

Tuesday 24 October 2017

## Imperial College Union Council Report

Fintan O'Connor, Deputy President (Welfare)

This first of my reports sets the scene for the year. I will outline my priorities for the, having refined my aims after working closely with the other Officer Trustees during handover in July, at training in August, and throughout the past twelve weeks (at time of print).

The objective of these reports is to give you, our key volunteers, insight into the most important aspect of the Officer Trustees' work: our strategic, long term development of your students' union. Following reports will use the same headings, so that you can track and challenge our progress as your student leaders.

While we inevitably and responsibly become involved in day-to-day projects in our roles, these reports will include both our strategic progress and operational, day-to-day developments.

Wherever we say "strategic", we mean a long-term change, fundamental to the student experience and the direction of the Union as a charity – for example, the Wellbeing Representation Network. *Goals* and *Team Goals* are strategic.

Where we refer to "operational" work, we mean the important work attached to our roles, but not necessarily related to our long-term goals – working on Freshers' Fair, or delivering training, for instance.

### Goals

#### Wellbeing Strategy

- Following the success of Imperial College Union's (ICU) collaboration with the College on the Learning and Teaching strategy, beginning to enshrine the "students as partners" ethic across the College, we feel that the time is right for a clear, committed wellbeing strategy, holding the College to account to provide the breadth and depth of support its students deserve.
- We hope to bring together the wellbeing work happening all over College into one overarching strategy and hold College to account on improving the wellbeing support and culture at Imperial.
- We hope that this will also secure funding for wellbeing at Imperial which has been chronically underfunded for many years.
- Working with Chippy, we have presented the concept to some of the College's key leadership, including the Provost and Vice-Provost (Education), who are supportive of the initiative.

#### Wellbeing Representation Network

- The Wellbeing Representation Network (WBRN) is a new initiative for undergraduate students, first developed by last year's President and Deputy President (Welfare) (DPW).
- Its purpose is to improve communication and understanding of issues affecting student wellbeing, as well as to improve student awareness of existing support services.
- The voice of the wellbeing representatives will force departments to make both immediate, positive change for student wellbeing, as well as provide the solid evidence base for structural change in support at Imperial for years to come.

Tuesday 24 October 2017

- It will mirror the existing Academic Representation Network's structure. There will be one Wellbeing Departmental Representative per department, as well as one additional rep for each year of the course.
- The representatives' roles are clearly defined, and any of the work they undertake must be clearly reported under defined headings. The DPW, Union staff, Constituent Union Welfare Officers and all existing departmental support structures will all work closely with the reps, and have oversight into their work.
- The training for Wellbeing Representatives is mandatory. Reps who do not attend training will be removed from their positions.
- Imperial College Union is the first in the Higher Education (HE) sector to develop such a student representation network with such a focus on wellbeing.
- The network has widespread support at every level of the university, from departments to the president and provost, who are committed to supporting the network, and working together to help students in voicing their needs more effectively.
- The Union staff and I have spent a lot of our time introducing the network personally at every level of the College, staff and students, to ensure the volunteers are well understood and supported upon their election. This has been an extremely valuable process, and I would like to thank in particular the students who contributed to the discussion, whose invaluable contributions have supported us and strengthened the network.

#### Liberation Review

- Liberation refers to work to promote the rights of underrepresented groups, who face oppression and discrimination. It carries more history and significance than its dictionary definition. For one brief example, read more from SOAS here: <https://soasunion.org/liberation/campaigns/liberation/>
- Traditionally, students' unions have been centres of activity in this area. Imperial College Union, however, has made very little progress on supporting liberation in the last number of years.
- Our liberation officers are the key volunteers whose role it is to promote the concerns of the oppressed group they represent, and campaign to make positive changes locally and globally for that group.
- The Union commissioned an external consultant, Pari Dhillon, an expert in liberation in HE, to conduct research into ICU's work in supporting liberation, and give recommendations on how we can become a centre of excellence in the area.
- Research included desk research, interviews with Union staff and focus groups with students identifying as part of each group, or *liberation zone*.
- The research took place over July and August, with writing-up over August and September.
- The report was delivered in September, with a range of short-, medium-, and long-term objectives to improve our liberation work.
- Chippy and I have been working closely with the liberation officers, the key stakeholders, to shape our response to this fundamental change in our direction, and make the most of this exciting opportunity.
- The work will be ongoing for the next number of years, but we are excited to develop the action plan in collaboration with the liberation officers.
- We will promote the report, action plan, and associated work once the key stakeholders have been allowed a reasonable period of time to discuss their priorities in safe spaces.

## Team Goals

As the President's report explains, some of our most important strategic aims depend on the five officer trustees working together as a unit. Below will detail individual officer trustee's work on each

### Wellbeing strategy

- Please see above.

