

What makes HCA so special?

Tanvi shares her experience of being an international student, and the supportive community of School of History, Classics and Archaeology.

Student life in Edinburgh is colourful and multifaceted, and this is something that the University has continued to provide throughout my time as a student here. My experience at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) started during Covid so my entire first year was online. I found that as an international student this eased the transition from home to university for me, somewhat. However, at the same time it sometimes made engagement difficult. I found, though, that the University – and especially HCA – strived to remedy this lack of in-person learning. And now, as a third-year student studying full-time in person, I find that the same opinion of student life here holds up.

Academic rigour



The School of History, Classics, and Archaeology provides not only a large variety of degree options, but also an allowance for flexibility and diversity

within those degrees. In addition to a wide range of course options, HCA implements a balanced but academically challenging environment – something that is put in place from

day one.

From my personal experience as a student from the USA, schools don't have an A-level system and the courses offered are general and broad, with no opportunity for Classics or Archaeology backgrounds. I found that even with no prior knowledge of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History – although I was surrounded by peers who had the opportunity to take a Classics A-level – HCA has ensured an all-round and in-depth introduction to the subject. Overall, the class structure, assessment style, and myriad of course opportunities have allowed me to garner the same proficiency in my chosen degree as someone who had prior knowledge of some of the course material. I have found that other international students with a similar background have shared this experience in other degrees.

In addition to literal content, HCA implements an academic system with additional external support from faculty and such tools as the HCA writing centre and peer mentors that result in a higher output of quality of academic work. Three years at HCA have taught me – besides academic content – the professional qualities associated with research, writing, and presentation in regard to my academic work and external projects.

Faculty

The academic opportunities that University of Edinburgh students have are a product of the faculty. The School ensures a broad panel of faculty spanning multiple historical, classical, and archaeological specialties. This not only allows the greater variety of choice for incoming and prospective students in pre-honours, it also allows honours students to choose from a large pool of academics to determine their postgraduate pathways and dissertation topics/guidance. In this way, the HCA faculty pushes students to explore various topics that allow them to experience a very varied

subject area.

Societies



By far some of the most influential engagement among students in HCA comes from the History, Classics and Archaeology societies. As a member of the Archaeology Society, I have found myself not only meeting other students in my course subject, but also other HCA students in HCA through joint society events. By meeting other people in the same subject as me my academic life has improved, which encourages me in my studies. And by gaining access to the wider HCA student network, this has created and sustained an even more warm and welcoming environment in the School.

In addition to the social aspect of the society programs, the academic and professional opportunities awarded to members and attendees is immensely helpful. Through opportunities like conferences and lectures by experts in various fields, the students of HCA have a wonderful chance to widen their academic horizons while also networking amongst academic professionals. And it allows them to browse and gain familiarity with future career opportunities. The Archaeology Fieldwork Fair instituted by the Archaeology Society provides multiple career and fieldwork opportunities annually in addition to other opportunities offered within HCA. The University also has a number of heritage and collections

internship positions for students in the relevant fields, providing valuable experience for the future.

The wider University community

The resources and support available in HCA are supplemented by the environment of the rest of the University, and its faculty and students. The multicultural and diverse surroundings of the University and the wider Edinburgh area is truly something that not only influenced my decision to attend the University, but has deeply affected my current experience here as a student. As an international student, and a person of colour, the University of Edinburgh has created a central community in which students of all backgrounds, interests, and identities can collectively explore the beauty that the city has to offer.

In with the bricks, or how a building can make a difference

Lockdown taught us that you don't really need to be somewhere physically to get the work done, right? History student Olivia might disagree.

When I started university, I didn't really spend much time in the William Robertson Wing – the home of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, or HCA as it's usually known. In the beginning I got lost one too many times, and gave up on it because the Undergraduate Common Room intimidated me, and the lift was out of service when I wanted to go to the research room and didn't want to climb the

stairs. So I found myself mostly in the main library feeling entirely anonymous. But now, almost all my time is spent in the HCA building, and I see and interact with the same people every day. A degree as large as history can be a little daunting, but the HCA building provides a small, tight-knit community within the larger University community which makes that a little easier.

A typical day, untypical places

I usually start my days early. I wake up around 6 or 6:30am and go for a run around the Meadows or around Holyrood Park (though in reality, it's pretty stop and go because there are lots of very friendly dogs out in the morning and I miss my dog at home a lot). When I get back, I take a quick shower, get myself ready for the day, eat some breakfast, and head off to HCA where I will inevitably realise I'd left a book I needed for class in the ever-growing pile of books on my desk at my flat. C'est la vie!

I usually get to HCA around 9am and head to the Student Research Room on the third floor for the first part of my day. When I get there, I wave at my friend Josh, and get settled in at my favourite desk (second from the door on the left). I usually



like to make a list on Monday of everything that I need to get done for the week and then set in on everything that I have to do. Inevitably, I will have a lot of thoughts and feelings about whatever it is that I'm reading for whichever seminar, and I will drag Josh into the hallway to gesticulate wildly about female poets in the *Gàidhealtachd* (an article by Anne Frater), or about a Medieval Islamic medical case study (an article by Cristina Alvarez-Millan), or Lidl being out of my favourite pasta shape (it can be a very hard life).

At around 1pm, unless I've had a seminar, I'll head down to the common room which is usually just picking up as everyone else comes down for their lunch break as well. I'll generally set my things down at the best desk in the common room (in front of the window second from the left) and settle in for about an hour with a group of my friends. Generally, I don't get into the lunch debate that plagues every University of Edinburgh student, but sometimes I dabble and will get a wrap from Nile Valley (not African Wrap because they don't marinate their aubergines the same way). I usually take about an hour for lunch, but my friend Ellie and I often have some kind of shenanigan going on that we loop the other in on (and very often get complained about on The Tab).



