



Edinburgh College
Students'
Association



ANNUAL REPORT

2019 – 2020

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Foreword

Wow! What a year it has been at ECSA. It is fair to say that it has been challenging beyond what any of us could have imagined, but it has also been incredibly rewarding, nonetheless.

Ordinarily in our End of Year Reports, we would go through our plans that we set out in September and explain how we have achieved them. This year, a third of my term as President has been taken up by reacting to the global pandemic of Covid 19 and setting about a new way of working for the Association.

Because of this, some of our plans had to be adapted, whilst others were replaced with new priorities, and the very process of dealing with it all became a core objective in its own right.

Nevertheless, we have achieved a lot in this unique set of circumstances, and, as I come to the end of my term as President, I am proud to present the work that the team at ECSA has achieved this year.

Our work on sustainability is truly sector-leading, being the only College Students' Association to ever successfully apply for the Climate Challenge fund...twice! Whether it has been on campus or from home, we have continued to support those students most in need, empowered our Class Reps to improve their classmates' experiences, and ensured the student voice is heard in critical discussions across the institution. We have continued to work in ever-more creative and interactive ways to better engage the student community and ensure that no-one gets left behind.

In short, despite the obvious challenges, we are proud to continue to break new ground, ensuring that our evidence-based approach to change puts student opinion at the heart of decision-making.

Underpinning all of our achievements is partnership, whether that has been with students, college departments, or external agencies, and this has never been more important. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board for all the support you've given the ECSA team this year. Working as partners in developing a positive and continually improving student experience is central to the successes we have laid out in this report.



Carla Ford - President 2019/20



Education

2019-20 has been another record year for Class Rep recruitment, with a total of 631 Class Reps registered for the year, which is up from 501 the previous year. Recruitment took place directly in the classroom where a [pre-recorded video](#) of President, Carla Ford, was shown ahead of the Rep elections. The video outlined the role of the Class Rep and introduced the Students' Association.

Once Class Reps were elected they registered right then and there in their classroom, and also signed up to a training session in the coming weeks. 283 Class Reps received in-person training during our initial week of lunchtime sessions, which take place on each campus every day. A mop up training session was also delivered on each campus to ensure as many Reps as possible could attend. All Class Reps were sent the online Class Rep training module on Moodle, as well as an [online Class Rep Handbook](#) to support their role.



[3 Class Rep Conferences](#) were hosted across 4 campuses, themed around the student journey and quality enhancement activities, with more than 250 Class Reps attending. Themes covered:

“Induction & Retention”
“Feedback & Assessments”
“Belonging & Inclusion”

A fourth conference on “Success & Progression” was planned to be hosted in April, but could not go ahead due to the College closure. All conferences take an evidence-based approach, where students are introduced to a topic, answer questions on a handout, discuss in small groups (with notes taken by facilitators) and then finally the whole cohort discusses the topic.



This ensures all students are heard and feedback is triangulated across groups, and ECSA also then receives written feedback. Following every conference, a report is submitted to the Senior Management Team and Academic Council for feedback and comment, which is brought back to the students to ensure a direct line of feedback and communication.

New for 2019-20 is the Rep Academy, which was initially set up with the purpose of recruiting Reps who

were willing to be further involved in representative activities. These students would be enrolled in the Rep Academy programme, which focussed on supporting Reps to learn new skills and become more effective in their roles. 88 Class Reps showed an interest in being a member of the Rep Academy. 3 meetings were held at Milton Road Campus, 2 at Sighthill and 2 at Granton, with 15 Reps actively engaging in meetings.

With it being the first year running the Rep Academy, it became clear that the majority of the students involved had very specific, individual projects in mind which did not lend themselves directly to a group project. The students were supported to engage in projects and wider college activities, and our Representation & Impact Coordinator will review the Rep Academy for 2020-21.



2020 has seen Edinburgh College Students' Association's 8th annual Full-Time Officer Elections, and it was another successful year which engaged 12 candidates to stand for our 3 Full-Time Officer Positions. This year we have had our highest turnout since 2017, and we managed to increase the number of voters by over 200 from last year (a 23% increase in turnout).