### Year-round democracy

- This year we have tried to put a greater focus on Autumn Elections and are hoping for an increased turnout.
- The governance review should highlight some possible ways to increase our democracy throughout the year so it isn't just confined to the Leadership Elections.
- I am excited to be working on the governance review with the Council Chair and the President and Deputy Presidents to make our processes more accessible to all students, and help students to take the lead and make change more readily.
- The governance subcommittee are tasked with this – all papers will be available through Your Union --> How We're Run --> Committees at [imperialcollegeunion.org](http://imperialcollegeunion.org)

### Support & development of volunteers

- This is a team goal and we've identified a segment of our key volunteers that each Officer Trustee works with.
- Training for Constituent Union (CU) welfare officers and liberation officers has already seen important changes take place. The training and induction sessions did not used to exist, which I delivered alongside Union staff.

### Accessibility & openness

- Our key welfare volunteers have had increased involvement through training sessions (above).
- Several drop-in sessions and meetings were scheduled to discuss the WBRN with dep socs, dep reps and CUs over the summer.
- Our liberation officers are leading the union's strategic direction on liberation for the first time, and have been involved in more of the College's meetings and processes than before.

## Operations

The following are some of the most important tasks I have worked on over the summer.

### Handover

- The handover period from the old officer trustee team is the last two weeks of July (13<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>). Emily-Jane Cramphorn, the previous DPW, made many of the important introductions and meetings for me with key members of the College staff.

Tuesday 24 October 2017

- A lot of essential training took place, including an incredibly valuable three days with the officer trustees, strategic management group, and board of trustees at the start of August, which crystallised our vision, instilled us with confidence, and cemented us as a team.

Tuesday 24 October 2017

### Governance Review

- The governance committee met, and will be working to review how we're run throughout the year, as mentioned above.

### Active Bystander Training

- The Union has developed Active Bystander Training in collaboration with the College, which empowers students to challenge unacceptable behaviours and cultures, or those which make our members feel unwelcome or unsafe.
- I spent a day delivering Active Bystander training in person to hall seniors. All hall seniors and bar staff have been trained
- The response was incredible, carrying particular meaning to students who have themselves been a victim of such behaviours. Feedback indicates that students found the training very useful.

### HEFCE Catalyst Fund for the Advancement of Sexual Violence Procedures at Imperial

- The previous DPWs secured funding for the College to review its sexual assault procedures and support from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, *heff-KEY*) known as the catalyst fund.
- I am in biweekly meetings with the director of student services to monitor the project's progress, which includes the provision of new Sexual Violence Liaison Officers (SVLOs), staff volunteers trained in handling first disclosure, as well as student training and provision of support.

### Interviews – Director of the Careers Service

- I spent a day interviewing for the new director of the careers service.

### Key Volunteers – Training

- I co-delivered the induction training for our liberation officers and CU welfare officers over two days.

### Interruption of Studies – Support

- I have begun work on supporting students on an interruption of study (IoS), and how they can engage with and find support from the Union while they are on interruption.
- The membership of students on interruption in clubs and societies continues to be an administrative and support challenge, not least from legal requirements around visas and data protection.
- We are investigating with senior members of the College staff on how to better support students on interruption.

### Interruption of Studies – Buddy Scheme

- We have launched a parallel scheme to Mums and Dads, which pairs students returning from IoS with a parent from their new cohort to facilitate their return to study.
- The scale is small, but we hope to see it as part of a renewed focus on supporting students through various transitions, particularly IoS.

### Safe Space

- We have redesigned our safe space posters to reflect the new Active Bystander initiative – they now challenge you to "Call It Out!"

Tuesday 24 October 2017

Tuesday 24 October 2017

### Welcome Talks

- I promoted the Union and its work to a number of students. These included international students on the pre-session intensive English courses, as well as first year undergraduates not in halls, students on the autistic spectrum, hall seniors, and a number of first year cohorts.

### Student Workers for Systems

- Working with Matt and Chippy, I secured new casual positions for student systems administrators at the Union, increasing the capacity of all our online services.

### Leadership

- The officer trustees work together closely to support one another in achieving their goals.
- Each of us contribute daily to the leadership of the charity, whether or not the case falls directly into our remit.
- We attend regular meetings to take decisions as a team, from Education and Welfare to the services in our retail outlets.

I am available in person and via email for any questions you may have on my report or the Union's work. It is always my pleasure to meet you to talk about what we're doing.

Best wishes,

Fintan O'Connor

[dpwelfare@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:dpwelfare@imperial.ac.uk) | [@icu\\_DPW](#) | Tel: +44 (0)20 7594 8060 | Ext 58064