

## Advice Centre Annual Report 2013/14 For the Student Welfare Committee

### Introduction

This year, the work of the Advice Centre has been guided by Imperial College Union’s Strategic Plan, the results of last year’s Advice Centre Review, and the diverse needs of our members.

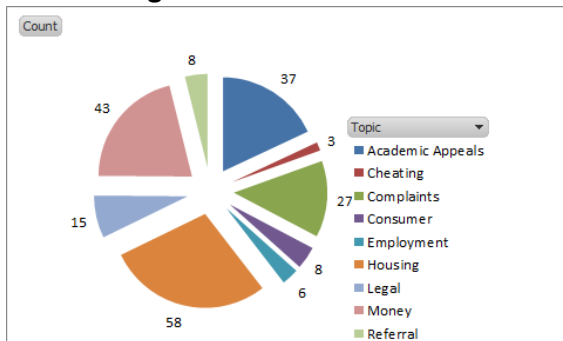
In addition to casework, the year has brought many challenges; a new casework system has been introduced and the role of the Student Adviser has expanded into the delivery of more training and campaigns.

The Advice Centre has also seen the categories to which we give advice change slightly, it is hoped in this report that we can analyse our statistics and make recommendations for the future.

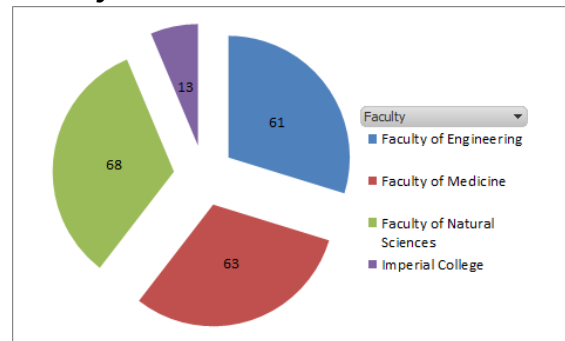
Within our Strategic Plan, the Advice Centre’s aims are placed in the theme of *Building a Student Community*; one of our main long-term objectives this year and next is to carry out a review of the relationships between College’s welfare services and our own advice provision. This is currently being constructed and will be presented to our Board of Trustees in the summer of 2015.

### Casework Statistics

**Case Categories**

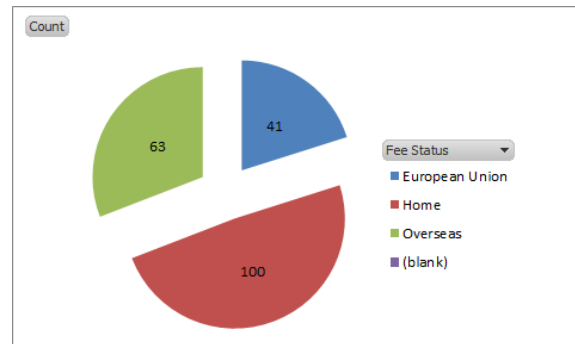
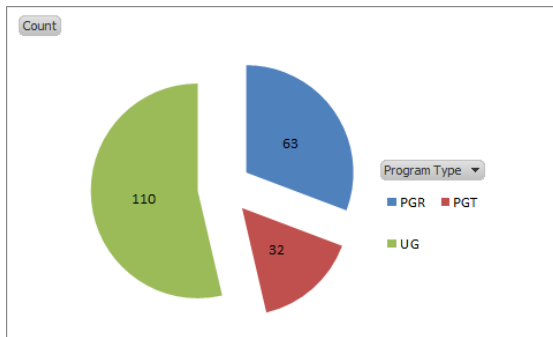


**Faculty**



### Study Type

### Origin



## Past Projects - Campaigns

### *StressLess*

*Over 200 students interacted with this campaign, which aimed to increase awareness of exam stress and mental health amongst the student community*

The Advice Centre was heavily involved in the *StressLess* campaign, a campaign to give a students a chance to do something fun in between their exams while opening a space to discuss stress, mental health and safe revision practices. The Advice Centre helped by booking events and promoting the events.

