Student Council
Thursday 28th January 2021, 18:00-20:00 (GMT), Microsoft Teams

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Agenda

Welcome

Sabbatical Officer Accountability

Paper A

Motions:

Paper B: Motion to lobby to re-join or replace Erasmus

Accessibility Break

Motions:

Paper C: Motion to campaign to stop Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs)

Paper D: Motion to support the Student Rent Strike

Paper E: Motion to support the complaint letter addressed to Edinburgh College of Art

Paper F: Amendment to Motion to support the complaint letter addressed to Edinburgh College of Art

Any Other Business (AOB)

Shout outs

Staff Directory: who to ask for help during the meeting

- Democracy Regulations: Sarah Moffat
- General Questions: Sarah Purves
- If you do not wish to be recorded: Dan Doyle
- Tech support: Sarah Connet
- Voting Questions: Stuart Lamont
- Wellbeing and Safe Space: Laura Smith
Paper A: Sabbatical Officer Accountability

Report from Ellen MacRae, President

It is hard to imagine that the second semester of this academic year would be more challenging than the first, yet here we are – Happy New Year! Before the Winter break, I was involved in the University’s Semester 2 phased return planning. This included ensuring rent pauses; that the Flexible Learning Week in February wasn’t removed from the teaching timetable and extending the provision of Lateral Flow Testing for students. Although Government guidelines and a new lockdown have changed a lot of those plans, here are some of the things I have achieved in line with my manifesto:

Accessibility

- Ensured that the University commits to providing Rent Pauses for all Undergraduate and Postgraduate students in University-managed accommodation whilst they cannot return to Edinburgh and their in-person teaching hasn’t started. I’ve also been continuing work with Amanda (VP Community) in how we can negotiate support being provided for (the majority) of students who are in private accommodation.
- Ensured that travel subsidies are still in place for semester two, please check out this link to find out about £1.30 Lothian Bus tickets and four month Just Eat Cycle passes for £10.

Change

- Met with the Sense of Belonging and Community taskforce with Rachel (VP Activities & Services) to talk about International and Black & Minority Ethnic students’ visibility within our University.
- Being involved in the University’s EU Communications group to ensure that the University is still communicating about its commitment to being European and the support available to EU students in light of Brexit. I intend to include previous European and Brexit themed Student Council motions in this work.
- Supported a letter from NUS Scotland to the First Minister asking for greater financial support for students, compensation for rent and ‘No Detriment’ policies.

Transparency

- I organised a meeting with the other Russell Group Presidents/Officers in response to the Russell Group statement about not reinstating the ‘No Detriment’ Policy from Spring 2020, with the intention to hold our institutions and the Russell Group to account.
- We wrote back to the Russell Group outlining guiding principles we wanted to see adopted by our institutions in light of the challenges experience by students this academic year. The Russell Group were very quick to reply! Conversations about what this support will look like are still ongoing within the University of Edinburgh and we are urging them to be transparent about the assessment process.

This academic year continues to be uncertain. Please know that we are always here to represent you and your concerns to not only the University, but NUS and the Government too. Hearing from you helps shape our responses to current, live issues so I’m always grateful when you get in touch – president@eusa.ed.ac.uk
Report from Rachel Irwin, VP Activities and Services

It’s been a while! Since we last met, a lot has happened in the world that has hit ‘activities’ and ‘services’ hard. Last Student Council, I reported that we had been working on a phased return to in-person activity – sadly this isn’t looking likely to happen as soon as we thought. Nevertheless, there’s lots more happening and even more to be done!