After lunch, I bid my friends in the common room farewell and I put my headphones on and face the window. I'll usually do my more intense work in the morning in the quiet of the research room and save my less intense work for the common room, so I often end up writing my dissertation in the afternoons or catching up on some work.

In the evenings, I try to take it easy. I generally leave HCA around 5 or 6pm, and I usually spend the evening making dinner and watching something dumb on television or reading. But on Mondays I have History Society meetings (a society I've been involved with since my first year and which has really helped me get to know my peers), once a month I have 'girls night' with my neighbours (who I only got the chance to meet because they're also in the History Society), and every so often I'll

stay late in the building to finish my dissertation work (with the help of friends who are actually largely distracting though there's no one I'd rather be distracted by).

The HCA Community



Being an HCA student and having these spaces reserved specifically for HCA people is really special and I cannot imagine my university experience without it. With the amount of time I spend in the building, I've gotten to know my degree much more intimately than I think I would have had I not spent so much time here. I've been able to make lasting connections with faculty because I am just always around. Whether it's been that I often ride the lift up with the same people, or I'm closer to office hours, I have really valued my time hanging out with lecturers and getting to know them more personally than we really get to in seminars.

I have also made lasting friendships through HCA. There is a definite group of us who spend every day at HCA doing the same things with the same people, and by virtue of proximity, we've been able to build these connections that have lasted years. It is a lovely thing to know that your space is a space you can share with your friends and with people who are just as excited about their degrees as you are about yours.

Being in HCA and being part of the little HCA community who spends all their time in the HCA building means that I know my friends are perfectly willing to have me gesticulate wildly at them about whatever I'm currently reading, and be frustrated alongside me that a text I need isn't available in English, and stay late with me in the common room for moral support while I struggle through my dissertation. Having access to the HCA building has made my degree feel much smaller, despite being a huge programme, and it has made me feel much more at home in the space I spend so much of my time in.

So, you've decided to study a joint honours degree ...

Twice the fun or double the trouble? Student Ambassador Aalish is studying a joint honours degree.

I made the choice to study Chinese and History simply because I love learning a language and history has always had a soft spot in my heart. Studying a language alongside history presents its own unique challenges, not only from each subject itself, but also when they are combined together. But what is it actually like to study a joint honour degree at the University of Edinburgh? I'm going to talk you through what a general day in my life looks like as well as talking about the how your degree could be structured and what your classes could be like!

The practical stuff

Most days my classes start at 10am. It is very rare that I

start much later (apart from a Tuesday where for some reason I have one class at 4pm!). Usually, I have around three or four classes a day, which I like to point out is a lot, but this is because I am studying a non-European language. Generally, at the University of Edinburgh, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Arabic have a lot more contact hours than European languages because they are just so different to English. If you choose to study a European language you will likely have more classes than your peers who study a straight history degree, but not to the extent where you have 15 hours of class a week like me!



The student research rooms.

Starting at 10am I don't usually leave the university campus until 5pm most days. I like to do the majority of my work at University so I can relax at home with my flatmates. My day mainly consists of language classes with the odd history class thrown in. I spend three hours at classes across the campus and for the rest of the time I prefer to study in either the School of Literatures, Languages & Cultures or in the Student Research Rooms in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology. This is a small library that only those who study history, classics or archaeology courses can access and it has little marble Greek statues around it!

Studying history mainly involves a lot of reading. For each history course you generally get two hours of lecture and a one-hour tutorial. The lectures will have a lot of people in them and you will all be listening to a lecturer talk about

the topic you are studying. It goes without saying that you should be taking notes as the lecturers can say a lot about each of the topics as this is often their area of special interest and study, and so you have to develop the skill of notetaking. This involves actively listening and deciding what is important or relevant information, and generally does not involve copying from the presentation as you will be able to access this information throughout the duration of your course.

Tutorials are smaller groups of about twelve students where you discuss the topics you have been learning about in your lectures. Most tutorials require you to do pre-reading and so you discuss these readings in the tutorials with your peers and instructor (who is usually either a PhD student or a lecturer) alongside discussing any proposed questions that were suggested on the tutorial worksheet. Doing these readings is really important as it is good practice for writing your essays. When it comes to writing an essay, you need to have done a lot of academic reading in order to back up your claims and argument – this means you need to know what is useful and what is not, which you can practice in doing the readings for your tutorials. The most important thing I would like to tell you is to learn to read well – it will really help you in your studies of history!

The good bit

Studying a language is quite different to studying history. First off there is much less reading which can prove to be a nice break from all the reading surrounding history. In Chinese, Russian, Japanese and Arabic you tend to get more classes than the European languages but you will definitely have quite a few classes ranging from grammar, reading and writing to listening to lectures and, of course, oral classes. Oral classes are usually around six people, with a tutor who is a native to the language. These are my personal favourite

classes because you get to apply what you know into practicing speaking with your peers, which I always find fun, plus, often you get to make up fun stories with your classmates!

Generally, I prefer tutorials in either History or in Chinese because I like to have a more of a classroom type setting like you have during high school. Saying this, I have had some really interesting lectures that I wished went on for much longer than their allotted time because it was just so interesting. The most recent one being a lecture on photography and its global influence. It really challenged a lot of my perceptions about the use of photography in history and I thoroughly enjoyed it! At university you get a wide choice in the courses you do so if there is something that interests you, I recommend choosing a course that covers this. But if you think this would be the most boring lecture to ever exist, make sure not to choose a course that covers this! Choose anything you think will really interest you and I am sure you will enjoy most, if not all, of the course.

Perhaps the best part of doing a history degree with a language, though, is the guaranteed year abroad in the country of the language you are studying. This is something I am really looking forward to as a day in my life next year will look a little different when I am studying Chinese and History in China.

All work and no play?



A view of Edinburgh from Calton Hill at sunset

Now you've probably gathered that I really like my degree and I probably sound like a little bit of a nerd, but I promise I do other things outside of studying! Most evenings, I spend time with my flatmates and friends across the city, sometimes going out into the pubs and clubs of the city, sometimes out to the cinema, or even sometimes on a walk around the city. Don't knock it! Edinburgh is a beautiful city both during the day and the night and one evening I happened to see the northern lights from Calton Hill!

