

Deputy President (Welfare) – Council report

Shervin Sabeghi – 12th May 2020

Intro:

Hi everyone. I hope you're all doing well and exams are going well for all of you taking them. This has undoubtedly been the most interesting period in the role so far - no one could have prepared us for this! Whilst the OTs are often put in a room with College staff and asked to provide a definitive view on behalf of 20,000 students, this has taken on a new level in the last 6 weeks and the stakes have never seemed higher. Be it decisions around exams this term or about delivering education next term, the pressure has been on to represent views that will try and make as many people happy as possible. [This article](#) written on Wonkhe a few weeks ago by sabs at other SUs summarises the experience quite well.

Responding to the crisis has pretty much consumed everything for the last 6 weeks, and most of the other free time has been spent involved in recruiting for our new MD, so I've struggled to fit in work on the same projects that I had going before. As things settle, and we adapt to the, dare I say it, 'new normal', it'll become easier to get back to these from now on.

How I've spent my time since the last meeting:

College Meetings and 121s	Union Meetings	Operational work (day-to-day)	Project work	Time with students + comms
50%	20%	10%	5%	15%

Key areas:

EDI and Liberation

Updates:

- There has been no progress on the implementation of the Liberation Networks since my last report. This work will begin again very soon.
- There have been meetings of both the College's Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter Self Assessment Teams (as I've reported on in most of my reports so far). Unfortunately, I couldn't make either due to various clashes with Covid meetings.
- Recently, the College has been putting particular thought into admission and experience of Widening Participation (WP) students due to the Covid-19 crisis. It is worried that the cancellation of A Level exams may disadvantage these students therefore particular attention is being paid to this. Encouragingly, the % of offers going to WP flagged students this year has gone up considerably this year.

Wellbeing Representation Network

Updates:

- The WBRN review project with College is still underway, though heavily interrupted by the situation. Expect an update next time.

Student Support & Services

Updates

- In many of my previous reports, I've talked about progress in getting the fees to have assessments at the Disability Advisory Service reduced. This is one area that could be completely bulldozed by recent developments. On the Covid side, in response to the crisis the College have postponed the budgeting round for next year until the dust has settled more and will likely be tighter with their purse strings going forward. However, further complicating this, the Director of Student Services with whom I was discussing this has been on long-term sick leave. I will try and pick this up as much as possible, but the situation isn't great.
- Students in halls has been a difficult issue to tackle. Halls are currently around 20% full with about 450 students who are socially distancing from each other. The pastoral systems (wardening team etc) remain in place, but are being delivered socially distantly. The College agreed early on to allow students to break out of their contracts early and not return for third term – at Silwood and Evelyn Gardens as well as the first year halls. The main part of Wilson is being used for final year medics (now doctors) working at St Mary's hospital while the existing first years were moved to the annex. As far as I'm aware, all personal belongings in rooms have been put into storage and kitchenware has not been thrown away.
- All the student support services are being delivered remotely, and, as I've not heard any complaints so far, I assume these are running smoothly!

Covid-19 Matters

I'm involved in three College committees that have been created in response to the crisis. I'll give a brief summary and update from each:

- Education Group: Abhijay, Ashley and I attend these meetings ~twice a week. The purpose is to deal with delivering education until the end of the academic year. In rough chronological order, here are the key things that have come out of this:
 - Agreed guidance for departments about *how* to deliver remote timed assessments (the decision to do this was made above this group). This included adjusting exam times, offering practise runs, how to mark and moderate, extending allowed times for exams etc
 - Agreed a safety net: as you probably all know, we agreed the safety net following the Union survey with 7,000 responses.
 - Discussed PG specific matters: agreeing matters such as exit degrees for PGT students, the ability to extend course registration, and extensions to deadlines. There has been more clarity around funding from funding bodies.
 - Discussing delivery of education next term: this is mostly an operational task to ensure things can be delivered as much as possible, and has been mostly delegated to departments working with their reps
- Student Recruitment Strategy Group: the remit of this group is planning for next year. Currently, no definitive decisions have been taken about if next year will be remote or not. However, the College are planning to be able to deliver everything remotely if needed and have started to work with departments to ensure that everything can be 'online ready' in the new term. This group hasn't focused much on the wider holistic

student experience, but the Union is steadily forcing this matter more and more so it isn't neglected.

- Student Recruitment Operational Group: this group looks more at the operational side of sorting out matters for next year – mainly dealing with making sure students still come to Imperial. It's been dealing with student comms and particularly focusing on Widening Participation matters.

Operational/other matters:

- I was involved on the recruitment panel for our permanent Union MD which involved 2 days of preliminary interviews and then a day of final interviews. There were also student panels and Union staff panels. This resulted in the successful appointment of a candidate which will likely be confirmed by this meeting.