Sabbatical Reports delivered at the Student Council Meeting of 21 January 2016

Report from Jonny Ross-Tatam, EUSA President

Over half way through our terms as elected officers. Here are some of the things I have been involved in achieving.

- **£0.5 million investment in Kings Buildings House**, with Urte (EUSA VPS). Giving KB students the better food options, study and social space they want.

- **450 new spaces in the Main Library** to be ready for first semester next academic year (2016/17)

- **£100k investment in the Wee Red Bar** at Edinburgh College of Art.

- All the above were part of a **£multimillion investment in student facilities**; new Law Library, investment in KB and investment in teaching facilities.

- **Releasing exam dates one week earlier**, saving students money on their tickets home and making it easier to plan their lives.

- **A new Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund**. £4,500 has been given out in the first round of funding, for projects ranging from a TV series on mental health, to Yoga and mindfulness courses, to mental health storytelling workshops and bike safety schemes at Easter Bush.

- **#30 miles campaign**, led by Urte (EUSA VPS). We have been working to source as much of our food from within a 30 mile radius as possible. Locally, ethically and sustainably sourced.

- **Campaigning to save maintenance grants**. Worked with NUS in successfully forcing a debate in Parliament and have been lobbying local MPs to vote in favour of saving the grants that 000’s of Edinburgh students from low income backgrounds rely on.

And there’s still lots more to do:

- **Protecting the Bursaries** at Edinburgh University for lower income students. The University are currently reviewing the UK bursaries, they promised to protect them, let’s make sure they honour their promise.
• **A new Participation Grant.** Our extra-curricular activities need to be affordable for all students – a new participation grant will help make that happen. Will be working on this for the coming months.

• **Make the Wee Red Bar free to use.** Many years ago, the Wee Red Bar used to be free to use for all Edinburgh College of Art students. Now it costs £150 to hire. Am working on making it free to use for all Edinburgh students, like any other student space.

• **Supporting student entrepreneurs.** Am working with EUSA colleagues to provide proper support to our new cohort of student entrepreneurs, social or otherwise. We have an intern working on this at the moment.

• **Pushing the University to make social impact investments.** The University can use its investments to achieve social aims, like tackling poverty, homelessness and isolation in the local area. Will be working with University colleagues on this.

• **Mental Health and Wellbeing Week,** with Andy Peel (EUSA VPSA). This will be launching the week beginning February 8th, lots of great events planned so stay tuned.

• **An online accommodation hub.** Am working with an organisation, Move’M, for an online site where students can compare prices, locations, letting agents and landlords.

• **Getting lectures recorded online.** Am working with Imogen Wilson (EUSA VPAA) on this and negotiations are taking place in the University Planning Round for a £mult million investment in lecture capture. It’s looking promising.

• **Wednesday afternoons completely free.** Have been working with Marina Sergeeva, Sports Union President. The University are promising to move as many classes as they can out of the Wednesday afternoon slot to make space for extra-curricular activities (sports, societies, volunteering etc.). **Sports clubs can now book rooms in EUSA venues.**

• **Pushing for cheaper transport for Vet School and Medic students.** Am currently working with Vet School and Medic School reps and waiting for the University’s publication of their Transport Strategy to make next steps.

• **Making EUSA’s Democracy more representative, inclusive and relevant.** See the democracy review presentation today! Referendum will be happening in March.

Report from Urte Macikene, Vice President (Services)

Welcome back everyone and I hope you’ve had lovely breaks! Here’s what I’ve been up to in the meantime, quite a few things I’m happy with in this one!
Kings Buildings House

Remember all those campaign posters with my face that said “better food and social space at Kings Buildings”? I’m happy to now be able to announce that Jonny and I have been able to secure £0.5 million for redevelopment of Kings’ Buildings House.

This work will all be done over the course of this coming summer, and be ready for use again by September. This is a short-term investment, as the entire KB campus is due to be redeveloped in 7-8 years’ time. We will be particularly focused on revamping the food offering, in light of the KB Food survey having shown significant lack of choice and dissatisfaction with the food options in KB as a whole.

We will also be looking at changing the layout of the ground floor to make it more inviting and visible, with new flexible study/socialising space and perhaps a new entrance.

Students will have the chance to influence plans through a consultation exercise in late February, which I am leading with close involvement of the Trading Committee conveners. There will be opportunity for School reps to get involved at a slightly later stage.

This is on top of our own £22,000 investment in new gym equipment and services!

