

# Students' Association 2018 End of Year Report



# Foreword from the President

Coming to the end of my tenure as President, I have the great pleasure of presenting my last End of Year Report to the Board.

My second and final year of office has seen the support for ECSA grow stronger than ever and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board for the support and guidance they have shown to help ECSA achieve all that it has done over the last two years. Long may it continue.



The continued efforts of ECSA to enhance the learning experience for all students hasn't gone unnoticed this year. With the further development of the class rep system, our best year of recruitment, and the introduction of the new Education Committee, there was no surprise when we learned of being short-listed for the NUS Scotland's Education Award 2018. What did come as a surprise, was when we picked up the award on the night, fending off strong competition from all of Scotland's college and universities. On the same evening, we did the unthinkable, and successfully regained our deserved title as NUS Scotland's College Students' Association of the Year.

Picking up Awards and being recognised for hard work is only possible with continued support and partnership working between ECSA and the College and a testament to how much impact a real partnership can have. With the development of the College's Strategic Blueprint, and with the success of ECSA leading on a Business Transformational Plan project around retention, it was excellent to see the college further include ECSA in its work towards achieving the Strategic goals set in the blueprint. Hopefully, ECSA, in the coming years, can make an even bigger impact on the lives of those who pass through our campuses and beyond, improving the Student Experience through this project and our annual cycle of activities.

I would like to wish everyone a well-deserved summer break and look forward to watching the new officer team from the side-lines who are destined to achieve great things in the coming year.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'NBL'.

Neal Black  
President 2016-18



## #1: We're on top of the country - again!

- College Students' Association of the Year
- NUS Scotland Education Award
- LGBT Youth Charter Mark

## #2: Highlighting ECSA-llent practice

- Highest amount of nominations from students, most staff nominated
- Recognised as the most effective college Learning & Teaching awards

## #3: Gaining Climate Challenge Funding

- Gained £178,000 funding for two full-time and four student staff
- Supporting retention by overcoming barriers in getting to college

## #4: Class Reps taking the lead

- Class Rep meetings now based around the student lifecycle
- Reps are identifying issues and leading on workshops themselves

## #5: Healthier Bodies, Healthier Minds

- On course to upgrade to a three-star rating this year
- Students engaging in sharing their experiences of mental ill-health

## #6: Building the Education Committee

- Around 50 students from all campuses are driving our work forward
- They provide data for Academic Council and devise student training

## #7: Self-evaluation days' engagement

- Devised and ran training for Class Reps to better engage in self-eval
- Students identified key areas for improvement across the college

## #8: Supporting student mental health

- Ran workshops in partnership with student support around anxiety
- Set up partnership with Nightline to support students at all hours

## #9: Establishing LGBT groups on campus

- LGBT Groups established on all campuses, with online forum
- Working on improving our LGBT Youth Charter Mark rating

## #10: Paid opportunities for students

- Worked with Quality to recruit students for the Destination Survey
- Currently recruiting a new team of Student Engagement Assistants

# #1: We're on top of the country - again!

For the first time in the award's history, we were again named College Students' Association of the Year at the NUS Scotland Awards for the second year in a row. At the ceremony, we were also grateful winners of the Education Award for our work on retention and improving the learning experience, beating off tough competition from other colleges and universities.

This February, we were pleased to receive the Bronze LGBT Youth Charter Mark for our work on ensuring the Students' Association is a welcoming and supportive place for LGBT people. This coming year, we look forward to working to improve our rating and ensuring Edinburgh College is the place that LGBT people want to study, building on our work of supporting LGBT groups across the campuses.



In addition, our President-elect, Sarah Hay, has been shortlisted for the Herald Higher Education Awards' Student of the Year for her work in overcoming barriers to education, leading on improving student mental health, and making the college a better place for students. As well as Sarah's shortlisting, the rest of this year's team were glad to be shortlisted for Team of the Year at the college's Star Awards. We await the results of both awards.

# #2: Highlighting ECSA-llent practice

This year marked the third time we've ran our ECSA-llence Awards, which give students a voice in paying thanks to the staff members and class reps who've made an impact upon their education. The student-led teaching awards had gained more nominations than ever before, with even more members of staff nominated.

Our work has gained us widespread recognition throughout the sector, with student representatives from four other colleges in attendance as well as representatives from NUS Scotland and sparqs, spreading the news of the good work that Edinburgh College does. Throughout the sector, we're recognised as running the most effective college learning and teaching awards, with the best engagement, and the only ones that are fully student-led from nominations, shortlisting panel, and even to giving the awards out!



## #3: Gaining Climate Challenge Funding

Working with the College Development Trust and the college's Sustainability team, we were successful in our bid for £178,000 from the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund to run a programme of work to help drive behavioural change in how students travel to and from college. As the first college to bid successfully, we will be employing two full-time active travel officers to help students to make more sustainable and healthier travel choices. As of writing, the officers have been recruited and we eagerly await them starting in the team!

