Representing Student Voices in the Council Elections

What will we do?

1. The Students’ Association will launch a campaign around the forthcoming Edinburgh City Council elections in May 2017, with the aim lobbying current and prospective councillors and political party representatives to commit to supporting certain student Asks (outlined below) should they be elected.

2. We will mandate the Students’ Association to include the following in its list of Asks:
   a) That councillors impose rent pressure zones in areas of central Edinburgh with a high number of student inhabitants, in order to make rents more affordable.
   b) That councillors assist in ensuring that organisations which provide support for survivors of sexual abuse and violence, such as the Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre, are better funded.
   c) That councillors work with the police department and local pubs, clubs and bars to encourage all staff to receive training on how to combat sexual harassment, and to allocate the necessary financial and human resources to make this happen.

3. Sabbatical Officers and the External Campaigns Committee will take a lead on advancing this campaign.

4. The External Campaigns Committee will produce a survey asking students what other issues they would like the Students’ Association to campaign on during the council elections. Issues arising from this survey could be raised at a future Student Council, in order to be included within the Students’ Association’s list of Asks.

5. We will work with Class Reps and Schools Reps to disseminate this survey and information about the council elections to their students.

6. The Students’ Association will use its online platforms, including its website and social media platforms, to promote the council elections to students and encourage students to register to vote.

7. We will work with the Students’ Association to collaborate with the student associations and student unions of other universities and colleges within Edinburgh in order to collectively advance the goals of this campaign.

What is the background to this?

1. The Students’ Association has campaigned on this matter during previous council elections and so should continue to promote student engagement with local government.

2. Levels of student engagement in elections, and particularly local council elections, is very low, which contributes to student interests being consistently overlooked within local government.

3. Organisations, like the Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre, provide vital support to people who have experienced rape, sexual assault or domestic violence,
however, many such organisations face continual funding shortages and are heavily reliant on volunteer fundraising.

4. Sexual harassment both on campus and within clubs and bars around the city is still far too high. A Students’ Association survey conducted 2011 concluded that “nearly 1-in-3 survey respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment”. 36.3% of these incidents took place in bars and clubs around Edinburgh. Such statistics are unacceptable and the council prioritise initiatives aimed at eliminating sexual harassment.

5. Housing prices in Edinburgh are on the continuous rise, now at twice the national average. The Students’ Association has taken on initiatives in the past aimed at reducing the price of university accommodation, however, this does not address the cost of accommodation within the private rental sector.

What beliefs motivate the actions you propose?

1. The Students’ Association has a responsibility to advocate for the interests of students within local government, and to encourage students to engage with local governance.

2. Having affordable housing is crucial to enabling students to adequately undertake their studies, and to improving the accessibility of higher education to poorer students.

3. As Edinburgh is a city with many students living within it, sexual harassment around the city affects a high proportion of students. Having adequate and well-resourced services locally available to support survivors of rape and sexual assault is crucial in enabling survivors to study at the University of Edinburgh.

4. Sexual harassment within pubs, clubs and bars is severely detrimental to the lives of students both on and off campus. It promotes an environment where it is deemed acceptable for this behaviour to happen which both demeans students and contributes to creating an unsafe environment. Having staff trained in how to tackle sexual harassment will help to reduce the amount that takes place and allow students to feel more comfortable within these places.

Submitted with 20 Student Signatures