Student Council

Thursday 24th September 2020, 6-8pm, Microsoft Teams

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Agenda

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  2.  Sabbatical Officer Accountability
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  3.  Accessibility Break
  4.  Motions:
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Paper A: Sabbatical Officer Accountability
Report from Ellen MacRae, President

A lot of my time so far has been spent with the ‘Adaptation and Renewal’ teams (ART) within the University which focus on the student experience in light of COVID19. Your Sabbatical Officers are well placed amongst these groups and I also sit on two of the four senior groups: Students ART and Estates & Digital Infrastructure ART. Here, I have been able to represent students and communicate their concerns, many of which still align with the three themes of my manifesto:

Accessibility

- Amanda (VP Community) and I have been in close contact with the Accomodation, Catering and Events (ACE) team to ensure students, particularly international students, were supported in University Accommodation over summer as well as ACE’s preparing to welcome new students this semester.
- With ‘Transport for Lothian’s own challenges and reduced capacity, transport to all of our campuses has been a key concern of mine. Amanda and I have been involved in a ‘Transport and Travel’ working group in which we have discussed the transport provisions for all students.

Change

- To create a greater focus on wellbeing during transition periods, such as the start of the new semester, I am currently working on – with assistance from The Advice Place – a ‘Working from my Bedroom’ campaign.
- I have met with staff from the ResLife team to better understand their training and discuss how the Students’ Association can support our Resident Assistants as students.

Transparency

- Within various meetings with college deans and University groups I have stressed the importance of closing feedback loops to students. I will continue to look into how we can improve communication pathways between students and the University.
- I am also organizing a Town Hall style event (Wednesday 14th October) to have an open discussion with students around how COVID19 has impacted their semester.

In my accountability report, I also wish to include just some of the ways in which your Sabbatical Officers have looked to support the Black Lives Matter movement:

- From the start of our time in Office, the Sabbatical Officers have been in conversation with our BME Liberation Officer, Ayanda Ngobeni, and members of BlackED. Niamh (VP Welfare) and I also met with members of the Model African Union.
- As a team, we chose to openly support the student-created petition calling to rename David Hume Tower. I was able to represent the students calling of this change during University Executive, which is the most senior managerial body within the University, that made the decision to rename the tower. Following this we are still in discussion with James Smith (Vice Principal International) and the University on it’s next steps on tackling the racial inequalities.
This academic year and time in Office will be unlike any other. Whilst it was written in a very COVID19-free context, I am still confident that I will be able to work towards my manifesto’s aims and values. I look forward to creating more positive change this year together, with the Sabbatical Team and Edinburgh students. Please feel free to get in touch with me at any point throughout the year, I will look to support you in any way I can!

Report from Rachel Irwin, Vice President Activities and Services

General Update

I have been in regular conversation with the Student Opportunities Team, and particularly the Societies Team, to deliver a Welcome Week that is not only exciting and engaging, but safe for all. With the constantly changing government guidelines, it has been a very challenging time, but I am proud of how well we have adapted necessarily, and I hope we have been able to provide our student groups with an offering that they are happy with, and support our student leaders sufficiently in spite of the circumstances and various limitations placed on us by Covid-19.

In terms of my work with the University, I sit on a couple of Adaptation & Renewal Committees, focusing on study spaces and social spaces. Due to the need for social distancing, we found that many of the study and social spaces across our campuses were facing a massively reduced capacity – something that needed to be addressed quickly and innovatively. I am happy that this has been a major focus of the university and hopeful that these new spaces will be not only used but enjoyed by our students.

Connectivity

My aim of achieving a greater sense of community amongst our students is now more important than ever, since many will not be physically on campus. Ensuring all Student-Staff Liaison Committees invite relevant societies is something myself and Fizzy have been working on. A proposal to amend the membership regulations to reflect this was submitted by Fizzy to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee on my behalf, and we are looking forward to seeing how this progresses. In addition, I am looking forward to attending the various welcome/induction sessions for our underrepresented groups that we are hosting over the coming weeks, and excited to provide more opportunities like these throughout the year for these students to attend.

Accessibility

I am thrilled that the university-wide study space finder app has been launched – this has become all the more necessary now that study spaces are scarcer. I’m hopeful the app will be a great success, enabling students to not only locate study spaces and view live occupancy levels, but also book these spaces in advance as well as access information on public transport routes, accessibility, and nearby food and drink. As part of the Societies Review that myself and the Societies Team are undertaking, I will look at the current room booking system and booking charges, as well as the creation of both Participation and Wellbeing/Welfare Officers on society committees, to ensure they are safe and inclusive places for all.

Sustainability
I have been working very closely with Amanda on our Good Foods campaign alongside our Trading Operations team and our colleagues at Accommodation, Catering & Events. Soon Amanda and I will both sit on a working group dedicated to ensuring that the Students’ Association is promoting sustainable practices in all that we do. Furthermore, I am very pleased to have collaborated with the University Chaplaincy in promoting their mindfulness workshops, which they successfully moved online over the summer and into semester 1. They have a fantastic offering that I am proud to be endorsing, particularly in times like these where our students may be facing significant tolls on their mental health and have limited access to in person help.

