

International Mobility Survey 2012 Response



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Online companion to this report

Online appendices to this report can be found at imperialcollegeunion.org/imsresponse.



Introduction

Imperial College Union believes that competitor universities are ahead of the curve on international mobility, and we are keen to see the College actively develop all initiatives that promote a diverse, internationally mobile student body. Imperial College Union's International Mobility Survey 2012 and academic representation network have formed the cornerstones of this Response.

The definition of 'international mobility' Imperial College Union is adopting is:

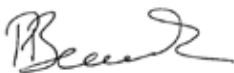
"The ability of a person to move around the world, without feeling restricted by barriers of language, culture or experience."

Throughout this response, we seek to target how the College can remove barriers to international mobility and promote opportunities to students – cementing Imperial's truly international education and reputation.



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Studying for a year abroad

Undergraduates undertaking a year abroad from Imperial currently do this in either their third or fourth year of study. A year abroad is credit-bearing for all departments other than Life Sciences and this opportunity affords students the chance to learn and carry out research at another world class institution – alongside, of course, allowing them to develop and experience different cultures.

The College's current year abroad partners are shown in the online appendices¹; each department has a year abroad scheme with some of the best higher education institutions in Europe. When compared to our national competitors, however, departments are very European focused: the inconsistency between departments at Imperial and nationally¹ will potentially hamper students' satisfaction and damage undergraduate application numbers.

The new government-imposed 15% cap² on annual fees for UK students undertaking a year abroad is a concern to Imperial College Union. Whilst this cap effectively acts as an 85% discount to students, who will save £7,650 from doing a year abroad, the Union is aware that this cap will discourage College from increasing the number of partners and may potentially decrease the number of places available to students. We fully appreciate that teaching students from partner institutions is a significant investment for College to make every year, but the Union believes the College should weigh this against the boost it would receive in international reputation should collaboration between universities increase.

If Imperial wishes to increase its international reputation and profile it needs to reach out to more institutions across the globe - not just Europe. The University of California is achieving this with their University of California Education Abroad Programme³; the University of Melbourne and Stanford University are also running insitutional year abroad schemes with various universities across the world.



Physics should offer a year abroad not just a year in Europe. I would have definitely gone if I could have gone to an English-speaking country like the USA, Australia, New Zealand etc.

PHYSICS STUDENT

¹ <http://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/imsresponse>

² HEFCE press release, May 2012 - <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2012/name,72835,en.html>

³ <http://eap.ucop.edu>

The College and departments should set up more year abroad schemes in the USA

The data collected from the Union's International Mobility survey clearly shows that regardless of demographic - students are vastly more interested in doing a year abroad in the USA over any other country. As some of our competitors are offering this opportunity - one example being University College London's relationship with Caltech⁴ - both the College and departments should strive to create year abroad schemes with world class American universities.

The Faculty of Engineering and the Department of Chemistry are currently the only parts of the College to do this. We strongly recommend the other departments in the Faculty of Natural Sciences and the Faculty of Medicine establish similar links – potentially through introductions from the Department of Chemistry and Faculty of Engineering.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

The College and departments should set up more year abroad schemes in the USA.

We understand that it is problematic to set up a year abroad scheme with world class American universities, particularly as they don't operate quite like the UK higher education system. Imperial's UK competitors have found ways to make these programmes possible though and some departments at Imperial are already having success too.

Please arrange more exchange schemes with more universities in the US for a greater number of students on the Mech Eng course. The current exchange programmes do not match with Imperial's pretensions to be one of the best universities in the world.

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

⁴ <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/international-students/current-students/ucl-students-abroad/options>

Studying for a year abroad cont...

More Year Abroad schemes should be developed at institutions which teach in English

The International Mobility survey results clearly show that our students are interested in carrying out a year abroad at top universities in Canada and Australia. The Earth Science and Engineering Department is currently the only part of the College to have a year abroad scheme in Canada, while four Engineering departments are the only ones that offer a year abroad in Australia. We believe that inconsistencies in opportunities between departments will harm students' satisfaction, as well as representing missed opportunities.

