

Imperial College Union
President's Report
A Note by the President

Browne Review

A lot of time over the last month has been spent reading and forming opinions on the Browne Review, the independent review into Higher Education Funding which came out on October 11. I have talked about the Review on national media, in fact, to various members of College and most recently, to other Student Unions in the Aldwych Group and the NUS. I will not go into my view here as it is presented in another paper, but what will soon happen is an official response by the Government and perhaps a White Paper before December detailing the future of student fees. Then in December HEFCE will receive its budget from the Government and we will know the cut to Higher Education by the Government (probably 40%). I want to stress that my backing of the Browne Review is not the same thing as backing Government cuts to Higher Education as they are linked but separate issues. I think the prudent stance would be to wait until the Government's White Paper is produced and Imperial knows exactly how much it will be cut by to make our response. What this debate could do with most is a bit of thought and less of the 'don't cut us' mentality which is unhelpful and reactionary.

Aldwych Group

On the 27 and 28 October, I went with the DPE to the Aldwych Group meeting in Liverpool. The Aldwych Group is an assembly of the Student Unions of the Russell Group, the top 20 research intensive Universities in the UK. Meeting other student Unions gives us a chance to share best practice, bounce ideas off each other, share information on what our Universities are doing and provide a student voice to the Russell Group.

Each of the six meetings per year focuses on a different topic and this meeting was University funding. We debated the effect, benefits and errors of the Browne Review, heard presentations on how changes to funding will affect the devolved administrations, had Q&A sessions with the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) of Liverpool University and the Chief Executive of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and worked through economic models with the NUS as to how the 40% cuts announced by the Government to HE will translate in real terms.

Scholarship Campaign Board

Imperial's bursary scheme currently allocates £4.5m per year, spread out between 40% of students according to need. This money comes in the form of cash into the bank to help maintenance whilst a student is at University. The Rector is currently setting up the Scholarship Campaign Board, a sub-committee of College Council, to increase Imperial's endowment to provide more bursaries. The Union has been invited to play a role in the Board to provide a student view as to how the bursaries should be used. Current thinking is to expand their remit to not only cover help with maintenance but to lower fees (and therefore debt) from whatever the headline fee is for all but the richest students and to help fund taught Masters courses.

End-of-year Accounts

The Union's end of year accounts are audited by an independent auditor (Knox Cropper) as a regular procedure. Once finalised, the audited accounts are passed by Exec, run through by the Trustee Board Audit Sub-Committee and then passed by the Trustee Board, after which they are signed off. The Trustee Board Audit Sub-Committee sat on Tuesday 26 October and we recommended that the Trustee Board pass and sign off the accounts. The next Trustee Board is on 9 November. The audited accounts will then be combined with the end of year report and be seen by College Council.

President's Surgeries

I have started doing President's Surgeries, which is a one and a half hour session in the Student Hub every week where any student can come and ask questions or bring up issues. I have done two so far, which have been mixed, probably because I don't think we've quite got the information out to people yet. There have been students turning up though, which is positive, and I have been following up issues and getting back to students. Hopefully after the advert in this week's Felix the word will start to get out.

Issues brought to College

- Life Sciences restructure; despite the 'final outcome' document looking pretty grim for the future of Plant Sciences at Imperial, a meeting with the Principle of Natural Sciences has reassured me. Their aims now seem different than the document suggested, with aims to keep plant scientists, maintain final year plant modules and plant-specific masters. Whether they have changed their minds because of our campaign is hard to say but it is looking more positive. We still need to wait and see what the changes to staff will be when we get that information later in November.
- International Student Post-Study Work Visas; there was an announcement by the Government that these visas, given to International Students so that they can work in the UK for up to two years after their degrees, would be further limited. After an Aldwych Group meeting about Internationalisation, I brought the issue up with the Rector and Pro-Rector (Education) and they have indicated that Imperial is against the Government's proposals.
- International Student Fees; we have expressed our discontent that International Student Fees are rising as fast as they are and that it is hard for International Students to work out what they will be paying each year as the course fees go up whilst they are studying. We will hear more about Imperial's plans in the next College Council but current indications suggest that International Fee rises will be slowed or stopped and in some cases, reduced.

Elections

Council Ordinary Members, Welfare Campaigns Officers, Entertainments Committee and Union Advocate elections concluded last week with the results as followed:

Union Council

Engineering (Undergraduate): Alice Rowlands, Stephen Long, Thomas Hills

Engineering and Physical Sciences (GSEPS) (Postgraduate): Edafe Edivri

Life Sciences and Medicine (GSLSM) (Postgraduate): none

Medicine (Undergraduate): Aislinn O'Malley, Alexandra Burke-Smith, Hannah Tullett

Natural Sciences (Undergraduate): Lewis Palmer, Angad Rekhi, Alan Itakura, Karmen Chiu

Non-Faculty: none

Union Advocate: Naida Dzigal

Entertainments Committee: Ali Rezaei Haddad

Welfare Campaigns Officers: S.H.A.G Week Coordinator and Gender Equality Officer remain vacant.

Congratulations to all those who now have positions and well done to all those who stood. We are still looking to fill the vacant positions. Because of the large amount of time it would take to fully campaign for students to vote, I am considering creating the position of Democracy Officer to sit on RWB, whose remit is still to be determined, but with the view that engaging students in democracy should be seen as a campaign.