

2025

IMPACT REPORT

| Represent | Connect | Support | Include | Help the Planet

Contents

3. President's Welcome

4. Our Top 10 for the Year

5. Represent

14. Connect

20. Support

26. Include

32. Help the Planet

37. Director's Notes

41. Photo Gallery

President's Welcome

Adam Lowe

The last year has been very interesting, to say the least. I think this year can be summed up as a journey.



From the beginning of this academic year, I started out as a simple young boy from a quiet town wishing to ease his way into the bustling culture of Edinburgh. When I was elected, I was surprised, I finally felt seen, maybe because I grew up knowing I was a bit invisible to people. I finally felt like I had a purpose fulfil, and I watched myself say goodbye to that quiet boy I once was, becoming Edinburgh College's President. I have developed in many ways, and there are sometimes when I regret not hanging on to my naivety. But I am now who this College needs me to be.

We are the Students' Association; we are responsible for 25,000 voices. All equally as important as each other, we are here to fight for them, to listen to them and to speak for them. We are not here to be pushed by anyone else but them. I believe that is what we have done, we have been a microphone to those students who need it. But I will never be satisfied as we must always push to be greater. We will continue to develop our Reps, we will continue to give food to those in poverty, we will continue to do everything that we have done this year and do more, because we are the Students' Association, and we're powered by students.

I hope you enjoy reading this year's Impact Report, which shows the breadth and depth of all the activities, events, meetings and projects we've been part of this year. The sections in the report reflect the aims of our ambitious new strategic plan: Represent, Connect, Support, Include and Help the Planet. This is an exciting time for the Students' Association and with our hands held in each other's we will become the most powerful force in this college, and we'll continue on, as we always will.

Adam Lowe
President 2024-25

Our Top 10 for 2024-25

**140 winter coats
distributed for free
to students**

**15 metric tonnes of
food saved from
landfill**

**New strategic plan
launched for
2025-28**

**Lead Reps
programme
launched with
33 recruited**

**Over 670 Class
Reps elected**

**Over 900
respondents to our
Student Life
Survey**

**10 SMT Staff &
Board Members
took part in
Reverse Shadowing**

**Collaborative
events for
Students & Staff**

**Launched our merch
& made over £2,000
for student projects**

**Awareness Days
held across all
four campuses**

Represent

We work to make sure that the student voice is consulted and listened to, ensuring that they have the best possible learning experience at college.



Class Reps

Our Class Rep system continues to be at the heart of student representation at Edinburgh College. This year has seen some of the highest numbers of Class Reps, with 677 registered over the course of this academic year (up from 548 in 2023-24). The reason for this substantial increase is that we have been working closely with the ESOL team to ensure their Reps are registered within the official channels. Of the total Class Reps registered, 257 have undergone training. The feedback we've gathered from Class Reps over the year has been hugely useful, with some of the emerging themes highlighted below.



Navigating campuses

One issue that was raised early on in the year was students finding it difficult to locate rooms on campus, particularly at Granton and Sighthill. Class Reps also mentioned it would be useful to have additional signage pointing out features such as lifts and water fountains. The college's Comms & Marketing and Facilities teams are now taking this forward, improving signage, maps and wayfinding on campus. The Students' Association is planning on running drop-in campus tours to students in the early weeks of the next academic year, to make sure everyone understands how to find their way around and doesn't feel overwhelmed by the size of the campus.

Social Spaces

One theme we have seen highlighted across four different campuses is the desire to see more social spaces for students. This ranges from requests for comfy seating, to more places to study quietly. We have been working with the college to identify spaces and are aiming to have more upgraded, comfy furniture included in future budgeting plans. In the meantime, we identified some 'quick wins' which have resulted in the following developments:

- Introduction of table tennis tables to Midlothian and Milton Road.
- An upgrade of the chairs at Midlothian – adding chair ferrules to reduce the noise in the food court.
- Reactivating the big screen in the Sighthill Atrium, and upgrading the table tennis table there, thanks to a donation from a local business.
- Identifying a new potential social space at Granton, outside the blue corridor on the first floor.
- Working with the college's new Collective Action Planning groups who have been developing ideas around the look and feel of the campuses.





General Cleanliness

The general cleanliness of campuses, including the toilets, was raised as an issue throughout the year. There were concerns that some students were not clearing up after themselves after eating. We worked with the college's marketing team to create a poster campaign which was rolled out across the four campuses, as well as working with cleaning staff to design posters for toilets. When there are faults with facilities, students don't always know how to report them, which leads to a sense of frustration and problems mounting up. We are working to create a new system which allows students to report issues quickly and with ease using a QR code.