ECSA continued to run the annual elections as part of the Scotland-wide project, "Big Student Elections" campaign. This sees Students' Associations from across Scotland working together to run their elections in the same week. The polling period lasted 4 days and involved polling stations being available in high-footfall areas on all campuses.



Voting was open from 10am on Monday 9th March to 4pm on Thursday 12th March. As voting takes place online on the ECSA website, students can vote from the comfort of their home, on the bus, or at one of the polling stations on campus. The results were announced at Three Sisters in partnership with 3 of Edinburgh's Universities: Heriot Watt, Napier and Queen Margaret.

The [2020-21 Full-Time Officer team](#) is President - Jordan Wyllie, VP Activities - Victoria Browning and VP Welfare - Rose Dodgson, who take office on the 1st of July.

The fifth year of the ECSA-Illence Awards took a different form this year, for good reasons. The entire nomination, shortlisting, and awarding process has been completed while the country has been in lockdown. Students submitted almost 400 nominations, with 200

people nominated across 5 categories. The ECSA-llence Awards recognise all the excellent work happening in all corners of the college, even when we are working from home. In response to current circumstances a new award was introduced; the Teaching from Home Award. This recognised a member of staff who is ahead of the curve in successfully adapting to working remotely, and who innovatively continued supporting the learning and teaching of students from home.



The shortlisting panel consisted of current and incoming Presidents, Carla Ford and Jordan Wyllie, as well as student staff. As ever, it was no easy job finalising the shortlist, and deciding the winners. Everyone who was nominated received a certificate with quotes directly from the students nominating them. Award winners and the students who nominated them recorded a short message to be unveiled as part of our ECSA-llence Award video. This was premiered on social media, and we encouraged teams and students to watch together. The video has reached 1600 people so far, and you can [find the video on our website](#).

Activities

GameSoc – events and Minecraft

This year our gaming society ‘GameSoc’ developed their organisation in two forms. Firstly, by breaking out from their usual virtual surroundings they were able to engage with students face-to-face. Through holding public competition sessions in high footfall areas, they were able to engage new members, generate buzz on campus, and ensure the society was better developed through increased social opportunities.



One participant said:

“The GameSoc events were great - they gave a chance for folk to meet each other that hadn’t, and because they were so public, random students were coming up and asking what was going on”

Secondly, the group decided to fund their own custom Minecraft game server, allowing members to build collaboratively from their own private space in the 3D game. This enabled the group to take responsibility for the server and make all the decisions about it. By giving that autonomy to members, it then gave them the confidence to plan to create their own servers for other popular games, and are looking at

fundraising at the start of term to set up more.

Video Content

This year saw a significant growth in our output of video content, with live streams to inform students about the impacts of coronavirus being an area that was particularly engaged with. We set out to develop more video content this year to engage students in our activities, but at a time and place that suits them.

Our year in video started with Carla’s [Class Rep recruitment film](#) which is shown to students across the college as their LDTs and lecturers support classes to elect Class Reps. This is a really valuable opportunity for us to get our President in front of as many students as possible, and led to us electing the most class reps we’ve ever had.

A new development for us was the production of [small animated clips](#) to support our register to vote campaign. These allowed us to rapidly produce content where a piece to camera video might not be appropriate, and let us use graphed statistics to make an impact on the viewer.



Getting students to know the officers better is a key benefit to producing video content. We therefore created

the 'Coffee with Carla' series, both to inform students about college issues (like balancing parenting responsibilities with studying), and to let them get to know Carla better so they feel more able to engage with her.

This year's best video engagement came from our live streams on coronavirus, which were a key method for students to get answers to the burning questions they had as lockdown started. Students found value in being able to engage with their elected officers in live streams.

Our [2nd live stream of lockdown](#) was our most watched video of the year, with more than 1300 views. These opportunities allow us to get timely information to a large number of students, and will be as important as ever when we move to a hybrid learning model next year.

Our year in video was rounded up with the ECSA-Illence Awards. We produced some short clips to promote the awards, but the most significant video here was the award winners video. As we weren't able to hold a physical awards ceremony this year, we reached out to nominators and award winners to give them a chance to say why they nominated the winner, and for the winner to say thanks. We premiered this video live, and that was very effective in getting [good engagement with the video](#).

