

Imperial College Union
President's Report
A Note by the President

Strategic Plan

According to rules laid down for large expenditure, we have tendered the project out to three companies, who are coming back with proposals as to how they would manage the gathering of opinion and data to form the new Strategy and the cost associated with this. The three companies are Red Brick, Impact Strategy Consulting and Blue Edge. So far the plans look suitably different to have a good debate about who to go with. When all three complete proposals are with us, Exec will decide who to go with. From then on we will be able to talk about the far more interesting topic of what students think of their Union and where it should be heading rather than the cost of the process.

Financial Procedures & Operations Handbook

The documentation of our financial procedures has begun, led by the company Counterculture. The documented procedures and the Operations Handbook which is a lower level instruction manual for operating commercial services, will be important tools for continuity in the Union, and will make training a lot easier.

The Union is also recruiting a new Finance Manager and interviews for the 4 short-listed individuals will take place next week.

Fees and Financial Aid Working Group

This group has been set up to advise Imperial's Management Board on the level of fees the University should set and the model for financial aid for students which will be adopted under the new system. We have another meeting of the Fees and Financial Aid Working Group on Monday so I will be able to update everyone more in the Council meeting. I have made an effort to talk as much as possible about this working group as all students should be kept informed. The main choice is between a lower fee and a much reduced package of financial aid, and a larger fee with a much larger package of financial aid than there is currently.

Imperial decided at Council on Friday morning to raise the fee to £9000, subject to the government's conditions on access.

Life Sciences Teaching Review

The teaching review for Life Sciences began at the end of January with a questionnaire for Undergraduates and one for staff, which were up for a week. The Chairs of the teaching reviews for Bio and Biochem replied to questions by Felix and myself, but there is a lack of any reference to the restructure. The teaching review appears to simply be taking a long view about teaching without trying to fill in the 25% loss in teaching time in both degree streams, or replace any of the lost administrative positions. I have heard from someone within the department that the Terms of Reference for the teaching review do not mention the restructure at all. I have contacted the Chairs and asked for the Terms of Reference and the answers to the questionnaire but so far they have not replied.

Hall Rents

Imperial College Union and the College's Commercial Services have identified several areas where cuts could be made to reduce the price of Hall accommodation. A survey is intended to gauge opinion on whether these changes would be welcome.

1. The 'Amenities Fund' is a fund that each Hall has which is spent throughout the year on social events for the hall. The fund comes directly from room rents and the amount is decided by the Warden in each Hall. Different Halls vary from £2.10 per person per week to £3.15. This money is spent on many things such as subsidising event tickets, food and alcohol. The issue with the amenities fund is that students are subsidising other students to take part in social events in what are already difficult financial conditions. Some people will always be left out. If the amenities fund were to be scrapped, social events would still take place, but they would cost more for the people taking part. There are other options such as a £10 'common room charge' for each term.
2. The current cleaning system in Halls is that rooms are cleaned once per fortnight and communal areas such as kitchens are cleaned every day. In many Universities rooms are not cleaned at all (a vacuum cleaner etc. is available) and kitchens are cleaned more rarely. Reducing the cleaning to once per week for communal areas and removing cleaning entirely for rooms would save everyone approximately £5 per week.
3. Contracts that students sign for rooms are for 39 weeks per year. Reducing this to 35 weeks per year and allowing your room to be hired out during the Spring Holiday would save 4 weeks rent. If this were to be implemented, it is likely to be used in a few Halls, and students could apply to these Halls or choose other Halls with longer 39 week contracts.

Business School Bursaries

Students in 2nd year and 3rd PhDs on a scheme called the 'GTA Scholarship' were told when they started that their bursary was £16,000 and that included in this was an expectation that they would do 6 hours a week teaching. Later last academic year they convinced the department that contracts would be a good idea for PhD students as they felt they were working far more than the 6 hours doing marking and teaching duties. The department drew up contracts for them starting October 2010 which detailed £16,000 plus 6 hours teaching time plus 9 hours 'non-contact' time ie. Marking. They signed this contract only to then find out that the contract drawn up for 1st year students starting in October 2010 was for £16,000 with no expected teaching – indeed, they could earn more money by teaching whereas the 2nd and 3rd years couldn't.

The issue with this is not so much a change in the contract for new students (which would be fair – you sign up for what you get), but that the two contracts were drawn up and signed at the same time, and yet stipulated two different sets of conditions for sets of students on the same scholarship in the same department. From emails I have seen between the department and the students the department do not seem to accept that there is anything wrong with this.

Council
14th February 2011

I took this issue to the Pro-Rector (Education) who has since told me that the issue has been dealt with and all students get paid for teaching above and beyond their bursary amount. I have yet to hear anything from the students to confirm this.

Executive

In Exec we looked over the recent Health and Safety incidents in the Union. Only two items needed further attention. One was CGCU Motor pouring petrol down a sink, which we will investigate. The other was RSM Hockey knocking the roof-rack half way off a minibus, for which appropriate disciplinary action has been taken.

We have also set the figures for the up and coming budgeting round. The budgets for Exec and RWB remain the same at £4000 and £17,000 respectively. CSB has been given a 5% increase on grants to clubs to cover the increased cost in operating activities such as VAT, inflation, petrol rises etc. CSBs total is now £337,200.

Minibus costs have risen slightly to allow the fleet to remain at break-even point for the year.

A rep system for casual staff is being created by the Deputy President (Finance & Services) so that they can voice their thoughts about working in the Union as a student. The system of reps will report to the Deputy President (Finance & Services).