#30 miles campaign and sustainable food
The #30miles campaign on EUSA’s local suppliers and sustainable food is now rolling out across our venues. You should notice the posters around featuring locations of all of our fresh food suppliers – all of which is sourced from within 30 miles of Potterrow! We’ve got a new supplier page on our website where you can see where all of our fresh food is sourced from, as well as roll-over menus with a breakdown of where each ingredient comes from: https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/eatdrink/suppliershowcase/

As part of the campaign, I have been traveling to visit all of our local suppliers and filming videos asking them about their sustainability and sourcing practices, to make sure they’re walking the walk, not just talking the talk! So far I’ve had a brilliant time at our fruit and veg supplier (Ivan Wood & Sons) and our butcher (The Buffalo Farm) in Fife. I’ve been really impressed with how they source their food and run their businesses, and can confirm they are truly impressive local family businesses. Look out for one video a week being shared to highlight each food group over the next 6 weeks, as well as some blog posts from me.

We are continuing to take forward other actions from the recommendations on ‘good’ food from our summer intern. We are working on and hope to gain Food for Life accreditation from the Soil Association before the end of the year. We’re also evaluating options for new healthy food offers in Dome café or New Amphion. Really pleased with how everyone in the organisation, especially the commercial team, have taken all of this on as a priority.

Student Art Exhibits
On January 14th, we launched exhibits by 15 student artists across Teviot and Barsito with a lovely reception for the artists and local art curators. The works were selected through a submission process open to all students, and a variety of work from students all across the university was submitted. I led this as it was a point on my manifesto and it took a lot more work and staff support to pull together than I expected. These works will be displayed until the end of the academic year, and we hope the open submission process will be recurring every year, with the number of submission and interest from local art galleries going from strength to strength. Go and have a look! We will also be installing works from the university art collection in the next few weeks.

**Strategic Planning**

We have been continuing intensive work on the democracy review, as you will have seen from the presentation of our initial recommendations ahead of this Student Council. Discussions around the results of the student survey and possibilities for new officer roles/student council structures have taken up a huge amount of time since the last Student Council. EUSA is also working through a few other massive organisational changes at the moment, most importantly the re-brand of our entire organisational identity, and the ‘National Living Wage’ (ie new mandatory minimum wage which the government is calling a Living Wage) which will be coming into effect in April. The NLW will have a significant effect on our commercial outlets; we have been evaluating financial and commercial projections for several different options of implementing this, and this has also taken up significant time.

We are also going into EUSA’s budgeting process for the year ahead, which entails all departments reviewing their spending this year, requesting budget for next year, and then requesting funds from the university in their planning round.

Our Commercial Director left in the beginning of January and I have been participating in reviewing his role and plans for recruiting a replacement.

**Affordable Housing**

I will be lobbying the university to adopt an explicit definition of ‘affordable’ student housing, and to commit to providing a certain percentage of housing to students in the ‘affordable’ bracket. Currently, accommodation services provides student accommodation at a variety of price levels, but has no policy regarding what they are or must be, and generally any new accommodation being built is high-end studio flats priced very expensively. If the university adopted an explicit stance on this, this would also in turn impact on private student housing developers (Unite, Student Housing Company, etc), who the university sub-contracts from. Timing for this is very well placed, as there is a new 10 year Estates Strategy in the works, to be approved in May-ish. This will for the first time include a Residential Strategy as a strategic priority. I am in the process of gathering data on student experiences with looking for/budgeting for housing, what is affordable housing to students, and their experiences with private student halls (survey to launch by end of January) as well as doing other desk-based research, to compile a report to make a
case for the affordable housing policy. I’ll also be trying to form a bit of a campaign group around this in the next month.

Central Area Redevelopment

Appointment letters have been issued to the design team for the Central Area Redevelopment which I have outlined in past reports. The interview and design team procurement process has been long and complex. The appointment won’t be official until they respond at the end of January, at which point I’ll be putting out more information on what stage we are at with the designs and what’s coming up. I’ll be spending a good bit of time at project boards and coordinating student consultation for this £60 million project during the spring.

