# CLOSING REPORT

Deputy President (Education)

Luke McCrone

2016/17

Students, President, Council Chair and Council members,

As I sit and write this closing report, I look back and reflect upon what has been an incredibly rewarding, eventful and fruitful time in office.

This year has admittedly had its challenges, as well as its opportunities. We have witnessed internal organisational adjustments, including staff changes in the Education and Welfare team with the departure of Sky and the appointment of Nayab, Fran and Laura. The start of the academic year also saw the appointment of a new Managing Director, Jarlath O'Hara. These human resource developments have been compounded by the creation and introduction of Imperial College Union's 2017-2020 strategy which has set a new and exciting direction for our activity and efforts as an organisation in future.

The Deputy President (Education), as part of their representation work, spends a great deal of their time liaising with members of the College. The changes which have taken place 'across the road' have therefore had significant impact on my daily work. Simone Buitendijk was appointed as Imperial's Vice Provost (Education) in August of 2016. Thankfully we have been successful in forging a healthy partnership with Simone making the lives of Academic reps and myself a little easier with regards to lobbying change over the past year.

I choose my words carefully when I describe the year as eventful - Imperial education has experienced significant turbulence both at an institutional and political level. The outcome of the National Student Survey highlighted significant student dissatisfaction with many aspects of Imperial's education. These results, combined with Simone's optimism and vision led to the inevitable development and subsequent approval of the Learning and Teaching strategy, a document which will carve out a path for transformative innovation and research of our pedagogical practise. Finally, the passing of the Higher Education and Research Bill in parliament implicated some controversial changes to the cost and regulation of higher education. Imperial College Union has had to unite in being rational and judicious with how it responds to and deals with these disturbances, whilst maintaining our commitment to satisfying the views and needs of our members.

These changes have demanded a level of adaptability and resilience on my part - two attributes which I have considerably developed over the past year! Having been a Year Rep in my department for 3 years prior to being elected into this position, I never truly comprehended the impact which Imperial College Union has on the educational landscape. This year, we have not only scrutinised policy but have also coordinated the creation of meaningful policy. I must stress that none of this work would have been possible without the input and guidance of the Academic Representation Network – this body of elected volunteers has been absolute paramount to the success of my work.

In light of some of the changes which I will elaborate on in this report, Imperial College Union and students alike are in a better position than ever before to truly have impact on education. Once again, I encourage anyone reading this report to fully engage with this timely opportunity and to partner with academic staff with the common mission of making Imperial College's educational offering the best it can be.


**Luke McCrone**

Deputy President (Education), Imperial College Union

# CONTENTS

# WHERE IT ALL STARTED

**Manifesto**

1. **Feedback**: Improve speed and quality of feedback across college by instigating a college-wide 'Feedback Traffic Light' system (already being piloted) to monitor feedback speed based on a two week return period.

2. **Assessment**: Utilise 'questionnaires' designed to obtain information on specific coursework assignments (e.g. how much time the student spent) which can be incorporated into departmental curriculum reviews to help regulate assessment quantity and quality.

3. **eLearning**: Develop college-wide strategies for 'Technology Enhanced Learning', which will address methods for utilising Mentimeter, Panopto, Blackboard etc. at the departmental level. Continue to explore new concepts, including 'Blended Learning' and online discussion boards.

4. **Postgraduates**: Ensure all taught postgraduate courses adhere to college policy, including Wednesday afternoons free and the availability of personal tutors, who could also be project supervisors. Review the Graduate Student Union and reassess academic support in place for PhD students (e.g. dealing with supervisor issues confidentially).

| Manifesto point | Actions carried out | Actions outstanding |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Feedback | • Collaboration with faculty members in capturing the approach taken to feedback monitoring by different departments<br>• Collaboration with faculty, registry and senior academic reps in authoring the Feedback Traffic light process policy<br>• Presentation and approval of policy at QAEC committee | • Execution of policy by establishing process at departmental level<br>• Engagement of academic reps in pressuring departments to adopt this process |
| 2. Assessment | • Embedded these improvements as recommendations in our 2016 NSS Response<br>• Presentation of NSS Response at VPAGE with later invitation to present at Provost's Board<br>• Full endorsement of ICU's recommendations at Provost's Board | • Continued partnership between students and staff in reducing assessment load and improving practise in future following mandate from Provost's Board |
| 3. eLearning | • Worked directly with College members to promote online and technology-enhanced learning which went on to comprise a central aspect of the Learning and Teaching strategy<br>• Worked with IT members to conduct an eLearning services review by testing the student opinion on eLearning provisions | • DPE membership on the Online Learning and Innovation Group (OLIG) which will oversee the digital aspects of the strategy, including the development of a MOOC |
| 4. Postgraduates | • Worked with central timetabling team to pull together data which identified which MSc/MRes courses were not providing Wednesdays free for PGT students – data went on to inform a paper approved at VPAGE | • Space sharing policy will enable programmes to change when they can teach without being so constrained by space |

