Sabbatical Reports Delivered on 5 November 2015

Report from Jonny Ross-Tatam, President

Widening opportunities outside our degrees

- Research on whether students from lower income backgrounds are less likely to be extra-curricular office bearers is nearly complete.

- Funding is being sought for new participation grant, to help make extra-curricular activities affordable.

- Developing a support network with the University for student enterprises.

- New social enterprise intern set to help us support growing number of student social enterprises.

- Airmiles campaign - using University Airmiles to pay for flights for students who can’t afford to go abroad - set to launch in Semester 2.

- Aiming for online alumni Mentorship scheme open to all students for next academic year.

- Credits outside the classroom: Student-led individually created courses (Sliics) pilot complete, office bearer positions now appear on transcript.

- Wednesday afternoons completely free - pushing to be done for the next academic year.

Making mental health and wellbeing a top priority

- Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund has launched (£10K). Open to all students - apply now!

- First Big Brainstorm on Mental Health and Wellbeing a great success.

- Mental Health and Wellbeing week set for Semester 2, February 8-12th.

- New good, healthy and sustainable food options will be coming soon to Dome Cafe and Kings Buildings.

We need to get things done on campuses other than Central

- Working with Urte to look into refurb of KB House, new food options.
- Working with ECA students to find solution to Wee Red Bar.

- Set to begin a transport campaign with the Vet School.

**Other**

- Exam dates released a week early due to student pressure.

- Launching online accommodation hub with external provider in Semester 2 - where we can rate landlords and letting agents.

- Working with Urte to launch Housing Survey to find out how much we are paying for housing and helping to push for affordable rent.

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**Report from Imogen Wilson, Vice President Academic Affairs**

**Examining semester 1 courses in December**

I’m working with the Assistant Principal for Assessment and Feedback to try and add this into assessment regulations, so going forward staff will have to apply to ‘opt-out’ of this and the vast majority of exams will be done in the semester in which they are taught. Success!

**End the physical hand in**

This is going really well and will roll out in CHSS by next academic year. This will mean essays will be submitted via TurnItIn, and this is also where feedback will be returned. Working with the university to make sure anonymity is protected when the online systems are used.

**Liberation work**

I’m leading a project in the university where 10 schools will experiment with embedding liberation issues into the curriculum next year, with the view that this will roll out to all courses in all schools in the long term. The first one that has been confirmed is in the School of Medicine, where LGBT+ issues are going to be included in the training programme for medical students. It’s difficult to pin down exactly what this will mean for different schools, but some examples are: Including the perspectives of minority groups into course readings and lecture content (clearly, a multicultural curricula is more inclusive), using more diverse
case studies, using dyslexia-friendly fonts such as ariel, introducing mandatory equality and diversity training for academic staff and personal tutors. We already have anonymous marking, but that isn’t enough. The new ‘Introduction to Gender Studies’ course is great, but we need to have these issues and perspectives more widespread, not just in a specialised course that realistically a small number of students will take.

**Fair pay for PhD Tutors**

I’m going to host an event early in semester 2 which all post graduate tutors will be invited to, to discuss their experience and try to iron out the differences across the schools (some are paid for preparation time, some are paid more or less for time spent marking etc). I’m also working with university HR to standardise more of the policy and make sure that training and support is adequate as well as their pay.

**Mainstreamed learning adjustments and recording lectures**

Jonny and I are working towards all large lectures being uploaded online by the end of the year. We also want to run an awareness campaign about the mainstreamed learning adjustments, from the university’s inclusive and accessible learning policy. These are things like being able to record classes with a personal device, having notes and lecture slides available 24 hours before class, and having course outlines and reading lists available 4 weeks before the start of the semester. At Edinburgh all students have access to these, and we want encourage students to make use of them, and demand them where academic staff aren’t adhering to them.

**Special circumstances review**

This is about to begin. The first meeting is next week, so please get in touch with anything you would like to feed into this. How do you think special circumstances could be improved, or what particularly have you found challenging about the process in the past?

**External successes**

As well as being elected alongside Urte as NUS UK delegates in the By-Elections, I was also elected onto the Higher Education Zone Committee for NUS last week, which means I will
have a chance to influence the work NUS is doing around education issues on a national level this year.

Report from Andy Peel, Vice President Societies & Activities

**Mental Health and Wellbeing Week**

Planning is now well underway for EUSA’s first ever Mental Health and Wellbeing Week, set to take place Feb 8th-14th. Co-hosted by the University and the Sports Union, the week will bring together students and staff to promote mental health awareness. More details will be announced soon but if you have an interest or would like to help in organising the Week, please email eusavpsa@ed.ac.uk to register your interest.