### *#TalktoDAS*

*Over 50 tweets were sent during this campaign, which aimed to increase disability disclosure rates amongst our students*

The Advice Centre ran an awareness campaign to encourage students to approach the Disability Advisory Service to declare their disabilities. This was carried out through social media, including the Union's Twitter and Facebook channels, and our website, each of which engages thousands of students every day. It is hoped that this campaign will run again in the coming academic year but on a larger scale.

### *Hub on Tour*

*In 13/14 we managed to visit every outlying campus, thanks to the Student Hub, aiming to promote our services to students who may not otherwise be able to access them*

The Advice Centre has continued its involvement in the Hub on Tour events, promoting services at other campuses. This is currently going through a review which we are involved in, sharing ideas on how we can improve on the current Hub on Tour model. We will be involved in many outlying campus events during the first month of term.

## **Past Projects - Service Development**

### *New casework system*

We now have a new casework management system through our bespoke eActivities software which has helped us to better manage our caseload. It now enables us to develop better outputs from our case work.

The software also helps us with identifying potential campaigns; our Advocacy to Action group receives updates from the Centre, gauging trends in casework and enabling us to better allocate resources to these areas.

### *Improvements in managing casework*

We have made significant strides in improving the way in which we manage casework and how we manage our practices. The Student Adviser's weekly workflow has been restructured, with time now set aside for various tasks such as casework, appointments, drop ins and time for campaign work.

This has helped to bring a more structured way of working in The Advice Centre and enabled us to be much more professional in our approach.

### *Client Promises*

New for the coming year are our Client Promises, which are being developed across Imperial College Union but are particularly important in the Advice Centre. These Promises, shown in draft form below, will help to give students times in which we will get back to them by and what type of service they can expect from us.

- We will treat you with respect and discretion, handling your enquiry professionally and confidentially
- All enquiries will be acknowledged as soon as possible; if you send us an email, we will respond within one working day
- We will support you and empower you to resolve any issue you have quickly and safely
- We will learn from the enquiries we receive, and campaign to remove the causes of common problems, improving the student experience for all of our members

## **Success stories**

### *Successful appeals*

Over the academic year we have had many successes with regard to academic appeals, often helping students to continue their studies at College. Some of these cases have included

students with disabilities and students who have valid mitigating circumstances; we have offered both support with procedures but also moral support at a stressful time.

#### *Amount reclaimed in deposit money*

in total we have claimed over £10000 in deposit money back for students. This has been achieved through writing letters to landlords and agencies explaining the students' legal rights. This process has been enhanced by the creation of template letters and the Student Advisers' ongoing training regarding housing and tenancy legislation.

#### *Council Tax Cases*

The Advice Centre has helped reclaim over £2000 in wrongly billed council tax for students, helping students appeal decisions that are made by various councils. We have also offered advice to students on the council tax regulations, referring them to the Student Hub where we students can get proof of their student status.

#### *Keeping students at the college*

Over the academic year we managed to keep many students at the College through academic appeals being upheld, negotiating debts with credit control, ensuring that students get the correct advice when dealing with landlords and advocating for students in housing cases where they find themselves in cases that they cannot solve themselves.

### **Conclusion**

Overall The Advice Centre has had a successful year, with new working practices and systems introduced and many cases resolved successfully. We have tightened up how we manage our data and have also improved how we communicate with students through implementing policies and strategies which enable us to ensure students feel empowered and informed as to the progress of their case.

Within our operational plan many of the objectives were met including:

- Developing a review of the Advice Centre
- Initiating a review of relations with welfare providers across College
- Developing a system that all enquiries are answered within 3 working days.

Aims for the future are:

- Increase satisfaction of the Advice Centre by 10%
- Increase number of interactions in the Advice Centre
- Work towards the Advice Quality Standard accreditation



It is hoped that during 2014/15 these objectives will be met, ensuring we meet our responsibilities with regard to our operational and strategic goals.

Nigel Cooke, Student Adviser  
September 2014