On top of this I am involved in a few societies. The History society is a big society for everyone who studies history or has an interest in history, and through this I play football at the weekend with the Edinburgh Woman's History Football Club. I really love this and it is such a fun way to get to know others who like to play this sport but also study history and also one of the cheapest ways to play football! I am also a committee member on another society and frequently attend other societies such as the salsa society.

If you are thinking about doing joint honours History with a language, I would highly recommend it! Overall, I would say a day in my life can be very busy, but dividing my time between history and Chinese helps to keep me interested and motivated.

Re-booting student life after two years of pandemic

How a song and dance helped Hanna connect with the University

community after studying remotely.

I came to the University of Edinburgh in September 2020 so was in the first cohort to experience what it is like to start my studies under Covid conditions. Unlike many of my peers, I was lucky to have comparatively many in-person classes. Academically, things went well and I felt sufficiently supported – there was just nothing to do except for studying. But when stricter measurements forced me to study entirely online from my home in Germany in spring 2021, I felt very much detached from the student community.



So, going into my second year I was excited for all the opportunities that would come with being in Edinburgh again but jumping back (or rather, for the first time) into student life in Edinburgh was harder than I expected. After all, I had just spent a year and a half either being chained to my desk studying, or to my bed watching Netflix. Although not consciously, I still had the mentality of staying inside and looking for activities that didn't involve too many other people.

I made sure to join as many societies as my schedule allowed, joined the committee of a society and assumed a job as student ambassador at the University to get fully involved, but

something was still missing – I still didn't quite feel at home and part of this great student community. That changed when I attended the first showcase organised by one of my societies at the end of last semester. Being at a place where it's mostly students and seeing something solely student-led come to life was truly exhilarating. I finally felt part of something bigger – something I've recognised again at our second showcase and at two theatre performance by other societies.



Sure, going to pubs, bars and flat parties is a great way to meet more people but I have found that they couldn't give me what being part of or seeing student showcases and performances did. I suppose there is a huge accumulation of sheer talent at Edinburgh University, but that's not to say you have to have the talent yourself or be part of such societies – I for one could never participate in a theatre performance or a dance competition. And regarding theatre and such, we are of course fortunate. Edinburgh, as the venue for the Fringe Festival, is the perfect place for student productions. However, I think it's the experience of what can happen when we all pull in the same direction and what we accomplish as a student community apart from the academics that really made me feel 'welcome'.

Now that restrictions are looser again and that people start to feel safe in a room with many others, it's time to revive real student life. Let's do that by going to performances by people you might not know but are connected to through University. Apart from honouring their/our hard work by going to these, nothing feels more inclusive. Plus, it is a great way to enjoy culture without breaking the bank.

The word on Societies

Retrospect Journal.

One of the tried and tested ways of finding your feet at University is by joining a Society. Tristan – 3rd year MA (Hons) Ancient and Medieval History – started with a journal

and ended up in Crete.

Undoubtedly one of my biggest anxieties about enrolling at the University was whether I would fit in. This was certainly heightened by the fact that I'm a somewhat more mature student, but it is a worry shared by many, regardless of age. Despite my fears, I was determined to find my place and make the most of my time here – something I realised through my involvement with 'Retrospect Journal', a student-led History, Classics and Archaeology publication.

'Retrospect', one of more than 290 societies available to join at the University of Edinburgh, centres on the online and print publication of articles written by a team of columnists and proofed by copy editors. Uploaded weekly, they cover all disciplines relating to History, Classics and Archaeology in

the form of academic writing, historical fiction, and reviews, to name just a few. It also publishes several thematic print editions throughout the year. In 2020, they included 'Prejudice and Pandemics', 'Histories of Hope' and 'Race in Retrospective' (in collaboration with RACE.ED), whilst 2021's first offering will be 'Development and Deterioration'. If it wasn't already apparent, we also enjoy alliteration.



The Minoan Palace of Knossos, a day trip whilst in Crete.

Whilst the publication of our journal is the crux of the society, it is also a place where I've had the opportunity to get to know and socialise with those involved. Our common interests and working together to produce engaging literature completely mitigated my worries about fitting in. It has made my student experience one which extends beyond the classroom – although the experience of writing for publication has certainly helped that. Of course, it isn't the only society with links to the School of History, Classics and Archaeology. There are those named for the respective disciplines, all of which offer a huge variety of social and academic events. In

February 2020, as part of Flexible Learning Week, I travelled to Crete with the Classics Society; not only a fantastic opportunity for an Ancient History student but through which I've formed close friendships.

If I could give one piece of advice to a prospective student, it would be not to let anxieties hold you back. Through getting involved with societies, whether those affiliated with the School or the University more broadly, you'll not only have a much more valuable experience, but you'll get to know your peers, many of whom may have a background similar to yourself, in a welcoming environment.

A day in the life... Scarlett

Scarlett is a 4th year History and Politics student and she's going to take you through a typical day in her life to give you a taste of what it might be like to study at the University of Edinburgh!

It's Wednesday, February 2nd...

8.00am – Typically when I wake up and the first thing to do is grab a cup of tea and breakfast. I can't say that I'm always waking up this time or getting up right when my alarm goes off at 8.00 but I do have some mid-semester deadlines coming up so its up and at 'em for me!

9.30am – I have arrived at the School's Student Research Rooms, a study space reserved for History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) students. After last year in the midst of a

full lockdown it feels amazing to be able to come back on campus and enjoy these beautiful study spaces once again. I'd say we're pretty lucky in HCA to have a study space just for us that is so atmospheric. There's a huge glass ceiling over the space letting the sun shine through and I see so many familiar faces studying in the space as well. For the next few hours I'll be working on one of my chapters of my dissertation in Medieval history.