Feel free to ask me any questions or email me at vpactivities@eusa.ed.ac.uk any time!

Report from Amanda Scully, Vice President Community

It has admittedly been a strange start to this Sabbatical Team but amidst the covid-19 associated meetings I have been finding time to focus and work on my three objectives for the year. These are getting students engaged with their local community, supporting students on their sustainability journeys, and building a university community and sense that Edinburgh is students’ home.

Local Community Engagement

- I’ve been working on getting a Local Business Directory published through the Students’ Association that will offer students an opportunity to discover local and small business around the city and get exclusive student discounts.
- I’ve regularly attended the university's Community Engagement Programme Board, offering a student perspective and developing ways in which we can get a wider array of students’ involved in voluntary work and more connected to the local community.
- Next steps: Launching various exciting community-related projects and working towards having a policy in place that has all Students’ Association vouchers paired in local shops instead of Amazon.

Sustainability

- I’ve sat on the Social Responsibility and Sustainability Committee and the Sustainability Strategy Advisory Group within the university, and countless other sustainability-related working groups alongside the SRS department (highlight being a Hedgehog Friendly Campus working group). In these spaces I have stressed the importance of student engagement in sustainability issues and the need to continue to address the climate emergency while we adapt to our new hybrid model.
- Working alongside Rachel to start promoting sustainable food choices within our venues and have helped the university revamp their Good Food Policy for the upcoming year.
- Next steps: Working towards relaunching a virtual Green Hub to connect green student societies and environmental student activists and helping to incorporate tackling the climate emergency into our long-term strategy at the Students’ Association.

Making Edinburgh a home for all

- Have had discussions with Living Rent to discuss ways in which we can organise and mobilise students’ to engage with housing action
• Picking up some of Rosheen’s last year by working on improving the University Guarantor scheme, which has already made some positive small improvements, and launching a website that can help students’ find rooms in private flats or halls and connect with other students to find flatmates during the year.

• Next steps: Starting an online campaign promoting students’ tenancy rights

Alongside these objectives I have been sitting on two working groups for the University’s Adaption and Renewal strategy. The first a Transport Short-life Working Group, in which Ellen and myself have consistently defended the Shuttle Bus and have pushed for more accessible and affordable forms of transport across our campuses. And the second, a Social Spaces Working Group, in which Rachel, Ellen and I have been helping to oversee the development of new student villages. Overall, I’m really keen to hear from students’ on all things related to sustainability, housing and community engagement so please reach out, I would love to chat and hear your ideas!

Report from Fizzy Abou Jawad, Vice President Education

Since taking up this role at the end of May, the majority of my time has been filled by sitting on various committees and working groups within The University. Many of these committees are subgroups of The University’s Adaptation and Renewal Team which aims to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic whilst encouraging positive change in The University. I have ensured that my priorities remain a focus even within these groups and have made the following progress:

Improving teaching and feedback

• Had discussions on how we can bring more awareness to the role of School Representatives and streamline the means by which School and Programme reps will communicate in the coming year, thus improving student to staff feedback through existing mechanisms.
• Approved adjusted guidance in SQAC that will ensure SSLCs are open to additional student representatives, such as PALS volunteers and academic societies.
• Next Steps: I will be working with the three colleges to share best practice regarding student representation and will be involved in the curriculum review later in the semester conducted by our Vice Principal Students – Colm Harmon

Academic student support

• Approved and offered recommendations on a new set of guiding principles for personal tutors and student support. The principles aim to offer guidance to PTs on how support for students may need to be adjusted in the current crisis.
• Did some work on the ‘How to find your academic community’ session for welcome week
• Next Steps: The PTSS review that was supposed to be implemented this year has been put on hold, though conversations around the new model will continue later this Autumn and myself and VP Welfare, Niamh will be involved in these conversations

Inclusive and accessible learning experience

• I sit on The Delivering Curriculum subgroup of The University’s Adaptation and Renewal team and have been involved in writing guidance on exams and assessments for semester 1, guidance will encourage the use of alternative assessment
• I sit on a study spaces subgroup The University’s Adaptation and Renewal team with VP Activities & Services, Rachel. We have been ensuring the proposed guiding principles for study spaces in the coming year is inclusive for all students

• Next Steps: Start The Student’s Association broader work on tackling the BME attainment gap by initiating conversations with key contacts from The University

Other

• Throughout the summer I have met key staff contacts at all of the colleges and highlighting my priorities for the year and identifying areas these contacts may be able to support
  • I’ve presented my priorities at Senatus Quality Assurance Committee and Senate Education Committee to identify areas were members of these committees can provide support in achieving these priorities

If you’d like to find out more about what I am doing or have any ideas, suggestions or concerns please email me at VPEducation@eusa.ed.ac.uk

Report from Niamh McCrossan, Vice President Welfare

Since the end of May, I have been working on increasing fairness within student’s university experiences. With an increased timetable filled with COVID committees and taskforces, there is adaption and renewal happening within the university that I have been able to influence, focusing on the following three themes:

Making Edinburgh equal, diverse, and inclusive

• Contributed in developing an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) hub for all students and staff. This comes in two processes; we have created a ‘minimal viable product’ for September 2020 and will continue to expand this to create a resource hub with training for 2021. This includes resources on privilege, intersectionality, and microaggressions.
• Secured funding for updating and further developing our BME welcome guide. This was a student led project, and all contributors were remunerated.
• Next steps: The EDI hub work above stemmed from my aim to create consent training; I hope that gender-based violence will be a component of this. Additionally, I am working on collating existing policies in order to make the procedure of reporting an incident of sexual violence or harassment more transparent and accessible.