Wi-Fi

Issues with the college Wi-Fi have been raised frequently by Class Reps this year. Many students are using their phones to access online learning, so Wi-Fi connectivity is increasingly important in classroom settings, for the overall quality of the student learning experience. The college is due a Wi-Fi upgrade in the summer, which will be appreciated by all students.



Communication about Staff Absences

Another point raised by Reps is to ensure that when staff are absent, their class is notified in good time, ideally through a message on Teams. This would be particularly helpful for students who are commuting long distances, as it would reduce their frustration of travelling to college only to find a class has been cancelled.

Lead Rep Programme

In an exciting development for this year, we launched a new representation engagement programme called Lead Reps, where we invited Class Reps drawn from different courses and campuses to form a focussed discussion group that meets regularly with the Students' Association and key college staff.

Our aim for this project was to recruit two Lead Reps per School (30 in total). We were delighted with the uptake (33 Reps), which was spread fairly evenly across the different academic disciplines and campuses. Having an engaged group of students to bounce ideas off and explore different ways to enhance the overall student learning experience has been an amazing opportunity. The Lead Reps will also be invited to play an active role in feeding into the Board's Student Success Committee.

Some of the topics our Lead Reps discussed this year were:

- Social spaces
- Decolonising the Curriculum
- The online learning environment

We are now engaging in a period of evaluation with our Lead Reps, as we work out the best way for the programme to evolve in the next academic year.



"I'm super excited for this Lead Rep programme to evolve and become even stronger, I was blown away by the reception that we got and how many students put themselves forward. I must say a great big thanks to everyone who did participate in the programme and hopefully we will create great change in our college!"

Adam, President

Reverse Shadowing 2.0

Our Reverse Shadowing Scheme that was launched in 2023-24 has gone from strength to strength. This year, we extended the scheme to members of the college's Senior Management Team as well as Board Members. This is a great opportunity to spend time with the Students' Association President, and gain a unique perspective on student life at college.

This year, we have been joined by 6 members of SMT, and 4 Board Members. We tailor each day to suit our participants' interests, and as a result have brought staff and Board Members a range of experiences, including joining our events, taking part in Lead Rep meetings, going on campus tours and meeting support and curriculum staff. Alex Killick was even persuaded to take part in our 'Plank Challenge' for Mental Health at Midlothian campus!



"I think everyone should do this, it's just so great to see all the amazing work yourselves in ECSA are doing. So, although I think it's great for board members, I can see it would be really useful for all management at EC."

Participating Board Member



The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many participants describing the experience as thought-provoking, insightful and informative. In particular, the three Board Members who joined at Midlothian campus highlighted how positive it was to get to know one of less familiar campuses and meet the teams working there.

Some great conversations about strategic direction took place, and while it is an opportunity for participants to see the realities of student life, it also helps us as a Students' Association to build relationships with key decision makers. We look forward to continuing the programme into next academic year.



"It took me away from my usual routine and gave me valuable view of the College from a student perspective."

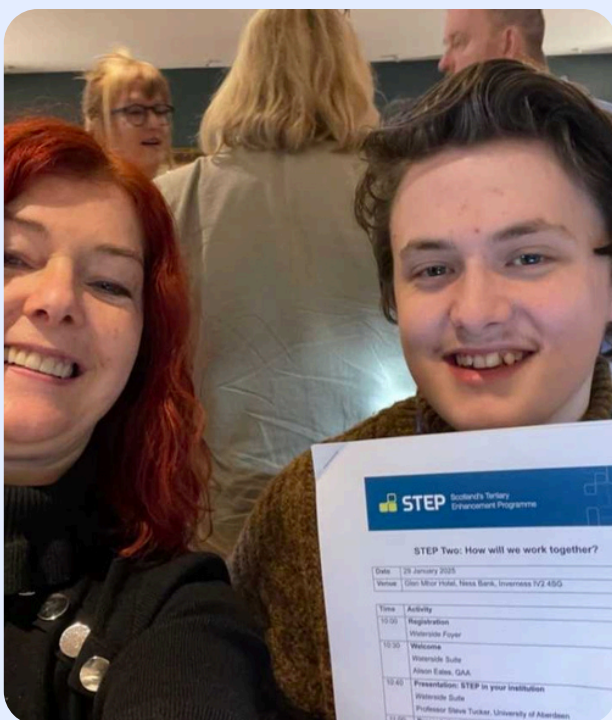
Participating SMT Member

Leading the Sector

Playing a role in the wider tertiary education sector is an important priority for us. Since the start of the academic year, Adam has involved in Scotland's new Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP), which has involved working with SMT members and attending conferences, engagement days and online meetings. Adam is passionate about making sure the college student voice is represented in Scotland's new Tertiary system. It has been a valuable experience, and a great way to meet with other institutions and students' associations and unions from across the country.