The Student Research Rooms.

12.00pm – My friend and I head out to one of our favourite coffee shops next to campus, Thomas J Walls, for some lunch. There are so many great food and coffee spots right on or next to our campus but today I was really feeling their avocado toast (they do it particularly well). As it's so close to our building we run into several members of staff including the head of History and have a quick conversation. One thing I've always loved about the school is how welcoming and positive members of staff are. I feel that over the years I've really been able to cultivate positive relationships and found that they have been so supportive when I reach out for help!



Thomas J Walls hot chocolate
– how good does that look?!

1.00pm – And we're are back in the Research Room! For the next few hours I'll just be doing some readings for my special subject course 'Early Medieval Sexualities c.500-1000'. Our next seminar is discussing Monastic purity and clerical celibacy in about the ninth century in Western Europe. We'll be going over sexual sin in male monasteries and why sexual purity was so important in the cloister. One thing I really appreciate about the structure of the History Degree is the fact that in our final year the classes we take are a year-long. It really allows us to delve into the subject at more length and really niche down on our interests!

4.30pm – In need of a snack break. My friend and I head over to Teviot, the student union, for some hot chocolate. I also really love the cookies that they sell at all of the student union venues so I make sure to grab one.



Me and friends all dressed up at our last History Society Ball.

5.00pm – I have a committee meeting with Edinburgh University History Society. I have been a part of the society since my first year and this year I'm the President! Being involved in the society has been a great way to be able to meet people in my course and stay active in the student community. Now out of the lockdown we're able to resume some of our traditional events from pre-COVID! Last semester we held our annual ceilidh and we are currently in the works for planning our International Trip in the Reading Week (going to Krakow!) and our Annual Ball. This has been a really essential part of my student experience and I recommend everyone get involved in some way.

6.00pm – Look at me heading to the gym (a New Years Resolution). I wouldn't necessarily consider myself an avid gym goer but Pleasance gym is great and has so many free classes for members. You can watch Netflix on the cardio machines and there's a sauna in the locker rooms (I must admit this is my main motivation to go).

7.00pm – I head home and have some leftovers for my dinner before getting ready to go out to drinks with some of my friends. There are so many cool places to explore around Edinburgh and it is such a great city to be in as a student. Tonight, we're headed to the New Town a little bit away from campus. I've genuinely really enjoyed my time here and am so happy with my choice to study here four years ago!

Give a little, get a lot

Fitting in, finding friends, 'the student experience'. There is no one way to be a student, but 4th year History (MA Hons) student Georgia-Taygeti shares her experience and how volunteering made the difference for her.

In my first year I didn't really feel like I was doing the student thing right. I made my closest friends during a Film Soc screening but they were not studying History and so when I would attend lectures and tutorials, I felt pretty lonely. Every afternoon, I would head off to my part-time job so couldn't attend most Society events. And while it was a great first year, I wanted to make an effort to feel more at home within the School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA).



When I came back for my 2nd year I joined the Peer Support Group for History and Classics as a volunteer. I hoped that by supporting 1st year students with their own transition into university life, I would find ways to also feel more integrated into the HCA community. And it worked! I still had a part-time job but most of our meetings were during lunch at

the Rosalind Mitchison Room, the undergraduate 'common room', so this was finally something I could attend! I got to know the other volunteers – mostly 3rd and 4th years – most of whom I wouldn't have had the chance to meet if I hadn't joined the group and I was able to learn from their own experiences within HCA. So, in a way, I was the one being peer-supported without realising it but I also made close friends who then made me feel more at home within HCA.

I continued volunteering with Peer Support in my 3rd and 4th year. Now, I get to work with mentees from the years below me, but also spend time with other 4th years that I don't necessarily share seminars with. When I look back on my 1st year, I remember how uncertain I was about the choices I was making, how overwhelming it felt at times to have to balance work, study, adjusting to a new city, making new friends, cooking for myself. When I decided to join Peer Support in my second year I felt that maybe it was 'too late'. It was definitely not. We all come here with different expectations and different responsibilities. I was only able to join Peer Support because it is so flexible in the times we met and I was only able to stay because I was surrounded by people who understood that sometimes I couldn't be there for our events or meetings because I had to be at work.

I'm not at the end of my student experience in Edinburgh and it did not look like what I thought it would when I was a teenager applying to University! I have loved my time here, though, but did it look like a coming-of-age film filled with wild nights out, heartbreak, and fancy balls? Not as much as I expected it to. My university experience has been more about potlucks, Sunday visits to the Stockbridge market, trying to figure out how to budget and pay for gas and electricity, and always missing the family Skype calls (and then getting yelled at by my mum for missing the family skype calls!), but because I volunteer for Peer Support, I feel like I belong to HCA. I recognize faces when I walk to class, I have people to chat to

before the seminar starts. I didn't expect this to be such a big part of my student experience in Edinburgh, but it has! And I am really, really glad I joined up.

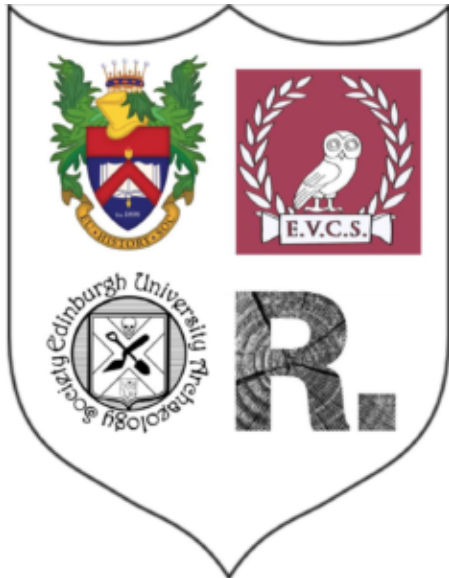
Find out more about peer support within the School of History, Classics and Archaeology

Do the knight thing, or why you should join a Society

Will I find those "friends for life"? Will I be able to balance my studies with a healthy social life? Will there be societies I want to join? Jack – History and Politics (MA Hons) – answers these very questions.

