Student Council Minutes
Thursday 30th January 2020, 6-8pm, Pleasance Upper Hall

1. Accountability

a. Andrew Wilson, President

Q: Martha Reilly, Women’s Officer: What you are you doing regards affordability?

A: This is a complex question as there are many elements to ensuring that Edinburgh is affordable, especially on transport and accommodation. I have been working to ensure that there is affordable housing from the University. Issues around whether the city is affordable is something I hear a lot from students and from The Advice Place. I am working with the university to provide lower band accommodation for students.

Q: Jeremy Pestle: Thanks for shuttle bus work; is it possible to get an update on progress and the University’s response?

A: There has been a limited response and little progress behind the scenes. As an association we have made our position clear and we are looking for the University to make the next move.

Q: Vivek Santayana: Thanks for all the work you are doing. I am one of many students studying here who are from India. Students at home are being murdered by the state - what is the Association’s position on the violence and what is the Association is doing to support students in India?

A: I don’t know a lot about it and I don’t want to make a statement just now, but I’m happy to chat with you about this after.

b. Rosheen Wallace, VP Community

Q: Jeremy Pestle: There are now a number of Terracycle recycling points that take products like crisp packets and lingerie on University – will the Students’ Association consider joining the scheme?

A: We have looked briefly. I would like it to happen especially in locations like the shops. However, there are a set number of types of bins you can get and they are not always all available and it depends what the company has available at the time. I would welcome more ideas on this.

Q: In terms of the Sustainability Report, what is the main ambition behind it?

A: The aim is to kind of work out where we are at just now, what we are doing well already, and what the next steps are in each are, such as in catering, and the bars. It aims to assess this formally each year so that we keep making progress.

c. Oona Miller, VP Welfare

Q: Jeremy Pestle: Regarding the Disability Policy, what input will disabled students get?
A: Thanks, this is an important question. There was representation at the meeting as well as across the University, including the Student Disability Service and the Estates Department, the Information Services Group, and the Disabled Students Officer, Ellen, was present and very involved in the progress. At other institutions frameworks have been informed by disabled students, and this shows best practice, so we will continue to engage.

Q: Vivek Santayana: The lack of acoustics in this room mean it isn’t good for those with anxiety or sensory issues - how can we get better support and infrastructure to improve accessibility?

A: This is a really important point. Elsewhere in my report I’ve highlighted that I’m continuing to work on accessibility progress I will highlight this to the head of estates who will coordinate on this work. I’m happy to work with you more and I hope we can make good progress. Access is about more than lifts and ramps!

d. Stephanie Vallancey, VP Education

Q: Jeremy Pestle: You mentioned the lecture record project, do you know of lecturers who voice opposition? On my first day this had a lecturer say they weren’t going to record their lectures.

A: There is currently an opt out policy, and the policy requests that lecturers explain to students the reasoning behind the decision not to record lectures. We need data on numbers in schools. We are pushing for more uptake and research, and I am on board with looking into more research.

Q: Rebecca: I wanted to know how to tell students I represent what happened in that meeting other than the minutes of the meeting?

A: This is a challenge of communication. I have been working on it in lots of ways, such as through emails of programme reps in schools and Facebook groups. I echo that it is a struggle and I am working on a solution.

Q: Rosie Taylor, LGBT+ Officer: This is a question about microphones. A lot of lecturers and seminar leaders don’t use microphones in small rooms, which goes against our accessibility guidelines. How can we encourage students to challenge this?

A: They definitely should be doing it and we should make sure people know it is their right. I would welcome thoughts on how we can do it.

A: Oona Miller, VP Welfare: I recently learnt how you can report it. Every school has named contact for disabled students to access, but it is poorly advertised but you can find more information on disabled students’ Facebook page.

e. Beth Fellows, VP Activities & Services

Q: Jeremy Pestle: I’m looking to get information on given that some activities representative positions have been unfilled all year, how are you working to plug this gap and interact societies who don’t have a representative?

A: Yes, I’m aware of this problem. I have been doing work to contact societies and encourage people to run to be representatives next year. We’ve had posts filled this year that weren’t filled last year but there is still a gap. I will keep contacting students and societies to ask them
to run, and highlight benefits for them in terms of personal development, as well as the benefits for their societies.

Q: Vivek Santayana: What are you doing in terms of supporting students from modest means in their membership of societies and sports clubs? It is often really expensive as you have to buy a gym membership as well as the club membership. How can they participate?

A: There is a participation grant which has criteria (you have to have a scholarship or bursary) and I am looking into streamlining these funds. The Students’ Association and Sports Union are working together on this.