Four part-time student positions have also been created, supporting the full-time staff to lead student activities on each of the campuses, which ensures that activities are student-focussed and relevant to the target groups. The student retention project highlighted travel to college as a key barrier to students staying on to pass their course - we hope that with this expertise coming into the team, we'll be able to help even more students stay on course.



## #4: Class Reps taking the lead

As part of our iterative approach to improving course representation and student involvement in college processes, this year's rounds of Class Rep conferences were themed around the different stages of the student lifecycle. This meant that from our first meeting, we were able to gather good quality data that allowed us to make evidence-based representations on behalf of students. That first round of meetings gave us the indication to clear issues in relation to student funding, which led to a college review of the funding process.

Class Reps also identified student mental health as a massive issue, so we supported volunteers to develop and lead workshops for students and staff, which resulted in two of those volunteers successfully standing for election. This work also became a key driver of the creation of the college student counselling service, due to begin next academic year. Keen to develop class reps' skills in reflection on practice, our last round of conferences were based around improvement & progression, even in the knowledge that the changes wouldn't directly benefit them.



## #5: Healthier Bodies, Healthier Minds

We have, again, been involved in the Healthy Body, Healthy Mind project, in conjunction with NUS Scotland and Scottish Student Sport this year, aiming to improve on our initial two-star rating to three or hopefully four stars based on the programme of work we've delivered throughout the year.

This has included delivering workshops to college staff and students, presenting to other institutions, and attending key sector events. The Vice-Presidents have worked closely with college staff from sustainability, facilities & student services to continue to create more chances for students to lead healthier lives.



The two most student-facing pieces of work undertaken was the 'Stories of Recovery' in which VP Welfare worked with a group of students to share their experiences of Mental Health and how they have come through it and survived, it has been a positive experience and was excellent to see students being so open about such a difficult subject.

The second project, wellbeing packs, were handmade goodie bags given to students from ECSA to give advice on taking care of themselves, and also included stress balls, a hot drink, sweets & information on HBHM. Finally, a student tips leaflet suggested ways to deal with poor mental health, written by other students.

Both of these student facing projects have been positively received by students, with the VP Welfare and VP Sports & Activities having given out over 1000 wellbeing packs across the four campuses.

## #6: Building the Education Committee

We had a membership of about 50 students in the group, from across the 4 campuses, contributing to our feedback to Academic Council, and designing the training for Class Reps to participate in the course team self-evaluation days.

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The Education Committee is a key part of our succession planning, helping to develop student capacity to understand and engage in the college's quality processes. Of the four candidates for President (with whom the Education remit sits), three were members of the committee.

## #7: Self-evaluation days' engagement

Early on in our annual planning, we identified the importance of building Class Rep capacity to engage in course team self-evaluation days, so we made sure to dedicate the second round of conferences to that, based on input from the Education Committee.

We used that opportunity to gather class rep feedback so as to identify traits that well-performing courses share, and areas where low-performing courses need to improve.

Students identified four key areas of improvement for the college that would make a significant impact upon the student experience, such as course organisation, curriculum co-creation, flexible and varied learning styles, and effective feedback.



## #8: Supporting student mental health

In conjunction with the student support team, we ran a series of events and workshops, which were designed to support students facing mental ill-health to provide them with tools and strategies to succeed on their course. We crafted resources for students facing common issues, such as stress and anxiety, to give them good quality advice and support, being made available in all our offices.

Recently, we set up a partnership with Nightline, a listening, emotional support and information service, run by students for students, which operates at night by a team of volunteers to give students advice on conditions such as anxiety, stress and suicide.

In the next few weeks, we'll also be involved with the upcoming Staff Development Day where we'll be working to ensure that all staff have a greater understanding of student mental health and how we can best support them.



## #9: Establishing LGBT groups on campus

As part of our work on the LGBT Youth Charter Mark, we wanted to build a space for LGBT students to self-organise and to give us feedback on how we could improve the way we work for LGBT students. Groups were established on each campus, with an online discussion space to coordinate their activity and giving a voice to those unable to take part in the campus groups for whatever reason.

That online space was key to giving LGBT students a space to raise and discuss issues that affect them, and to give those who want peer-support a supportive environment to find it. In recognition of our work in building the groups and more, we were awarded the Bronze LGBT Youth Charter Mark and hope to improve on that in time.

Beyond the establishment of the groups, participating students started to discuss how to challenge the stigma around mental health particularly in the LGBT community, sharing information, events, and planning activities for the coming year.



## #10: Paid opportunities for students

Over the last couple of years, we have been keen to work to create as many paid work opportunities for students. This year, we worked in partnership with the Quality team to create new roles supporting the Student Destination Survey - the outcome of which was a marked improvement in the timeliness and overall response rate of the survey.

One of our student engagement assistants carried on her employment with us through the year, working on a range of projects including getting us GDPR-ready, updating website content, and growing our social media reach.

We are also currently recruiting a new team of student engagement assistants for next year who will support us to deliver activities for students across the campuses.



**POWERED BY STUDENTS  
DRIVEN BY VALUES  
COMMITTED TO BETTER**