Headline figures

- More than doubled the minutes of video viewed on 2018 - from 2808 to 5938 mins
- Net followers up 60% year on year - 253 to 396

Student Parents & Carers Group + events

The Student Parents & Carers Group was a priority for our officer team this year, building on work from the previous year. As participants of this group were spread across the college, they were keen to keep the group as a virtual space rather than trying to travel across campuses.

By creating a space for parents and carers to network and discuss the issues they were facing around balancing home life and studying, we worked to ensure that this group was supported through any issues that could have prevented them from staying on at college and completing their course.



The group held a successful Christmas party for parents and their kids this year, taking over one of the Milton Road classrooms. There were Christmas movies, messy activities, and enough snacks to keep everyone happy. Sorry for the glitter on the floor! The group had planned to hold a swap shop for children's clothing and toys around Easter time, but this was sadly cancelled due to the ongoing global pandemic.

Support

One of the major services we run is our Advice & Support Service. This generally comes in 2 different forms- enquiries and casework. Enquiries are usually dealt with instantly, whereas casework involves multiple people and can take weeks or months to resolve.

Although we have been recording our casework on our online casework system for several years now, we have not previously recorded the enquiries we receive. This academic year, we started a new process of tracking 'walk-ins' - i.e. students who came into one of our offices with a query that was answered instantly. From mid-September to mid-March (when campuses closed for lockdown), we had 558 enquiries recorded on our walk-in system, dealing with 805 students. The majority of these visits were recorded at our 2 largest campuses, Sighthill (57% of walk-ins), and Granton (33% of walk-ins). Students visit the offices with a wide range of enquiries including accessing other services such as C-Card or free sanitary products.



We have seen a 30% increase in the number of cases we have worked on this academic year, compared to last, with a total of 85 cases logged on our system. The majority of these (56%) are academic-related, with the next 2 largest categories being Funding (21%) and General Support (20%). These 3 categories can be further broken down as follows:

Academic Cases

- 54% of Academic cases related to Disciplinarys, Fitness to Study & Fitness to Practice Panels

Funding Cases

- 39% of these cases were students struggling to apply for funding or provide adequate evidence
- 47% of Funding cases related to Students who were rejected for funding

General Support

- 53% of this category involved student seeking emotional support
- 24% of the General Support cases involved students seeking help for accommodation issues



In December, we conducted a survey open to all Edinburgh College students to get a better idea of their current [housing and financial situation](#). A total of 402 students responded to this

survey, which asked them about their accommodation (e.g. affordability and safety) and financial situation (e.g. their employment status, income, and ability to save money)



The survey gave us a greater insight into issues relating to these specific circumstances. 43% currently live in their family home, and 27% live in privately rented accommodation. Overall, we found that only 56% found their accommodation to be affordable, and 25 respondents feel unsafe in their current accommodation (of these 25, 18 were female).

In terms of finances, 38% of respondents to the survey said that they were never able to save money, whilst a further 25% said they were only able to save money occasionally. When asked to rate how much money caused stress out of a scale of 1 (none) to 10 (the most), 1 in 4 students rated it at 10 out of 10, the highest response from all options.

This survey has helped us better understand how we can focus our energies when it comes to supporting students with housing

and accommodation issues. We have revamped [the housing](#) and [personal finances sections of our website](#) with more relevant information, and we are working with local and national organisations to ensure our advice is as up to date as possible.

Throughout the academic year we have been developing new content for the support section of our website, to complement the information available to students via the College's Wellbeing Team. The lockdown has given us the impetus to complete this process and in May 2020, we launched a new Wellbeing Hub covering mental health; food and lifestyle; physical and sexual health; as well as general help and external resources. This process has very much been led by students in their input to the various campaigns, casework, surveys, and activities throughout the year.

Equalities

In partnership with the college learning support team, the first Care-experienced students group was set up for students to have a central place to easily get information or speak to other care-experienced students. ECSA supported a student to set up the Facebook group, which has been useful in getting specific feedback, as well as passing on useful information to this specific group of students. The group currently has a membership of 56 students.



2019-20 saw the first Edinburgh College Men's Support Network established to give male students a space just for them, as we know that men (and especially younger men) are less likely to reach out when they need support. The group has fluctuated in membership, currently with 37 members. A host of face-to-face meetings were planned across all 4 campuses. The uptake was not as high as hoped, however engagement was significantly higher online in the Facebook Group, where the students shared their concerns and supported each other.