Some of the biggest worries that Freshers tend to have about coming to university are around becoming part of the student community. It can be daunting at Freshers' Fairs or Open Days (virtual or otherwise) or even just walking around campus. Everyone seems to have their own passions, niches, groups and extra-curricular goals.

I remember thinking how important it was that I "put myself out there". Yet, in my experience, it's never as hard as it seems. At Edinburgh, the sheer variety of opportunities means there really is something for everyone. At the end of the day, once you do put yourself out there once or twice, there's no looking back. For every interest, hobby, sport or passion, you will find an open, enthusiastic community of students ready to welcome any new members. Be it academic, sporty, musical, campaigning, fundraising – finding your niche, your own wee community, doesn't have to be the scary task it first appears to be



Student Societies within SHCA.

The School of History, Classics and Archaeology has a thriving student community (made up of various societies and student groups) which continues to organise a diverse array of events and activities. For me, I have benefited immensely from being a member of and now officeholder in the History Society. We are a tight-knit student family of history-lovers. We engage in serious academic discussions and respond in historical ways to important current affairs issues, whilst also having fun and organising exciting socials and trips.

In the past, we have had fascinating academic discussions and speaker events, from “A Journey through Ancient Egypt” to the history of Edinburgh’s HIV/AIDS outbreak to disability history to the slave trade in Scotland. We have hosted incredible speakers, from Professor Sir Geoff Palmer, Scotland’s first black professor, to Holocaust survivor, Tomi Komoly. Our programme has also included high-octane ceilidhs and balls at prestigious Edinburgh venues. We have organised trips to our favourite historical sites, as well as city breaks abroad during our (always productive) reading weeks. Our most recent trip was to Prague, where we visited the famous Castle and Cathedral, went on a Communism tour and even dressed up as kings, queens and knights (see the fabulous photo, above). We

also have karaoke nights and walking tours, pub quizzes and movie screenings. And to think we are just one of many, many societies!

Undoubtedly, at the time of writing, things are different. Covid has massively changed the student experience. Involvement in societies is no exception. Yet, groups across the university are adapting. Whether its baking or Persian or netball or Harry Potter appreciation, societies are refusing to let Covid ruin the fun, the discussions and the memory-making. The History Society is still running plenty of events online and has been a platform for first years to get to know fellow history-lovers, as well as meet older students to get advice and guidance.

I personally have met some of my best friends through the History Society. Sharing a love for a subject and having a laugh at the same time is the perfect way to enhance your university experience. Getting involved in societies also affords you the chance to stand for election as a committee member. I cannot recommend this enough: it has been an opportunity for me to get involved in student representation at university and to really connect with faculty members. It also gives you the chance to organise your own society events and represent your society at official occasions. We even got to meet the Chancellor, HRH The Princess Royal, last year!

Moving up to university can be worrying at the best of times and Covid has been a huge challenge. Yet getting involved in our societies and becoming part of our HCA community is a fantastic way to break down those barriers. My advice? Don't hold back! Reap the benefits of an active campus life and explore the diverse range of student groups and societies waiting to welcome you.

The write stuff

Former History (MA Hons) student and now MSc History student, Ruby, takes a look at student journalism and creative writing opportunities at the University of Edinburgh.

Undertaking a degree in the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology means you won't be short of chances to hone your writing skills. Whether they take the form of a blogpost, an essay, or a translation, most of your assessments will be written work – plus, you've got your dissertation at the end of the four years! But if you fancy yourself as an art critic, investigative journalist, or political commentator, there are plenty of opportunities at the University of Edinburgh to take part in extracurricular writing. Below are just a few of the Societies you can get involved in – keep your eyes peeled for their events during Welcome Week.

“The Student” (studentnewspaper.org)



Perhaps the most obvious outlet for student writing is the University of Edinburgh's fortnightly newspaper, "The Student". It was founded in 1887 by Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson ("Treasure Island", etc.), which makes it Europe's oldest student newspaper. As you might have guessed from its name, "The Student" is entirely produced by students. Whilst the paper is registered as a Student Society, with the Edinburgh University Student's Association (EUSA), it is totally independent from the University – meaning the stories

they publish don't pull any punches!

"The Student" covers breaking news, but also has sections dedicated to features, opinion pieces, reviews, sports, science, and lifestyle. Whether you've got opinions about events at the Scottish Parliament, the latest film releases, or the price of curly fries at Teviot Row House there's likely to be a space for you.

All articles written for "The Student" are published online and some make their way into print with physical copies being available for free across campus. Perfect for proudly sticking up on the fridge, or for posting home to your family.

Because The Student is not just a paper, but also society, they run plenty of social events alongside their writer's meetings. You can write two articles before you need to buy membership, but why wait and miss out on all the fun?

"Retrospect" (retrospectjournal.com)



"Retrospect Journal" is a student-led journal for the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology. Originally founded in 2006, as the journal of the Edinburgh University History

Society, it became an independent EUSA society in 2012, and now accepts submissions from across the three disciplines.

It's the perfect place to submit that essay you're really proud of, but they also accept everything from interviews, to reviews, to even short historical fiction pieces. Submissions are accepted throughout the semester for its website, alongside publishing a themed print edition twice a year. Copies of the journal – complete with beautiful illustrations – can be found in the Undergraduate Common Room or ordered online.

Much like “The Student”, “Retrospect” is a great way to meet other students, especially those within the School. Members can often be found at school-wide events, such as the William Robertson Cup (an annual staff versus students competition), alongside the History Society, Classics Society, and Archaeology Society.

You do need to buy a membership before you can be published in Retrospect , but all membership fees go right back into funding the journal – either maintaining the website or covering print costs.

