

Imperial College Union

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

A note by Stephen Brown

Governance update

Welcome to the first official meeting of the Imperial College Union Trustee Board which was established over the summer following a comprehensive review of our governance structures. To restate what has been said in previous meetings the original intention was for the Union to embark on the process of registering with the Charity Commission but after feedback from our solicitors and the NUS we are waiting until the Commission issues its guidance for Students' Unions on the impact of the new Charities Act.

In terms of recruitment Mandy Hurford and Lewis Hands have been appointed by Council as lay members. Omar Hashmi has been appointed as a replacement for Adele Peel and Ali Al-Hussaini was elected by cross campus ballot to one of the remaining student trustee positions. Hamish Common has identified another suitable candidate but it was not possible to interview and appoint him before this meeting. RON also won the last remaining student trustee positions in the recent elections and the last student trustee will be elected at a bye-election at the next meeting of Union Council.

Annual Report

The annual financial statements were signed off by the Executive Committee and are presented to the board as a separate agenda item. In future the Trustee Board will have the final sign off on the accounts so 2007 was the last year in which this function was performed by the Union Executive.

Internal Reporting

Following the completion of the end of financial year work the Finance Division are now reviewing our internal controls. A first draft of the 1st quarter management accounts were presented to the Executive on Tuesday and they indicated that the Union is currently performing very strongly. Since August overall the Union is running at a £116,558.24 which is up £86,488 on budget. I do not have confidence in the corresponding figures from the 2006/07 period as on closer inspection they do not make sense – a further indication of why this review is necessary. I have included the first draft of these management accounts a separate agenda item but I would like to emphasise that these are not the final figures as there are still a lot of unanswered questions, particularly in the area of operational budgets which are currently being addressed by the management.

Beit redevelopment

I have started sounding out senior College managers about when we can expect the funding to be released for the next stage of the Union building project. On Tuesday the Executive Committee had preliminary discussions about how happy the Union would be funding our share of the capital plan out of our reserves. It was felt by the committee that if we over-committed our general reserves then this would severely weaken the organisations ability to absorb any unforeseen financial difficulties. On the basis of the annual report we are currently in the position to fund roughly £1.2m out of our total share (see PID) of £1.7m.

Environmental policy implementation

Last summer Union Council passed a comprehensive environmental policy requiring the Union's operational areas to become considerably more eco-friendly than they had been previously. There have been numerous teething problems with the shift away from the predominant use of disposable food containers, utensils and drinks glasses but managers have been asked to ensure that the policy is upheld wherever possible. There is also room to develop the Union's recycling strategy but since College deal with our waste I think it is best until we wait and see what their waste management strategy will be as it is currently under review. Myself, the DPEW and 2 representatives from the Environmental Society discussed this at length with a member of the Estates Division last month in order to get student opinion on this topic. Steps have also been taken to procure recyclable stationary and off-premises food packaging provided that the increase in cost was marginal.

Wye

On Tuesday afternoon I met with the Chief Operating Officer to discuss the future of Wye Bar. Due to the decrease in student numbers that has happened since teaching transferred over to Kent it is no longer possible to run this bar on a commercial basis. Last year College acknowledged this but wanted to support us in keeping open a valuable social space for Imperial students at Wye and gave us an extra £20,000 in our subvention to cover any losses the Union would incur. If Wye bar is to remain open while the last group of Imperial undergraduates are still studying in Wye then College must absorb the loss that this bar will inevitably make. A number of options were discussed at this meeting in order to maintain provision of this service.

Postgraduate representation

I am currently working to get a strategy in place to revitalise PG representation following the poor performance of the GSA so far this year. Between writing this report and this meeting I have held a meeting with PG's to discuss this and I will now give you a verbal update.

NUS Governance

Currently the Union is taking a very hawkish stance on the NUS's governance review and will be supportive of any reforms which will make the organisation considerably more cost effective than it has so far demonstrated itself to be. Their sabbaticals and senior managers that the organisation has suffered in the past from poor management, financial controls and inaccessible democratic structures which has resulted in various interest groups having a disproportionate influence on policy. This review has broad political support from across the rational political spectrum with the only real opposition to the proposed reforms coming from the hard left. We have submitted a request to the National President requesting an Extraordinary NUS Conference in December so that the constitutional changes can be approved and ratified in this academic year.

College handovers

Over the past few months College have had a lot of changes amongst their senior managers. I am pleased to report that so far the Union has established a good working relationship with the new College Secretary and Pro-Rectors which is vital if we are to be effective representatives of the student body.

Health and Safety

The General Manager and I have a meeting scheduled with Ian Gillett to discuss how the College's new health and safety policy will impact on our activities and reporting standards.