# MANIFESTO WORK

### 1. Feedback Traffic Light process policy

- My original approach to completing this project involved forming a team with faculty members from Life Sciences and members of IT to explore ways of creating a centralised, College-wide digital system that would allow all departments to monitor the timeliness of feedback return from staff to students
- This approach proved to be complicated since different departments used different systems to gather coursework submission data. This did not completely halt progress, however, as the concept had been endorsed via our NSS Response 2016 meaning there was top-down support for its eventual implementation
- I decided that writing the process into College policy[1] was the best way to ensure eventual adoption by departments. This aim was fulfilled following compilation of a policy piece in collaboration with faculty, registry and reps followed by approval at QAEC.

### 2. Postgraduate Taught Wednesday afternoons

- The first step of this project was to gather evidence that PGT programmes were breaching the College policy. This guided my work with Central Timetabling in pulling together the taught components on Wednesday afternoons
- Following the acquisition of this evidence I was then able to test the views of PGT students via a survey with our PGT reps to understand if an appetite existed for this non-academic contact time. This research unveiled that students valued have Wednesday afternoons free for personal and professional development
- This data informed the formation of a paper[2] that was presented and approved at VPAGE and later circulated to departments and academic reps.

### 3. Digital Learning strategy

- I entered the role of DPE with a strong belief that the College needed to have better oversight of the best practise that exists in the digital realm at Imperial, including how this can be shared and disseminated
- With the creation of the Learning and Teaching strategy, Imperial College Union championed technology-enhanced learning as an essential innovation. This contributed to the recognition and distinction of online learning as a separate strategy and led to the restructuring of College governance with the formation of the Online Learning Innovation Group which will oversee digital education development at Imperial in future.

### 4. Personal Tutor working group

- Emily-Jane and I recognised this pre-existing working group as a potential avenue through which we could solve the personal tutor conundrum. The working group concluded its work with a set of recommendations and role description amendments which we hope will encourage positive activity around strengthening the support in place for our students
- We worked hard to bring about an awareness of the severity of the shortfalls with PGT personal tutors to ensure these were properly addressed.

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[1] https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/registry/academic-governance/public/academic-policy/academic-feedback/Feedback-Traffic-Light-Policy.pdf
[2] file:///C:/Users/lm2912/Downloads/Postgraduate%20Wednesday%20afternoons.pdf

# MANDATED WORK

### 5. NSS Response 2016

- Year on year the Deputy President (Education) is mandated to compile the Union's annual response to the National Student Survey. This work is hefty yet is well supported by members of the education and welfare team in the Union
- Any ambiguity with the survey results is alleviated by conducting exit interviews with outgoing reps in all departments to understand the core issues
- This year we were incredibly encouraged to see our Response[3] fully endorsed by Provost's Board. This puts us in a powerful position to hold departments to account if they are not adhering to our recommendations
- The theme of this year's response advocated the *Students as Partners* approach to innovating educational practise, a theme of which later became a major underpinning of the Learning and Teaching strategy.

### 6. PTES Response 2016

- The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey is a bi-annual response which the College take very seriously. Accordingly, we look to create a formal response which is distributed to all Faculty Education Committees and to academic reps
- As with our NSS Response, we summarise the PTES Response with a series of recommendations to College, many of which we identified alongside active members of the Graduate Student Union
- Our Response[4] this year saw buy-in from most departments and has influenced individual PTES departmental action plans.

### 7. LKC Medical School Second Stage review, Singapore

- I travelled to Singapore in October with a group from College (chaired by Simone) to act as a Student Representative on a review panel – the review concluded with the panel's approval for the school to continue with usual business under the caveat that a set of minor recommendations proposed by the panel were satisfied.