As well as taking part in STEP events, our Full-Time Officers have taken part in networking days with other elected representatives from across the country. Discussion topics have included the housing crisis facing students across Scotland, and how to lobby for protections for students in the new Housing Bill. Several productive relationships have been built from this, including an enhanced network of officers at Edinburgh-based institutions, with Heriot Watt, the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh's Napier University participating.

We continue to be an affiliated member of the National Union of Students and recently sent a delegation to attend their national conference in Dunfermline.



Elections

Our annual elections took place in March, with four candidates running to become the next Full-Time Officers. Polling was open for four days online, and we provided in-person election stalls at every campus. This year, we had a total of 845 voters, which is slightly down on last year's record high of 1085. Next year's priority will be to ensure each position is contested, and that we reach our target of over 1000 voters.



Our 25-26 Full-Time Officer Team



President - Adam Lowe

Adam is currently serving as President and is continuing to his second term. He's planning to get more involved with national campaigns, enhance the social spaces on campus, and expand our Lead Rep programme.



Vice-President Activities - Mary O'Driscoll

Mary currently studies HND Contemporary Art Practice at Granton campus. Her main aims are to put environmentalism at the core of College life, and to plan activities which focus on both physical and mental health in a holistic way.



Vice-President Welfare - Sukinder Landa

Sukinder is currently serving as Vice-President Welfare and is continuing to her second term. Her priorities are improving wellbeing support, advocating for increased housing and finance advice, and championing EDI.

Connect

We work to make sure that the student voice is consulted and listened to, ensuring that they have the best possible learning experience at college.



Events and activities

Throughout the year we have offered a series of drop-in activities and events on different campuses as a chance for students to socialise. These have included 'Paint & Sip' events, which proved really popular with students, particularly at Granton campus. Students were invited to paint on a mini canvas responding to the themes of the sessions, including Halloween, Autumn and Christmas themes. We've seen some stunning creations, and students have wowed us with their creativity. Most importantly this has been a chance for students to get together and meet people from beyond their course or classes.

"I enjoyed painting and chatting away with others. It was a very fun event and I was able to express myself." **Student Participant**

As part of our plan to provide engagement opportunities for students during the breaks in the college calendar, we held a February Fonzies event at Sighthill Atrium, with Video Games, Tabletop Games and craft activities available for everyone who wanted to take part. Student parents were encouraged to bring their kids along to the event too.



We also have had students approach us who are interested in setting up their own clubs, including tabletop games, fandom club and badminton, which we have been supporting them with. Our aim for clubs and societies is to help students get set up and create a self-sustaining community which they are responsible for running and facilitating – but they know they can ask for assistance from us if they need it.

Supporting student-run activities has been a huge part of our engagement work this year, and we have supported a range of different classes, groups and individuals, from a showcase event celebrating the talents of local Ukrainian groups, to table tennis tournaments and video gaming events.



Working with students

This year, we've been able to employ two Student Engagement Assistants who are working with us on a part time basis. Laura Balestrieri is a UX Design student helping us with Social Media and Marketing, and Lauren McKay is a Contemporary Art Practice student who is assisting with Events and Activities. It has been great to have two enthusiastic new members of our team who know the student experience inside out, helping us to achieve our engagement goals and offer as many activities as possible to the student community.

We have also made a concerted effort to engage more students in volunteering with the Students' Association, as this helps them to build up their skills and also increases our capacity to deliver events and activities. One of our volunteers, Zahra Maleki, has played a big role in enhancing our activity, particularly at Sighthill campus, where she was involved in leading on the Nowruz event to mark the Iranian New Year. Volunteering is an area we want to expand on in future years, as we have seen what a huge difference it makes when you have enthusiastic and passionate students empowered to lead on their own projects.



New HQ at Sighthill

In summer 2024, we moved offices at Sighthill and now have a Students' Association HQ Hub in the Atrium. We have transformed this space into a welcoming area, providing a vibrant first point of contact for people entering the building. Since then, the number of students and staff who have engaged with us, whether to seek advice or meet our Full-Time Officer team has increased significantly. We have created a cosy chill zone where students come along to play board games and video games, which has made a big impact on our footfall in the office and general awareness of who we are and what we do among the student body at Sighthill.



Edinburgh College Merch

As a result of an exciting partnership between Edinburgh College Commercial and Marketing teams, we are now selling Edinburgh College branded merchandise to students, with all profits ring-fenced for student projects. Hoodies are available in two colours (£20 each) as well as mini teddies sporting their own Edinburgh College hoodies (£8).