University

- I worked with the University and the Students’ Association to create and promote their respective Winter Break activities offer for students remaining in Edinburgh over the Winter Break. This included the University’s Sharepoint site, Yammer page, and buddying system whereby students could be partnered with a volunteer staff member or alumni to socialise safely outdoors, as well as the Association’s 12 Days of Christmas campaign and free goodie bags for remaining students.
- I have also been a part of the recently reformed Sense of Belonging taskforce. This group’s purpose is to tackle some of the issues identified through the likes of the Pulse survey last semester, which highlighted that many students feel isolated and lack a sense of community and belonging. If you have any suggestions, please get in touch!
- I also participated in the University’s Virtual Open Day at the end of last semester, where I was able to chat online with lots of prospective new students and answer their questions about the Students’ Association and the student experience at Edinburgh.

Student Groups

- A big focus at the moment is re-registration for societies and student groups. As we approach annual report and re-registration season, we know lots of Office Bearers and committees will face various challenges when it comes to meeting previous requirements. With the help of our Activities Reps, we have been working on how to make re-registration requirements as flexible as possible, so our student groups don’t suffer.
- I had the pleasure of attending a few society events during Give It A Go Week (shoutout to Theatre Paradok and the Buddhist Society!). It was great to meet some of the committees and experience first-hand how well our student groups have adapted to online activity.
- I was also able to host a few How-To sessions for new and returning students during Give It A Go Week; one on how to join student groups and societies, and one on how to make friends and stay connected as an online student.

Manifesto

- Accessibility: This month I sat on the Participation Grant panel for semester 2 applications. This Grant is so important in increasing accessibility to extra-curricular activity, and I’ve been looking into how we can make it even more accessible and effective.
- Sustainability: This is still at the top of my agenda. I have continued to work very closely with VP Community, Amanda, on drafting a new Sustainability Policy for the Association, and have also had great engagement from student volunteers for our Green During Covid-19 campaign (due to launch in February).
- Connectivity: I have been working with our Activities Reps to build their own online communities with the student groups within their category by setting up their own Teams channels, and now helping them to plan some ‘mini-Town Halls’ to host for their category.
Report from Amanda Sully, VP Community

Happy 2021 everyone and huge congrats for accomplishing all that you have last semester and I hope you were able to have a restful break - you deserve it! Into the new year I will be specifically focusing on addressing the climate emergency, supporting student tenants, and connecting students to the Edinburgh community.

Addressing the Climate Emergency

- I have drafted a Sustainability Strategy for the Students’ Association to ensure that addressing climate change is a priority across our operations in the long-term. I have brought this strategy forward to Association Executive for feedback and next steps are to strengthen this draft and bring it forward to other relevant stakeholders, including students, for further review.
- Vice President Activities and Services, Rachel, and I have been working on our Green During Covid-19 Campaign that will be launching next month, huge thank you to the students and student groups taking part in this.
- I organized and ensured that students will be having an active role in shaping the University’s [Edinburgh Earth Initiative](#). I will be chairing a student workshop next month and contributing to further workshops alongside academic colleagues.
- This month I also attended a Roundtable hosted by SOS-UK on Responsible Investment, presenting on the ways in which student activists were a key voice in pushing for fossil fuel divestment and ethical reinvestment. I also hosted a second ‘How To’ session for new and returning students on how to live sustainably.
- Met with the University Transport team to discuss ways in which we can promote active travel, specifically through the [Just Eat Cycle passes for £10](#) and helped to successfully distribute free bike lights to students through Edinburgh Council’s Be Bright Be Seen campaign.

Support Student Tenants

- Been in contact with NUS Scotland and other Scottish Sabbatical Officers to form a Housing Group, specifically in response to private student accommodation providers not letting students permanently out of their contracts.
- With President, Ellen, I worked to ensure and make students’ aware of the University’s commitment to providing [Rent Pauses](#) for UG and PGT students in University-owned accommodation. Ellen and I have also been working on how we can provide support to students in private accommodation, and I have contacted other Student Unions in Edinburgh to help coordinate and strengthen some of this action.

Community Engagement

- Attended my first Community Board, and worked to ensure there is adequate student representation in local community-focused activities and within the delivery of the [Community Plan](#).
- While my original Community Guide idea has taken a bit of a hit due to the lockdown, I am still working to use some of the great responses from the form as a way to highlight local community spaces.

