Elected positions for Postgraduate Research and Postgraduate Taught University Representatives (Extraordinary Motion)

What will we do?
1. Amend Edinburgh University Students’ Association ‘Student Democracy Regulations’ as follows:
   
   Part 1, Section C: ii) c), delete the word “five” and insert in its place the word “seven”;
   
   Part 1, Section C: ii) c), insert “6) Postgraduate Taught Representative” and “7) Postgraduate Research Representative”;
   
   Part 2, Section A: i) a) 3), delete the word “Five” and insert “Six”;
   
   Part 2, Section A: i) a) 3), insert “6) Postgraduate Research Representative”;
   
   Part 2, Section A: ii) a), insert “2) Postgraduate Taught Representative”.

What is the background to this?
1. Our Students’ Association includes over 13,000 postgraduate taught (e.g., Taught Masters) and postgraduate research (e.g. Masters by Research and PhD) students, who we currently fail to adequately represent in the same way we represent undergraduates since the vast majority of representative roles are filled by undergraduates.
2. Postgraduate students feel that their student experience is extremely different from the experience of undergraduate students, so they need to be represented on different issues.
3. The Students’ Association has consulted both postgraduate-taught and postgraduate-research students widely about ways in which postgraduate representation can be enhanced. Whilst there is postgraduate representation at School-level, they need university-level representation to address many additional issues affecting postgraduate students.
   a) Postgraduate taught students feel that they need to be represented on issues including (but not limited to): the lack of postgraduate taught community across the University, study space, social space, extremely high tuition fees, integration of both on campus and online distance learning students into the wider university, inconsistency of academic support including dissertation support, and issues arising from the short duration of their degree.
   b) Postgraduate research students feel that they need to be represented on issues including (but not limited to): inconsistency of academic support including research support, the lack of formal support for personal and
welfare-related issues, the lack of postgraduate research community across the University, the allocation of desk space, social space, integration into the wider university, the provision of tutor and demonstrator roles, training and support for tutors and demonstrators, and issues arising from interrupted study in Edinburgh during field research.

4. The Students’ Association Sabbatical Officers have worked closely with postgraduate tutors over the past twelve months over a host of issues, including fair-pay, subject-specific training, and access to facilities. It is clear that having an elected representative for postgraduate research students would help the Students’ Association advocate for and represent this cohort in the future.

5. The best persons suited for representing these groups are postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students themselves.

6. Whilst University and College Union Edinburgh (UCUE) represent postgraduate students in terms of their working conditions, the Students’ Association has a responsibility to support their needs and welfare as students, and to ensure they are listened to by members of academic staff.

7. The Students’ Association has been establishing specific committees for postgraduate-research students within Schools, but there needs to be wider representation for postgraduates across University committees and across the Students’ Association.

8. The Students’ Association has been establishing more representative spaces within the University for postgraduate students, and has been developing strategies for increasing postgraduate engagement in the future.

9. The addition of these two elected positions would ensure that the Students’ Association provides more representative structures, which will mean that postgraduates are less likely to be forced to rely on undergraduates to present their concerns to University staff members.

10. Role descriptions for these new positions are currently being formed, based on the previous Postgraduate Convenor role and tailored to Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research student needs based on consultations. The role descriptions do not need to be ready until September 2017, ahead of the by-elections.

What beliefs motivate the actions you propose?

1. That postgraduates need more representative spaces across University-level decision making boards.

2. That postgraduates should not have to rely on undergraduates to address concerns across the University.

3. That student representatives must support those students who teach, particularly when many of these tutors and demonstrators are on
precarious contracts, are provided with little training, and who currently have little representative input.

4. That the experiences of postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students are fundamentally different from each other and from the undergraduate experience, and therefore two separate roles are required to capture the vastly different set of needs and demands of these two groups.

Submitted on behalf of Association Executive