As 53.3% of the UK students that filled in the survey can only speak English, we would strongly recommend that the College and departments establish year abroad schemes in Canada, Australia and other English-speaking countries.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

More Year Abroad schemes should be developed at institutions which teach in English.

Carrying out a year abroad in Singapore and Hong Kong was slightly less popular amongst students, but, as they also teach in English, the removal of a language barrier will still be attractive to most students.

Study abroad opportunities in Maths are extremely limited.

MATHEMATICS STUDENT

The College should place all current year abroad partners online and this should be kept up to date

The College doesn't currently have a single repository where all year abroad information can be found - we believe, creating confusion for both current and prospective students⁵. This website should also link to IROP placements and the College's UROP page.

OUR RECOMMENDATION



The College should place all current year abroad partners online and this should be kept up to date.

International study at Imperial seems to be more "go back and study in the country you just came from for a year". Also more than a handful of people in each department should be able to study abroad.

AERONAUTICS STUDENT

⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2013/mar/06/lack-of-advice-turns-students-off-studying-abroad>

Studying for a year abroad cont...


The College should lobby both the Russell Group and the Government to change the 15% cap on year abroad tuition fees

We understand that the Government introduced the 15% cap on year abroad tuition fees to try to increase student mobility² but we are worried that this may have an opposite effect at Imperial, with the College forgoing a substantial amount of money for every partnership they maintain. The government's oversight in this matter is a concern for Imperial College Union: this is harming Imperial more than other universities, being a STEM-only university.

We therefore urge the College to lobby both the Russell Group and the Government for an alternative system for increasing the student mobility of UK students that incentivises all universities. We also urge College to weigh the opportunity cost in forgone fees of year abroad schemes against the benefit to College's strategic goals of international prominence and competitiveness.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

The College should lobby both the Russell Group and the Government to change the 15% cap on year abroad tuition fees.



The opportunities for an exchange to a good US university is so terribly limited. Only 1 or 2 go each year. That is really small compared to what other overseas universities offer to their students

CHEMISTRY STUDENT

Departments are urged not to take purely the grades of students into account when considering applications for competitive places

When two students are sitting on first class exam results, how should the College determine who is the best ambassador to send on a competitive placement?

Imperial College Union believes departments should not only take into account the student's performance in credited work, but also consider their extra-curricular activities. The Faculty of Engineering already do this when deciding which students go on the year abroad scheme with the University of California. This process is more administratively intense, but acts as an incentive for engineering students to achieve First class honours whilst actively participating in College life.

This process ultimately creates more well-rounded graduates, inspires students to work harder and sends the best representatives for the College to other world class institutions.

The amount of places available for study abroad seems to be limited in my department and faculty.

BIOENGINEERING STUDENT

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Departments are urged not to take purely the grades of students into account when considering applications for competitive places.

International Research Opportunity Programme (IROPs)

IROPs allow students to undertake research at a higher education institution located in another country over the summer holidays.

We believe IROPs are easier to set up and maintain than year abroad schemes: they do not need to fulfil quality assurance standards and do not require students from the other institution to carry out a reciprocal IROP at Imperial College London. Furthermore, based on the International Mobility survey data, more of our students would seek to undertake an IROP than a full year abroad¹.

Currently the College only runs one central IROP scheme, with the National University of Singapore, which is fully funded and open to various disciplines. As an example of how this scheme could develop since 2009 the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's MISTI (MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives) programme⁶ has allowed students to take part in IROPs around the globe at both Higher Education institutions and industry.



I would go on an internship at any world university if it would have an interesting research topic.

CHEMISTRY STUDENT

¹ <http://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/imsresponse>

⁶ <http://web.mit.edu/misti/>

Increase the number of IROPs, specifically with institutions in the USA

83.5% of respondents were interested in doing an IROP¹. The International Mobility survey showed that regardless of the demographic (language spoken, subject studied and fee type) the vast majority of students wanted to carry out an IROP in the USA. The three most popular American institutions were the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, California Institute of Technology, and Stanford University.