It is always invaluable get your questions and input on any campaign work I have planned for this semester so please do send me an email at [vpcommunity@eusa.ed.ac.uk](mailto:vpcommunity@eusa.ed.ac.uk) if you want to discuss anything I have mentioned further.
Report from Fizzy Abou-Jawad, VP Education

Since the last Student Council, as I’m sure you’re aware much has changed and many plans for this semester have had to adapt in light of these changes. In addition to this I have recently returned from Annual Leave. We are aware of students concerns regarding a no-detriment or similar safety net policy for this academic year, and I am pleased to say that I, along with VP Welfare Niamh, am a part of the working group that will be establishing what this safety-net policy will look like for University of Edinburgh students. We have met once, but I am optimistic for the outcome of this group. I have been collating information from all of your emails and petitions about the no-detriment policy and will use this, along with the focus group I intend to run with School Reps as the basis of our feedback to the working group. I’ve ensured to keep my key priorities for this year as a focus and have made the following progress.

Improving teaching and feedback

- Chaired the first College Research SSLC for the College of Science and Engineering
- Successfully shared CSE School Rep info with the relevant Schools in CSE, and have had that info publicised in relevant School controlled spaces
- Shared results of School Rep hybrid teaching consultation with members of the Curriculum and Student Experience working group, prior to the winter break
- Attended the first ‘Impact of COVID-19 on Assessments’ working group, where early conversations of potential safety net policies took place.
- Next Steps: Ensure the Safety Net policy created by The University is reflective of students needs and is created in collaboration with students

Academic student support

- Attended an NUS task group focussed on informing students about the ins and outs of Academic Integrity
- Created guidance document with Prof Tina Harrison that was disseminated about how staff can actively build a sense of community in their Schools
- Next Steps: Continuing to work with Rachel, VPAS, to build awareness to the importance of SSLCs for students

Inclusive and accessible learning experience

- Attended the first meeting of the new Digital Strategy working group for The University
- Attended a meeting with ISG and SDS regarding creating more accessible study spaces on campus
- Next Steps: Collecting student feedback on study spaces to pass on to study spaces working group, that should indicate what aspects of the changes to the study space should be retained post-pandemic (if any)
Report from Niamh McCrossan, VP Welfare

These past two months have been filled with team effort on securing better provisions for students. It was great to wrap up our many campaigns in November, and review all that was learnt from online campaigning and hosting workshops. If you have any feedback from #16DaysOfActivism, #LetsTalk: Mental Health and Wellbeing, Disability History Month, Estranged Students’ Solidarity week, or Trans Day of Remembrance, let me know!

Making Edinburgh equal, diverse and inclusive

- Relaunched our #NoExcuse webpages to reflect the primary user as someone who has experienced sexual or gender-based violence, streamlining access to support services from the university or external bodies.
- Secured funding and service agreement for a Rape Crisis Scotland training module for students, which is available online now.
- Met with student activists to discuss the next steps in making our campus free from racial harassment. Taking this forward to discuss with Security, Estates, and senior management.
- Next steps: take a paper to the Equality Diversity Inclusion Committee to update the University’s ‘Dignity and Respect policy’ to create protections for trans and non-binary students, and for incidents of discrimination that is directed at a group, not an individual.

Facilitating healthy lifestyles

- Organised a self-care workshop for survivors of sexual violence. I hope to work with the new Sexual Violence and Harassment Liaison Manager in order to make these workshops a regular event, through the Fearless Edinburgh post (a Rape Crisis Scotland worker that will spend two days a week working with our University).
- Lobbied for a virtual contact centre be set up specifically to fulfil proactive outreach during the holiday period to certain cohorts of students. This will be continued through semester 2, and all those in quarantine will receive 2 phone calls in the first 7 days.