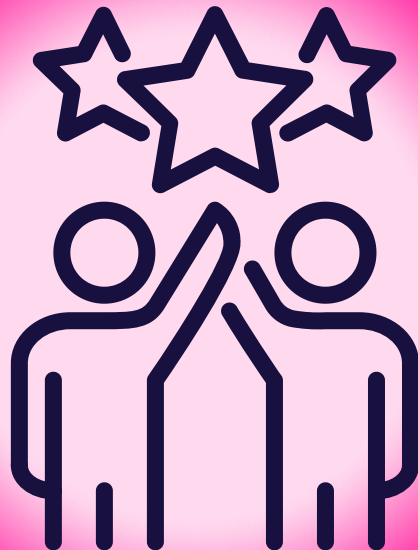
We kicked off our sales at the Graduation Ceremony in November 2024, where we sold 81 items and made £1,128. Since then, we have hosted an online shop and made steady sales throughout the year (£977). We have also hosted pop-up shops on campus, which have been great for engaging students. In total our in-person sales have made £1,520. We are looking forward to making a final push of sales at the annual Prizegiving event at Granton in June.



Support

We provide students with professional, confidential, and effective advice & support, ensuring they stay on course.

Equipping them to help themselves & their peers.



Student Mental Health Agreement Activities

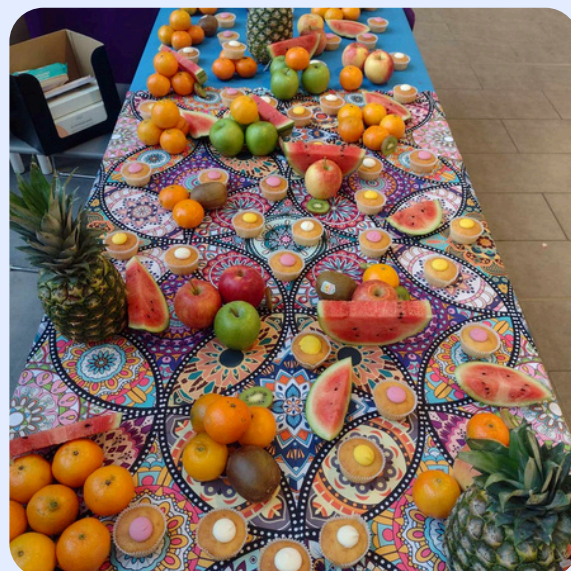
As part of our Student Mental Health Agreement, which was signed jointly with the college in May 2024, we pledged to deliver a series of activities designed to support students.

This year, we held our Wellbeing Fairs at Granton (December) and Sighthill (February). The aim behind these fairs is to promote the external services that are available to students, and we had a wide range of charities represented at either fair, including:

- Get2gether Edinburgh
- SPACE Youth Befriending
- Penumbra Mental Health
- LGBT Youth Scotland
- NHS Healthy Respect
- Health In Mind
- Crew 2000
- Thrive Edinburgh
- Volunteer Edinburgh

We ran a variety of stalls which included giving away fruit and other healthy snacks, and our 'Wall of Hope' activity, where students could write their wishes for the coming months. Approximately 500 students have directly engaged with our wellbeing events this year.

We were also joined by colleagues from the college's Wellbeing team and the Active Campus Coordinator, who promoted their events, clubs and services, and ran engagement activities for students passing by.



At Milton Road for World Mental Health Day in October, we joined Routes into Education students to celebrate their #HelloYellow day, wearing yellow to fundraise for Young Minds.



At our Mental Health events, we ask our students to reflect on how they're feeling on a scale of 1-5. It's a chance for them to pause and think, and also gives us an indication on what the mood and feeling is like with students on different campuses throughout the year.

Mental Health Rating	Milton Road Oct 2024 (37 students)	Granton Dec 2024 (67 students)	Sighthill Feb 2025 (54 students)	Midlothian May 2025 (26 students)
1 - I am in a dark place	0%	4%	4%	8%
2 - I am having a hard time	5%	12%	7%	4%
3 - I am doing ok / unsure how I feel	33%	31%	28%	15%
4 - I am doing very well	38%	34%	39%	38%
5 - I am the best that I can be	24%	18%	22%	35%

Student & Staff Activities

Winter Warmer

One part of the Student Mental Health Agreement was to create more opportunities for staff and students to come together, which was the inspiration behind our Winter Warmer event at Sighthill in December. There were hot drinks, board games, video games, crafting and plenty of opportunities for colleagues, classmates and friends to mingle and get into the festive spirit. We invited students to share their favourite thing about Edinburgh College and received some fantastic responses.