### 8. Imperial Award

- Members of the Student Development team and I have had input into the development of this initiative throughout the year by working with a team of College members. It is a very exciting scheme which has already been piloted at a small scale
- It will hopefully enable students to reflect on the development of attributes via extra-curricular activities outside of degree study. It will also provide the personal tutor with more purpose in their roles by guiding the student through this process.

### 9. Electrical & Electronic Engineering PGR Period Review

- I acted as the student representative on a panel to review the research provision in the EEE department. The panel concluded that the department were to fit to continue considering they fulfilled a set of recommendations.

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[3] https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/sites/default/files/NSS%20Response%202016%20FINAL.pdf
[4] https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/sites/default/files/PTES%20Response%202016%20FINAL.pdf

# POLICY WORK

## 10. Late Submission policy change

- A longstanding conversation between ICU and the College existed around the zero-tolerance late submission policy which mandated departments to zero any piece of work submitted beyond the deadline
- After surveying a historic number of 1700 students (an action which came out of a previous QAEC meeting) we acquired the necessary data to prove that students felt this to be a harsh and damaging approach to penalising late coursework submission
- New policy[5] was approved at QAEC following the agreement that a 'capped at pass mark' approach would be more suitable than the pre-existing zero tolerance version.

## 11. Provisional marks policy change

- I found this policy change to be a very effective reaction to the opinion of reps who had stated earlier in the year that there was inconsistency between some departments releasing numerical percentages and others releasing letter grades
- Despite resistance to this amendment from some departments, the unanimous expression of an appetite for this change allowed me to drive through the appropriate policy change
- QAEC approved the policy[6] amendment.

## 12. Teaching Excellence Framework submission

- Following evolvements of the Higher Education White Paper and the inevitable passing of the Higher Education and Research Bill, Nas and I wrote a paper to Union Council
- The paper[7] requested the approval of two things: 1) That the Union would be permitted to contribute to Imperial's first TEF submission 2) That a working group were to review the Union's higher education funding policy considering the legislative changes made by the government. The paper was passed successfully and the Union could make meaningful contributions to a profound document.

## 13. ICU Higher Education funding policy review

- A working group (chaired by myself) have compiled a list of principles which outline our stance on different aspects of higher education funding, including the TEF metrics and financial support for students
- We are due to make finishing touches to a consultation survey which will go out to all students testing their opinion on various aspects of HE funding.

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[5] https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/registry/academic-governance/public/academic-policy/marking-and-moderation/Late-submission-Policy.pdf
[6] https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/registry/academic-governance/public/academic-policy/marking-and-moderation/Guidelines-for-issuing-provisional-marks-to-students-on-taught-programmes.pdf
[7] https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/16-17/Union_Council/file/3712

# ACADEMIC REPRESENTATION NETWORK

### 14. Academic Representation Network training

- I can't stress enough how instrumental reps are to the work we carry out. These are deeply valued volunteers who work tirelessly to seek the opinion of students around them
- For this reason, we invest heavily into their personal development. This year Nayab and I have experimented with new training approaches, including a foundational training package tailored specifically for Dep Reps and AAO's, whilst also offering 'lunch and learn' sessions for all reps that want to explore certain areas of academic representation more deeply
- We have also worked closely this year with members of the Graduate School to design a training package for the GSU and for PG Reps which includes webinars and Graduate School resources that we hope elected volunteers will benefit from.

### 15. Mid-year/Final-year Rep catch-ups

- The E&W team and I have made attempts to ease the communication struggles experienced between the DPE and academic reps. I experimented with introducing a slack network for the whole ARN shortly after my inauguration, for example
- We have encouraged reps to attend reflection catch-ups throughout the year which have proven to be basic in concept but very effective in practise.

### 16. DepSoc/ARN interactions

- Nas, James and I along with members of ERB have explored ways of bridging gaps between academic reps and DepSoc members in a bid to strengthen community in departments. Much is to be learnt from certain departments, including Civil Engineering and ESE
- It has been advised that Dep Reps in future should attend DepSoc committee meetings whilst DepSoc presidents attend SSC meetings.

# EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

## 17. SACAs 2017

- This was a personal highlight for me in the DPE calendar. I worked diligently on filming material, distributing mugs, chairing panels and presenting at the ceremony
- We received a record number of 830 nominations this year. Credit must go to Nayab, Fran and Shakira for their outstanding work right the way through.