Paris COP21/Ethical investment

In December I spent three days at the UN summit on climate change in Paris (COP21). I learned a lot from the panels I attended, and came back inspired to pursue ethical investment and sustainability campaigns within EUSA/the university. But more importantly, I reflected a lot on the nature of power, institutions, bureaucracy, and political engagement. I can honestly say that reflection from the conference has been a massive turning point for me in the way I see this role, and has made me really re-commit to campaigning, activism, and getting as many students as possible directly involved in my work and EUSA more broadly. You can read my blog on my time at COP here: http://bit.ly/1NxSTaD

There has been some significant movement on ethical investment within the university, which I will be able to update on publicly at the next council. In general, I am pleased to see there seems to have been a significant culture change on ethical investment within the university over the last few years (owing in large part to student pressure and campaigning), and that this is an issue being kept consistently at the top of the agenda.

Scottish Elections Planning

After collating the responses to our student consultation on what issues are most important to students in the categories of education, housing, environment, and employment, as well as taking a steer from the NUS Scotland campaign goals, these are the main points we will be lobbying on ahead of the Scottish elections:

- Summer SAAS support
- Tuition fee and living cost loans for all postgraduates
- Maintenance grants not loans for lowest income students
- SAAS support for asylum seekers

A motion also passed at the last Student Council with three additional issues to lobby on. We’re in the process of setting up lobbying meetings and will be inviting students
along to these to contribute their views and for photo-ops. This will also be part of our voter registration drive.

We will be organising 2-3 elections debates with candidates as well as representatives from key organisations on specific issues of interest to students. I will also be working with student media to coordinate questions to local candidates on the issues we have identified, so students can make informed comparisons between candidates and parties on issues that affect them.

**Student outreach bits and bobs**

As I mentioned in the Paris section, I’m really committed to spending more time this semester building political networks, getting active students running for EUSA positions, getting the word out about EUSA campaigns, and generally helping to provide support to student-led campaigns on campus. Here are a couple of the things I’ve done just in the past two weeks:

- Marched down to Parliament for a press call and photo-op handing in the open letter calling for access to SAAS funding for asylum seekers
- Helped coordinate and spent time flyering with the medics expressing solidarity and promoting awareness of the Junior Doctors’ Strike
- Spent time collecting petitions and organising actions and lobbying for the Equal Access campaign for full fee waivers and bursaries for asylum seekers
- Attended People & Planet meeting to keep them up to date with ethical investment plans, and plans to be involved in future actions
- Spoke on a panel on the Prevent Counter-terrorism legislation with several academics and university management, where I made the case for how the policy is Islamophobic, xenophobic, and harmful to students, in line with policy passed by this council.

**Report from Andy Peel, Vice President (Societies & Activities)**

**Mental Health and Wellbeing Week**

EUSA’s first ever Mental Health and Wellbeing Week will be co-hosted with The University and Sports Union bringing together all the work that is being done on campus around mental health and wellbeing. The week will begin on Feb 8th and aims to bring all staff and students together, encouraging everyone to open up and ‘start a conversation’. Keep an eye out for more information closer to the week!

**Gender Neutral Toilets**

I’ve met both with the Director of University Estates and Head of Space Management to discuss gender-neutral toilets within the University as I continue to push for a formal gender-neutral toilet policy within new builds. Internally, since December, we have sought legal advice from our solicitors on whether implementation of the motion passed at December Student Council would put us in breach of both Scottish building and licensing regulations. Initial advice we received in January suggested
this would be the case and we have sought further legal advice to clarify this. I will continue to keep Student Council updated on this matter in due course.

Anti-Sexual Harassment Campaign

As I mentioned in my previous accountability report, aiming to launch this semester, the campaign is as a result my predecessor Eve securing a commitment from the university to address sexual harassment on campus. After lobbying hard to have a stake in the campaign, last week EUSA was handed the reigns and will have majority input into the campaign. The design brief is currently being written up before we approach external agencies to help with co-designing the project. I’ve very pleased that EUSA is having such critical input into such an important collaborative campaign.

Personal Tutors

As I have previously mentioned, addressing important issues in the personal tutor system has been very high on my agenda throughout my term in office. Last week I gave a presentation to the Senior Tutor Network, a group of 60 Senior Tutors about the importance of mental health first aid training for personal tutors as well as having lengthy discussions with members of university staff recently tasked with improving the personal tutor system. Currently, compulsory training of any sort faces opposition within the university and mental health first aid training is no exception. However, I believe we have now reached a position where there will be a ‘minimum expectation’ that the PTs will undertake level one mental health first aid training.

Miscellaneous Updates

I’m continuing to feed into the university’s student employability strategy, trying to get a focus on student development. Jonny and I are helping the careers service with ‘MyDevelopmentHub’, similar to that of MyCareerHub but with a focus on personal development. Currently in its very early stages of development, it will provide a comprehensive account of all the opportunities for students to develop their skills both at University and in the local community.

