of trading, but I knew it would be 24/7 for a while, to get things off the ground. Now I am beginning to have some time to myself, especially as I have a great team that I can delegate to.

**How do you spend your spare time?**

I love eating out – trying new restaurants and returning to old favourites. I’m always fascinated to see what other chefs do. I enjoy cycling and hillwalking too, as well as going to art galleries with my husband.

**What makes Edinburgh the best location for you to live/work?**

As a child whenever my parents took me to Edinburgh for a day out, I always loved it and knew from an early age that I wanted to live here. I first moved to the city in my early twenties and have stayed on. No matter how long I've lived and worked here, Edinburgh never fails to blow me away with its beauty.