"Edinburgh College has given me a new chance at education after a rough time at High School, I've found new friends and I wouldn't be where I am today without Edinburgh College."

Participating Student

Brew Monday

We also built up the collaborative community feeling on campus with our 'Brew Monday' event at Granton in January. The event was inspired by a Samaritans initiative to counteract the narrative around 'Blue Monday' - the idea that the third Monday of January is when people feel their lowest. At the event we provided free tea, biscuits, board games and the opportunity to chat. Thanks to our colleagues in Wellbeing, we were also joined by two Therapet labradors, who proved very popular with everyone.



Student vs Staff Badminton

For Mental Health Awareness Week in May, we worked together with Xsara Murray, Active Campus Coordinator, and Holly Murray, HR OD Advisor, to run two Student vs Staff badminton competitions at Granton and Sighthill. Running a joint physical activity hadn't been tried in some time, but it was great to see students and staff playing together. Across the two tournaments, there were over 50 participants.



Sukinder's Blogs

Each month, Sukinder Landa our Vice-President Welfare has been sharing wellbeing tips through her blog, 'Big Things on the Horizon'. This has included tips on nutrition, sleeping well, establishing healthy routines, practicing mindfulness and setting positive intentions.



"The aim behind this blog is to give students simple, relatable advice to teach them how to look after their physical and mental health. Drawing on my own experiences, I've really enjoyed coming up with different themes each month and I hope students have found it useful." **Sukinder Landa, VP Welfare**


Student Life Survey

Over the course of the spring, we asked students to complete our annual Student Life Survey. In total, 905 students filled out the survey, a record high for us and up from 629 last year.

The results have given us a great insight into the issues students are facing right now, from housing, to travel, finances and the sense of belonging at Edinburgh College. Some of the key headlines of the report are very encouraging.

There are however some parts of the report that show the challenges facing students. Multiple students highlighted precarious living situations, the lack of affordable housing in and around Edinburgh, and more general financial difficulties, which shows that the cost-of-living crisis continues to have a big impact on students' lives. Students are juggling work and study alongside personal responsibilities, and it's sometimes a challenge to balance out all their commitments.

We will use all the research from the survey to inform our strategy in the next academic year.



It's very expensive and hard to find accommodation, I work and study and I can barely afford to rent a room I live in.

Student Survey Response

Most respondents...

- ✓ Feel happy and safe in their living situation
- ✓ Feel they belong at Edinburgh College and that the college is a welcoming place
- ✓ Have access to a digital device that they can use for online learning
- ✓ Feel positive about the College's facilities

Include

**We value & celebrate diversity
and will work to ensure Edinburgh
College is a welcoming & safe
place for all. We will always
challenge inequality at College
and in society.**



Advocating for others

LGBTQ+ community

Over the course of the year, our Vice-President Activities, Charlie Whitson, has been leading on various advocacy projects for our LGBTQ+ student community. Working closely with Nina Munday, the College's EDI Lead, we created a posters series, *Being Inclusive at Edinburgh College*, part of our wider LGBTQ+ Friendly Classrooms initiative. The posters, which were circulated to Heads of School and Curriculum Team Managers, as well as being available to download from our website, provide some useful key terms and information about how we can all be more inclusive towards the students in our community who identify as LGBTQ+.

February was LGBTQ+ History Month and as part of the celebration Charlie wrote a blog about his experience as a queer, trans student at the college. Drawing on his personal experiences, Charlie also helped Nina to deliver the Understanding Gender Identity workshop to staff in May. We received positive feedback from the staff who attended, several of whom are keen to return to the training session next year.

"I really enjoyed helping Nina to deliver the Understanding Gender Identity workshop, and to get a chance to shape the materials that were used. I was delighted to see a range of staff involved, keen to participate and increase their knowledge on how to support our gender diverse students."

Charlie, VP Activities



Disabled students

Following student feedback about the unique challenges facing our disabled student community, we launched our first Disabled Students' Forum. This is a safe space for students who identify as disabled (including hidden disabilities). The group has been set up to meet online monthly with a member of Students' Association staff present, so we can connect with them regularly, proactively listening and helping us to advocate for them in our discussions with the college, particularly in relation to facilities and any barriers to learning.

For Autism Acceptance Week in April our VP Welfare Charlie wrote a blog about their experiences of being diagnosed with autism aged 17.



