Sustainable Growth in Student Numbers

What we will do:

The Students’ Association to lobby the University to re-assess their strategy on expanding student numbers and to consider the current educational landscape and impact on existing students
1. The Students’ Association to advocate for improved financial investment in key student support services to keep in line with student numbers
2. Request that the Students’ Association is invited to work with the University to map out a strategic plan behind the growth of the university; to ensure that the experience of students is at the forefront
3. Mandate the Students’ Association to continue their collaboration with School Representatives to solicit feedback and to assess the impacts of expansion on students
4. Mandate the Students’ Association to work with online distance learners and the international community to represent their interests and requirements for support
5. Mandate the Students’ Association to advocate for more space for societies and to ensure that the increase in demand is being accounted for
6. Positively challenge the University to become a national leader in the recruitment and support of Widening Participation¹ students

Background to this:

1. The University merged with Edinburgh College of Art (ECA) in 2011, 2,723 students (Edinburgh University Student Factsheet, 2011/12)
2. The University has expanded its student numbers by approx. 8,000 in the last 5 years (Edinburgh University Student Factsheets)
   i. 16/17 39,576
   ii. 15/16 37,416
   iii. 14/15 35,258
   iv. 13/14 33,110
   v. 12/13 32,868
   vi. 11/12 31,335
3. The University currently has 3000 online distance learners, with plans to expand this to 10,000 in near future

¹ Widening Participation is a term used to refer to students from a lower socioeconomic group, who’s status is determined by 5 different indicators defined by the University [https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/widening-participation/about/what](https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/widening-participation/about/what)
4. The University has recruited a larger proportion of its student body from an international market, rising from X to 41% in the last year.

5. In the National Student Survey (NSS), the University is 90th in the UK with 83% overall student satisfaction.

6. The student experience has been impacted by:
   - Limited teaching space
     - There are 5 courses which have more students than the universities largest lecture theatre (George Square Lecture Theatre) can accommodate, which has resulted in double teaching. To combat the over-capacity, the University has been known to live stream the lecture to students who are unable to fit into the lecture hall, which provides a different quality of teaching.
     - There are 39 courses which have more students than the universities two largest lecture theatres (GSLT and Appleton). This puts pressure on these venues and the available teaching space. There is still 4.1% of core teaching occurring on a Wednesday afternoon, which effects at least 2070 students. This goes against the University policy of “no teaching on Wednesday afternoons to allow time for extra-curricular activities”.
     - Due to the increase of staff and the limited space in the university estates, Postgraduate students have lost their permanent office space. This has resulted in the introduction of “hot desks” where students are to share their desks. However, due to the nature of the programmes, and uptake of tutoring and demonstrating, students are often reliant on the space at the same time which leads to unsatisfactory working conditions.
   - Reduced examination period
     - The revision period for Semester 1 is already reduced in comparison to Semester 2. This increases the pressures exerted on students, particularly those in Law and the College of Examinations where the curriculum is still heavily assessed via an exam. The University requires at least 11 days to schedule examinations in 2017 and due to the increase in student numbers and examinations this would be more in 2020/21. In 2020/21 there will only be 10 days available with 3 days.

---

2 Introduction to Linear Algebra (623), Calculus and it’s Applications (587), Sociology 1A (509), Sociology 1B (498), Political Thinkers (488).
for a revision period because of the way the academic year falls. As a result, due to the volume of examinations and lack of available space they are looking to outsource examinations by renting buildings across the city.

- Lack of University owned accommodation
  - In previous years the university regularly relied on hotels and emergency accommodation to deal with overflow of incoming students.
  - The University has started long term contracts with private halls companies such as Unite, which is a much more expensive option for students. This has been justified by stating that the projected numbers from admissions are forcing the contracts, as the university cannot build housing quickly enough.
  - These rapid expansionary pressures are likely leading to worse deals for building leases and rental agreements due to the considerable pressure on the University to acquire under tight, reactionary time pressures making prices higher for students.
  - The price of accommodation, therefore, has been rising and started pricing out students from a widening-participation background. This is in tandem with the University’s drive to increase the number of International Students due to their fee status and, thus, greater propensity and ability to afford more expensive accommodation.

- Pressures on transport
  - The shuttle bus to kings buildings is regularly full and due to the limited capacity, students are left behind.
  - The Royal Infirmary to Western General Shuttle Bus ceased operations in 2016 for medical students.
  - The Veterinary School has limited evening return services and limited, if not no weekend services which has resulted in students walking.
  - Increased numbers put even more strain on these services, and whilst it is recognised that the University has made investments, this is not meeting the demand.
  - Increased housing pressures in central Edinburgh is leading to more students living afield which is a trend that will continue to grow as the University does. The University does not supplement the costs of travel for these students.
Pressures on the Counselling and Disability services

- Demand for student counselling has been steadily rising at universities nationwide, largely due to decreasing stigma around mental health and increasing financial, academic and other pressures on students. Rising demand, combined with a rise in total student numbers, can result in pressure on student services where they are not accompanied by corresponding rises in resources and physical space.

- Students at the University have raised concerns in the past about the difficulty accessing both the Student Counselling Service and the Student Disability Service. Whilst the funding for the Counselling Service has risen, the number of students accessing the service has also continued to rise.

Steeper Competition between Societies for Limited Space

- With more students, comes more student societies. We currently have just under 300 societies, one of the highest numbers in the UK, who already struggle to get access to adequate space for their activities. This can stifle potential society growth, and lead to dissatisfaction with the Students’ Association and the University.

Lack of Community-Building Support for an Increasing International Student Population

- Given the eviction of the student-run International Student Centre from their space on Buccleuch Street, and the general lack of community-building programming by the University for International Students, international students have not been given adequate attention in University services.

With a continued focus on recruiting more international students, any further expansion of student numbers ought to involve closer attention to the pastoral support of international students.

Beliefs and motivating actions:

1. Students at The University of Edinburgh deserve the highest quality education and student experience that can be offered. In promoting the University of Edinburgh to prospective students, the University claim that “You’ll experience the very best in teaching and research... Our flexible degree programmes, world-class facilities and award-winning support services combine to ensure your experience is exceptional and unique”
2. The number of contacts hours are already limited for some degree-programmes. With the pressures of limited teaching space, staff resource and time this could become more reduced with more aspects being digitalised. For example, live streaming.

3. Expansion should be happening more naturally and incremental rather than all at once due to a reaction of under-investment over the years.

4. The current levels of construction on campus to deal with expanding student numbers can be disruptive to current students and have a negative impact on our experience.

5. Access and inclusion of support and services should be prioritised and equal regardless of a student’s mode of study. The level of access should not be diluted as the number of students increase.

Submitted with 20 Student Signatures.