Facilitating healthy lifestyles

• Attended various University committees working on areas such as: the new special circumstances and extensions system, COVID19 impacts on mental health, and training for staff who provide student support.
• #LetsTalk: Mental Health and Wellbeing 2020 has now been expanded to cover three weeks, 9th November-27th November. This year we will focus on COVID19 related issues around loneliness and isolation, the importance of culturally competent care, and how to help a friend without compromising your own mental health. Students will also be invited to apply for funding to host events in line with our objectives for the initiative.
• Next steps: increase the conversation of mental health and wellbeing to extend beyond the three weeks allocated to #LetsTalk:MHWB2020
Alleviating financial worries

• Led on two of the Students’ Association’s ‘How To’ sessions for incoming students; how to access support at university, and how to manage your money and live well for less.
• Participated in the Widening Participation department’s introductory sessions for estranged students, as well as ‘Moving On’ events for incoming students transitioning from high school.
• Next steps: work with the Widening Participation department to address issues faced by estranged students, particularly around finances and housing.

Other

• Working on delivering the Student Council motion on creating a mural for women of colour by women of colour. I have secured funding, a space for the mural, and appropriate students have been identified to lead a workshop to aid the design process. The workshop to design the mural will take place on 9th October.

Motions

Paper B: Mock Motion: Improve University support for student parents

What we will do:

Mandate EUSA, through Sabbatical Officers, to lobby the University to:

1. Adopt a uniform, consistent and supportive approach to the provision of child friendly facilities across all 22 schools. This includes, baby changing facilities, a room that can be designated for breast feeding, breast milk storage and heating facilities and alternative child friendly study space to the library.
2. Provide an effective point of contact for student parents, either within schools or centrally within the University to address problems and provide more effective support.
3. Provide genuinely affordable childcare and part-time/flexible hours at Arcadia Nursery, with priority for Edinburgh University Students and Staff.
4. Allow student parents to use the library as normal students, without restricting their entry to 30 minutes.
5. Allow Edinburgh University students AND their partner to access to the King’s Shuttle to take the child to Arcadia Nursery.
6. Register, in the strongest terms possible, student parent’s dissatisfaction with the lack of help and support given to them by the University.

Background to this:

1. Student parents are consistently passed around various members of University staff because there is a complete lack of coordination and coherence in their approach to student parenting.
2. Current library policy dictates that student parents and their children are only allowed to be in the library for 30 minutes.
3. Relocating Arcadia Nursery from the Central campus to Kings Buildings incurred increased transport costs for some student parents.
Beliefs and motivating actions:

1. The Vet School provides excellent child friendly spaces for baby changing, breast feeding and to store and heat breast milk. This should be provided by all schools; no student should face greater difficulties because of the subject they are studying.

This policy was passed by Student Council in February 2016.

Paper C: Expenditure request: SE7EN Magazine Website

Total amount of funding requested:

£150

Background to this:

1. There are no dedicated women’s magazines on campus at The University of Edinburgh, where 61.4% of students identify as women.
2. We have created Se7en Magazine to fill this space and to represent women.
3. Funding from Student Council would allow us to publicize the magazine, as well as publish online on a website.

Beliefs and motivating actions:

1. We have created Se7en Magazine to represent women across the University of Edinburgh.
2. Our aim is to highlight various aspects of the women’s experience across all areas of the university, and to foster an inclusive and diverse atmosphere to share opinions, ideas, and creativity.
3. We have already begun to establish an online presence on social media, and hope to achieve a lasting impact through the creation of a website, which will allow us to publish the magazine online, and to showcase writing, poetry and art from contributors throughout the university.
4. We are looking forward to continuing to grow this project, and be able to represent the huge community of students, staff and alumni at the University who identify as women.

Expenditure Request:

1. Domain name registration and web hosting (including VAT) - £100 per annum
2. Marketing materials including printing flyers - £50

Submitted by Eleanor Rushforth in September 2020.

Paper D: Lapsing Policy

This document lists the policies which are due to lapse in the 2020-2021 academic year. The Students’ Association’s Democracy Regulations state that policies shall be deemed to have lapsed after 4 years unless they are readopted by Student Council, or they are subsequently replaced, overturned or
amended. If any student wants to uphold any of these policies, they must be submitted as a new motion the usual way by using the online form, where they will be debated in Student Council. If any motion is not resubmitted, it will automatically lapse.

You can find a document with all the policies due to lapse this year [here](#).