“The Rattlecap” (therattlecap.com)



Founded in 2018, “The Rattlecap” describes itself as an “intersectional forum for discussion and change”, and a “thought-provoking, kind, and empowering space.” Their self-confessed “monthly-ish” issues are always centred on a theme, with previous editions including: “Connection”, “Isolation”, and “Recovery.”

Each month’s theme is always open to individual interpretation and submissions can take the form of current affairs reporting, opinion pieces, or creative writing and poetry. It also has a dedicated “History, Philosophy, & Education” section, if you’re interested in turning an essay or seminar presentation into a more concise, journalistic article. Articles are published online and always accompanied by a unique illustration.

Whilst your first submission is free, in order to have more than one article published you will need to pay for

membership. Paying for membership also allows you attend its social events, which include everything from a book club, to film screenings, to cooking and crafting sessions.

There are hundreds of societies at the University of Edinburgh, with new ones being founded each year. As a result, this blogpost has only managed to scratch the surface of all student-run publications available to take your submissions. Rest assured, whatever you write, it's likely you'll be able to find a home for it – even if it means taking a leaf out of Robert Louis Stevenson's book and founding your own paper!

Being an international student in Edinburgh

Leaving home to go to University is daunting enough, but what's it like if you're travelling across the world to do it? Scarlett is from the US so she can tell you.

At times as an international student, it can be difficult to be so far away from home. But trust me when I say it's worth it! Now, as a third-year student I can say I've found a home in Edinburgh.



Members of the History Society in Prague.

When I first started university, I didn't experience too much homesickness. The first few weeks are packed with classes and social activities. I was so busy meeting new people and going to class I barely even noticed how far away I was! My accommodation was really social, and a few of us would go to the Welcome Week stalls and then go to society events in the evenings. When classes started, my tutorial group would grab coffee or drinks afterward. It was also so much fun to learn more about Scottish culture and history. Although I struggled to adjust to the accent, Scots are so welcoming, and I loved exploring the city.

It wasn't until around late November and Thanksgiving was coming up that I started to feel homesick. Most of my friends from home were on break from their own universities and hanging out with each other. It was also my first time missing out on the holiday and the longest I had spent away from my family. It's not easy to be so far away from home especially since my friends around me could do weekend trips to see their families.

Coming back from the winter break, I felt rejuvenated but still fearful that the feeling would return. Thankfully, by

then I had built up a solid group of friends and I started attending more society events, getting closely involved with the History Society. With them, I attended social events like the Annual Winter Ball and Burns Night as well as going on a trip to Prague in the February Reading week. This gave me a group of people to turn to if I was ever missing home, and last year my friends and I put on our own Thanksgiving meal together.

I still get homesick, but it's so much less frequent now and I absolutely love being an international student in Edinburgh. The city offers so much to do from outdoor climbs up Arthur's seat or a fun spooky tour of Mary King's Close to just popping into different restaurants and pubs in the New Town. I'm so happy I made the choice to study abroad!

What I wish I'd known before starting university

Student Ambassador Scarlett looks back at the things she wished she'd know before starting her studies.

With 2 years of university completed, I've had a bit of time to reflect on my experience so far. As a History and Politics student I've gained several writing, studying, and analytical skills, but there is so much more to coming to university than just lectures and learning.

Take advantage of the City you're in



You're at university to study, of course, but you just moved to a new city as well! Edinburgh as a city has so much to offer outside of George Square and the immediate Old Town that surrounds it. It's so easy to get caught up travelling around the Nicolson Street area but you do not want to miss seeing the Castle, Holyrood Palace, Botanic Gardens and more. The rest of Scotland is easily accessible and it can be really helpful, some days, to travel out of the city and see the beautiful views available. You don't want to go all four years not taking advantage of what an amazing city Edinburgh is.

Don't beat yourself up if it's not amazing all the time

University is some of the best times of your life! But don't worry if it's not like that all the time. It can be easy to feel lonely and hard to be away from your parents sometimes, it also can be really difficult to go from school into university. You're making the transition from just focusing on your academic and personal life to having to constantly juggle academics, cooking, personal life, health, etc. all at once. It's exciting in the beginning but as the term progresses and you get more of a workload it can be difficult to balance. It's a big change so don't worry if you find it difficult. Also, don't worry if your friends you find in freshers' week aren't the same later on. Everyone is still trying to find their group of people and you won't always end your year with

the same people you started with. Take everything at your own pace!

Take care of your physical and mental health

Your health is super important so make sure that you take care of yourself! One of the hardest parts in the first year of university is adjusting to living by yourself. You don't have someone there to remind you to eat properly or take a break. Try to keep on top of things and learn how to deal with stress and time management. In my first year I struggled to balance cooking, gym, classes, personal life, breaks, and seeing family. Now I've realised it helps me to make a list of goals at the beginning of each week and think on it. It's helped me keep my balance and work ethic sustained! And if you need any help, it's okay to ask for it.

It's okay to have alone time

In my first year I felt like I always had to be around people and always had to have plans on the weekends. It is important to take a breather, though! There's nothing wrong with having a night in to recharge. It's okay to say no to going out sometimes and just spend time with yourself. You have four years here and those club nights, parties and plans aren't going anywhere! Take everything one step at a time. Not everything needs to be done in the first semester of the first year.

First year does count

Yes, there is the safety net that first year technically does not count towards your degree, but because of this there are always some students who may not show up to every class. However, first year is incredibly important in giving you the tools you need to get you through second, third, and fourth year. Get into the habit of doing regular work, making relationships with your tutors and spending time studying. Just because it doesn't count doesn't mean it's not important!

Trust me on this one.

The library is your BFF

Going along with number 5, take first year seriously and learn how to utilise the library and use the time there wisely. Edinburgh has an amazing library with every single book on the reading list. Some classes even make use of the research collections on the 6th floor.

Learn how to use the systems and online journals and save yourself a lot of time. I promise this will come in handy! Nothing like a fourth-floor library session to crack out the final bits of your essay.



