

Imperial College Union
Deputy President (Welfare) Report
A note by Nicolas Massie

There haven't been many working days since the last Council (twelve to be precise) as I've taken five days of leave and was off for five days of College Closure but some very meaty issues have come and gone and come again. This report is overwhelmingly positive, in contrast to the last.

Volunteering

It is with great pleasure we announce that next week will be a new staff member's first day. Her employment is coordinated with Student Hubs, an external charity working to 'transform student social action'. What does that mean? We will now have specialised help on site to help turn your volunteering ideas into reality – and to help source local volunteering opportunities for you. This is an area in which we underperform as a Union. She'll also work on our long term volunteering goals – more on that next report!

Toilet posters

Students don't often like to be seen taking down the phone numbers of helplines in public places. FACT. Most posters for self-help resources are in public places because those who put them up want maximum traffic. FACT. The Welfare Officer's Forum (WOF) and I have worked together to create a poster that will go (ideally – watch this space) in every student toilet cubicle in college. It'll contain local resources like Counselling and Disability, and what to do in an emergency (call 4444) but also, crucially, the helplines for DrinkLine (a helpline specialising in helping [students] who have trouble with or are concerned for someone's alcohol consumption. Drug, sexual victimisation, depression and other helplines will be on this poster. It was sent to the Dean of Students for final OK yesterday.

Student Experience Survey

Last council I informed you that the original Student Experience Survey, a combination of questions on welfare provisions and depression, alcohol use and sexual victimisation came very close to being pulled from the system (indeed, it was but was then put back up) last term. I had a productive meeting with very senior college staff in which they clarified their concerns and suggested a new course of action which may be better than the original. The Student Experience Survey will continue to run, alongside SOLE, once a year, while a questionnaire about depression, sexual victimisation and Alcohol use will be run as a separate research project supported by the Union and the College, pending Imperial College Research Ethics Committee approval. I spent most of my first week back from leave working closely with the Dean of Students writing and rewriting the ethics proposal which went to committee on Tuesday. We are waiting to hear back. If we are successful it will go to a pilot group of 500 first year students.

There were issues reported with the SES as it ran alongside SOLE – some departments weren't aware of it and some of the questions were rather repetitive – I'm looking into all of this for next time. In theory it should have been coded such that one wasn't forced to answer questions having responded negatively to earlier questions. If anyone has comments on the survey, please send them to me, dpwelfare@imperial.ac.uk I'm very keen to see them.

Organ/blood drive

There will be an Organ/Blood drive in early March! This will be the first of its kind (combining blood donation with marrow and organ donation registration) but also the very blood drive at Imperial in a very long time. If uptake is good, we hope to make this a regular fixture (three times a year, ish) at IC. If interested in donating, send me an email. We need preliminary figures to work out how many vans to bring on site.

Halls

The accommodation situation in College has been targeted by the most senior levels in College. This has perhaps stalled plans we in the Union had for changes to halls allocations and availabilities for this year. They are looking to work out exactly what the student population wants and work to that end. This could take several years to achieve but will be better for us in the long term. For now I'll continue to relay both the Hall Committee's and the general students' views such that they are kept in sight as they make their big decisions.

Nightline training

One of my manifesto points was that I would ensure welfare officers had better training and preparation for their jobs. One might say it's a little overdue or that it's just in time for the stress of exam season but I've coordinated with Nightline (charity listening helpline) to provide free (covered in our subscription) listening training for our welfare officers. If the trial goes well with the welfare officers we might be able to expand the offering to any student who would like to become a better listener or who feels overwhelmed by the troubles of their friends. This should be a regular fixture by next year.

Brief updates on issues mentioned last report:

Fairtrade – Still happening. One last meeting to have next week then papers can be sent off.

Personal safety day – was good. Decent attendance. 40+. Will work on another one.

Campaigns – Two students have submitted completed forms and these will go to committee this week.

Unseen Imperial – This lost some momentum over Christmas but I'm picking it up again now.

Health Centre – they have new software for reminding students of appointments/offering a 'cancel-by-text' feature and don't want to make any changes until its effectiveness has been trialled. We wait with breath that is bated. They have agreed to write on their most important issues for Felix.