

Imperial College Union

Deputy President (Welfare) Report

A report by Marissa Lewis

Sharia-compliant loans

The government launched a consultation process for a new Sharia-compliant way of financing university education to sit alongside student loans. With the help of iSoc and Nida (International Officer), we gathered opinions of students on the new finance system and wrote up the responses to submit to the government consultation. This should be available to view online sometime after the Summer Ball.

Affordable Imperial

This is an upcoming campaign around the cost of living at Imperial that should hopefully be going live in the near future. It essentially looks at the financial support available to students (SLC, Imperial bursary, etc) and the cost of living at Imperial in the light of changes in 15/16 to the accommodation portfolio and government support to the sector.

Stress Less

This has been well-attended again this year, with Crazy Golf on Queen's Lawn, a bouncy castle, garden games, etc. With a renewed focus on activities at campuses besides South Kensington, this has the added benefit of being able to engage more with postgraduate students.

Student Health and Well-being Taskgroup

This is an initiative launched by College to look at the support services we provide in students with the idea of reforming or improving welfare support. So far, we've met to look at the existing provision and any gaps in the offer which need to be made up. The scope of the review includes the Health Centre as well as College and Union support.

GNT Campaign

Thanks to the efforts of Nia, our LGBT Officer, we will soon have gender-neutral toilets in the Union building. In addition to this, the Union have committed to ensure that all single-stall toilets in development are gender-neutral and we are working to put together some guidance around gender-neutral terminology we can use when communicating with our members.

PGR Rights Campaign

Myself and Nat have been involved in developing the postgraduate-research students' 'Know Your Rights' campaign which is working to inform PGR students of what they are entitled to in terms of supervision and employment as graduate-teaching assistants, as well as what to do should anything go wrong in the course of their degree.

Misc

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- Sat on Union Awards Panels for Campaign of the Year, Contribution to College Life, Innovation and Enterprise, Event of the Year, CSP of the Year and the Colours Committee
- Gave a speech at Fulham Cross Girls' School about being DPW
- Myself and Nat met with Councillor Charles Williams and Mayoress Mrs Williams from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea as part of our political engagement efforts.

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Accommodation

David and I went on a tour of the new halls in W3 – the halls themselves seem very impressive and good value for money but we had some concerns regarding student input into the project and also the rents of the accommodation portfolio as a whole. We will be meeting with those involved to discuss the best ways of getting student input into the project and I will be working to put together some evidence around the cost of living whilst studying at Imperial to help inform decisions around student support. We met with the incoming sabbs to brief them on this work as it is likely to continue on through their term in office as well as ours.

Political Engagement

Further meeting with local councillors have occurred since the last Council, I've met with:

- Joe Carleback – Councillor for Avonmore and Brook Green Ward, Hammersmith and Fulham Council. We discussed how to involve students in the local community and also the NHS Trust profile and engaging students in STEM at an early age.

Local/EU elections

We have put together a comprehensive online resource which gives students some information about the upcoming local and EU elections (Thursday 22 May – don't forget to vote!). This contains an interactive map which shows students which local councillors and MPs currently represent them when they click on their ward/borough. A reminder to vote also went out in the all-student email.

Stress Less

Stress Less has been well-attended so far – we've offered free massages at South Ken as well as Hammersmith and St Mary's campuses. Look out for Crazy Gold taking over Queen's Lawn on Thursday 29 May.

Student Information Management Programme

Myself and Kieron attended a 'big ideas' workshop for this project to discuss the student lifecycle (UG, PGT and PGR) from admissions all the way through to alumni relations. I'm heading up the Admissions work-stream which is the first area the project is tackling and other sabbs are in charge of the different work-streams, which all aim to create operational excellence at Imperial.

Misc

- I'm currently rewriting the Equal Ops policy as our current one is out of date - this is likely to be a Trustee Board policy

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- The Union is currently working towards achieving an accreditation for environmental practices – we have had initial meetings to discuss the best way to approach this
- I was on leave for 1 day, Wednesday 14 May

Deputy President (Welfare) Report – 29 April 2014

House of Lords

The inquiry that we lobbied for on the effect of current and proposed immigration policy has concluded and the report is available to view online here:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/science-and-technology-committee/news/international-stem-student-report/>

As a quick summary, the inquiry has made several recommendations that fit with the evidence that we submitted and the point about sustainability of Masters courses with decreasing international student numbers referenced the data we provided directly.

