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Introduction

Council have become particularly familiar with many of the political educational happenings recently, mostly via the Extraordinary Council meeting which took place on Thursday 12th January. This meeting addressed an important issue regarding aspects of the Higher Education and Research Bill (HERB) in relation to Imperial College. Other aspects concerning the pursuit of educational excellence here at Imperial have consumed my time alongside this topic, meaning that there are updates to deliver on many different areas.

Learning and Teaching strategy

Having been through a consultation period, the Learning and Teaching strategy is now being written by the College team and myself (representing the Union and students). The strategy primarily aims to facilitate a move towards a more evidence-based Imperial education system which makes greater use of active learning, online learning and research-based curriculum. The strategy will also look to achieve an institutional culture which is diverse, inclusive and less cutthroat competitive to accommodate a better quality educational experience for our members.

- A central theme which runs through all elements of the strategy is the importance of involving students in innovation and quality assurance procedures. The Union have lobbied, through the NSS Response and via other means, to ensure that students are held as a central focus when addressing problems and identifying solutions regarding education. College, notably Simone Buitendijk (Vice Provost Education), have been very receptive to adopting this partnership concept.
- Aside from consultation findings, the strategy has been informed by information attained externally from other institutions and areas of the literature. Nas and I were able to impregnate many of our findings and observations taken from the AACU conference in Boston, for example. Simone and Alan Spivey have recently returned from the University of British Columbia to further explore a system developed by Carl Wieman, a highly commended expert in the education world.
- A separate yet related aspect of the broader strategy has been the distribution of the Teaching Excellence fund. Departments have been invited to send one application per department to apply for a sum of money which will finance a research project that looks to develop pedagogic practise in some form. I have personally had the pleasure of being a member of the panel which recently selected the strongest applications.
- Imperial College have a vision to be leaders in education and teaching in the UK. This will naturally ensure students are educated to be properly equipped for having significant societal and global impact in which ever career they choose to pursue. The Union play a key role in providing the student voice for enabling this vision.

Late submission policy change

Following a great deal of investigation into the student views on the preferred policy option via two separate surveys and discussion with Senior Reps, the Union have been successful in lobbying College to repeal the pre-existing zero-tolerance policy.

- This objective was first captured in a recommendation put forward by the Union in our 2015 NSS Response last year:

Repeal the zero-tolerance policy for late coursework submissions

- Following this year's NSS results, it was apparent that late submission was still an area of dissatisfaction for students. I raised this in a conversation with Simone who subsequently decided to take two alternative policy proposals to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). Many of the faculty members present at that meeting were initially sceptical of repealing zero tolerance as they felt it worked effectively as is; this led to the Union consulting students on an initial survey to gain a better understanding of what students preferred, and gain evidence for any position we took.
- The initial survey yielded results which conflicted somewhat with many of the opinions put forward by our Senior Reps, who insisted on a second, better informed survey being sent out to students. The second survey returned a historic turnout rate of 9.13% of the total student body.
- The Union chose to stand by the most popular policy option voted on by students via the second survey and conveyed this in a paper which went forward to QAEC on Tuesday 10th January; this policy option was a graduated mark reduction system of 10% mark reduction per day since the submission deadline. I was personally present at that meeting and made best efforts to stand by what students wanted.
- After a very insightful discussion with various College members at that meeting, it was agreed that a graduated mark reduction system could be deeply problematic in two ways: 1) firstly it would enable a student to "game" the system and consequently submit work after the deadline with little incentive to submit on time, deeming it an unfair approach 2) students who are suffering from genuinely serious problems (e.g. ill health, family bereavement etc.) would be able to hide these mitigating circumstances more easily if they had several days of mark reduction before alarm bells started ringing. From a welfare perspective, this proposal was deemed to be highly unfavourable.
- Instead a compromise scheme was reached. The new late submission policy will cap a late submission at the pass mark. 24 hours beyond that, the student's work will then be zeroed. Based on the reasons outlined above from the QAEC discussion, and the level of push-back we faced over the graduated scheme, the Union are very pleased with this outcome and feel the new system is both fairer and more reasonable for our students.
- Overall we have achieved an end of the zero-tolerance policy and a more forgiving deadline for our students.

Teaching Excellence Framework submission contribution

An extraordinary Union Council meeting was called on Thursday 12th January, in which I proposed a paper to seek permission from Council to do the following: 1) Allow the Union to contribute to Imperial's TEF submission which will be sent across by the end of January 2) Review the Union's current Higher Education Funding policy. The paper was passed with certain conditions stated.

- Nas, Union staff members and I have since had textual input into the submission document highlighting many areas to College which we feel can be improved and/or are not an accurate representation of reality. We have learnt a great deal in the process so far about where Imperial really needs to focus its efforts if it wishes to deliver an outstanding educational service to its students in future; I feel it is therefore a great reflective exercise for both College and the Union.

Feedback Traffic Light system development

The Feedback Traffic Light system is an initiative which College have been mandated, according to the endorsement of this year's Union NSS Response, to roll out across College. IT have been tasked with exploring a technological solution and are making progress. IT have also been in contact with faculty members to gauge the needs which such a system would need to deliver both administratively and practically.

- Mike Horner (IT) and I will be presenting the concept at the E-learning Advisory Panel (ELAP) over the next few weeks. We will look to gain information from members of this panel about which software's are available to fulfil the requirements of the traffic light system.
- I feel an ideal outcome would be for us to have an implementable system by the start of the next academic year. This will hopefully enable College to monitor feedback timeliness and to instil a cultural change around the importance of timely, quality feedback.

PTES survey response

The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) is the only UK higher education sector-wide survey to gain insight from taught postgraduate students about their learning and teaching experience; Imperial have engaged with this survey for many years. The survey is alternated every other year with the Postgraduate Research Experience.

- As a result of where my team and I have been able to invest our time and energy, we decided to compile a summary response which listed our recommendations. This was sent across to College just before the holiday break and was presented by myself at the same QAEC meeting which late submission was talked about. Many of the departments have already set action plans regarding PTES yet Engineering and FoNS are both very receptive to taking on board our recommendations.
- This year, we will collaborate closely with the Graduate School Union to co-write a full response. We look forward to engaging the experience offered by the GSU when compiling our full response.