

Student Hubs

A note by the President

Summary

Student Hubs is a charitable organisation set up firstly at Oxford University Students' Union to provide volunteering, environment & sustainability, ethical careers, international development, social action and social enterprise support to student groups. Student Hubs is now working with other Students' Unions around the country on various aspects of these main themes. Student Hubs are funded by a variety of grants from donor organisations. Information about the organisation is available on their website at www.studenthubs.org

Student Hubs have made contact with ICU to see if there would be benefit to our activities in developing a group of students at Imperial who are affiliated to the Student Hubs organisation. Over the past few months we have been working with Student Hubs to understand what it is they would envisage at Imperial, what they would need, how it would work and what benefits it would bring. We have used the work recently undertaken by Warwick SU as a basis for discussions and planning.

Appended to this paper is a draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) about how such a setup could work. Key to the success of the idea will be finding a group of students to effectively start this work at Imperial. The name of the project is of some debate given the use of the term Student Hub at Imperial College. The working title is "Connecting students with causes", though this is not set in stone and suggestions are welcome. Student Hubs have committed to provide a member of staff, their on-costs and support for their events (at no cost to us) to support the work to be undertaken. The Union will host the member of staff in the main offices in the Union Building and broadly make the services available to Clubs, Societies & Projects available to them.

The Trustee Board are invited to consider the proposal and approve the MoU for signing; noting that the agreement is reviewed annually and can be terminated.

How do these type of activities currently work at Imperial?

Community volunteering: The Imperial Volunteer Centre previously offered a volunteer bureau service, matching potential student volunteers with local community projects. This service ceased in early 2010. There is no formal programme of community volunteering at Imperial, though various Societies and Projects undertake activities in this area.

Fundraising: ICU RAG and ICSM RAG raise varying amounts of money for charity each year. Various Clubs, Societies & Projects also undertake fundraising for charities of their own choosing.

Projects: Recognition as a Project within ICU gives an avenue for student groups who would not meet the requirements of a Club or Society to undertake their activities under an official banner and receive services provided by ICU.

Student led project recognition: The College has a newly introduced method of officially recognising a student led project venture. The first stage in this process is registration as an ICU Project. Expert guidance and support will become available through the College recognition scheme, as will funding through the IC Trust. Ventures in this arena to date have concentrated on voluntary infrastructure projects overseas.

Campaigns: ICU is in the process of revitalising the provision of campaigns within the remit of the Deputy President (Welfare), to encompass a bidding/franchise process. Few campaigns have taken place over the last few years on subjects in which Student Hubs might be considered to have expertise in.

Events: Various student groups run events throughout the year of an ethical, environmental or social nature. The most common methodology is through the invitation of external speakers, though ideas such as exhibitions and demonstrations have also proved successful. Activities in this area are relatively small.

What could we gain from Student Hubs?

Support for existing charitable and ethical student groups: ICU has an active and relatively wide range and charitable and ethical student groups. These groups have little access to specialised staff support, either within the Union or College as other groups do (whether officially or unofficially). Examples being sport, music, expeditions etc.. Availability of expertise as well as access to a wider support network could only benefit this strand of our activities, bringing together groups with similar campaigns (or speakers) to work together for example.

Hub Support: Support and advice from the management networks that exist at Student Hubs on a national level. ICU's expertise in volunteering, social action, ethical careers and social enterprise is currently limited. This area has been identified by our members as one in which they would like the Union to do more.

Training & networking: Access to a wide variety of high quality training, national conferences and events, national programmes and other students engaged at ethical activities at different Universities. The Union's interaction with groups at other institutions is limited, the opportunity to build networks should be considered important in our ongoing development.

Social enterprise: Student Hubs organise events and programmes to inspire and incubate student social enterprise. This programme includes working with major partners including social innovation organisations, corporate social responsibility funds and the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at Oxford University. No social enterprise activities are currently undertaken at Imperial.

Social action: The Student Hubs has a formidable history of developing projects which create sustainable and positive long-term social change. Student Hubs also coordinates conferences and events for the student volunteering movement at large. For the Union to create a range of local community action projects would be an area of work we have minimal experience of doing – the Soup Run and Foodcycle projects being the two main exceptions.

Ethical or alternative careers: The Union's strategic review survey and focus groups carried out earlier this year identified a desire by students for more choice in the careers information and advice they receive, in particular in the area of ethical and "alternative" options. Student Hubs undertake a strand of work around ethical careers, advertising opportunities, hosting events and operating an internship scheme.

Funding: Student Hubs has grown into a significant operation over the past few years. There is the opportunity to benefit from their wide range of funding sources for specific projects at Imperial. Importantly they also have funding available for staff members to practically support their work at Imperial.

Conclusion

The opportunity to partner with Student Hubs to create a strand of work under the banner of Connecting students with causes is an excellent opportunity. This will cost the Union virtually nothing and allow us to develop activities in an area where we have currently have little expertise, minimal activities and where our members have indicated a desire for us to operate.