2. Motions

a. Motion for free bus passes for disabled students

Speech for from Iona Douglas on behalf of proposer, Ellen Blunsdon:
According to the disability charity, Scope, being disabled costs on average £500 per month. This is an option which asks for support from the University. They have proposed discounted bus passes for all students, but this is not enough for disabled students. The council can provide some free bus passes but they require proof of disability, which many students don’t have. For example, our Disabled Students’ Officer, Ellen, wasn’t deemed disabled enough to qualify for a bus pass. I really urge you to vote for this motion!

Questions
Q: Oona Miller, VP Welfare: I appreciate this isn’t your motion, but I’m trying to understand as the person who will adopt responsibility for implementation of this motion, why is this aimed at the university rather than the council or Transport Scotland?

A: Thanks for your question. In large, the motion is written this way because the process through the council isn’t good enough – it’s designed to make money for the council and excludes disabled people.

Speech against: no appetite

Summation from proposer
There is scope within the disability service and staff for this to go ahead so we would very much like for you to vote for this!

b. Motion to cease the sale of beef in Students’ Association cafes and restaurants

Speech for from proposer, Elena Silverstein:
The facts are clear: the climate crisis already killing the most vulnerable. It will affect everyone. Agriculture is responsible for over half of emissions. Forests are being cleared to make room for livestock farming. This motion is not about stopping people from selling beef in Edinburgh, but it is about reducing the University’s greenhouse gas emissions and showing that we can
eat less meat, there are options available. It’s about the values of the University. It’s not just about who we want to be but about who we are now.

c. Amendment to the motion to cease the sale of beef in Students’ Association cafes and restaurants

Speech for from proposer, Andrew Wilson:
I’ve submitted this in capacity as your President. It doesn’t take a position on the issue but calls for good and effective policymaking as an Association when we are taking big action. I want to make sure students are informed about the potential positive impacts of the motion, and about the potential negative financial implications, which the feasibility study will be able to find. This motion will impact on all students so everyone should have a say, not just those who are here tonight. My amendment also calls for the promotion of Meat Free Mondays and a continued commitment to our local food policy, which ensures all meat is sourced from 30 miles away or less.

Questions

Q: Mikey Ferguson, History, Classics & Archaeology Undergraduate School Representative: Would this mean we would be doing feasibility study and a referendum before the motion was implemented? Or does it mean that if it was feasible and voted on we might do it?

A: If the amendment were to pass, I would sit down with motion proposer and discuss next steps. It would be reasonable for proposer to take further action for their cause with confidence that all the information will be available to all students. It will affect every single student so all students must have their say. All students have a perspective on the issue and all students should have their say.

Q: Catherine: I wanted to ask who will be involved in the study as the issue affects everyone?

Q: Gethin Binns, Law Undergraduate School Representative: The text of the amendment is rather vague on whether we are committing to a referendum. Do you personally support one and will you voice that at the meeting?

A: The decision should be done in a representative way and a referendum of all students is a good way of doing that.

Speech against, Vivek Santayana:
The beef ban is not the solidarity with India I was asking for. Regards, deciding on our own policy about what to serve in the café, there never as much debate on whether or not to have potato wedges. Surely the association and kitchen can decide for themselves without so much input from us. The amendment defeats the point of motion so it isn’t worth passing.

Summation from proposer, Andrew Wilson:
If this motion passes as amended student council will be indicating through a feasibility study that we consider the implications of this. We all agree we should take decisions like this
seriously and take a fully informed and representative approach for effective and representative policymaking.

d. Motion to cease the sale of beef in Students’ Association cafes and restaurants, as amended

Speech for, Gethin Binns:
I believe this motion is muted substantially by the amendment, but I still think we should vote for it. There’s great deal of passion so it would be a shame not to have more study put into it. If you don’t like the policy that’s not a good enough reason to vote against it. In the name of greater information and representation, you should vote for it. I am frustrated by the lack of commitment to a referendum – I would support one.

Questions

Q: Catherine: I know you are not denying people the choice to eat beef, but how do you justify taking away the choice of the people to buy beef on campus?

A: We aren’t denying anyone from eating beef you can buy it from a supermarket or restaurant, which is very easy as we are not campus university. This is a university based issue about greenhouse gas emissions.

Q: Nirvana Leaver, Veterinary Studies Undergraduate School Representative: Where are your references sourced from? You say that beef has a widespread impact, but what relevance does this have given that you said you aren’t stopping people from eating beef?

A: All the references are in the motion we submitted. They are all scientifically backed and undisputed.

Q: I understand that the motion as amended isn’t the one you wanted to pass, so I wondered what your thoughts on the policy as amended are? Is it something you’re comfortable with? It’s a trivial issue which some take more seriously than others. A feasibility study would be worth it. What are your thoughts on the motion as amended?