LGBT+ Liberation Group Update

The main events will be:

**Wednesday 3rd Feb**- LGBT+ History in Edinburgh-Local organisations talking about the history of being LGBT+ in Edinburgh and how things have changed-Dining Room Teviot

**Wednesday 10th Feb**- LGBT+ and the wider world-Speakers talking about world issues like homelessness and the refugee crisis in relation to LGBT+ issues-Dining Room Teviot
Wednesday 24th or 28th- tbc- Gaylidh- annual LGBT+ themed ceilidh to celebrate the end of history month

Monday 29th- Film screening of 'Happy Birthday, Marsha' followed by discussion- last event of the month!

There will also be some cross liberation events and events run by other groups and societies that we will promote so keep your eyes peeled :) –Rachel Ram

Report from Imogen Wilson, Vice President (Academic Affairs)

Liberation in the Curriculum
I'm working with the School of Divinity to design part of their training for new tutors. The induction will include a section on how to facilitate tutorials with accessibility and inclusivity in mind by using techniques such as getting people to speak in pairs and then feed back to the group, by using gender neutral pronouns, and by using sensitive language when discussing topics that some people may find distressing. When we have completed the training hopefully we can roll this out to other schools, using Divinity as a pilot.

I was unfortunately not successful in the project I had applied for funding for from the Higher Education and Scottish Funding Council on Embedding Equality and Diversity into the Curriculum, but I'm still leading the project within the university, and the staff were keen to carry on the project anyway, which as well as the training above will include an audit of course reading lists, encouraging staff to include more perspectives from BME, women and LGBT+ writers.

HE Green Paper
On Friday 15 January we submitted EUSA’s response to the Higher Education Green Paper, which has been open for consultation since October. We firmly oppose almost everything in the paper, and were very clear in our response that we do not agree with linking the rising of fees to ‘teaching excellence’, and how this will have devastating consequences for many students. From an event before Christmas we took on board which issues in the paper that students at Edinburgh were most concerned about, but we were wholly unforgiving about everything in the consultation.

Gender Jam
We have almost finalised arrangements for Gender Jam, a half day conference exploring gender inequality in higher education which will take place on Thursday 18 February as part of Innovative Learning Week. Free tickets for Gender Jam are now available at this link: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/genderjam-2016-tickets-19891021581

Special Circumstances Review
For September 2016 it has been confirmed that we will have a university wide extension policy. At the moment every school has a different policy on this, which makes consistency for students studying courses from different schools impossible. It is widely agreed that where possible it is better to get an extension immediately than have to apply for special circumstances and wait for results for a long time, so hopefully this will help many students avoid the process altogether. Progress is being made on ‘self-certification’ for special circumstances, and the group has been having discussions on whether testimony from parents or friends will be appropriate. It’s
looking likely that this will be included in the outcomes of the group, but we have two more meetings at which more things will be confirmed before the end of the year.

Voter Registration Week and Scottish Parliament Elections
We will be out on stalls every lunchtime the week beginning 1 February getting students to register to vote and talking to them about our manifesto. I've also made a Thunderclap which you can sign up to here https://www.thunderclap.it/projects/36755-student-register-to-vote and will send out a tweet/facebook message all at the same time on the 1st to get something trending.

Democracy Review
We have been working really hard on the democracy review, but I won’t mention anything about this here as we have had the workshop this evening. If anyone would like to get in touch with thoughts on school and college level representation in particular I would welcome any comments and love to hear from you! Just email eusavpaa@ed.ac.uk

Lectures online
Jonny and I have been lobbying hard in the last few months for lectures to be recorded and put online at a more consistent and higher quality than they are at the moment. We have commitment from some parts of the university to bid for a significant amount of money for this project in this years planning round (when every department has to bid for funding for projects each year). At next week’s Learning and Teaching Committee (the main academic policy-making body in the university) we are having a discussion about the various options for ‘lecture capture’ and how to move forward, but staff have been really positive about it and I’m confident that we will get somewhere by the end of the year.

Teaching Awards
We are almost half way through the Teaching Awards nomination period. There have been over 1000 nominations so far, but we are hoping to get over 3000 by the end. It’s not too late to nominate for any of the categories for last semester, so if you had a particularly good course, teacher, assessment or support staff please take the time to nominate them! Staff love the awards, and are always proud to receive nominations. You can find the nominations page here: https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/representation/campaigns/teachingawards/