In our opinion it is difficult to set up and maintain a year abroad partnership with a world class quality university in the USA, we view IROPs as viable alternatives.

If a student wished to do a year abroad at a Japanese university they would normally need to be proficient in Japanese: students carrying out an IROP do not need to meet this requirement. Nearly 40% of the International Mobility respondents were interested in studying in Japan – something that, without the IROP, would otherwise be closed to many due to the language qualification pre-requisite. We recognise that the

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Increase the number of IROPs, specifically with institutions in the USA.

Faculty of Engineering offer an IROP at the Tokyo Institute of Technology through the TiROP scheme and believe that more opportunities like this should exist.

Imperial College Union would therefore recommend that the College attempt to create IROP schemes with popular universities and promote the opportunities to all of our current and prospective students.

It would make imperial seem more deserving of a top ten position in global rankings if it had strong ties with other top ten institutions. If you think our students are in a top ten university then we should be good enough to study at another top ten university.

PHYSICS STUDENT

IROPs cont...

Year abroad and IROP schemes should be listed together

The College should centrally run a website that shows the IROP opportunities alongside the year abroad opportunities. This will allow both current and prospective students to easily navigate the international opportunities Imperial offers, which should increase applications and students' satisfaction. This page should be kept comprehensive and up to date.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Year abroad and IROP schemes should be listed together



I could not undertake an international UROP unless costs were covered as I have limited financial means.

MEDICINE STUDENT

IROPs should be fully funded

To undertake a summer of research, students must be in a position to forgo earnings from summer employment. As it stands, only students from comfortable backgrounds could benefit from the employability and personal development benefits a UROP or IROP can bring. To allow students from any socio-economic background to undertake an IROP they – like the current National University of Singapore collaboration currently is - should be fully funded, 46% of respondents said they could only do an IROP if travel and accommodation was paid for.

This will inevitably be the largest hurdle to overcome and our suggestion is that initially funding is in place for some IROP schemes, but not all. Students with the highest grades, who have undertaken a UROP placement (or a similar scheme) and who are from a poorer socio-economic background could be supported more over students from a richer socio-economic background.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

IROPs should be fully funded.



Research abroad should not be limited to those who have the finances.

PHYSICS STUDENT

Local Initiatives

Whilst the major focus of this Response is on the College's ability to satisfy students' aspirations in studying or working abroad, it is also important to recognise the work the College and Union can do to ensure Imperial's campuses are truly diverse, and supportive of an internationally mobile culture. Recommendations in this section indirectly relate to international mobility; the language support and the cohesion between students of different nationalities, for instance.

Collaborative work to encourage mixing

The Union is very aware, and is concerned, that the segments of Imperial's diverse student body co-exist, rather than mix. This is to be naturally expected to an extent, but more collaborative work or activities in the early years of a course in departmental set groups would encourage UK, EU and International students to mix with each other and develop friendships outside of their own demographic.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Collaborative work to encourage mixing.



Change the format of the current Welcome Week to one free from teaching for all new undergraduates

The International Office has run successful International Student Welcome events for several years. The Union fully supports initiatives such as this and is keen to continue participating in the events. We fully support the creation of a dedicated Welcome Week that allows all students to participate in the International student specific events – not just those who arrive early to London. We are aware of the time pressures on the annual teaching calendar, but we would fully support a Welcome Week for first year students full of events that are not interfered with by introductory lectures, or tests. Through these events, we would expect to see a more mixed and settled cohort of students who – through more time devoted to ice breaker activities – would be well integrated into the College.

OUR RECOMMENDATION



Change the format of the current Welcome Week to one free from teaching for all new undergraduates.

Local Initiatives cont...

Increase international participation in Union societies, and UK student participation in cultural activities

Data from the College census and the Union shows that whilst 71% of home students participate in the Union's Clubs, Societies & Projects, only 66% of international students are members. It is Imperial College Union's aim to increase participation in clubs and societies amongst International students to the same level as home and EU students.