- **The government should treat student numbers separately for immigration policy making purposes.** This is a recommendation in ICU's own submission and relates to a pledge the government made to reduce net migration by 15-20% in the next five years. As we should be encouraging International Students to apply to the UK to study given the benefits they bring to our country and universities, it doesn't make sense to include them in these targets.
- **The government should review their package for international students every two years to ensure it is globally competitive.** One of the main points from our submission is that higher education is fast becoming a global market and if we fail to make International Students a competitive offer, the UK's reputation will only hold out for so long before students simply go elsewhere.
- **The government should reinstate the previous post-study work route.** The last reform to immigration legislation occurred in 2012 and reduced the length of time an International Student could work in the UK after finishing their degree from two years to just four months. This is considered an important way for graduates to gain work experience before returning to their home countries. Since the implementation of restrictions to post-study work, the UK has seen its first decline in International Student numbers.
- **The government should establish a working group to determine the impact of decreasing international taught Masters students on the sustainability of courses.** This was another major point in the Union's submission of evidence, which showed that many Masters courses are financially dependent on International Student numbers.
- **The Home Office should improve the way information is provided to prospective students to ensure welcoming and clear language is used.**

Stress Less Summer

... is back! The full programme of events is available to view online at imperialcollegeunion.org/stressless. This year we have giant bouncy castles, crazy golf, meditation sessions (including chocolate meditation) and so much more, so make sure to check it out. I'll be working with the relevant reps and officers to ensure that students are aware of the free events available to them at the times that are most relevant to them.

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Political Engagement

Over the last few weeks, we've been meeting with local councillors and MPs in order to engage positively with the local community. I'm sure David will talk more about this in his report, but as for the people I've met with:

- Mark Field (MP) – relevant to us as he's our local MP and also has recently set up a Conservative group investigating the effect of immigration policy on international academics and, to a lesser but still significant extent, international students. On his visit, we provided him and his team with the evidence we submitted to the House of Lords.
- Tom Copley (London Assembly Member) – he has a particular focus on housing, so we spoke to him about student concerns with renting in the private sector and the possibility of running a joint campaign with other London Unions to inform students on their rights
- Daniel Moylan (Queen's Gate ward), Prof Anthony Coates (Courtfield ward), Greg Smith (Hammersmith and Fulham Council), Linda Wade (Earls Court ward) – we spoke about ways the Union and our students could engage with the local community, especially through CSPs

Liberation Officer Campaigns

I thought it would be nice to give a quick run down of current liberation officer activities:

- Gender Equality Officer – work on the pledge campaign that was passed by CWB (a voluntarily scheme to promote inclusivity in CSPs) and working on setting up a mentoring scheme for women students in departments where there are few women role models
- LGBT Officer – campaign to set up Gender Neutral Toilets in the Union
- International Officer – working on a proposal to fix international students' fees and also helping us consult with Muslim students on proposed changes to the Student Loans system
- Interfaith Officer – set up an interfaith mixer with plans to hold a speaker event later this term, also helping us consult with Muslim students
- Campaigns – helping with the voter registration campaign

Student Experience Survey

The full report from this year's SES (including our recommendations) is available to view online here: <https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/news/student-experience-survey-response-2014>. I presented this at the Annual Welfare Seminar which is an event run by College to share knowledge and best practice from student support services at Imperial. I'm currently drawing up an action plan to ensure the recommendations can be achieved.

Sexual Health Clinic

The last sexual health clinic of the term ran on Thursday 20 March and once again proved very popular. The dates of this term's clinic are still waiting to be confirmed, but once I have them I'll pass them on to Constituent Union Welfare Officers so they can promote to their students.

Mental Health Awareness Week

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College is running the Mental Health Awareness week on 12-17 May and Debra Humphries is signing the Time to Change Pledge on behalf of College. I've been working with the Equality and Diversity Unit to establish what events are open to students and also run relevant Union events during that time.

Bursary Survey

As per our agreement with College, I analysed the data of the Bursary Survey and wrote a report which was presented at various College boards related to widening access. The main findings of the survey:

- Students prefer receiving their bursary as cash in hand payments
- Awareness of the scheme was good before arriving at College and over half of students stated that awareness of the scheme was an important part of selecting Imperial
- 13% of students stated they felt unable to take part in volunteering due to their financial situation – possibly suggesting that students are supplementing their income with part-time work as theoretically volunteering should be free
- Worryingly, 30% of students felt unable to participate in course activities due to finances, including going on field trips, buying text books, etc.
- The new Masters fee waiver was viewed positively but might be too late for many students to take up as many have already made plans for next year

Residential Experience Review

This has now concluded and the report has been submitted to College. The recommendations of the report (not the report in its entirety) will be going to Provost Board this term along with the College's response to the recommendations.

Alternative Accommodation

We've been working on an Alternative Accommodation booklet which can guide students through renting a property in the private sector and inform students of their rights in doing so – this should be distributed this term.

Talk to DAS

The Advice Centre has also run an 'Talk to DAS' campaign which is a social media campaign encouraging students to disclose disabilities to the Disability Advisory Service as often these go undeclared. It also aimed to encourage students to declare earlier as many students leave it until just before exams to declare which causes them unnecessary stress and a big spike in demand for the service.

Misc.

- I've chaired the Student Academic Choice Award panels for Best Supervisor, Best Support Staff and Best Feedback.
- Leave: I took 3 days of leave, 2-4 April

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- I was also out of office at the Trustee Board Away Day on 7 April – a training day for incoming and outgoing trustees to learn about their responsibilities and duties as a trustee of the Union as well as to meet the rest of the Board.
- Apologies for the length of this report – it's been a busy few weeks!
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