

Teaching on the first week of term

A paper by Natalie Kempston, Deputy President (Education)

Background

Imperial College does not have a protected “Welcome Week” or “Freshers Week” unlike some other Universities. However, there is a rule that the first three days of the first week of term will be free from “teaching” for incoming Undergraduate first year students. “Teaching” does not include welcome talks, health and safety information, tours of departments etc, but refers to actual examinable material in the form of lectures, practical classes, or tutorials.

This year Chemistry first years had their whole first week free of taught-material, with teaching only starting on Monday 7th October (Week 2), and the first week being entirely introductory and induction talks. This gives time for new students to adjust to university, living away from home, and living in London. It also allows students to freely attend Welcome Week events, which is important for meeting other students and forming a peer group. A lot of students have the mentality: “I can’t attend my halls event as I must write up this lecture tonight. I can’t afford to fall behind!” A lot of students feel under pressure to perform, and may not allow themselves to enjoy welcome events, instead feeling as though they have to work hard from day one. A protected Welcome Week would at least allow them one week where they can adjust and form friendships.

While we are discussing this, I want to remind everyone that teaching on Wednesday afternoons is NOT supposed to happen. If you or anyone in your department has any compulsory teaching on a Wednesday afternoon please let me know. We want students to be able to get involved in any Club, Society, Project or any activity they wish to, and Wednesday afternoons are time protected for this purpose.

Discussion

- Does your department stick to the “3 day rule”?
- Does your department have any teaching during Welcome Week for first years?
- Postgraduates: Is this protected time important for Masters/PhD students?
- Do you think we should lobby College to keep the whole of Welcome Week free from teaching?