

Council
14th December 2009

Report to ICU Council
Jonathan Silver, Deputy President (Education)

Quality Assurance Agency Institutional Audit 2010: Student Written Submission, and audit cycle

The SWS was approved by Council by email and received by College on the 25th of November, and couriered off to the QAA on the 30th along with College's massive Briefing Paper. I will have presented it to the Quality Assurance Advisory Committee for information three hours before this Council meeting, so if anything came of it, I will be able to give you a verbal report now. It's likely they'll just nod and move on.

The audit itself comes in two parts: the briefing visit and the audit visit. While your head is recovering from the holiday season before the start of term, I'll be back at work already, helping College cope with the briefing visit on the 5th, 6th and 7th of January. This is where the audit team do some initial investigation, talk to staff and us to clarify elements of the SWS and College's Briefing Paper, and tell us what areas they'll be investigating more closely at the audit visit, for instance, taught postgraduates, or engineering quality assurance, or degree classification. Whatever they decide.

The audit visit is the scarier of the two for College, and it's likely that some students will be nominated (by senior staff or Ashley or me) to come and talk to the audit team. That means you! The team will be asking students about their experience, so they get a proper handle on what Imperial is like to learn at. The audit visit will take place the week beginning the 8th of February.

What's the end product? A report on the audit team's findings. A draft will be out in March-ish, ready to be passed round so that we can all agree that it's fair and accurate, and then it'll be published on the QAA website for the world to see. If you're curious, the report from the last audit in 2005 can be found here:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/institutional/imperial05/summary.asp>

National Student Survey 2010

The NSS is the big mother of all surveys. It's publically funded and well-respected, and contributes towards the Times, Sunday Times and Guardian league tables. It's for final year undergraduates to complete every year, and most places (including Imperial) manage to achieve >50% participation rates. It's got a standard 22 multiple choice questions and a free text box, and on top of that, we're given a few options for extra stuff to ask at the end of the survey.

I was honoured to be able to choose these questions and other finer details about how we're running the NSS this year. These are the variables that we are using for the survey this year:

<u>Variable</u>	<u>My choice</u>
Extra optional question banks	Questions on: <i>Workload</i> (4 questions)

	<i>Intellectual Motivation (3 questions)</i> <i>Welfare Resources (2 questions)</i> <i>Course Content and Structure (3 questions)</i> <i>Feedback from Students (3 questions)</i> (these cover the biggest issues experienced by Imperial students and will help to map out problem areas of College)
Additional scale answer question	<i>How much do you agree with “My personal tutor provided me with adequate support”?</i> (this is to achieve some continuity and to help with the review of personal tutoring across College)
Additional free text answer question	<i>If you intend to continue with postgraduate study, do you want to stay at Imperial, or go elsewhere? Why?</i> (this is to do with recruitment strategy)
Start and end date	8 th February - 16 th April 2010 (finishing as late as possible)
Prizes offered to participants	Four 2010 Summer Ball entertainments tickets and four life memberships of Imperial College Union (a good incentive, I reckon)

The results will be available in the summer. If you are interested in having a look at the results, then have a look at www.unistats.com for an overview, or get in touch with me and I can show you more detailed results and conduct analysis, including splitting responses by gender, department etc.

Academic Fora

With the help of my colleagues, I'm running two academic fora early next term: a postgraduate forum and a taught course forum. (Both apply to taught postgraduates.)

All academic and welfare reps are invited - year reps, dep reps, course reps, academic officers. If you're a student, but not a rep, and you have a burning desire to join in, you're most welcome.

The plan is to vent. To rant. We're going to start by discussing some known issues that students experience, and then throw the floor open so we can really let out what's bothering us, and find out who else it affects. Us sabbs will be paying very careful attention - we're very keen to map out the student experience across College and make sure we're working as hard as we can for the perfect studying environment.

Postgraduate Working Group

After the initial postgraduate forum, we will hold further meetings with a smaller working group to help the GSA and Central Union tackle the big PG issues. The PG forum is, to this end, a recruitment shop.

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Academic Representation Policy

It bothers me greatly that, while we have a magnificent undergraduate representation structure in place, and an excellent postgraduate structure currently being established, there are some serious flaws:

- Role descriptions and responsibilities for academic representatives are patchy and scattered across various constitutions and policies within ICU.
- There is no list of academic representative positions; the FU constitutions mention the roles of Dep Reps and Year Reps, but there is no written requirement, in a constitution or elsewhere, or for a Dep Rep in each department or a Year Rep in each year of each department; it's simple stuff like this that isn't written down. People know roughly who needs to be elected where, but every year, officers have to make it up as they go along ever so slightly. It's also not as simple as it might seem: for instance, some years require more than one Year Rep to be elected and some don't; Information Systems Engineering has a *Dep Rep* and four Year Reps, but it's within the *EEE Department*; similarly Life Sciences is a Department but has several Dep Reps. Medicine is different altogether, which will take anyone expecting the traditional *AAOs-Dep Reps-Year Reps* by surprise.
- The communication channels between reps are also not written down anywhere, other than in my new handbook.

I am going to start very soon on writing an all-encompassing Academic Representation Policy, which will feature the following sections:

- A simple, unequivocal list of representative positions across College, undergraduate and postgraduate (GSA), so that every position is named and includes or refers to a short role description. This will include details like the number of people required to fill each role.
- Flexibility in the above, to allow for changing representation needs and changing departmental structures.
- A clear statement of communication routes from each representative.
- Procedures for the election of representatives: timeframe, responsibility of officers, use of forms

This will formalise and simplify the election process, make roles clearer, enable ICU to show off our representative structure, and perhaps most importantly, enable academic representatives to be held to account for their activities.

If you would like to contribute to this endeavour, or if you have any comments so far, then please get in touch with me. I hope to get writing soon.

JS – 8/12/09