Alleviating financial worries

- Secured extensions and special circumstances for students experiencing a significant adverse impact on their performance in assessment due to more paid work than usual, as a “key worker” (e.g. in healthcare, retail, delivery).
- Worked with the Wellbeing services to introduce a free delivery service for students to receive sustainable period products anywhere in the UK.

Policy updates

- Holocaust Memorial Day – reached out to the Jewish Society and the Chaplaincy, have ensured an appropriate COVID-19 safe commemoration happens.
- Free travel for disabled students- successfully lobbied the Scottish Government to put the NEC Bus pass form fully online, removing physical accessibility issues.
- Women of Colour mural- mural has been completed! Unveiling happening once the Potterrow building can open for students.
Paper B: Motion to lobby to re-join or replace Erasmus

What we will do

1. Officially support the UK re-joining the Erasmus+ student exchange programme and make a public statement declaring this.
2. Lobby the relevant elected representatives to re-join Erasmus+ or at the very least to ensure that its proposed replacement, the Turing Programme, will replicate the benefits of Erasmus+ as closely as possible.
3. Lobby the University to provide more funding to support Widening Participation students in studying abroad.

Background to this

1. The Erasmus+ scheme is a European Union initiative that provides opportunities and funding for students to study in different countries. This includes vocational education and training as well as University education.
2. Those who take part receive grants which cover the cost of living abroad, whilst any extra tuition fees incurred by exchange students at universities are also covered. Students from low-income backgrounds are eligible to receive supplementary grants to support their exchanges.1
3. Between 2014 and 2017 the University of Edinburgh received an estimated £4.5 million from the scheme and as a result were able to support 1600 students on study exchanges during this period alone. Since the beginning of the initiative, over 7000 students from Edinburgh have participated.2
4. The UK Government has chosen to leave Erasmus+ as part of Brexit, meaning that after May 2023 most Edinburgh students will no longer have the opportunity to take part or receive funding. This is despite the fact that the Prime Minister previously stated that there was no threat of the UK leaving the scheme as part of Brexit.
5. The UK Government is proposing a replacement initiative, the Turing Programme, which will operate on a budget of £100 million a year.3 Compared with this, since 2014, £900 million in Erasmus+ funding has been distributed throughout the UK, and the EU has proposed doubling the amount of money given to the scheme for the 2021-2027 period to around £27 billion, bringing more opportunities for more students.4
6. The Scottish Government has estimated that Erasmus+ delivers £7 in value for every £1 of public money spent on the scheme, highlighting the vast benefits.5
7. Not all the countries which take part are members of the EU. The UK could continue its participation despite the fact that we have now left the EU. Indeed, Northern Irish students will still be eligible to participate as the Republic of Ireland has undertaken to pay on their behalf.

Beliefs and motivating actions

1. Erasmus+ has been culturally and intellectually enriching for the University of Edinburgh and its students. Edinburgh students have accrued huge benefits from Erasmus+ exchanges. These

1 https://www.ed.ac.uk/global/exchanges/funding/erasmus-grant
2 https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/stories/the-university-of-edinburgh
3 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-turing-scheme-to-support-thousands-of-students-to-
study-and-work-abroad
4 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47293927
5 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-55466439
range from new friendships, to linguistic skills, to the general broadening of outlook that comes with living in a different country. Leaving the programme constitutes a loss of opportunity and a narrowing of horizons for Edinburgh students.

2. The University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh itself has significantly benefited from the presence on its campus of European students on Erasmus+ exchanges. These students have enriched student life and participated in the local economy.

3. For lower income students, Erasmus+ grants and supplementary grants offered opportunities to study abroad. Leaving the programme means a loss of funding and a loss of opportunity for these students. Therefore, the University should allocate more funding for these students in studying abroad to mitigate the negative impacts of leaving the scheme.

4. The Turing Programme is unlikely to fully replicate the benefits of Erasmus+ given its smaller budget. In any case, the fact that all the infrastructure and funding for Erasmus+ is already in place makes a replacement programme unnecessary. Despite this, if re-joining Erasmus+ does not appear likely, the Students’ Association should lobby for the new programme to replicate the benefits of Erasmus+ as closely as possible.