Care Experienced students

As part of Care Experienced Week, we asked Care Experienced students to share their stories with us, which were then published anonymously. The aim was to celebrate the varied experiences that our students have, and educate the wider student community. This project, along with a guest blog by Catherine McCormack, the college's Corporate Parenting Lead, highlighted the tailored support that is available to Care Experienced students. This was later shared as an example of good practice by two external forums outwith the college, HUB for Success Steering Group and the Care Experienced, Estranged, Carers East and West Forum.

International Women's Day

EC Students' Association celebrates International Women's Day every year, but this year's celebratory event was our biggest yet. We held an open call for female performers to share their talents with students at Granton hub at lunchtime. We received 16 submissions, with students wishing to perform songs, poetry and dance pieces. On the day itself, performances included a Ukrainian student dance group, musical theatre students performing solo songs, and personal stories of encouragement for all women. We also hosted crafting activities and welcomed Jen Ouson from the Granton Library team who ran a zine-making stall.

Our pop-up photo booth proved to be very popular, and students from the catering course created bespoke cupcake designs for the day. The Gather & Gather cafe at Granton also assisted us by providing free pink hot chocolate samples. It was a step in a new direction for us and will provide a useful blueprint when delivering larger scale events, collaborating with student performers and multiple partners in future. To mark the day, we also created a news article about the history of the event, with a section highlighting the Women of the Students' Association.



Black Leadership Group annual conference

Following a series of focus groups we held on the topic of Decolonising the Curriculum, two of our Lead Reps attended the Black Leadership Group annual conference held at Dynamic Earth in March. After attending the event, they wrote a reflective blog about their experiences, "Between Fire and Restraint: The Tension Between Passion and Palatability in Anti-Racist Activism", which was published on our website.



College of Sanctuary

As the college works towards receiving accreditation as a 'College of Sanctuary', we have been ensuring our sanctuary-seeking students, whether they are asylum seekers or refugees, are also involved. We have produced bright, eye-catching posters that explain some of the different terms around sanctuary-seeking, and are in the process of planning a celebratory event at the end of the academic year that will bring students and staff together. Our ethos of inclusion means that this project is close to all our hearts.



Lunar New Year

For Lunar New Year in January, we ran a stall at Milton Road where students could decorate their own fortune cookies. Sukinder and Nina Munday wore red, which signifies luck, joy and celebration in Chinese culture.



‘Call it Out’ campaign

In March we were delighted to be invited along to the launch of the ‘Call it Out’ campaign, which has been ongoing collaboration between staff and students. The slogan, ‘empowering minds, embracing diversity’ has been strategically placed at prominent places across the four campuses. The aim is to ensure everyone in our community feels valued, respected and enabled to thrive in an inclusive learning environment. It also encourages students, staff and visitors to call out any negative behaviour using the online form.



Help the Planet

We will educate & support students to tackle the climate crisis – saving them money and improving their health by making small, sustainable changes in their lives.

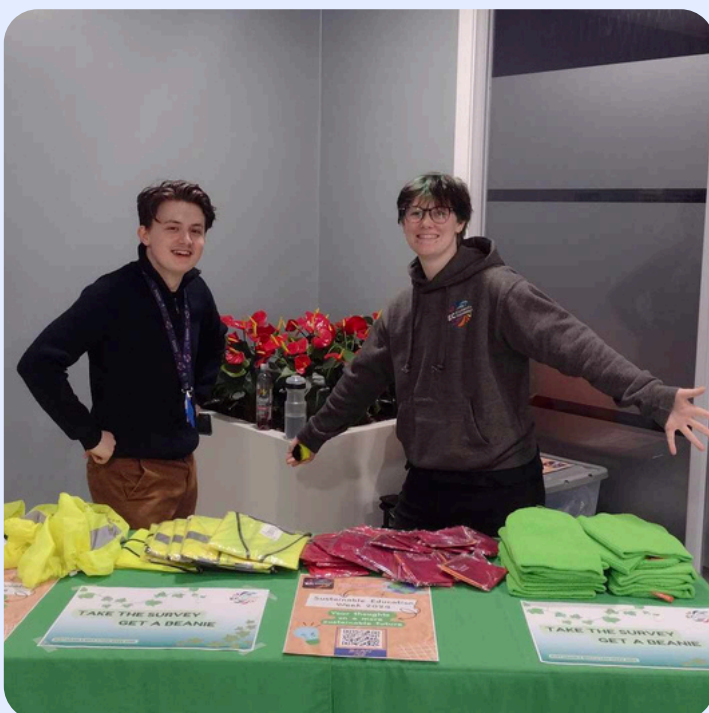


Sustainability Survey

For Sustainable Education week in October 2024, we researched students' views on sustainability at Edinburgh College, through a mixture of in-person stalls and online engagement. Over 200 students completed the survey, giving us an insight into what students know about sustainability work that is already happening at college, and what the student community's sustainability priorities are for the future. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Students' Association Community Fridges were by far the most recognised sustainability project. The areas students would like to see prioritised were:

- 1 Tackling poverty to enable more students to access and succeed at College
- 2 Investing in new sustainable energy systems to run our buildings
- 3 Moving towards plastic-free campuses

Research is an important part of what how we engage with students on sustainability issues and we will be conducting similar surveys in the next academic year to see if student priorities have changed.