For [World Mental Health Day](#) in October, we hosted stalls across 2 campuses with tea and coffee, cake, and sanitary products and C:Card. We encouraged

students to sign up to our pledge to support all those struggling with mental health, which gave us opportunities to speak to students about how they were doing and if they knew about the services available at college and in the community. Especially younger men were more likely to come speak with us after being offered a piece of cake! Following two days of suicide intervention training, President Carla, [wrote a blog](#) asking people to speak up about suicide and stop hiding behind symbolism and metaphors.



As part of the Edinburgh College Women's Group, students organised activities for '16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence'. To raise awareness of the campaign they did a [social media take-over](#), meaning they shared content on social media directly from students about the campaign and related activities. They also hosted a number of stalls sharing information in leaflet form and through

individual conversations with people based around different topics (e.g. AIDS, discrimination, and violence against trans people). It was through conversations with students about trans rights that the Women's Group realised there was a distinct lack of awareness around the importance of talking about trans rights.



For LGBT History Month, the Women's Group and LGBT Society came together to host the event "Building Trans Pride", an event exploring trans equality in Scotland while raising awareness of [how we can be better allies](#). The event took place at Sighthill with about 15 attendees taking part in constructive conversations and hearing from Sisters Scotland, who highlighted ally-ship and the campaign for the Gender Recognition Act reform.



Most importantly, the event saw two Edinburgh College students talking about their own experiences: Elspeth as a transwoman and Shona as the mother of a trans son. Their stories were incredibly powerful and the students who attended told us how thankful they were for the opportunity to attend a safe space to talk about their experiences and to hear from others.

Sustainability

- We completed our first Climate Challenge Fund project. This saw over 1200 students engaged in sustainable transport and climate change, and we saved the equivalent of 413 tonnes of CO₂
- Over £190,000 awarded by the Climate Challenge Fund to run another two-year project to April 2022

At this time last year we reported on the success of the first year of our CCF project. Now that the [project has been completed](#), we're incredibly pleased to report that we exceeded our carbon reduction targets! The project will lead to a lifetime saving of 1009 tonnes CO₂e, which is almost 2.5 times more than our initial target.



This was achieved through engagement with over 1200 students through a multitude of different events and activities. These included challenges to encourage students to travel to college in more sustainable ways, cycle training

and fuel-efficient driver training, and delivering workshops in classes. More than 100 students took part in these climate literacy workshops, which led to 54% saying that the session increased their knowledge of climate change.



Fortunately that isn't the end of our work in sustainability, as we successfully applied for more CCF funding for another 2 year project! The new project will offer free support to help students to travel more sustainably, and to reduce their food and textile waste. Activities will include cycle training and bike maintenance workshops, continuing the current Liftshare scheme, introducing a Community Fridge at each campus, and running swap-shop events across our campuses.



In addition, we will continue to increase understanding of climate change among our student community by running workshops during class time. We are also planning to provide opportunities for our students to [develop sustainability skills](#) through extracurricular and voluntary activities.



We also organised a bloc at the Global Youth Climate Strike protest in September, which was attended by 20 Edinburgh College Students. This was promoted to students as an opportunity for them to take climate action and learn more about climate change - we worked with Edinburgh College and teaching unions to ensure that students who attended were marked as “engaged in learning” on registers. Our project staff also liaised with the Edinburgh city cycle hire scheme to bring hire points to Milton Road and Sighthill campuses, providing another sustainable travel option for students, staff, and visitors. Since their installation in August 2019, they have been used over 400 times.

Through our first project we were also heavily involved in creating the College’s new ‘Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2019-24’. We are especially proud of our involvement with this, as it will leave a lasting legacy of this project at the College. We were invited along to the preliminary meetings of

the steering group for this Strategy, and we made it clear that we wanted to see more ambition from the College than was outlined in the first draft of the strategy.

This led to a strategy that we believe is far more promising for steering the College towards greater sustainability measures over the coming years. In particular, the College has now set a target of becoming carbon-neutral by 2030.