A: Cambridge has already banned beef and lamb, and shown the feasibility of doing this. They saw a 10% reduction in carbon emission as a result. In 2009, the livestock industry was responsible for 37% of all methane emissions, 65% of nitrous oxide emissions and 9% of CO2. This is only getting worse. According to the BBC, if everyone became vegetarian by 2050, there would be 7 million fewer deaths each year. Plant-based diets can reduce the land we use for agriculture by 76% according to George Monbiot, a columnist at The Guardian and British environmentalist. The amendment is slowing things down to be honest, and delaying is to deny good. The feasibility study sounds good but will delay progress, and the climate crisis is about time so we shouldn’t slow things down. On inclusivity, even in a referendum not all students will vote, maybe 80% won’t vote. Regardless I still think you should support the
motion as amended for sake of any progress that we can make.

Speech against, Harry Fletcher:
We don’t need a referendum because every day there is referendum on if people want meat because people buy meat. People buy it so they clearly don’t want it banned. Why should Student Council tell people what they want when they vote with their money? Regardless of the environmental impact, people buy meat. It is arrogant of this room to decide on behalf of everyone. The university should be supporting local business by buying local beef, which is grass-fed in way that helps the land. If people are buying the beef then they don’t want it banned.

Speech for, Martha Reilly, Women’s Officer:
I’m speaking for the motion because the ‘against’ side has a lot of representation tonight and we should try to have a balanced argument. The climate crisis is real and we know that at least beef consumption needs reduced. The local food argument doesn’t offset the water used by beef. This probably won’t make huge difference, but we should be respectful of people who want this to pass.

Speech against:
There is mention in amendment that the university will replace beef with meat free products. These are usually made of soya and soya is not grown in UK, so we will have to ship products from southern America, which emits gases during transportation and deforestation in the production of the soya. This motion will increase greenhouse gas emissions.

Summation from proposer
85% of soya produced goes to animal feed, not humans so if you’re concerned you should be all the more in favour of the beef ban. Grass-fed cattle take up more room than industrial cattle so even though it’s better for the cattle it’s worse for environment. Our petition has 530 signatures in support of the motion, showing that there is widespread support for it, so it is not arrogant of the people in the room. People can still eat beef if they want to. At the moment the veggie options are not great, but they could be improved with the banning of beef. It’s not just about tastes really good, but about improving the environment and saving humanity.

e. Motion for Ecosia

Speech for from proposer, Lucie Scharre:
I study astrophysics, and started a campaign for implementing Ecosia as the default search engine on campus. It was inspired by climate crisis which many peers like myself are concerned about. Ecosia is carbon negative. It is a search engine similar to Google which generates ad revenue and uses that money to plants trees. It is financially transparent, has sustainable principles, good data security, and tracking can be turned off. Planting trees is one of proposed solutions to the climate crisis. We need to be carbon negative if we are to solve this crisis. So, we ask for support from the Students’ Association and staff in continuing our campaign.
Questions

Q: Rebecca Rees, Geosciences Undergraduate School Representative: Last year or two years ago there was a search engine running automatically on campus computers, something to do with planting trees – is it the same one?

A: There was Easysearch, a search engine where you could pick different charities to support. I believe students picked a different charity each year, but no one was using it because you can change the default browser settings. It’s quite different from other search engines and so it was not used a lot.

Q: Kingsley Johns: I have a question on security - why is Ecosia better than Google and other search engines?

A: I’m not exactly sure if it’s better. To my knowledge it’s better, but that’s not really the point we are trying to make. The motion is not trying to improve security. But Ecosia certainly isn’t worse than other search engines.

Q: Jeremy Pestle: This is a purely procedural question for the benefit of those who don’t have an agenda in front of them. To flesh it out could you give us details of route you’d take to get Ecosia implemented as search engine on university computer? What is the timescale?

A: There are different routes I could take. I have already presented this to the sustainable IT group and it was suggested that this could be implemented after September for either all students or first years so that people can decide whether to use it or something else.

Speech against, Daniel Mutia, International Students’ Representative:
I think this motion is great and environmental action is amazing, but I am concerned about the ability of students to decide on their search engine based on not just one issue like the environment. It is also about reliability and we shouldn’t ignore other factors. I don’t know about the quality of this browser. I don’t know if we should pass laws that promote some businesses over others, I don’t think that’s our part. These decisions are supposed to be based on tough criteria.