Earth Day

Earth Day has become an important part of our sustainability work each April, and this year we arranged a series of activities to get students thinking about the natural world and their impact on it. Our Full-Time Officers led a litter pick around Sighthill campus, collecting two huge bags of litter, and recycling the waste whenever possible. The collected litter was then displayed in the Atrium as a powerful reminder of our responsibility to protect wildlife, take pride in college surroundings and care for our environment collectively.

We also hosting a free mini terrarium-building workshop using upcycled glass jars, and distributed wildflower seeds for students to plant at home, including cress, coriander, sunflowers and chilies.

We hope that by holding this event, we encouraged both students and staff think about their impact on their surroundings.



Community Fridge

Our Community Fridges are at the heart of our strategic aim to help the planet. There are weekly deliveries across the college, with stock tailored to each campus. Over the course of this year, we have saved 15 metric tonnes of food from going to landfill, which is the equivalent of 36,144 tins of Baked Beans! This is up from 14 tonnes in 2023-24, and helps students to save money as well as enabling them to make greener choices. The Granton Fridge has been relocated to outside the Students' Association office on the first floor, with the aim that only students can access the food deliveries. We have an additional storage fridge at Granton, which now helps us to make sure food is accessible to students throughout the week.

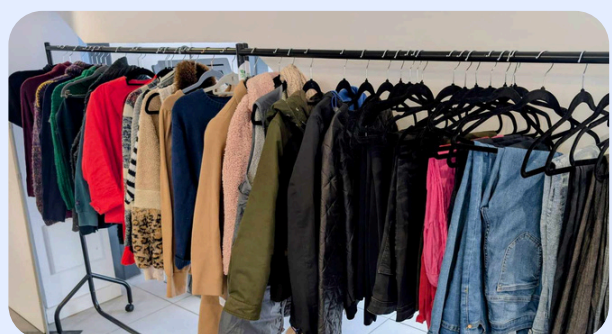


Swapshop and Winter Coat Drive

Our Swapshops continue to run on Granton and Milton Road campuses, where they are well used and frequently restocked with new donations. In addition to our permanent Swapshops, this year, we have been trying a new approach, running clothing drives and pop-up shops to increase engagement.

During October and November, we ran a Winter Coat Drive, encouraging staff and students to donate good quality pre-loved or new winter coats, scarves, hats, and gloves to the Association. Thanks to the generosity of everyone taking part, we gained over 140 winter coats to distribute to students for free, no questions asked, through our Granton and Sighthill giveaway events.

Clothing drives are a new strategy for us, all part of our ambition to reduce waste and counter poverty among the student community. They have proved popular with both students and staff and will be building these events into our calendar of sustainability activity for 2025-26.



Director's Notes - Al Wilson

“

2024-25 was a special year for me that I haven't really talked or thought about before now. It marked 20 years since I started working in Students' Associations.

”



The very fact that I naturally revert to measuring my years in academic terms illustrates just how much of my life I have spent in this cycle. Over that time, I have had the opportunity to work with some of the most interesting, idealistic, and passionate people I have ever met.

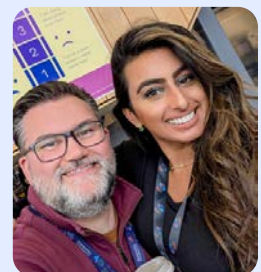
To say that “every year is different” in the world of Students’ Associations is like saying a red weather warning (and we had one of them this year!) will mean it will be “quite windy” – the words don’t really do it justice. Needless to say, 2024-25 has been identical to every other year in the past two decades of my working life by virtue of being entirely different to all of them.

In July 2024, we saw our entire student officer team change, with Adam, Charlie, and Sukinder beginning their journey with ECSA. With a core team of just six (including myself), having three new team members is both exciting and daunting in equal measure. They joined at a time when long and hugely disruptive industrial action was just coming to a resolution, but with many students still not clear if they could or would be able to finish their courses or get resulted.