## 18. Education Day 2017

- The DPE is kindly invited every year by the Education Development Unit to present on the chosen topic. This year I presented on the *Student perception of Innovation*
- This was a fascinating piece of research work which involved focus groups and interviews with UG and PG Reps.

## 19. Union Awards 2017

- Partook in shortlisting nominations and presenting at the ceremony

## 20. Transforming STEM Higher Education conference, Boston

- Nas (partner in crime) and I were invited by Simone to attend a conference in Boston, US around the time of the Learning and Teaching strategy being shaped and moulded. It was a fruitful trip which allowed us to identify best practise in change management, student representation and pedagogical methodology
- This trip also inspired me to pursue further research into other institutional practise around the world that could inform aspects of Imperial's strategy.

## 21. TEF provider submission conference, London

- A conference with the primary purpose of educating university and union members on the mechanics of the Teaching Excellence Framework
- This served as a useful event in bringing me up to speed with the basics of the HERB and TEF ahead of writing the Union paper with Nas.

## 22. Future EdTech conference, London

- I have recently been invited as a member of the student panel at this conference which will look at how technology is modifying the education received by the modern-day student.

# SIDE PROJECTS

### 23. Learning and Teaching strategy

- This is one of my proudest contributions[8] throughout the year because it exemplifies the amazing potential of collaboration between staff and students
- I have thoroughly enjoyed preaching and practising the 'students as partners' philosophy and am excited to see Imperial attempting to design an education system which is evidence-based, active and inclusive.

### 24. Imperial Festival

- I enjoyed working with the Imperial Festival committee to provide feedback from students of previous years and to provide key contacts with volunteers and societies that had imperative contributions at the festival
- Here's why I feel the festival is so iconic[9]

### 25. Imp-ER-ial Escape Room project

- I have worked with members of the Imperial Horizons programme to create an opportunity where students can work in teams to design an educational escape room
- These are the kinds of small seeds that need to be planted if we wish to flourish into an innovative higher education provider in future.

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[8] https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/blogs/deputy-president-education/learning-and-teaching-strategy-%E2%80%93-so-what-earth-all-about

[9] https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/blogs/deputy-president-education/imperial-festival-more-a-festival

# LOOKING FORWARD

Before I leave office and handover to my lucky successor, there are a few recommendations I'd like to share for both the DPE and for the Union based on my experience in post:

➢ **Engage your volunteers**

The academic representation network is the most powerful tool in the DPE's arsenal. If led and employed properly, it can have serious impact on all areas of your work. Nonetheless, leading and managing the ARN has undoubtedly had its challenges. Future DPE's need to find new ways of engaging and interacting with this network of students to maximise its output

➢ **Don't forget postgraduates!**

Postgraduate representation has come on leaps and bounds yet we are still a long way off where we should be. A significant portion of the ARN is comprised of postgraduate reps which can easily be neglected and left to their own devices. ICU, and the DPE for that matter, needs to work harder at supporting and working with the GSU to ensure PG representation and engagement is strengthened

➢ **Manage your relationships**

I entered this role thinking that the world is conquered alone – how wrong I was. The age-old wisdom of 'who you know not what you know' resonates. The DPE needs to work hard at forming and managing relationships with Union members, College members and students if they wish to be successful in their role.

Now that my last few pearls of wisdom have been passed on, I want to express my excitement for continuing in an elected positon – I will be taking on the GSU Presidency during the 2017/18 academic year.

Alongside this role, I will be pursuing a PhD in educational research at Imperial. I hope my conversion from Geology to the field of education sufficiently demonstrates how much impact the past year has had on me. I would recommend it to anyone.

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**With Thanks to:**

Abs, Alan, Alexandre, Alejandro, Andrew, Becky, Beth, Britt, Claudia, Edgar, Eleanor Emily-Jane, Gareth, Giskin, James, Jarlath, Judith, Kat, Lorraine, Laura, Martin, Martyn, Malcolm, Mike, Paul, Phil, Nas, Rachel, Roberto, Shakira, Simone, Sky, and Sue

for contributing to my work and for teaching me a little something about myself and others

**With Special Thanks to:**

Fran and Nayab

for supporting me in my work, for being an amazing team and for being great friends.