

Deputy President (Welfare) Report

Jenny Watson

Since last Union Council things have been fairly operational and not given me as much time as I'd have liked to crack on with projects.

- Our new student advisor has started and has settled into to life at ICU. Debbie previously worked at Citizens Advice Bureau for several years and has extensive experience and knowledge of housing, financial and debt advice. She is working on improving the Advice Centre's online information sources at the moment while also getting to grips with the ins and outs of Higher Education and academic advice.
- Along with Ben, Cyin ad Lucinda I've contributed to the College's long term strategy for the next 40 years, including an away day at Silwood Park.
- I've been heavily involved in the recruitment of our new Managing Director by working on the longlisting of candidates and sitting on the final panel.
- I've also been working with the Disability Advice Service to help recruit a new disability advisor specialising in autistic spectrum disorders.
- The most recent CWB was inquorate; however some useful discussions were had around what the liberation and welfare officers in attendance had been up to lately.
- I've had to sit on a few residence tribunal panels.
- A lot of potential candidates approached me over the last few weeks about the possibility of running for my role. This has taken up an unprecedented amount of time in the run up to close of nominations.
- Attended the Gender Equality and Institutional Steering Group. The researchers are almost ready to enter the next stage of their research which will take the form of an action enquiry which will aim to discuss and analyse themes which have emerged in their data. This stage will also allow members of the College community to help form the recommendations of the final report.
- Lucinda and I have been working with the College to work out what sort of services will be provided at the new residences for continuing students at Evelyn Gardens.

Some of the slightly more fun and interesting stuff that's been going on between the College and myself, and with some of my projects:

- I've been in discussions with the College's Director of Finance about the details of my proposed guarantor scheme. This is all looking very positive, and he seems confident that I will be able to get the scheme passed at Provost Board this year. At the very least I think I can get a 3-5 year pilot, which will become more permanent if successful.
- Also on the subject of housing, Lucinda and I have been working closely with the Hub to deliver this year's Private Housing Evening. Unfortunately this is why we can't make all of this meeting of Council.
- I've been working with staff and the LGBT+ Officer, Emma Little to organise a workshop for medics on delivery of healthcare to trans individuals. This was well attended and has so far received excellent feedback from those who came (including

some alumni). We're now looking at how we can turn this into a more formal or permanent fixture on the medical school curriculum.

- I'm currently involved in the Complaints & Appeals Task and Finish Group, part of the Academic Standards Framework. The group ultimately aims to define and standardise procedures for academic appeals and complaints across the College. Unfortunately progress in the group is currently slow and there seems to be very little direction. However the Advice Service Manager, Cyin and I are determined that we can push for a system which is student friendly, accessible and sensible.
- I'm currently in the process of consulting with experts and leading students' unions on how to tackle a variety of gender issues. I had a long discussion with Alison Phipps and Liz McDonnell from the Sussex Centre for Gender Studies, and will soon be meeting with UCLU's Women's Officer to discuss the success they've had with their Zero Tolerance campaign. Watch this space for details of this project as they emerge.

College Accommodation Working Group

Attendees:

Chair: Jennie Watson – Deputy President (Welfare)	JW
Philip Kurukgy – Ordinary Member (FoE)	PK
Andrew Tranter – Campaigns Officer	AT
Saloni Datani – ICSMSU Academic Affairs Officer (Science Years)	SD

Purpose of the group

- To discuss and identify issues surrounding to cost of halls accommodation.
- To identify a clear and achievable course of action for the Union to take to tackle the cost of rent in College accommodation.

Matters discussed

- A proportion of rent for halls goes towards ‘capital costs’. It was agreed that current and future students should not be expected to pay for College’s investment into new halls and that accommodation should not be for profit.
- It was agreed that there is very little transparency regarding the use of rent. Students have the right to know how such large sums of their money are utilised.
- PK expressed belief that the halls amenities fund of £2 per person per week should be increased for those students paying higher rents to make up for their excessively high cost of rent.
- Allocation of halls is agreed to be a problem. The chance nature of the allocation system may be forcing students to take room types or halls which they did not want or cannot afford.
 - PK proposed a pooling system allowing students not satisfied with their original room allocation the opportunity to swap rooms prior to moving in
 - SD expressed interest in development of a more robust system for student hall preferences.
- PK stated that there are social issues in halls due to a higher proportion of international students living in South Kensington halls reducing diversity in Woodward.
- The current rent strikes at UCL were discussed, however the group was divided on this issue
- AT stated that the issue should be divided into efforts the Union can currently make to mitigate problems caused by such high rents, and long term campaigning to address to ‘bigger questions’ surrounding halls rent.
- PK stated his belief that there should be ‘more balance’ across the portfolio and that travel costs is not a justification for lower rents in Woodward
 - Concerns were expressed by JW and AT over a repeat of last year’s council vote on halls rent (https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/14-15/Union_Council/file/2866).
 - It was felt that this was not a victory for the union but actually an attempt by College to place blame and difficult decisions into the hands of Union Council, absolving the College of the decision.

- JW expressed concerns that 'tinkering' with the rent profile again would only lead to dissatisfaction from a different group of students and not actually solve the problem and potentially lead to the same discussions being had by the Union next year.

Actions

To investigate with the College how rent in halls could be better distributed and whether there may be any potential to alter the bottom line	JW
To find out exactly how revenue from halls rent is used	JW
To learn more about the UCL rent strikes	AT/PK
To seek student opinion and gather a larger campaign team	AT/PK
To liaise with the Campaigns & Representation Coordinator for campaign planning support	PK
To work with the Student Hub to improve the halls allocation procedure	JW/SD