5. The UK continues to participate in various EU initiatives and programmes after Brexit. There is no reason why we cannot also be part of Erasmus+.

Submitted with 20 student signatures by Patrick Hall on 18th January 2021.

Paper C: Motion to campaign to stop Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs)

What we will do

1. Lobby the University of Edinburgh to commit publicly to not contribute to the development of “killer robots”, also known as lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs).
2. Lobby the University of Edinburgh to establish a clear policy stating that the University will not contribute to the development or production of LAWs systems and include implementation measures for the policy.
3. Lobby the University of Edinburgh to ensure staff and researchers are fully aware of the precise use and implications of the technology they are producing.
4. Consider signing the “Future of Life – Lethal Autonomous Weapons Pledge” and lobby the University of Edinburgh (and its subsequent Schools, Departments and individual academics) to do the same.

Background to this

1. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has rated the University of Edinburgh in its top ten global research institutes in the field of artificial intelligence.¹
2. Through the Alan Turning Institute, The University of Edinburgh has entered into a strategic partnership with GCHQ, the Government Communications Headquarters.
3. GCHQ already has considerable experience in the field of LAWs, in addition to access to large quantities of data through the Ministry of Defence, which is responsible for defence intelligence and information systems.
4. The partnership is “interested in developing data science methodologies and techniques, and in the direct application of data science”, including that of artificial intelligence in LAWs.

¹ https://futureoflife.org/lethal-autonomous-weapons-pledge
5. Additionally, eight universities also work as part of the University Defence Research Collaboration, a £8 million joint venture between the Ministry of Defence and EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council) aimed at using academic research to boost military capabilities. The University of Edinburgh is one of them.

Beliefs and motivating actions

1. Artificial intelligence (AI) is poised to play an increasing role in military systems.
2. We are increasingly concerned about the role the University of Edinburgh holds in researching Lethal Autonomous Weapons.
3. We believe in ethical academic research and believe the University is not upholding its duty to only participate in ethical academic research.
4. There is an urgent opportunity and necessity for citizens, policymakers, and leaders to distinguish between ethical and unethical uses of AI.

Submitted with 20 student signatures by Justine White on 18th January 2021.

Paper D: Motion to support the Student Rent Strike

What we will do

1. Promote Rent Justice Edinburgh’s (RJE) campaign amongst students through the Students’ Association’s social media pages, emails, and website.
2. Facilitate meetings between RJE representatives and University senior management.
3. Coordinate correspondence between the Students’ Association and the University regarding issues with university owned accommodation, with representatives of RJE. This will include but not be limited to discussions of RJE’s rent strike action and their three core demands – to reduce rent by half for the period in which the hybrid learning model operates; to upgrade WiFi connections in halls and improve the online learning platforms we use; and that no student participating in the RJE rent strike will face legal or academic repercussions.
4. Protect the rights of students regardless of any action they choose to participate in under the name Rent Justice Edinburgh. This would include publicly opposing any threats made by the University towards striking students.

Background to this

1. Over the summer, new students had been told to expect a hybrid-learning experience, and were encouraged to move out of their homes and into University-owned halls. Many students have been dissatisfied with their learning and accommodation experience. They are still required to pay the same amount of rent and tuition fees as previous students whose experience was unaffected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. RJE are one of over 55 student groups organising rent strikes in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic due to how poorly UK universities have responded to the crisis. Students at the University of Manchester recently won a massive rent rebate of £12 million.

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8 https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/manchester-university-rent-strike-protests-coronavirus-b1762187.html
3. Last semester, RJE collected some testimonials from students in which many complained about the asynchronous learning; near inedible food delivered to isolating students; a lack of welfare support; poor WiFi; having to buy equipment which would usually be provided; high rent; and feeling misled into taking out leases despite their courses being entirely online.
4. RJE have previously made contact with the Principal, who declined to grant students any rent reduction or rebate, suggesting that other services would be cut back if they did so.
5. The University of Edinburgh has the 3rd biggest endowment in the UK, and made a surplus of £63 million last year.

