

Deputy President (Education) report
A note by Jonathan Silver

Representation

I'm doing my best to review and revamp the training behind academic representation this year, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the performance of Year Reps and Dep Reps is highly variable, sometimes excellent (see Biochemistry's representatives) proving that reps can move the earth, and sometimes fairly ineffective. Secondly, following the College's recent Quality Assurance review, College are keen to make sure that Staff-Student Meetings are actually working, and that our reps are trained to make the most of the meetings. The biggest part of this is my undergraduate rep training handbook (the GSA have produced an excellent one for postgraduate representatives). I started it in August and it's still in an early stage of completion but it was used in its current state for the AAO/Dep Rep/Welfare rep training day on the 28th of September. If you would like to help me improve it before it is printed on any kind of large scale, then please get in touch – it would be massively appreciated.

For the first time, I'm requesting that all academic reps report all their activity back to me at a new email address, studentreps@imperial.ac.uk. This is so that I can put it all together to report back to College to prove we're doing all we can, and to highlight the departments that are stubborn and disinterested in students so that College can give them a slap on the wrist. It'll also be much easier to nominate reps for Colours if they've done well.

This year's reps seem to be enthusiastic and dedicated, so I see a good year ahead for representation and academic quality improvement. Of course, most Year Reps are yet to be elected, and our elected Mech Eng Dep Rep this year has left College, so we will strive to fill these positions ASAP. Members of MechSoc have been proactive in covering the position for now.

Student Written Submission

If you aren't already aware, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA) are conducting a massive audit on College early next calendar year. This is the audit that happens every five years and the QAA go round College with a gloved white finger checking for the slightest deviation from best practice. As you can imagine, College are trembling on their feet, and have already done a lot of work to smarten up ready for the audit. Our role, apart from helping them do this by sitting on the committees and working parties, is to contribute to the audit visit with a Student Written Submission, where we tell the QAA in detail about the student experience at Imperial.

It's massively useful as leverage – if we tell the QAA that College continually fail to put something right, College will be very embarrassed. On the other hand, we can't put anything in there that we haven't already told College is a problem. But you can see just how important this is. We can even suggest that the QAA make specific recommendations to College. You can see how the tables can turn.

As DPE, the SWS is my baby, so I've delegated writing jobs to those best-placed to write about them.

Unfortunately this submission needs to be complete very soon (originally it was going to be sent to this Council) and I am still waiting for major contributions from a lot of people (you know who you are). If you don't do this, we don't have a submission. Consider yourself prodded.

It'll come to next Council so you can peruse it.

Committees

So far I've sat on meetings of the Quality Assurance Advisory Committee (pronounced 'quack'), the Quality and Academic Review Committee, now defunct (pronounced 'quark'), the Careers Advisers Committee, a Mitigating Circumstances Working Group, the Postgraduate Qualifications Framework Working Group, Senate, both Graduate Schools's Postgraduate Quality Committees, the Early Years Education Centre committee, the Student Administration Systems Improvement project board, the Student Academic Experience Working Party, the ICT Student Experience Stream Board, and a couple of others. The most significant things to report from them are:

- The improvements in personal tutoring are underway. It might take a while but the Dean of Students, the Dean of Learning and Teaching and the Pro Rector (Education) are all taking it very seriously and have promised they'll fix it.
- As part of that, it won't be long before every student and their personal tutor has a computerised interface to view their marks, much like there already is in DoC (it's called CATE). Instead of module

conveners sitting on coursework marks for months, they'll be made to submit them to the database straight away, enabling students and their personal tutors to see inconsistencies and drops in performance straight away. We were successful in convincing the Student Experience Stream Board that setting this up was a priority and convinced them to divert their money in that direction.

- Joe Illingworth and the second year biochemists' complaint letter last year was met with appropriate concern, and College set up a working party to do a quick emergency review and a longer-term review of teaching in the Division, particularly second year. The emergency review has finished, so second years this year should get a much better deal. If you'd like to read the initial complaint letter, the Working Party's report and the Division's response, let me know and I'll email it to you.
- I've seen a number of new courses and modules be approved, mostly at MSc level.
- The Postgraduate Qualifications Framework Working Group have decided that 'cumulative' Masters degrees are a good idea. When we've met a few more times, departments will be able to design MSc courses so that you are awarded a PGCert for the first bit, a PGDip for the second bit, and an MSc if you complete the lot. It's so that students not of the standard to achieve the MSc do go away with a qualification, and to appeal to people studying through the Centre for Professional Development who only want a quick bite of education. It brings us in line with our competitors and seems like a perfectly good idea to me, but if you have an opinion or any concerns, feed them back to me and I'll present them at the next meeting.
- The Mitigating Circumstances Working Group have done a lot of arguing and not achieved much. I'll report more when I can.
- We've suggested some changes to the My Imperial portal to make it more intuitive to use. ICT will make the changes at some point but it's been deprioritised right now. Meanwhile, it's a very useful resource: go to imperial.ac.uk/myimperial to use it.

Freshers' Week

There's not much to do within my Education remit during Freshers' Week, so I mucked in and got to know as many freshers as I could. I moved people into Beit all day, was a dinner lady for a bit, went to both Mingles, spoke to freshers at various halls events where I could find them, and generally made myself useful as a hot pink human signpost. At Freshers' Fair without a radio I had to do an awful lot of running around campus, but once everything had settled, I had some fun being taught how to salsa on stage. Sabbs can't dance... fact.

Pies

I have now been pied twice.

Conferences

Ashley, JJ and I attended a conference paid for by the QAA and run by the NUS called Quality Matters. We picked up a lot of useful advice and were very polite to the NUS exec. I reported back to our SWS team on the tips we were given and it will have been a productive day. I'm expecting to attend a workshop on the National Student Survey on the 15th of October, learning how best to get people to fill it in and deal with the results.

Casework

I have had a lot of casework through my door already. Nothing's ever straightforward! Most cases have involved College regulations in some way, which I am becoming scarily familiar with. The Student Advisor, JJ and I make a good student support team and where students haven't always got what they wanted, I'd like to think they leave the Union building knowing we've done as much as we possibly could.

Moving offices

JJ and I have finished our move and are making ourselves at home in our office at the beginning of the new sabb corridor. To find us, come up to the second floor up the west staircase behind dB's, or go up to level 2M, walk through SAC to the staircase, and down one floor. The new facilities are excellent; space is less so but we're working with the staff on finding storage solutions to sort that out. Thankfully we have similar tastes in music. JJ has given out his business card to an awful lot of people so he's keeping extension 58064 while a new one is on order for me. Come and join me for a cup of tea some time.