

# **Council Report**

## **Tom Wheeler - President**

### **Leave**

I have been on sick leave for about a week since my last Council Report. I have also taken 2.5 days of annual leave.

### **Union Office Space Review**

Work has been completed on gathering initial input to come up with a proposal. This proposal is now being consulted with users of office space (Officer Trustees, Staff & student representatives). It is envisaged that the space review will be implemented in August 2015.

### **Union Budgeting**

A huge amount of work went into writing the operating budget for 2015/16. Due to the Union currently being in its third and final year of the 3-year funding agreement with the College, we are in a particularly tight financial situation, but (following some tough decisions) now have a budget to implement for the 2015/16 financial year. This took loads of time.

### **Strategic Management Group**

The newly appointed Head of Student Experience and Services has now begun work in Imperial College Union. Paul joins Alex McKee (Head of Student Voice and Communications) and Malcolm Martin (Head of Finance & Resource) as of 1 June 2015. The structure is bedding in well, and I'm sure will help continue the Union's successes.

### **Imperial Varsity incident proceedings**

Apologies and admissions of fault have been communicated to the Women's Rugby Club. The College has responded fairly to the criticisms raised by students regarding the organisation of Varsity, and has decided to launch an external investigation into sexism at Imperial to enable the institution to objectively analyse and improve the culture at Imperial College.

### **College Meetings**

I've attended the recent meetings of College Senate, College Council Risk Committee, and VPAGE. Things of note are the College's progress in an external study on sexism at Imperial, as mentioned above.

### **Postgraduate Graduation Ceremony**

I was honoured to perform the role of student orator at the 3 Postgraduate Graduation Ceremonies in May, and wish all the new graduates all the best in their future endeavours.

### **Union Awards**

I've been enjoying the rewarding task of reading the hundreds of nominations for Union Awards over the last couple of weeks. Decisions have now been made for the awards and the results will be announced at the Union Awards Ceremony.

# A Snapshot of My Year

## **First-Year Accommodation (Halls of Residence)**

The College is currently nearing relative completion of a huge overhaul of their first-year accommodation portfolio. There have been real losses due to this, including the closure of Evelyn, Garden, and Weeks hall. Positives that have come out of the ongoing conversations include a guarantee that Pembroke Hall will remain open for 3 years; a promise that the College will offer us the option of using Evelyn Garden after its refurbishment (following a consultation on whether it would be in any way affordable, this consultation will begin in December 2015); improve the rent price portfolio following feedback from the 2015 cohort (in December 2015); review the Hall Activity Fund (in December 2015) as well as consult on a “general specification” of rooms in halls (again, in December 2015).

The year has also involved the imminent opening of Woodward hall, and having to take a pragmatic approach to the fact that students are moving in in October, regardless of the convenience of the halls location. This has led to a lot of input from the Officer Trustee team to make it as nice as possible for the hundreds of students moving in. One success for these students is the outcome of our lobbying work to provide Acton with rooms at a 50% rate per square meter of those in Prince’s Gardens, to reflect the less attractive location and more expensive travel costs.

## **Political Engagement**

We’ve responded to numerous government consultations this year, including the: APPG Post-study work restrictions as well as the BIS consultation on offering providing PGT/PGR loans.

I have also met with Mark Field MP to talk about the importance of politics in keeping Imperial in the international Higher Education Sector, as well as showing him the range of Activities that ICU offers.

## **Inter-union collaboration**

I really wanted to do more of these events this year but it’s been a bit more full-on than I anticipated. The one Royal Mixer that we hosted was very successful, with loads of people providing very positive anecdotal feedback. The Social Enterprise Team have said that they are intending to continue the events next year, which is good.

## **Teddington**

This was a bit of a baptism-by-fire. I came into office to be thrown into the middle of what was a very emotional situation regarding the closure of the much-loved ICSM Rugby grounds in Teddington. I started after the cessation decision had been made, so worked with Dariush Hassanzadeh-Baboli (ICSMSU President) to ensure that what can be captured and translated to Heston was, and to give Teddington a good send off.

## **College Bursary**

I put a lot of time into continuing the work of Marissa Lewis (Deputy President (Welfare) 2013/14) to address the squeeze-middle that adversely affects our students. We successfully lobbied to improve the College bursary such that it worked more harmoniously with the Student Loans Company loans and bursary. As of 2016/17, all students from a £50k household income will receive over £11,000 as a total financial support package, to ensure they can afford to meet the 39-week cost-of-living estimation. In addition, students from household incomes of less than £16,000 will receive over £14,000 as a total financial support package, to ensure they can afford to meet the 52-week cost-of-living.

