

Imperial College Union

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

A note by Jenny Morgan

Swine Flu

I have been working with College Communications, the Health Centre and Occupational Health to make sure we are taking steps to prevent an outbreak occurring at Imperial and preparing for the situation that might arise if one of our student or staff contracted the virus. Please see the college website for details. In addition I have been arguing for extra resources to be put in place so that student of the college who aren't registered with a GP can be treated in college hours but we are still working towards an agreement.

Aldwych Group

The Aldwych group (Unions of the Russell Group Universities) has had a reasonably active year with their next meeting to be held at Imperial on June 15th which I am organising. By the end of term myself and Charlotte Richer, the secretary of the Aldwych group, will have completed a generic presentation which can be used by union volunteers from across the Russell group universities to do Outreach in schools promoting not only the educational side but all of the extra curricular activities as well.

Hannah and I joined several members of the Aldwych group in Bristol to have a Q&A session with the Minister for Higher Education, David Lammy. There has been a lot of discussion regarding university funding in relation to the recession and a probable change of government. As many of you will know, the Rector has recently spoken about this publicly. please see below.

Rector statement – for discussion – from telegraph.co.uk

Sir Roy Anderson, rector of Imperial College London, said up to five leading institutions should be privatised to protect their world-class reputations.

He said it was "madness" that many universities rated among the global elite - including Imperial and the London School of Economics - were facing funding cuts as Government grants were increasingly placed in the hands of former polytechnics.

He insisted that within "10 or 20 years" some top universities should be allowed to go private.

It would allow them to recruit more foreign students and set higher tuition fees.

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In an interview with The Daily Telegraph, Sir Roy, who was appointed last summer, said the current £3,100 cap on student tuition fees should be "relaxed" to allow universities to charge as much as £12,000 a year.

Imperial is already being forced to recruit around 300 more foreign students, who pay higher fees, in September to cope with a funding short fall, he added.

Sir Roy said some smaller institutions should be re-branded as "vocational training centres" to ensure funding was channelled the very best.

"If we were a business you wouldn't worry about nationality, you would just take the best students from wherever they came from in the world," he said. "We are taxpayer funded and we have in the past tried to recruit 60 per cent of our students from home and 40 per cent from overseas. But if financial times became very tough we would change that because we would have to survive and compete internationally so we would go where the market was."

At the moment, Buckingham is the only independent university in Britain.

Sir Roy said replicating the move would ensure Imperial - rated among the top 10 in the world - "would not be subject to the fads and fashions" of the Government's Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Earlier this year, the organisation handed out £1.6bn of research funding.

But many top universities including Imperial, Cambridge and University College London suffered below-inflation allocations, while some newer universities saw huge rises.

"It is madness," he said. "The likely consequence is that in the longer term Britain will not continue to play in the top league. Some of them should not be universities, they should be vocational training centres."

He also told how Imperial had been forced to toughen up its entry requirements to identify the brightest students from record numbers applying with straight As at A-level. From September, they will take part in a more rigorous day-long interview.

Imperial is also trialling new entry examinations which all applicants may take on top of school exams.

He said a year-on-year rise in the number of teenagers leaving school with top grades was down to the fact that exam papers were now "somewhat easier".

"How can it be that the quality of teaching has improved so dramatically and we have such an extraordinary change in the intellectual ability of our population?" he said. "Do we really believe it is the quality of teaching or do we believe that the quality of the examination has been declining?"

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However he has gone on to say in a recent staff email

Colleagues may have seen reports in the media over the past few days stating that I wish to free the College from government control. To actually do so would require a proposal, a debate and a decision within the College and at its Council that has not taken place. The media's emphasis is inevitable but the headlines obscure the real debate I am calling for, which I hope to explain here, and have consistently stated in recent press interviews.

As I have said in Q&A sessions with staff (<http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/rector/yourquestions>) at Hammersmith and Silwood in the last week, the College is facing very tough economic times. We are going to see significant cuts in UK public expenditure on science and higher education in the coming years, which will be felt for a long period hereafter. Imperial must argue forcefully against these cuts being applied equally across the sector and in particular to the detriment of the UK's world class universities.

In addition there are three key issues we must confront.

We must have the freedom we need to set our own fees for all our courses. The value of an Imperial degree is not reflected in the income we receive. A serious debate about student fees is required and we have to raise its visibility. However, in any changes proposed, we must be absolutely confident that they would not deter prospective students who would flourish at the College. I have repeatedly stressed we are committed as a College to encouraging students from any background and to try and prevent financial circumstances acting as a barrier to entry to Imperial.

Secondly, we must seriously consider the opportunities open to us on the global stage. In the growing demography of highly qualified potential students from overseas, in particular China and India, there will be a huge demand for British universities to provide their high quality education to the world.

Thirdly, and touching on a matter flowing directly from Imperial's founding mission: universities are the source of discoveries that, if commercialised, can be used to assist the UK economy in its recovery. When this country is crying out for a long-term industrial strategy, and our universities are placed so well to support this through the supply of people and ideas, we cannot stay silent and must position ourselves to influence thinking.

It is an often-overlooked fact that the UK is excellent at providing higher education. It is an industry worth £45 billion to the UK. The fact that we have four universities in the world top 10 underlines Britain's standing. To harm these 'brand leaders' would be to hurt the whole sector.

The UK's leading universities should be properly supported and nurtured; if they can't be, we should debate whether they should be set free. But doing nothing would imperil a unique culture and an international asset. My responsibility is to lead the College through this period of economic difficulty and to build a platform for its future success, and in doing so I believe we have much to offer the UK.

University Challenge

Finally we have been able to announce the team that will be representing Imperial in 09/10. These are Gilead Amit, Simon Good, Benedict Nicholson, Ciaran Healey and in reserve Edward Brightman. And on Friday night we learnt that the team will actually be

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featuring on the Television this year with filming on the 20th June in Manchester. Very best of luck to them and my thanks goes to Ali Mozaffari for helping me on this.

Trustee Board

Ram Gidoomal has had to resign as Chair of Imperial College Union Trustee Board. This is because he has been given the position of Chair of the (check email) which would mean he has a conflict of interest which is why he has had to stand down. This means that not only do we need a new Chair but constitutionally we need another external member of College Council to sit on Trustee Board. I have been working with the College secretary, Rodney Eastwood, to fill this position however due to timings between the next College Council and the next Trustee Board we will unfortunately finish the year Chairless but don't worry we shall still be Quorate!!

Clubs Activity Space

Lily and I have spent a large proportion of last week negotiating with engineering to use the mech eng foyer as activity space although some person has issued a directive to have security throw our clubs out. This is hopefully resolved now.

PG Award Ceremony

You may remember that I rewrote the student oratory to bring it into the 21st century at the beginning of the year for the UG award ceremony. And it was introduced to the PG award ceremony for the first time in May. This adds another three minutes onto the length of the ceremonies (hehe – sorry).

Thank you

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for contributing so much to the union this year. It's been a pleasure to work with you all. There is the president's dinner on July 24th which is a celebration of the union officer's year and an introduction to the incoming officers. You will all be invited so please come along if you can.