

Press Release

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MSP welcomes European delegates during official opening of Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel.

Robert Brown MSP, Deputy Minister for Education and Young People welcomed members of the European Union Federation of Youth Hostel Associations (EUFED) to the city today (Saturday 25 November) as he officially opened Edinburgh Central, the Scottish Youth Hostels Association's 5 Star hostel on Leith Walk.

EUFED represents the interests, at European Union level, of the national Youth Hostel Associations of Europe, and the young people who stay at Youth Hostels.

Welcoming the Executive Committee and members at their Annual General Meeting: the first to be held here in Scotland: Robert Brown said: "This world-class facility is a shining illustration of both the quality and breadth of accommodation Scotland offers its millions of visitors each year.

"When we offer our guests wonderful facilities like those at Edinburgh Central – a groundbreaking mix of five-star hostel and hotel in the heart of this historic city – there is little doubt we are moving in the right direction to meet our commitment to increasing tourism revenue by 50 per cent over the next decade.

"As the Scottish Youth Hostel Association celebrates its 75th anniversary, and looks to a bright future exemplified by this ambitious and innovative development, Scotland's tourism industry can do the same. It is a really exciting development."

The Youth Hostel network across Europe provides safe, secure, welcoming and affordable accommodation for hundreds of thousands of young people on their travels and fulfils a vital role in terms of facilitating youth mobility and promoting European integration.

The importance of Youth Hostel Associations contribution to the European tourism economy should not be underestimated, EUFED members account for around 1,800 Youth Hostels across Europe, 2.8 million members and 23 million overnight stays within Europe.

President of EUFD, Peter Kaiser added: "It is a great privilege and pleasure for EUFED to be invited to Edinburgh by the Scottish Youth Hostel Association to hold EUFED General Assembly to discuss about youth hostelling and the importance of youth mobility within and outside Europe."

"SYHA is one of the most active Associations in Europe and works closely with EUFED to develop training modules and e-learning modules for Youth Hostel staff as well as supporting EUFED for the Humanity and Tolerance campaign."

The AGM was preceded by a seminar, funded by the European Commission under Action 5 of the EU Youth Programme, that is bringing together 24 delegates from 17 national Youth Hostel Associations and like-minded organisations in Europe, and young people working in Scotland plus guest speakers from the National Agency of the EU Youth Programme and from YoungScot.

Keith Legge, Chief Executive of SYHA said: "We are delighted to host this years EUFED seminar and AGM. It is an ideal opportunity to showcase the Association, our hostels and to discuss issues affecting our business and ways of ensuring that hostelling evolves to meet the needs of today's travellers. We intend to take full advantage of this three day event to present our new Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel as an ideal base for exploring the best that Edinburgh has to offer and to promote it as the gateway to discover the rest of Scotland".

Edinburgh Central's Manager, Ralph Klinkenberg added, "We are confident that EUFED delegates are enjoying their stay at this 5 star facility. They are among the first to put our conference rooms and new restaurant to the test and we look forward to receiving positive feedback and anticipate some return bookings."

Delegates arrived on Wednesday 22 November and attended a Seminar on Youth Mobility on Thursday 23 and Friday 24 November prior to today's General Assembly and AGM.

END

Note to Editors

EUFED

EUFED is run by an Executive Committee, who are the elected representatives of the Youth Hostel Associations of the European Union. The Executive Committee comprises a President, a Vice-President and Treasurer and three Members. The Secretariat is based in Brussels.

EUFED was founded in 1987 and its main activities are:

- To promote the youth hostelling movement at the EU level, and thereby to gain financial and political support for the cause;
- To assist national Youth Hostel Associations to access EU funding, to help them in the development of their work;
- To facilitate on-going performance improvement within Youth Hostels. Staff training and environmental sustainability at Youth Hostels are two key areas in this respect. EUFED, with the support of the IYHF and national Youth Hostel Associations, has recently been awarded funding from the EU to develop new training modules;
- Running European-wide volunteer exchange programmes for young people aged between 18 and 25, based at Youth Hostels, and with the financial support of the European Union; and
- Assisting the national Youth Hostel Associations of the EU accession countries to make the most of the new opportunities arising from EU enlargement.

There are currently 17 European countries represented within EUFED (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).

Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel

The £10 million refurbishment of the former Apex House has been the most ambitious project ever undertaken by the SYHA in its 75 year history. Although outwardly the building has changed very little, the interior is almost unrecognisable from the original open plan offices. Work undertaken includes new internal layouts on all floors, construction of partition walling & corridors, introduction of suspended ceilings and renewal of all electrical and mechanical services as well as the installation of air conditioning throughout the building.

The hostel also has high levels of sound insulation with all windows, floors and ceilings having been soundproofed for the comfort and peace of guests and it does make a remarkable difference.

Lifts have been incorporated for those with ability impairments, lots of luggage or who are just exhausted at the end of a long journey! In addition disabled access and facilities are provided in accordance with legislation and best practice. And signage, although not yet in brail, has been designed with the sight impaired in mind.

We provide an extensive programme of outdoor activities for hostellers of all ages, and for those with and without previous experience of their chosen activity.

The hostel boasts a café and restaurant offering quality food at affordable prices in a relaxed stylish environment as well as conference facilities aimed at small to medium businesses or those seeking space to host business meetings, training sessions and seminars for groups of up to 50 people.

In summary, Edinburgh Central Hostel provides ideal accommodation and facilities for those wishing to visit Edinburgh and still have enough cash to spend on enjoying the delights of the city. This new style of hostel also enhances the facilities and services available to workers, residents and businesses the local area.

SYHA

A registered charity, the Scottish Youth Hostels Association is an important provider of hostel and accommodation services within the Scottish tourism sector.

SYHA Hostels provide a unique base for environmental education and outdoor activities. For generations we have been of service to walkers, climbers and cyclists, children and adults, in some of Scotland's most inaccessible areas - places that would not be viable accommodation sites for commercial operators.

To celebrate the 75th Anniversary in 2006 the Association opened Edinburgh Central, the networks flagship international standard 300-bed hostel on Leith Walk.

The Association - a member of the International Youth Hostel Federation - has hostels in 70 across Scotland, offering low-cost, high quality facilities appealing to everyone from the very young to the young at heart.

Many of our hostels have been refurbished or upgraded to reflect the demands of today's traveller and now offer single, twin or family rooms and en-suite facilities.

Hostels regularly attract large numbers of visitors from all over the globe, especially those who want to visit Scotland's historic, cultural and tourist attractions, or enjoy outdoor pursuits and wildlife watching.

With 30,000 registered members, the SYHA is the largest participant in the hostel market, attracting more than 500,000 overnight guests each year - of which over 70% are from out with Scotland - making a valuable contribution to the Scottish economy each year..

All media enquiries to Proscot Public Relations Tel: 0131 468 7055