Beliefs and motivating actions

1. Considering the wealth of the University and their refusal to engage with RJE’s demands, it seems clear that senior management favours profit over the welfare and learning experience of students.
2. Many students and their families will have suffered financially during the pandemic, so a rent reduction is one effective way in which the university can support them through these difficult times.
3. Too often students have been made scapegoats for the rising number of cases, despite the Universities being responsible for this by encouraging students to live in cramped accommodation. It is time for university management to be held accountable for their irresponsible actions.

Submitted with 20 student signatures by Ellis Ludlow on 11th January 2021.

Paper E: Motion to support the complaint letter addressed to Edinburgh College of Art

What we will do

1. Write a letter on behalf of the Students’ Association to the Head of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, declaring support for the Pause or Pay complaint letter.

Background to this

1. The letter in question is part of the nation-wide ‘Pause or Pay UK’ campaign which formed April 2020 in response to the disruption of studio-based learning by the pandemic.
2. Pause or Pay UK calls for Higher Education Institution (HEIs) to: pause all studio-based learners' studies until they can safely resume the course they signed up for, or pay a rebate for loss of teaching, studios, access to facilities, and industry networking opportunities.
3. In July 3, 2020 Pause or Pay UK conducted a National Survey that illustrated that HEIs are not delivering quality education online to studio-based learners. The used the data gathered to present a way the Government can help the institutions support learners on studio-based degrees.

4. To date the letter has gathered over 750 signatures from students across the University, mostly from Edinburgh College of Art.

Beliefs and motivating actions

1. Ensure that the University of Edinburgh continues to provide an uncompromising level of education.

Submitted with 20 student signatures by Elias Vasiloudes Nikolaides on 18th January 2021.

Paper F: Amendment to Motion to support the complaint letter addressed to Edinburgh College of Art

What we will do

1. Write a letter on behalf of the Students’ Association to the Head of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, declaring support for the Pause or Pay complaint letter.

Background to this

1. The letter in question is part of the nation-wide ‘Pause or Pay UK’ campaign which formed April 2020 in response to the disruption of studio-based learning by the pandemic.
2. Pause or Pay UK calls for Higher Education Institution (HEIs) to: pause all studio-based learners’ studies until they can safely resume the course they signed up for; or pay a rebate for loss of teaching, studios, access to facilities, and industry networking opportunities.
3. In July 3, 2020 Pause or Pay UK conducted a National Survey that illustrated that HEIs are not delivering quality education online to studio-based learners; they used the data gathered to present a way the Government can help the institutions support learners on studio-based degrees.
4. Since it was published in December 2020, the letter has gathered over 750 signatures from students across the University, mostly from Edinburgh College of Art, and access to facilities has significantly worsened.
5. On January 22nd, following a University-wide decision, Edinburgh College of Art students were informed that Undergraduates who are not in their final year of study will not have any access to onsite facilities during the second semester, and that Postgraduates and final-year Undergraduates will only gain access if Edinburgh’s lockdown tier is decreased.
6. The developments outlined above have global detrimental impacts on the student body and even more so for students on studio-based programmes.
7. In short, access to resources has further deteriorated than since the letter was conceived, and recoupment looks ever more unlikely.

Beliefs and motivating actions

1. Ensure that the University of Edinburgh continues to provide an uncompromising level of education.
2. The University of Edinburgh cannot provide studio-based education online without proper access to our studios, facilities, workshops, and visiting artists.
3. Learning outcomes on studio-based programmes are not being met despite claims of the contrary by university channels.
4. The Students’ Association’s commitment to prioritising work that matters to students should guarantee the union’s support on this issue.