## **Club behaviour and discipline**

I put a lot of time into investigating and resolving a few incidents that occurred in quite quick succession in October. These have been covered quite extensively in previous reports but to

summarise, ICU Rugby and ICSMSU Rugby were involved in incidents on the London Underground and a privately hired coach, respectively, which gained the attention of external bodies including: the Transport Police; Avon & Somerset Police; Transport for London; national press; sponsors; the Coach Company; affiliate bodies (RFU) and College Tutors. We believed that it was important to act swiftly and severely to reduce any possible future ramifications for the students involved; as well as protect Club, Society and Project autonomy (which would be threatened if College intervened); and protect the Union's reputation. We ended up with no criminal or academic sanctions for any of the students involved, no loss of sponsorship for the clubs involved; and no long-lasting reduction in activity levels across our Club, Society and Projects.

### **College Strategy**

I engaged from very early on in the writing of the College's new Strategy for 2015-20, which will set out the direction of the College for the next 5 years. This strategy affects a large amount of the University's culture and underpins a lot of their decisions for years to come. Due to our work on providing feedback and inputting on the drafting of the strategy, we succeeded in getting the College to make firm commitments to: prioritise the mental well-being of the student body; recognise students as key stakeholders and consult them on the decisions; and to provide a portfolio of inclusive activities and services. These aims (amongst others) were not included in earlier drafts, so I am very proud of the successes we have had here.

### **Women@Imperial Week**

One of the genuinely nicest things I've participated in this year is Women@Imperial, led by one of the most incredible women I have met, Prof. Dot Griffiths. She wanted to run an event that would shout and scream about all of the great things for women at Imperial, and it happened. We helped involve student groups on this project, and organised contributions to the main exhibition.

### **Lay Trustee Recruitment**

There were two vacancies for Lay Trustees on our Board of Trustees at the start of my year, and I put in a lot of work with Joe Cooper, Managing Director, and Dame Julia Higgins in interviewing a pool of candidates. This turned out to be a really enjoyable process, and the wealth of experience that the applicants had was very rewarding. We ended up appointing two individuals as well as a Trustee Designate to take over from Dame Julia when she steps down as Lay Trustee in early 2015. I think that the Union has a really great opportunity for further growth and improvement over the next five years due to the new added strength of its Board.

### **Union Senior Management Restructure**

Due to Dr. Phil Power's departure, we launched a restructure to reassess how we can best serve our members. This was a rare and interesting opportunity to be involved in a high-level restructure, and I put in a lot of time with the Managing Director, Joe, to ensure that the outcome best served the membership. I'm convinced that it puts us on a very firm footing for the future.

### **Union Strategy**

As some are probably aware, the Union has a three year plan which helps provide some element of consistency for the teams of staff who work at the Union for longer than the one-year period of sabbatical office (some aims and objectives are added to the plan year-on-year to accommodate the mandate of new Officer Trustees). Our current plan will expire in July 2016, so Joe (Managing Director) and I have begun to arrange meetings with senior Union volunteers, officer and staff, as well as senior College staff to ensure that we produce a realistic, grounded plan that sets out where we want to get to over the subsequent three years. Lucinda Sandon-Allum will no doubt continue this work next year as President 2015/16.

One of the important key themes that I believe we should aim to tackle is engagement with our members. We are incredibly privileged to have some of the most engaged members in the Student Union sector, with some club officers pouring in hundreds of hours a term into doing what they

love, and benefiting our members and the organisation in the process, however we also don't engage as well with large bodies of other students, in particular Postgraduates, students on other campuses, as well as overseas students. I hope that in the future we address these gaps, and continue improving as a students' union.

### **Medic Funding**

To support the passionate work of this year's ICSMSU Welfare Officer, Jennifer Watson, I engaged in some lobbying work with senior College staff to ensure that the issue of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year medic funding is made aware to them. They now do, and are currently starting to look at what the College can do as an institution to support those students. Jennie will be ICU DPW for 2015/16 and I'm sure will have lots of success with her project.

### **College discipline**

One of the things that really surprised me when I started is the involvement that Officer Trustees have in College Disciplinary Processes. One of us typically sits on all: residence tribunals; academic appeals; Fitness to Practice Medicine tribunals; as well as the less specific "College Disciplinary Committee" hearings. I didn't enjoy this aspect of the role, as I never stood for elected office to be sat on the other side of the table to a student in a disciplinary process, however I found that a lot of the time it was commented that Officer Trustee input was fairer and more "down to earth" than other panel members. It's not something that most of us enjoyed, but there was a benefit to students, and we are required to sit on them for the foreseeable future by College ordinances. The reason I bring it up here was as a "heads up" for any potential future Officer Trustee candidates.

