

Operations Manager Report – a note by Robin Pitt

Trading

The summer period is clearly a quieter period for our trading outlets than in term time, however trade from the Albert Hall during Proms season was healthy for the bars. The Freshers' period was as expected extremely busy and for the first time we held two welcome parties over moving in weekend (the Mingle), building on our recent shift towards a live music. Both of these events were extremely successful with the Saturday night absolutely sold out and the Sunday night was close to capacity. This trend was repeated with the Freshers' Ball selling out completely, which is a massive improvement on the previous two years.

While management accounts for this period are not yet available, indications show that the bars have hit their budgeted takings for this period, it is also expected that the retail outlets have also hit budget for this period.

We are currently trading in some very difficult circumstances, clearly the economic crisis has had an impact, however we are now operating with increased competition from College outlets, with the opening of Eastside Bar and the Tower Rooms restaurant. The Freshers' period has suggested that the Eastside Bar has not had a significant impact on our licensed trade, however it is clear that the Tower Rooms is having a huge impact on our daytime catering business.

In addition to competition, owing to the SEQ project, we have lost a large amount of our storage capacity for the retail outlets, replacement storage areas are being investigated with the Director of Estates and use of storage areas in Beit is helping bridge the gap until we can permanently re-locate our retail storage somewhere in College.

Membership Services

Since the start of term we have recorded over 8700 memberships for Clubs & Societies, an increase of about 5% (and an all time record) at this point last year. Of these memberships 96% have been transacted through the website, imperialcollegeunion.org representing monetary sales on membership online of over £92,000 during October.

Monday 2nd November saw us taking delivery of three new minibuses, increasing our fleet to 12 vehicles. One of these minibuses will be located permanently at Silwood Park as was purchased following a generous donation from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Harlington Grants Committee. The other two vehicles will enable us to offer a service from Charing Cross - convenient for students studying Medicine and for the many others who live in the local area.

Building

Phase 2a was completed at the end of September, providing new offices for Union Staff and Officers; a new Membership Services Area, comprising a Student Activities Centre, Advice Centre, Office and a meeting room; a new suite of meeting rooms in the East Basement; a new gym with changing and washroom facilities and some cosmetic work to Union Dining Hall ceiling. In addition, the infrastructure works started in Phase 1 have now been progressed to allow for further Mechanical & Electrical improvements in Phase 3. Aside from some additional

Phase 2b, which sees the old offices stripped out and turned into flexible activity space is due for completion in early December and marks the end of this phase of the Beit Masterplan. The contractors and design team should be commended on the quality of what they have created and for the minimal disruption felt by the users of the building.

During the summer some minor works were carried out to other areas of the Union, not included in the Masterplan. These included light refurbishment to Meeting Rooms 1 and 7 and a minor refurbishment of the Concert Hall, including a much needed sand and polish to the floor.

The President and I have been working with the existing design team to establish a project initiation document (PID) and preliminary delivery strategy for the third and final phase of the building works. In addition to this, we have had preliminary meetings with Dr Martin Knight to discuss funding opportunities. The third phase will see the redevelopment of the ground floor of the building and the completion of the mechanical and electrical upgrade. The PID will be submitted, along with a presentation to the College Project Review Board in mid-November.

Website

At the end of the last academic year, additional resources were made available to carry out some upgrading and functionality to the Union website. With the vast majority of our users utilising our online services for Club & Society related activities we have been working on re-focusing the site.

Launched during the summer our redesigned website features greater prominence for Club & Society activities, products and events. Logged in users now experience customised content in all areas of the site based on the Clubs & Societies they are a member of as well as their department, faculty and even Halls of Residence they belong to. The shopping experience was also streamlined allowing users to get to the products they want more easily, whilst their range of payment options also increased.

Charity Registration

As mentioned at the last meeting of the Trustee Board, as a result of the Charities Act 2006, Students' Unions must register as a Charity in their own right, rather than deriving their charitable status from the Institution. Initially it had been anticipated that this registration would have to happen in October 2009. The President and I had a meeting with Alistair Lyons from accountancy firm, Horwarth Clark Whitehill, who is widely regarded as the expert in Students' Union charity registration, following test cases and research he carried out on behalf of the NUS. Based on advice from the Charities Commission, he has informed us that the deadline for registration has slipped quite considerably and it is now anticipated that the registration process will be able to begin during December, however there will no obligation to register at this point.

I have had subsequent meetings with Andrew Murphy, Director of Finance, to discuss the implications of us registering as a Charity as well as establishing a Company Limited by Guarantee to oversee our trading arrangements. I am meeting with Andrew and Jon Hancock, Head of Central Secretariat, next week to take these discussions further. Based on advice from Horwarth Clark Whitehill, we anticipate that we will prepare ourselves for registration in late spring 2010.