

UK's first student housing co-op launches in Edinburgh



Credit: Edinburgh Student Housing Cooperative Campaign

Edinburgh is famous for its history, its architecture and its literature, but it's not known for cheap rental property. Well, students at the University of Edinburgh say that this is about to change. The Edinburgh Student Housing Co-op, which launched publically last night at the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) chaplaincy, aims to provide cheap rents to Edinburgh students squeezed by landlords.

Mike Shaw, one of the student campaigners behind the cooperative, told the Edinburgh Reporter that, "it was just an idea over a cup of tea a year ago."

The co-operative – recently incorporated as the Edinburgh Student Housing Cooperative Ltd – will be the first working student housing co-operative in Britain.

"It's something that a lot of people said we couldn't do, but we've done it," he said.

Students coming to Edinburgh from across Scotland and across the globe can expect to pay over £400 a month for a flat in the city, as well as having to fork out for tuition, books and rising living costs.

Campaigners have already secured the 106-bed Wrights Houses overlooking Bruntsfield Links, and hope to rent rooms to students at cut-price rates from September onwards. The co-op hopes to rent out the property to students for just £260 a month. Each of the 26 flats will contain a kitchen/living

room, two toilets and a shower – and all with a view of one of the city's largest public parks.

Those behind the campaign say they want to follow the business model developed by students in the USA, where small-scale housing co-ops have existed for over 70 years. They say that the example of students at Michigan State University, where over 4,000 students live in housing cooperatives, proves that students can be trusted to manage without help from university faculties.

The campaign has been helped out by EUSA, Scotmid and the Cooperative Educational Trust Scotland, but is financially independent. Kirsty Haigh, Vice President of Services at EUSA, told the Edinburgh Reporter that, "we've been helping the students throughout the process, working very closely with them. It's something that EUSA has worked to support, and will continue to do so in the long term."

Mike Shaw, one of the students behind the campaign, told how he collaborated with Rector Peter McColl. "It was just an idea over a cup of tea a year ago, and we both knew people who could help us."