Join societies and make connections



You have nothing to lose, so join as many societies that interest you! This is the perfect time to try something new. On the activity side Edinburgh has cheer-leading, horse riding, and dancing as well as academic ones like Model UN, History Society, Classics Society and so many more. Edinburgh has an abundance of societies and you're bound to find one you like! Even if you're nervous and you've never done it before, I promise there are a thousand other new students in exactly the same position. Try new things and take some risks! I've met some of my closest friends through joining these societies and have just got back from a fun trip to Prague with the History Society. It's a great way to get involved and create a community in your School and you never know what fun

experiences you'll get! Also, making sure to network and take advantage of the cool events the School and these societies offer. When opportunities come to meet professionals or graduate scheme recruiters, take advantage of them. You never know when it can come in handy!

You don't have to do what everyone else is doing

Take everything at your own pace. Everyone learns differently, everyone has different preferences, etc. Don't let the student stereotype of stress culture pressure you into acting a certain way.

Don't over pack

Your room in your halls does not have the capacity for your entire wardrobe. You can leave a couple shoes or random bits and pieces behind. The top you haven't worn in 5 years can stay behind. Please learn from my mistake.

Enjoy every moment

Everyone is in the same boat, navigating this roller coaster of a time. There's so many opportunities to take advantage of, new friends, and new experiences to enjoy! Just relax and don't overthink things. You'll be great.

History Society trip to Prague and Vienna, 2018



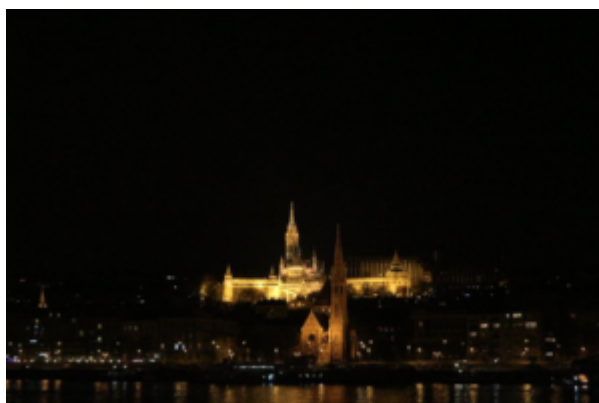
As one of the Trip Officers for the Edinburgh University History Society, Student Ambassador Carmen was responsible for organising a trip to Budapest and Vienna for 40 society members during Innovative Learning Week.

While we were only away for 5 days, it felt like ages because we did so much in both cities! – Carmen

Day 1: Monday, 19th of February

Our flight to Budapest was extremely early – but this meant we got there really early too, giving us plenty of time to get our bearings! While the sky was blue, it was freezing cold as we walked around streets on the Pest side of the city, taking in the amazing views of Liberty Square & Parliament Square.

After giving everyone a few hours to have dinner (and a nap after a long day of travelling!), we met up again to see the iconic Hungarian Parliament building light up at night. Here, we were able to get a big group photo, before running off to take some night shots of the stunning view over the River Danube!

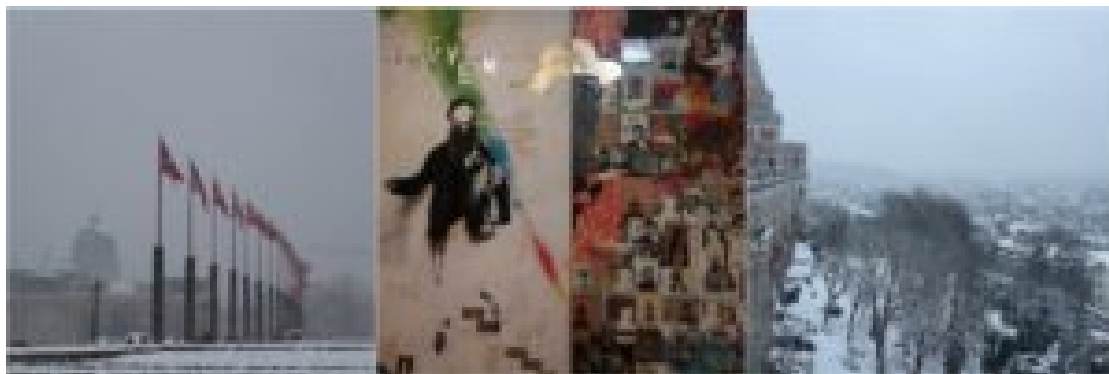


Day 2: Tuesday, 20th of February

On our second day, we walked along the Széchenyi Chain Bridge (covered in snow!) to go across the Danube to Buda Castle. Using our trusty Budapest Cards, we were able to get a free Castle bus that took us outside the building – a lifesaver considering it was a very uphill walk!

Some of our group were lucky enough to see the changing of the guard at the Sándor Palace, the residence of the Hungarian President. Others visited The Budapest History Museum and The Hungarian National Gallery. I particularly enjoyed the third and final floor of the Hungarian National Gallery, as it had some really interesting Hungarian modern art.

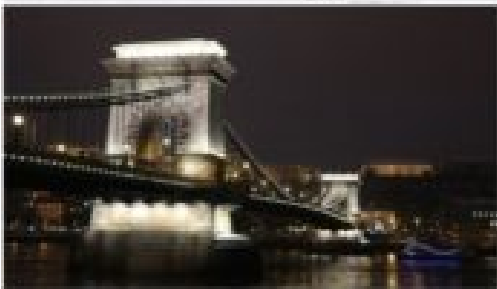
Later that afternoon, we had a private tour of Hospital in the Rock. This is a museum located in an underground cave system near Buda Castle, which was previously used as a hospital during World War II and The Hungarian Revolution of 1956. During the Cold War, it was also used as a nuclear shelter and remained a top-secret operation until 2002. We were not permitted to take any photos during this museum tour, but everyone loved the tour. During our visit, there were items on loan from museums in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, giving us the chance to see objects that were destroyed during the blast in 1945.