**Democracy Review**

EUSA is changing. We are having some independent consultancy work being conducted throughout first and second semester, which will potentially change a lot - EUSA’s governance, representation structures and sabbatical officer positions. The first stage of this is a survey that will be sent out to all students wb. 9th Nov. It’s a chance for every student to have their say in how EUSA should be run, how they should be represented and whether they feel represented at all. This is perhaps one of the biggest changes EUSA will go through in the next 5+ years and so it’s a great opportunity for students to feed into that.

**Personal Tutors**

Imogen, Jonny and I have outlined the Personal Tutor scheme as one of our big priorities to address for the year. The University has just created a new Assistant Principal who will be tasked with overseeing the PT scheme and we will be working closely with him to help deliver the necessary improvements. Within that, my major priority is working to get more PTs taking mental health training enabling them to better assist tutees who come to them in crisis.

**Welfare Committee**

The Welfare Committee of the Student Council met for the first time in the middle of October. It was great to meet the newly elected Academic Campaign Organisers and Sectioned Group Convenors and for them to share their priorities for the year with the committee. The committee is run very informally and is a space where any student with an
interest in welfare or liberation can come along to share ideas, thoughts and welfare concerns. In this meeting we discussed what students would like to see in the Mental Health & Wellbeing Week, feeding ideas into the planning.

Student Parents

Student parents are a group that have been traditionally underrepresented within EUSA’s democratic structures. Eve (previous VP Societies & Activities) pushed for them to have their own Sectioned Group and as a result they elected their first Convenor in the October by-elections. So welcome, Hannah! We have already met a number of times to discuss the issues that the group are facing. I have realised that EUSA had been far from perfect in ensuring student parents were both properly represented and made to feel welcome on campus. Since then we have invested in high chairs - for our bars and cafes, and we also can now offer breastmilk storing and re-heating facilities. In addition, I am in talks with members of the University to see how can ensure that student parents feel welcome across campus and not just in EUSA venues.

Liberation Group Update

Black History Month

The BME group has had its focus on black history month since September. We’re relatively satisfied with participation but there is lots more that needs to be done throughout the year so that black narratives are included in the wider curriculum. Next month we’ll be highlighting this in a campaign about accessibility in Edinburgh as well as working on students not suspect campaign with a day of action. We’ll be putting some resources into the blog we’ve recently launched and raising awareness of the new BME women’s fringe group. – Shuwanna Aaron: Black Minority & Ethnic Group Convenor

Disability History Month

We are currently working on several events for disability history month including a Therapets session, cross-liberation Share Your Story night, a panel debate featuring an MSP, GP, psychiatrist, and local charity, and several other events. We are hoping to launch a campaign centered around ‘You Are More Than Your Marks’ during exam time and are
eager to collaborate with other groups and societies for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Week. – Jess Killeen: Disability and Mental Wellbeing Group Convenor

**Report by Urte Macikene, Vice President (Services)**

**Student Art Exhibitions**

One of my manifesto points was getting student art installed in as many EUSA venues as possible, to increase EUSA’s engagement with the ECA, make our spaces more vibrant, and showcase the amazing work our students do.

We're now running a submission process, with exhibition spaces available in Baristo, Teviot, and Potterrow. These venues see thousands of people pass through every week, so it’s an amazing chance to get your work out there.

I have negotiated with the University that they will review the works with a view to potentially buying some of them for the universities permanent art collections, which should be a great incentive for students. The deadline for submission is 7 December and exhibitions will launch with an event in early January. Submit your work here: http://bit.ly/1M6wdeq

**Housing**

Jonny (EUSA President) and I met with City Councillors on the Housing Committee to discuss incorporating a 25% affordable housing requirement on purpose-built student housing blocs (Unite, The Student Housing Company, CRM, etc). This is currently the requirement and best practice in the private renting sector for new builds. If a 25% affordability baseline isn’t feasible in a particular area, the builders pay into a community fund which is then used to build affordable housing. This requirement currently does not apply to purpose-built student housing, which is often comprised of luxury studio flats students have no choice but to pay for. The Councillors indicated there was some significant appetite to include student housing in this regulation, so we will be continuing lobbying work for it.

We are developing a student housing survey in order to get statistics on what students budget for their housing and end up paying, and if/whether/under what conditions they would consider private student housing. We will feed this info back to the City Council as evidence that purpose built student housing is unaffordable, as well as using it for our own campaigns. We’re also encouraging groups to submit consultation responses on the housing guidance (https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/edinburgh-planning-guidance-student-housing/consult_view) and looking for case studies of student who have had bad experiences with this type of housing.

**Conflict minerals policy update**
I had hoped for this to pass SRS committee on 21st October, however a last-minute snag meant it will now have to come to the next SRS Committee in January, but I have been assured it is on track to pass and preparations are being made for implementation.