Summation from proposer
There are other universities already using Ecosia and its working great for them. If you use any other search engine you could say the University are promoting them and Google are not the most ethical so Ecosia is a better choice. We would be planting thousands of trees per year. It’s an easy switch to make, and students can easily change the default search engine back to something else they prefer if they don’t like it.

f. Motion for library help desk

Speech for from proposer, Alexandra Taylor:
I wouldn’t want anyone to wake up earlier than necessary, but I’m asking for the Library Helpdesk to open 30 minutes before classes start to support access and to make people’s lives easier. It would be better for people stressed about classes and who need to sort something before classes start. Whenever I’ve been into the library before 9am, there have always been others there, so it would really help.
Questions

Q: Jeremy Pestle: Your motion does not include opening the help desk at the other libraries which have identical opening times to the Main Library. Would you advocate for those to open early too?

A: I wasn’t aware that other libraries had the same opening times as the Main Library, but, yes, that would be a good idea.

Q: Vivek Santayana: Have you asked the unions representing the library staff to consider the conditions for those who would be working at that time?

A: I recognise that it’s a pain for staff to start earlier as they are often already running around before the helpdesk opens at 9am. We initially wanted an 8:45am start, but we asked for 8:30am to give the Sabbatical Officers leeway to negotiate. Even one member of staff would help as not that many need help, but a few people do.

Q: Rosheen Wallace, VP Welfare: Would the proposer accept an earlier close time in exchange for an earlier opening time?

A: Potentially yes, it would be an acceptable compromise.

Speech against: no appetite

Summation from proposer

Basically, there are issues which need to be solved before class and even one member of staff would help improve access and the overall student experience.

g. Motion for support for menstrual products bill

Speech for from proposer, Martha Reilly, Women’s Officer:

Period products have been available for students since September 2019, and I had the pleasure of welcoming those behind the Bill and congratulating them on their success. The feedback universally is that we have benefitted from the scheme. There is now a Bill in committee stages to make access to menstrual products universal and enshrined as a statutory right. The Scottish Parliament is currently saying that it is not supportive of the Bill. In my position at Sanitree and as Women’s Liberation Officer, we have been campaigning and the Students’ Association should support the campaign too - we have benefited from free menstrual products and others will too.

Questions

Q: How will the Students’ Association support the campaign? What will we do to help?

A: For the benefit of those who don’t have the motion in front of them, it says we will be: supporting the campaign to back the bill and raise awareness among the university by:

a. Signing the petition in support of universal access.

b. Supporting the poster campaign through the use of Student’s Association spaces.

c. Issuing a public statement in support of the campaign.

d. Including the campaign and petition in the Student’s Association newsletter.

Speech against: no appetite
Summation from proposer, Martha Rielly, Women’s Officer:
Just one more point that I forgot to mention: students need to access menstrual products elsewhere as well as on campus, so it affects us as students as well as in terms of our moral consciousness.

3. NUS Motion Development, Andrew Wilson

The National Union of Students, often referred to as NUS, represents students at the national level (in the same way the Students’ Association represents students at Edinburgh). As a member of NUS, the Students’ Association has access to NUS’ democratic processes, as well as a range of services. NUS is member-led, and each year they hold national conferences where members can hold them to account and shape their organizational direction for the year ahead. In our annual elections, Edinburgh’s 40,000 students elect delegates to represent them at the national conferences.

As a member of NUS, the Students’ Association can take one motion to each conference (NUS UK and NUS Scotland). If we decide to submit a motion to either conference, it should represent the interests of our members but also reflect the concerns of students nationally. Last week, your NUS delegates met to discuss potential policy ideas which you can see on the screen now. As we can only send one motion to each conference, we need you to let us know which motion ideas you think we should prioritise. If you have any thoughts, you can get in touch with me by emailing president@eusa.ed.ac.uk.

4. Any other business

Rosie Taylor, LGBT+ Officer: It’s now February, which is LGBT History Month. There are events going on all month, with proviso of focussing on marginalised voices:
- Monday: showing of ‘Rafiki; the movie in Appleton Tower – 7pm
- Tuesday: NUS UK are to talk about GRA consultation and are down to support trans and non-binary students
- Come along and support our Facebook page!

Meyra Coban, BME Officer: The elections are coming up I am offering drop-ins for anyone BME considering standing. There are details on the Liberation Facebook page and in the Students’ Association calendar. You can pop to ask a questions and talk about the challenges of standing in student politics, no matter what role you’re standing for.

Vivek Santayana: In the staff student solidarity movement, you may know that negotiation following the strikes is ongoing and there’s voting on issues today on. There are ongoing campaigns on the issues of the strike, and on Tuesday the 4th of February at 5pm we have an opportunity for people to find out how they can get involved

Martha Reilly, Women’s Officer: Relating to the period products campaign at 5pm in David Hume Tower on Tuesday there is an open campaign meeting, so come along and get involved!

Andrew Wilson, President: Next week is National Student Money week and we are looking at addressing the cost of living. We will be across campuses gathering your ideas on how we can address the cost of living and on national student funding. It’s great to hear your ideas so get in touch!