

Imperial College Union
Deputy President (Welfare) Report
A report by Marissa Lewis

Immigration Bill Progress

I'm going to start off with a big win as these are pretty rare – we got an inquiry from the House of Lord's Select Committee on Science and Technology. After a (nerve-wracking) conversation I had with Lord Winston, he went on to request an inquiry into our concerns about the Immigration Bill at the Select Committee. The inquiry is called 'International STEM students' and covers both existing policy and the impacts of future legislation, like the Immigration Bill, on the higher education sector. I hope everyone involved in this campaign feels adequately rewarded for their efforts on the working group.

I've been involved in heading up the group who produced ICU's submission of evidence to the inquiry (attached). This has involved liaising with Debra Humphris (Vice Provost (Education)), James Stirling (Provost), Sharon Bolton (Head of the International Office) and colleagues in the alumni office and registry to gather all the relevant evidence for our submission. A working group of staff at the Union (including Nat!) have been working hard to put it together.

The deadline for the submission is February 20th but to ensure adequate student oversight in this project, we wanted to bring it before Council - hence a rather speedy draft and a lot of work from all concerned.

In terms of sector-wide updates, there was another reading of the Bill in the House of Commons due to proposed amendments relating to Romanian and Bulgarian students. In this reading, another amendment was proposed by MP Paul Blomfield to exempt students from the proposed changes, thought to be as a result of lobbying from Sheffield Union. Unfortunately, the amendments were not heard due to the lack of time so they were not discussed.

Residential review

So far the Review Panel has heard evidence from Jane Neary (Campus Services), Denis Wright (Director of Student Support), Kelly Swaby (Student Hub manager), Paul Noke (Campus Services) and the Hall Wardens. There will be another evidence session and then more meetings to set the recommendations of the Panel which will be presented at Provost's Board at the end of March. In addition to being on the Panel, I've led the creation of ICU's submission of evidence to the Panel (attached as a paper). Although I'm sure I've expanded on this in the meeting, the incredibly short timeframe that was given to us by College has meant there wasn't an opportunity for proper student consultation. The Executive Committee was provided with a skeleton draft at the end of January and certain points of the document were discussed with them to check we weren't going off track and to allow for student oversight into the project. Council has been presented with the full ICU submission and, as you can see, we point out the need for adequate consultation in the document. Within it, we offer suggestions to College about how the Hall Committees can be better supported and trained to handle the amenities fund; how College could implement a landlord accreditation scheme and a proposal I drafted for how College could implement a rent guarantor scheme for students lacking a UK-based guarantor. It may appear to be pretty blue-sky thinking but please bear in mind these are all suggestions for consideration, not ICU-backed proposals to lobby College with.

Stress Less Spring

The Spring programme of events has been really well-received with good attendance this year. The massages in particular have proved popular, as has taking Stress Less on tour and offering the massages at Hammersmith and Silwood campuses. The other events have included: meditation workshops, laughter yoga, arts and crafts sessions and walks around Hyde Park. Events have run a full month from mid-January to mid-February to try and accommodate as many exam periods as possible.

Mental health talks

Alongside the Counselling Service, Disability Advisory Service and Nigel Cooke (Student Adviser), I travelled to Hammersmith Campus to give a talk on the student experience of mental health to Biomedical and Graduate-Entry Medical students. Although it was poorly attended due to an unforeseen timetabling clash, it was particularly well-received by staff.

Safer Parks Panel

Yas and I attended the Safer Parks Panel – a meeting to talk about safety issues and environmental concerns around Hyde Park. In terms of relevant information to students, the police informed us that the main problems seen in Hyde Park relate to cycling complaints – specifically that cyclists are using routes which aren't permitted to them. A lot of confusion may stem from the use of international signs which show where cycling is prohibited (a picture of a bicycle in a circle with no line through it) – for students, if you cycle through Hyde Park, be aware of this issue and if you are unsure of allowed cycle routes, there should be maps at all the Barclay's bike docking stations now. The police also reported there was a lot of pickpocketing crime related to the Winter Wonderland event, but it was well controlled and crime rates only increased slightly this year despite a much greater attendance due to the measures they had put in place to control the event.

Science Library Changes

As you may have read about in Felix, the Science Museum Library has begun its move from Imperial Library's third floor. The library staff have been working hard to ensure that students who need to use the Science Museum collection will have access through the move by referring students to alternative libraries and exploring online content. The move is likely to cause some noise disruption to students for up to six weeks (although it is thought this might be an over-generous estimate), but again the staff have developed plans to ensure this is kept to a minimum. Any students impacted by this change can email queries to library@ic.ac.uk. Students will be consulted on what to do with the vacated third floor and will be informed of the new location of the collection when this has been established.

HEFCE meeting

Nat and I met with the Higher Education Policy Advisor from HEFCE to talk about current issues affecting students at Imperial as well as best practice from the Union.

Interviews

I was on the interview panel for a subwarden appointment at Pembridge Hall.