

## **DPEW's Report** *A report by the DPEW*

### **Lobby of Parliament**

On the 21<sup>st</sup> February I attended a Lobby of Parliament on top-up fees organised by the Aldwych Group. This could best be described as a qualified success – it was a useful exercise in that it once again raised the issue of top-up fees, but the lack of any senior politicians, bar Boris Johnson, made it seem quite ineffective (especially compared to the NUS FE lobby which was immediately afterwards). Looking at the issue a bit more just a few points I'd like to pick up:

- The biggest threat at the moment is not the lifting of the cap but the imposition of commercial rates of interest on student loans – this would really screw people over.
- I'm not that sure that I'm opposed to top-up fees really. They do bring in more money. They do provide more support to the poorest students. They haven't deterred students from applying to university. So what's wrong? My only gripe is that essentially they're a form of taxation based purely on parents' income – bizarre when you think about it – and it has started the introduction of a market in higher education. However, I would be concerned at any significant rise in the fees paid.

### **Student Experience – the whole picture**

Those of you who actually read reports may have noticed that I have been involved in several projects which aim to enhance the 'Student Experience'. As I have become more familiar with these projects it has become increasingly clear that while the individual projects are worthy there is a lack of a coherent strategy which cuts across all College (administrative) departments. In some areas of support services there is still an ingrained culture of 'siloes' which prevents them from working together where it obviously benefits students. One area where this is displayed quite clearly is the staffing structure behind the Student Hub. Instead of having dedicated employees, the hub will be staffed by people who will continue to spend some of their time in their home department.

What's the solution? I think we need to look seriously at having an overall Student Service department, which takes responsibility for all student facing matters – from degree transcripts to bursaries. What do Council think?

### **Halls Committee**

I chaired a meeting of the ICU halls committee which provided some useful discussion around areas such as smoking in halls. Of more interest is a development since that meeting: the Director of Commercial services has suggested that the Head of Residences no longer attends the committee, allowing it to become more of a student forum. This ties in with other aspects of restructuring within Residences which should see more accountability introduced further down the chain – giving students in halls a more direct line to get problems solved. I have given qualified support to this proposal, on the proviso that a charter of rights for students in halls – guaranteeing response times to defect reporting etc – is produced. Any comments?

### **NSS**

I have been working to raise awareness of the National Student Survey. The college's response rate is currently quite low, so if you are a final year student please, please fill it in.

### **RCSU Office/Ritz**

I helped the RCSU in the redecoration of the office. Well done to Jad and the rest of the exec for all the hard work they put in. On a slightly bigger scale a massive well done for the awesome party they hosted at the Ritz on Friday – Jad for Distinguished Fellowship!

### **NUS**

Since the results for NUS delegates came in I've been working on arrangements for National Conference. The next step is to deal with how we whip on the motions (Omar and Stephen had the good luck to attend compositing). More info on this during Council I expect.

### **Green Week/Fairtrade Fortnight**

Both these were great events (look at the awesome environmental policy, and make sure you vote for it) – a massive thank you to Hannah, Joao, Kirsty and everybody else who helped.

### **And the rest**

Attended the usual array of College meetings – of most interest was Senate, during which an explosive discussion over the percentage of degree classes awarded (following on from the Union's SEC presentation) took place. I think it's fair to say that those departments which do

have a below par rate of firsts and upper seconds will have to improve if they are to avoid serious repercussions – something for next years team to follow up.