Lockdown

Remote Working & moving services online

On Tuesday the 17th of March, ECSA took the decision to close our offices and move our services online. This was following the announcement the previous afternoon from the College that all on-campus classes were suspended, as well as the statement from the Prime Minister that evening asking everyone “to stop non-essential contact with others and to stop all unnecessary travel”.

Although College Campuses remained open until the 20th of March, and the official UK-wide lockdown did not come into place until the 23rd of March, we took the decision to move to remote working from the 17th, when on-campus teaching was suspended. We had been preparing for this for the previous few weeks, so we were ready to make the move as soon as it became necessary to do so.

We used all available communication tools to reassure students with the clear message that, although on-campus classes were suspended, and campuses were about to close, we were very much still available to help them. We hold daily team meetings each morning to monitor communications, distribute tasks, and plan proactive communications.

The vast majority of our services and ways of working were already online, so we focussed on the 2 main in-person services in the first instance - C-Card and Sanitary products.

Our C-Card service provides free condoms to any student over the age of 16 and is usually run from our offices. We moved this service to students using the online booking system, directly from C-Card, allowing products to be booked and posted directly to students free of charge.

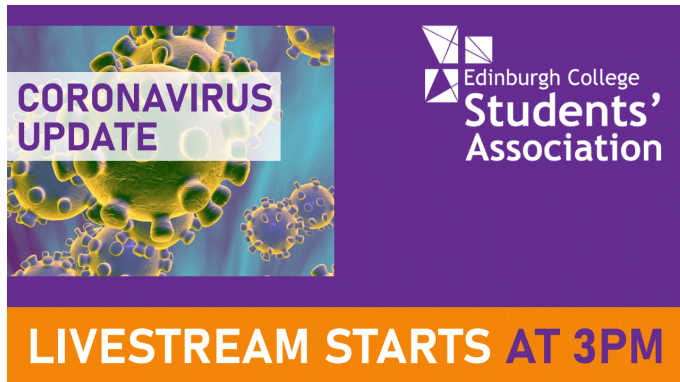
For the sanitary products, initially, we worked with various College colleagues to collate supplies from each campus before identifying and then contacting local food banks & charities that would be able to distribute them. These were delivered by the Estates Services Manager, Dave Keen, to four relevant sites across the city. We also worked with the Wellbeing team and the company “Hey Girls” to provide access to free reusable sanitary products posted to students’ homes.

Since we moved to remote working 3 months ago, we have been holding daily team meetings each weekday morning, created new webpages every week, and hosted several interactive sessions with students using a wide range of platforms - this is our new normal.

Communicating the right information at the right time

From February the Association Director was involved with the College Critical Incident Management Team to help coordinate the response to the ever-changing environment of the global pandemic. We worked closely with all departments involved, but predominantly worked alongside the Communications Team to ensure students were kept up to date and queries were preempted as much as possible.

We helped develop frequently asked questions documents, shared developments as they happened, and added new, supplementary information to [our own website](#) alongside the webpages developed by the College. We made full use of our social media channels to share updates as they came, as well as asking Class Reps to help share information at a local level.



Student enquiries

For the past couple of years we have used a group Skype telephone number, because we move around campuses daily, which means not all of our offices are opened every day. This means that when someone calls the main ECSA telephone line, every member of the team logged into Skype can pick up the call, meaning that we rarely miss a call. We were able to re-establish and test this system off-campus prior to moving to remote working, so we literally never missed a beat when we finally closed the offices.

In the first couple of weeks of remote working the situation was changing rapidly: there was a lot of information to be sifted through for students, and there were a great many questions about individual circumstances. The team worked on a rota basis to cover each of our means of communication (telephone, e-mail, facebook, Instagram, & twitter) to ensure queries were answered quickly. Common queries were also flagged up to

be added to the FAQs.

Whilst a lot of our energy was spent on developing new, up-to-date information, we recorded and answered more than 50 direct queries from students in the first 10 days of lockdown, with the majority contributing to updated information on our website. On top of this, we have worked on a further 15 student cases since lockdown began. Enquiries are logged when a question can be answered immediately, whereas cases are more complex, usually involve multiple people, and ordinarily take weeks or months to resolve fully.