Afterwards, some members of the History Society committee and myself (with a giftshop bag from Hospital in the Rock in hand) went to visit Fisherman's Bastion, a beautiful terrace giving

us some panoramic views of the city.

Day 3: Wednesday, 21st of February



Early on Wednesday morning, I took a large group of people on the trip to Memento Park (also known as Memorial Park). Located on the outskirts of Budapest, this open-air museum houses over 40 statues that would be placed throughout towns and cities in Hungary during the Communist era.

Later that afternoon, we went to House of Terror, a museum dedicated to the fascist and communist regimes in Hungary during the 20th century. We were also not allowed to take photographs in this museum, but it was fascinating being able to see how Hungary exhibits its horrific past. Afterwards we went to Lukacs Thermal Baths. This is one of the local baths in the city and allowed us to relax before getting ready to pack our things and leave for Vienna the next day.

Day 4: Thursday, 22nd of February

Early in the afternoon, we set out from Budapest via private coach and made our way to Vienna! Here, we checked into our hostel and had a wander around the city before eating at the Naschmarkt, home to many fantastic restaurants. That night, I was so tired after a long day of travelling and sightseeing I went straight to bed! However, some very dedicated tourists in our group went to the prestigious Vienna State Opera.

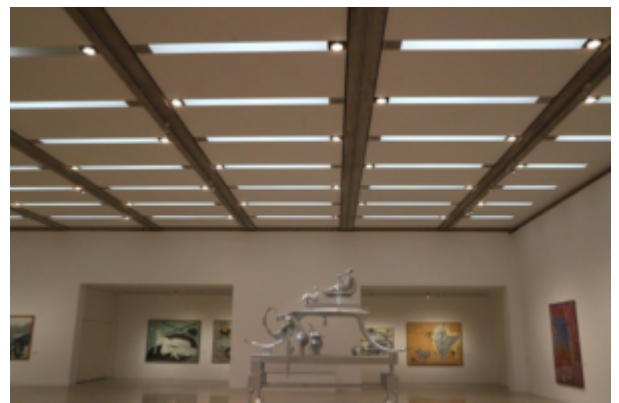


Day 5: Friday, the 23rd of February

On our last full day of our trip, we got up early to go and visit the Hofburg Palace. This was the former imperial palace and winter residence of the Habsburg Dynasty, who previously ruled the Holy Roman Empire. The building was built in the 13th century and today serves as the residence and the workplace for the President of Austria.



The Palace has many interesting exhibitions. We got to see The Imperial Silver Collection, which was fascinating because it showed how complex and ornate having dinner was for the Habsburg family; we got to find out about the life of Empress Elisabeth of Austria, commonly known as Sisi, who had struggled with the fame and social expectations of royalty before being assassinated; and we got to see The Imperial Apartments, which gave us a glimpse of how the Austrian royal family really lived. We were not allowed to take photos in most of these exhibitions, but I definitely took a lot from this visit and learned so much about Austrian history that I did not know about before!



Afterwards, we all went to lunch and then reconvened later in the afternoon to go to the Imperial Crypts. This is the burial vault of the Habsburg Dynasty, where the bones of 145 royals are kept, and it is astonishing to see how extravagant their coffins are! Here, we also saw Sisi's coffin, as well as that of her husband, Franz Joseph.

For the rest of the day, everyone had free time to get as much sightseeing as possible of Vienna! I went to Mumok, a world-renowned modern art museum located in the famous MuseumsQuartier. It was really great fun, especially the interactive exhibition when we were allowed to wear aluminium foil jackets!



Later that evening, we had our final dinner of the trip as one big group in an authentic Austrian tavern. This gave us time to reflect on our busy and fun-filled week that we'd had, as well as the opportunity to eat some pork schnitzel and kaiserschmarrn, a fluffy shredded pancake traditionally served with plum jam.

Day 6: Saturday, 24th of February

Home time!

I thoroughly enjoyed being responsible for organising an international trip with the Edinburgh University History Society. While certainly stressful at times, I learned a lot about myself and played a key role as part of a team; developed so many new skills that I would not have been able to otherwise; and made long lasting friendships along the way. I believe that societies truly enhance student life here at Edinburgh, and I am so glad that I made the decision to become involved in the student community in this way. Hopefully I'll get a place on the very popular History Society trip next year, as they are such a fantastic way to go abroad with new people at an affordable price!

LGBT+ History Month and Time Warp, 2018



Student Ambassador Ruby reports on a busy February for the School's Societies.

February has been a busy month here at the University – particularly for History, Classics and Archaeology students! Not only have we had the Staff-Student Pub Quiz and the History and Classics Society trips, but it's also been LGBT+ History Month and RAG (“Raising And Giving”) Week!

A lot has been going on across campus this LGBT+ History Month; our student's association has been running everything from film screenings, to LGBT+ self-defence classes. The History Society has also managed to get involved and organise some events of our own. We collaborated with PrideSoc (the University's LGBT+ society) to write a pub quiz, we designed historical Valentine's cards, and we led a walking tour of Edinburgh's LGBT+ history. Did you know that the 1974 International Congress on Homosexual Rights took place on our

campus?



Our Valentine Cards.

RAG Week takes place in the last week of February and is an opportunity for societies to host fundraising events for worthwhile causes. This year, History, Classics, Archaeology, and Retrospect (our School's student journal) decided to combine RAG week with LGBT+ History Month and host the event Time Warp. Time Warp was billed as a "party for people of all sexualities, genders and degrees", and all profits went to the Scottish charity *LGBT+ Health and Wellbeing*

Time Warp was held in Teviot Underground – one of the many bars and live music venues on campus – and was DJ-ed by volunteers from FreshAir, Edinburgh's student radio station. There were glowsticks, glitter aplenty and a slideshow of historic LGBT+ photos (because who said parties can't also be educational?!)



The Time Warp raised over £100 for charity and we had a blast!