World Autism Awareness Day

What will we do?
1. Light Teviot – and any other Students’ Association building possible – up blue every 2nd April to raise awareness for World Autism Awareness Day
2. Turn off the music in all Students’ Association buildings every 2nd April to raise awareness of accessibility issues faced by hypersensitive autistic students
3. Release a statement outlining why we are taking these actions and encouraging the university and other buildings in Edinburgh to do the same
4. Put up posters in Students’ Association buildings on the 2nd April explaining why the actions have been taken, to raise awareness and provoke discussion

What is the background to this?
1. Approximately 1 in 100 people suffer from autism or an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and the number of diagnoses – particularly among young people – is on the rise. The National Autistic Society estimates then when the families of autistic people are included, around 2,000,000 people are affected by autism every day in the UK. World Autism Awareness Day is held every year on the 2nd April under a UN decree, and for the past 10 years the Light It Up Blue campaign has encouraged buildings to be lit up blue for the day

What beliefs motivate the actions you propose?
1. Autism has a profound impact on young people attending university. It is a processing disorder, which means that their ability to learn is different to their neurotypical course mates and adjustments have to be made. The difficulties autistic people have in communication and social interaction can make integrating into university life, forming relationships and living independently a real challenge. Research has found that autistic students often avoid their students’ unions, partially due to the hypersensitivity many of them suffer in busy, noisy environments. Many can also find large communal spaces such as libraries inaccessible. As an "invisible disability," autistic people are often misunderstood and appropriate adjustments are not made by their peers or academic staff. One in five autistic children has also been excluded from a school and over 50% are in school considered inappropriate by their parents, making them less likely to make it into higher education.
2. Addressing these issues cannot be limited to one day, but a bold action can make a difference. Lighting our buildings up blue will send a message of solidarity with students on the ASD, and can be used to encourage discussion on the issue, which may help students and staff address their own stigmas towards ASDS. Turning off the music in our union buildings may also make it that little bit easier for autistic students to come in and experience the environment they have a right to access. The Students’ Association can take
the lead on improving accessibility for autistic people in Edinburgh, and hopefully our university and other institutions will follow our lead.

Submitted with 20 student signatures