For the first 3 weeks of lockdown, when there were a lot more questions than answers for most students, we streamed live question & answer sessions on our facebook channel. This meant that students could register questions in advance, as well as ask questions during the live stream. We were also able to share a recording of the live streams across all our social media channels for anyone who missed them, so students could watch when they had the time. These videos were viewed more than 1,700 times and the 2nd Facebook Live stream on the 27th of March was our most watched video of the year.

Developing new web content

Throughout the lockdown period we have tried our best to react quickly to the needs of students, so our website has become even more important for hosting information and developing new resources.

With about 50% of students relying on part-time work, and another 10% in other means of work, the financial effects of lockdown have hit students

hard. From the first week of lockdown, we produced a daily-updated part-time job listing of employers that needed to rapidly expand due to increased demands of the coronavirus in, for example, supermarkets and care settings.



TEMP JOBS AVAILABLE

As well as that, feedback showed that many students weren't coping well with learning under lockdown, either as they struggled to find an effective physical learning space, or were juggling childcare or work commitments. We therefore produced materials on helping students studying at home, ensuring that students were well-supported as well as encouraging them to [share their own tips](#).

Over the course of the last 3 months, we have produced at least 1 new web article per week, as well as re-writing and redesigning several sections of our website, such as the [Wellbeing Hub](#) and housing advice pages.

These materials contributed to a 24% increase in users accessing the website (compared to March - May 2019), with a 27% increase in new users accessing the website in that period too, showing that timely, pertinent content will engage students even when we can't be on campus.

Maintaining the student community
Moving from on-campus learning to

wholly online during lockdown has been a huge shift for students' learning experiences. We were aware early-on in the lockdown that many students felt isolated, anxious, and unsure about how to connect. We established our own ["Virtual Campus" on Facebook](#) to help tackle these issues. This group has more than 500 members and has helped provide fun, discussion, feedback, and support throughout the lockdown period. We have used this group to run polls on specific issues, organise online events, and share information and updates, such as the SQA announcements over recent months.



In addition to this, ECSA has focussed on producing new campaigns and events every week to maintain the student community and allow more students to interact with us on issues they are interested in.

We have asked students to help us [design a new green space](#) at the Milton Road Campus, promoted daily themed materials every day of [Mental Health Awareness Week](#), and our President, Carla, shared her experience of lockdown in a blog post to encourage others to [talk about their own experiences](#). Now we are at the end of the academic term, we are surveying students on how they have found learning & teaching from home during the last few months, and this will continue to help us as we plan for the next academic year.

Finally, we took the decision to push ahead with our annual ECSA-llence Awards, despite not being able to ask for nominations in person, or physically be able to present awards. With the whole process moving online for the first time, we were delighted to receive almost 400 nominations for more than 200 people across the college. We even created a new award category called the “Teaching From Home” award, highlighting some of the amazing efforts from teaching staff throughout the lockdown.



The student short-listing panel included both the current President and President-elect, and we unveiled the winners through a video with messages from nominating students and awards winners premiered on our social media channels. Everything was different this year, but what hasn't changed is the enthusiasm from students to get involved and tell us about some of their “ECSA-llent” experiences about being a student at Edinburgh College. [The Awards video](#) has now been viewed more than 1600 times in just over 2 weeks.

Reflecting and planning for the ‘new normal’

March, April, and May can be some of our busiest months for activity under normal circumstances - the last 3 months have been far from normal and we are proud of being able to deliver the level

of support and activity that we have managed to produce during lockdown. As student queries and casework, understandably, increased throughout this period, we have managed to get answers to the questions students have and continue to support those most in need. Furthermore, we have continued to develop new content, engaged students in new activities, and conducted surveys & groups meetings. We even managed to produce our ECSA-llence Awards under very challenging circumstances.

However, reacting to a crisis in order to get students to the end of their courses, and planning a new year under completely alien circumstances are 2 very different issues. As much as everyone will need to adapt to the ‘new normal’, within ECSA, we will be re-thinking almost everything we normally do.

- Physically standing in front of students to tell them about our activities
- Hosting groups of students in 20 minute intervals in computer labs to gather their information and interests
- Aligning our Class Rep activities to each Campus
- Holding stalls, event, and Freshers’ Activities
- Holding confidential conversations in small offices with students we are supporting

All of these things and many more will change and we are already working with students on solutions. We will continue to work hard, continue to innovate, and hope the Board will support us as we continue to break new ground for our students.



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