### **Looking back**

To look back on what I've achieved in my year as President, it's good to look at what I promised to do in my manifesto. If I'm honest, I haven't been able to tick off as many as I would like, but that's mainly down to my poor expectation of what "presidential duties" entail. I had a lot of responsibilities to fulfil due to where we are at the moment, including in particular: a lot of work on protecting college accommodation; work on the College bursary; Trustee recruitment; senior management restructure; as well as the unpredictable and very 'reactive' work on Club discipline, which effectively ate up a couple of months.

One thing that did stand out to me though, is that as a student I felt as though College had no idea of the problems facing students. To be honest, I have found that this to be by and large, untrue. Issues like "poor feedback" are clearly understood throughout the College as things to improve, but it takes time to ensure that structures and individuals at every level, and at every corner of the 7,000 members of staff have the ability to work on improving them. The College is probably one of the most complex stakeholder environments I will see the "workings of" for a very long time, and I've started to understand why I have always felt frustration at how slow it takes any time for things to improve.

# My Manifesto

I promised in my manifesto to focus on improving satisfaction, personal development and inclusivity. I said I would:

- “Create a confident, informed student voice to question decisions we disagree with”
  - There have been a few instances this year when this has not only been not improved, but has actually gotten worse. Fundamentally, consultation will always require room for improvement, but is not acceptable. This is why we have made college commit to consulting with students in the future in the Strategy. I have also done all I can to ensure that the Union’s democratic structures (mainly Council) receives a lot of information and is consulted on decisions (including bursaries and college accommodation). We have had loads of senior College Staff come to Union Council to discuss issues with us this year, more than have been seen in previous years, so although there is a lot of room for improvement in this area, I feel there have been successes.
- “Maximise funding for UROP’s”
  - Pascal Loose and the Reps from the Academic Representation Network have done a lot of work on UROP’s this year, so this has not been an area I have put a lot of time. Pascal worked on writing a list of recommendations to the College to improve fairness, accessibility, as well as benefits of undertaking a UROP, which is with the College Academic Standards Committee. Well done Pascal!
- “Increasing the quantity and quality of feedback for exams and coursework”
  - This year, we made sure that the Imperial College Union NSS Response was themed around the need for improvement of feedback. The College also responded with a similar message, and now Debra Humphris, Vice Provost (Education) is going about implementing a plan to continue the improvement in this area.
- Provide more work-experience/internships/placements
  - I have not followed up on this one as much as I would like to be honest. It didn’t feel to be as much of a pressing issue.
- “Ensure that we are properly consulted on all decisions that affect us by pushing to implement a college-wide consultation system”
  - This is something that my predecessor, David, launched with his Consultation Framework. This sees regular use in departments throughout College as a guide to how best consult with students when making a decision. Unfortunately, it doesn’t always work, and decisions are made without student satisfaction or experience as the priority. The closure of Weeks Hall, Garden Hall and Teddington are examples of this.
- “Push the Careers Service to provide more alternative graduate opportunities (outside finance/consulting sectors)”
  - This was one of the first discussions I had in my term of office. I met with Elspeth Farrar, Director of the Careers Service, and found out that the Careers Service does a lot of work to ensure that it offers as few Consulting and Banking sector career fairs as possible. She did say, however, that the non-consulting/banking careers fairs were very poorly attended despite being as heavily advertised, which was interesting. In short, not much progress here, but maybe it was a misconception I had that isn’t as much of a problem as I believed. Happy to discuss this one!
- “Further existing relationships with other London Unions to encourage more art, music and creative collaborations on campus”
  - Following the success of the Royal Mixer in first term, we will be repeating the event next academic year. Unfortunately it didn’t get repeated, due to a breakdown in communication between the different Students’ Unions. To be honest, I didn’t do enough to fulfil the rest of this pledge, but hope future years will work on this if they deem it worthwhile.
- “Improve the support, visibility and recognition that Overseas Clubs receive”

- This year we've done more work to advertise the events that all our Clubs, Societies and Projects are doing. When a Club wants a shout-out via social media or emails, I've done my best to do so, and hope that this continues to improve.
- "Continue to fight the Immigration Bill"
  - Disappointingly, the Government passed the Immigration bill without amendments shortly after we had fought to stop it before I came into office.
- "Push for more mental-health support on campus"
  - There has been a real step-change this year in the institution's perception of mental health on Campus. It hasn't changed yet (and if I'm honest, it takes a while for there to be real cultural change when it comes to things like this) however due to the amazing work of the student-led campaign Mentality, and the fact that we continue to shout about this with a lot of the lobbying work we do with the College, it is now included as a firm commitment in its strategy, which is accompanied with a wider assessment of the student support services at Imperial, which is ongoing.