Part of the policy includes a commitment to awareness-raising around the issue, so I organised a student forum on conflict minerals with guest speaker Bandi Mbubi who founded NGO Congo Calling and this went very well. I have also written a version of the policy for EUSA’s IT services, which I will be bringing to the next council on 3rd December. Check out my blog post on the issue for more info: http://bit.ly/1kYra9l

**Ethical Investment**

I was involved in conversations leading up the University’s announcement that they will officially adopt the policy of not investing in controversial arms. Whilst I don’t think this goes far enough, it is a positive step. I am now the key student contact for the ongoing review of the ethical investment policy, and am liaising between senior management and key societies (primarily People & Planet). This work is very slow and ongoing, but a meeting between major stakeholders is coming up next week.

**Democracy review**

Over the summer, we secured funding for external consulting from NUS to undertake a holistic review of our democratic structures throughout the year. This will include a review of our sabbatical officer roles, governance structures, and democratic engagement processes with the aim of making EUSA more democratic beyond policy making and elections.

We will be launching a student survey next week to collect student views on how they would like EUSA to represent them, and this will have to be a massive push led by the sabbaticals to ensure a statistically significant number of responses. I have spent substantive time the last few weeks making preparations for launching this survey and the ongoing review, including the content of the survey and how it will be marketed/communicated to students. Any changes to representative roles and potentially some other changes will have to be put to student referendum and we are planning for this in conjunction with the March EUSA elections.

**Preventing Prevent**

Following the passage of the ‘Preventing Prevent’ policy at the last student Council, I attended a workshop in Glasgow run by NUS and the UCU regarding non-compliance and opposition to the policy. We have confirmed with the university that there will be no change to our reporting policies in the Advice Place as our current procedures are sufficient to fulfil the requirements of the policy. Our staff will not be attending any training related to
Prevent, though the university has not yet implemented or distributed any trainings for its staff as they are waiting for the results of the pilot trainings in the West of Scotland.

With regards to our room bookings policy, this will again involve no change to policy as we already require groups to note any external speakers on room bookings 2 weeks in advance. However, we will be required to flag up any potentially problematic bookings to the university. We have complied with this request as the alternative would have been to allow the university to take over our room bookings procedure and potentially add additional Prevent-related questions to the bookings procedure.

We are continuing to lobby the university to be transparent surrounding their implementation of the Prevent duty and have been assured that the training will be made available online once it is being implemented. I have additionally requested that the online page where the Prevent Training is available also contain anti-Islamophobia messaging and a video or tutorial about the potential risks of prevent to stereotype Muslim students and student activists. This is under consideration.

**Climate Change Action**

I have been raising the issue of the university’s missed climate targets and emphasising the need for adjusted targets and concrete commitments to meeting them in light of the university’s growth. I have also been emphasising the need for carbon offsetting strategies such as investment in renewables (ex. St Andrews is building a wind farm). This seems to have hit home as I now often hear it mentioned in meetings that “students find missed CO2 targets unacceptable”. I was consulted as part of the Climate Action Plan review and have been feeding into the development of a new carbon emissions forecasting tool.

I will be traveling to Paris as part of the University’s delegation to the COP21 UN Climate Change conference, and will be blogging/tweeting/feeding back throughout the conference, though arrangements are still a bit vague. If any student groups would like to coordinate video chatting from the conference or events following the conference, please get in touch.

**Asylum seeker fees/SAAS**

I have been liaising with the International Office regarding their response surrounding asylum seeker fee status and bursaries. Since the outbreak of the migrant crisis I have been pressuring the international office to change their policy to allow asylum seekers home fees status whilst their application is being considered by the Home Office, which is at the discretion of the university, and has been the policy for those with refugee status for some time now. At the time of writing, the international office has stated that they are now doing this, however it is unclear whether this implies a change in policy and since when. I have a meeting to clarify this on Friday.

I am also starting a campaign to pressure the Scottish Government to allow asylum seekers
access to SAAS funding, as those with refugee status are currently eligible and asylum seekers are not. I will be putting together an open letter this week, and am liasing with students from Amnesty who are starting a parallel campaign.

**International Students Campaign Day**

I met with the NUS International Students’ Officer and am helping to coordinate an action on campus for the International Students Campaign Day of Solidarity to help support the work NUS is doing to defend the rights of migrant students. There will be a national student walk-out on 17th November at 10.30 AM to highlight student dissatisfaction with the curbs on international students’ right to work during and after graduation, and to the UK governments’ response to the migrant crisis. There will be a rally outside of Teviot and a related event in the Debating Hall following the walkout.