But 2024-25 was to be different. Again. Our new team members brought with them fresh, and diverse perspectives, and the learning experiences that had shaped their time at Edinburgh College were each, very different. As we worked together to help our new Officers develop our Priority Objectives for the year ahead, the permanent staff team were learning too. For every “annual event or activity” that we discussed, we were met with ideas for improvement, and, in some instances, better activities in their place. I am not a betting man, but I would strongly discourage anyone to confidently predict the priorities of a new student officer.

With our new Priority Objectives in place, we set about establishing another new thing for the Association – a new headquarters at the Sighthill Campus. For the previous 11 years, we have diligently worked from traditional office space, but now, we had the chance to create something new. A space that was both highly visible, and multi-functional, a space that looks and feels like it belongs to students, and a space that is just a bit different to your standard working office (inflatable comfort boats and a Nintendo switch, alongside a community fridge, and a range of pronoun badges aren’t on most working office’s stationery orders). With many, many more students coming to see us than before, using the space, and feeling comfortable enough to just come and sit, our new HQ was immediately proving its value.

It didn’t stop there. By virtue of being more prominently positioned and having a huge glass-fronted office, we started to see something different that we have never really experienced before. Staff from across the college, from cleaners to advisors, lecturers to Heads of School, support assistants to Senior Managers, would see us and pop in for a chat. “I just saw you and thought I’d ask”. “I was just admiring your new office and thought I’d pop in for a nosey”. “I was wondering if you’d be interested in a project we’re working on”. Launching our new HQ has had an incredible and positive impact on the way we work and helping us achieve our priority of building up the essential relationships with staff that make us more effective as an organisation.



This theme has been developed throughout the year on various levels. Working more closely with curriculum teams for specific projects like our community fridges that involve students to help us deliver services. Collaborating with classes to help them deliver mental health awareness events. Developing “Reverse Shadowing 2.0” to involve both Board Members and, now, Senior Managers, helping us all understand better the needs of students and how we can work together to meet them. Or working with staff to help shape and design training that helps students from our LGBTQ+ community feel safe and welcome in the classroom. These examples and many more illustrate how we have focussed our energies this year on pulling resources together with partners across the college to increase what we can deliver for students.

Our focus will always be on working with students. The work of the team across the year to help support, engage with, and guide students and student volunteers has seen a step change too. Developing the Lead Rep programme to help improve opportunities for students, resource for the Association, and impact for students has been a challenge that has been met with fervour and delivered huge benefits. Recruiting and supporting student volunteers to help with events like our hugely popular “paint & sip” or crucial services like our community fridges has made the Association more open, our activities more authentic, and our connections with students stronger than ever, helping to combat loneliness and isolation for some of our most vulnerable students by giving them a sense of purpose and belonging.



Our events such as the Wellbeing Fairs, Winter Warmer, Brew Monday, and many more have shown a new approach to delivering events that prioritises time for conversations and focusses on making students feel part of something. These events and the way in which our team have delivered them, has been a truly proud part of this last twelve months. We have had so much disruption over the previous four years for a variety of very obvious reasons, that it has been a joy to be part of a team that has really put those moments of welcoming and conversations with students at the heart of what we do. It shows that, even with change, we can always be true to our core purpose. Powered by students, driven by values, and committed to better.

And with that, we come to the most recent part of our year that was – the launch of our new Strategic Plan for 2025–28: Buzzin’ for the Future.

This has been in development for more than a year now, and it is a personal point of pride to be able to launch it recently. The plan sets out exactly what we are all about as an organisation, and with the ambition and passion that I see every single year from our Officer Team and student volunteers, we aim for the stars to work hard to make students lives better. To represent, connect, support, include, and help the planet. To put students first, and work with our partners to achieve. This plan exemplifies the core of what a Students’ Association is and the potential of what we can deliver.

For two decades, I have had the privilege to work alongside amazing people, in an amazing sector, to be part of making a difference to peoples’ lives, and to show the world that, no matter how wee we are or how many challenges we face, the diversity of our students and the passion that they show, can be brought together to create something so much more powerful than the sum of its parts.

Thank you to everyone who has worked with the Students’ Association over the past year – your support and willingness to accept our diversity as a positive is truly valued and valuable to the future of our sector. A particular special thanks from me to my staff team of Genevieve (the author of this report) and Graham.

2024–25 has been another incredibly different year. I look forward to the same, incredibly different experience in the next twelve months.

Time to get to work.



Al Wilson
Director





















GRANTON | SIGHTHILL | MIDLOTHIAN | MILTON RD

EST. 2012

**Powered by students.
Driven by values.
Committed to better.**

Edinburgh College Students' Association is a charity registered in Scotland.
Charity Number SC028544

