

Student Hubs and Student Development Update September 2015

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1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Imperial College Union entered into a partnership with Student Hubs in 2011. Student Hubs are an independent charity which provide and facilitate student volunteering opportunities, with a particular focus on Environmental issues, social entrepreneurship and community engagement.
- 1.2 At the time the partnership was mutually beneficial - Student Hubs were keen to get a foothold in London, and the Union was keen to grow the range of volunteering opportunities that were available to the membership. Volunteering at the Union at the time was limited to internal volunteering through Clubs, Societies and Projects. The Student Development department did not exist and the organisation had no strategic objectives or funding to enable it to grow in this area.
- 1.3 The partnership involved Student Hubs setting up 'Imperial Hub' which was housed within the students' union and supported by a staff member, fully funded by Imperial Hubs. The Union provided the space within its building, marketing and access to the membership to enable the Hub to develop and provide opportunities.
- 1.4 The partnership was largely successful – providing hundreds of opportunities for students to volunteer and campaign over three and a half years.
- 1.5 During this time the Union has grown enormously, and has increased its capacity to support volunteering through the creation of the Student Development department, Imperial Plus, and Community Connections.

2.0 Reasons behind the decision

- 2.1 In late 2014 Imperial Hubs staff indicated, at a meeting of the Hubs Advisory Board, that the funding model for Student Hubs had changed nationally and that individual Hubs (such as Imperial Hub) would need to undertake more fundraising to support its activities.
- 2.2 In March 2015 it became clear that the Imperial Hub had been set a fundraising target of £135k by central Student Hubs to not only fund the activities and salaries for the Imperial Hub, but to generate a contribution back to the charities central costs. This represented a complete change in approach and fundamentally altered the nature of the partnership. The Union immediately raised concerns about this change, and in particular the risk related to Student Hubs attempting to raise funds from College sources.

- 2.3 In subsequent discussions regarding the annual renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding between Student Hubs and Imperial College Union, Imperial College Union requested that the following clause be added to the MoU:
- 2.3.1** “Student Hubs will not enter into any agreement (including, but not limited to, financial agreements) with Imperial College London without gaining approval in advance from Imperial College Union”
- 2.4 Student Hubs were very resistant to the change and as attempt to achieve the same objective but soften the tone the Union suggested the following amended wording:
- 2.4.1 Student Hubs will consult and agree with ICU any proposed agreements with college (including but not limited to) resource requirements or applications for funding.*
- 2.5 This final suggestion was made in July 2015. Shortly after this discussion the Union learned, by being copied into an email response to Student Hubs from the Vice Provost (Education), that Student Hubs staff had been approaching senior College staff (including the College President) for direct support for their activities.
- 2.6 Given the financial circumstances face by Imperial Hub it is understandable that these approaches were made. However the fact that these discussions took place without the knowledge of anyone in the Union, whilst negotiations about the above clause were taking place, posed significant questions about the relationship between the Union and Student Hubs and whether there was sufficient residual trust for the partnership to continue.
- 2.7 In addition, it was important to measure the impact of ending the partnership across the College of ending the partnership before making a decision. To this end, discussions took place with senior College staff and a number of different College departments, which had working relationships with Student Hubs including Energy and Environment, Outreach, and Enterprise. All these discussions were positive, the reasons for the change were understood and all areas were happy to develop a more direct relationship with the Union to undertake student engagement work in their areas.
- 2.8 In late July, following discussions between Union management and Officer Trustees, the view was taken that the partnership should come to an end as the intentions of Student Hubs were becoming clearer and the partnership presented more risks than opportunities. The intention to move forward with this change was emailed to all Board members through an email from the Managing Director on August 3. The Board members

were not asked to formally approve this decision but all responses were supportive of the decision.

- 2.9 One of the reasons that a quick decision was required was due to the timing of the academic year. The MoU with Student Hubs required the Union to give three months notice to terminate and it was important to honour that, but also important to ensure that the impact of students was minimised and the closure of projects and volunteering schemes during term time would have been too disruptive.

3.0 Impacts and Actions

- 3.1 The most serious concern for the Union when managing the transition from the partnerships is the immediate impact on those students who are currently involved in the Imperial Hub or its current projects. The Union is confident in the Union's ability to grow its current operations and to, in time, expand and improve upon the services and activities that were delivered by Student Hubs. However, this will take some time and it will not be possible (or optimal) to exactly replicate all the activities provided by Hubs in the immediate term.
- 3.2 The Union will try to engage directly with the students that were heavily involved in Student Hubs and encourage them to provide insight and direction into the Union's growth into this area.
- 3.3 In order to facilitate the growth in this area more staffing resources will be required within the Student Development department. The department currently consists of two staff members, a Student Development Manager and a Student Development Senior Coordinator. The Union had previously decided to add one full-time staff member to the department to account for the extra resources required for the Imperial Award pilot scheme and the underlying growth of Imperial Plus. This staff member will be half-funded by additional funding from the College. Given the extra work required to establish activity to replace that previously provided by Student Hubs, the Union is now advertising for two new staff roles, increasing the head count within Student Development from two to four.
- 3.4 These two new roles will be at the same level, and will work across the activity of the department, but have two separate broad thematic areas to steer the recruitment process – 'Personal Development and Enterprise' and 'Volunteering'.
- 3.5 The Union will establish a student steering group to inform the development of its work in these areas to ensure that student direction is central from the outset, and that the knowledge and enthusiasm of students is harnessed to ensure that the Union's growth into these areas is as quick as possible.
- 3.6 The first step for the Union is to provide an equivalent service to College departments that previously had an arrangement in place with Student

Hubs, in particular with Student Recruitment and Outreach, Enterprise and Sustainability. The Student Development Team will receive funding to co-deliver College's flagship tutoring programme, The Pimlico Connection, with the Outreach department. We are looking forward to working with the Enterprise department on their social enterprise development strategy and with their Enterprise Development Manager to shape the Union's offer to student groups and the wider membership in this area (from November). The Sustainability Department are open to future discussions as and when students come forward with a new volunteering initiative where they could lend support.

4.0 Responses to decision

- 4.1 Union staff and officers have spent a lot of time over the past few weeks discussing the change with staff members around the college, mainly to understand how the Union can ensure that activities previously provided in partnership with College departments (such as Schools Outreach) can be provided in direct partnership with the Union.
- 4.2 These discussions have been overwhelmingly positive and a happy by-product of the issues has been an opportunity to measure the level of goodwill across the college for the Union and the Union's value to the College community. Staff from around the College have stated that they welcome the opportunity to develop their direct relationship with the Union.
- 4.3 There have been some negative reactions from individual students and staff members, mainly from those who have worked closely with Hubs and were planning on doing so in the coming year. These understandable frustrations have been exacerbated by the fact that the Union has not been able to communicate as openly or in as timely a fashion as it would prefer. The Union's approach is to try and reach out to those who are feeling frustrated about the decision and involve them in the Union's development.
- 4.4 The Union has issued a brief statement outlining the decision and the Union's intention to grow the scope of its volunteering support activities.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 That the Board note the decision to end the agreement with Student Hubs in the context of the advice previously received from board members.
- 5.2 That the Board note the intentions regarding the expansion of the Student Development department to facilitate this growth
- 5.3 That the Board request to receive updates on the development of the Union's work in these areas in six and twelve months' time.