OUR RECOMMENDATION




Increase international participation in Union societies, and UK student participation in cultural activities.

Advanced language and culture courses for undergraduates in the Horizons programme

As part of the definition of 'International Mobility', the Union is keen to see that students are 'able to move around the world, without feeling restricted by barriers of language, culture or experience'. In this vein, Imperial College Union would like to see advanced language and culture courses for later undergraduate years that build on initial courses given in the first year. A developed knowledge of other cultures will increase the likelihood that students will be able to confidently study abroad.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Advanced language and culture courses for undergraduates in the Horizons programme.



Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP)

Improving links, and building bridges between different parts of the College community are integral for an inclusive and respectful environment. The undergraduate and postgraduate divide between students is still something that needs to be tackled across the College – and the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme goes some way into bridging that divide. The Programme is held in high regard by undergraduates looking to challenge themselves academically, and is a good way for undergraduates, postgraduates and academics to interact more closely. Skills resulting from a UROP placement are attractive to institutions across the globe – enhancing the attractiveness of Imperial graduates to universities and businesses internationally. UROP placements specifically target ‘experience barriers’ that may be seen as a hindrance to students’ international mobility – for this reason, we believe UROP should be an integral part of the College’s international mobility strategy.



I think the Mathematics Department should be more supportive of UROP and provide more funding, like other departments in Imperial.

MATHEMATICS STUDENT

Encourage supervisors to take on UROP placements

Academics are understandably not going to offer UROP places if the process is detrimental to their research or teaching activities. Anything the College can offer to make offering placements rewarding for supervisors may increase the availability of such programmes. The Union suggests that a range of incentives for academics could be used: anything from an increase in funding for a researcher that takes on UROP placements, to taking on a placement contributing towards the minimum teaching requirements the College asks of an academic for their position (ie, instead of having to mark examination scripts, or lead a lecture course).

OUR RECOMMENDATION



Encourage supervisors to take on UROP placements.

You only hear about UROPs in the third or fourth year, which is far too late. We should be told about it in the first year and lecturers should offer them at the end of their courses.

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

UROPs cont...

Promote UROP placements

The Union is keen to suggest that something as simple as more active promotion in lecture courses is encouraged. A simple mention of UROP placements at the end of a lecture may increase awareness of the programme amongst the student body and encourage more applicants for the UROP places.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Promote UROP placements.



MATHEMATICS STUDENT

More advertising of UROP placements in general!

Update the centralised UROP webpage

The Union is fully supportive of a central repository and information centre for all aspects of UROP placements. The current repository⁷ is not always updated to reflect the true number of opportunities available to students. Whilst we appreciate that many supervisors will already have contact with their UROP students prior to their placement, in the interests of fairness, applications should be open to all eligible students via a central repository. If nothing else, by openly displaying the vast number of opportunities actually taking place, the number of applicants should increase and as such a culture of offering placements should develop to meet this demand.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Update the centralised UROP webpage.



I did a UROP but it took me forever to find the funding and a supervisor. The UROP website wasn't even up to date, which made it even more confusing.

MEDICINE STUDENT

⁷ <http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/urop>

Conclusion

We believe the College needs to set up more fully funded IROP partnerships with other world class institutions, as they are more popular with our students than year abroad schemes. Since the demand for these placements will be high we recommend that the College should take into account whether a student has done a UROP (or a similar scheme) when deciding between applicants, as we feel the UROP scheme creates great research ambassadors for the College.

Imperial College Union also believes that more year abroad schemes should be set up outside of Europe, since inconsistencies between departments (both at Imperial and our national competitors) will only damage student satisfaction and harm application numbers.

Finally, the College needs to consider how they can integrate students of different nationalities more effectively through first year accommodation, the Horizons programme, a Welcome Week being free of teaching and working with the Union on increasing our Clubs, Societies & Projects memberships.

Online companion to this report

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