

Silwood Park Student Union Report

2010-2011

President overview:

Mark Ramsden

At the start the academic year we sent a newly revised Silwood Handbook out to all current and new students. This was also uploaded onto our new website [www.silwoodparkstudentunion.co.uk], which is regularly updated with the activities and events going on at Silwood Park. In addition to ensuring that there are sufficient activities for the students here, as we are so isolated from the South Kensington campus, it has also fallen to us to maintain the various facilities we have. The student social room has recently received a long overdue revamp, and we are very grateful for Alex Kendall's role in making this happen.

We are still looking forward to many more events here this academic year. Most of the sports currently active will continue through the summer, as well as others that will begin shortly, such as Cricket and Tennis. We have started planning Silfest 2011, and several bands have already contacted us asking to perform again.

Silwood's isolation from the main Imperial campus will always make it somewhat unique in the way it runs. This year I think that the efforts made on both sides has been worthwhile, and I hope that this will continue. We are still concerned that the welfare of students at Silwood Park is off the main campus radar, but feel that this is starting improving.

My concern is that too much is expected of full time PhD students. There is no defined position responsible for the social aspect of student life, or for student well-being at Silwood. Most students here are studying for an MSc, and so only join in September and remain for one year. While PhD students remain for longer, they can only spare time to run events in their first twelve months. Minimal effort is made by ICU to provide facilities or events at Silwood.

Looking forward to next year, it is difficult to predict what will happen. We have prepared a budget based on what has happened this year and what we still have planned. Jen and I will not be able to continue in our roles after September 2011, and at present we cannot be sure that anyone will be in a position to take on our responsibilities. Similarly, Will Pearse and Diane Lawrence will not be able to continue with their welfare responsibilities. It may be that replacements will come forward, but this cannot be guaranteed. Having asked around the current PhD students, no-one has expressed an interest. Should this remain the case, the reality is that there will be no social infrastructure at Silwood when the next intake of MSc students arrives in September.

The number of students at Silwood has continued to rise over the last ten years (see table below). This year more students were accepted than were places available in Halls on campus. We expect that the number of MSc students in 2011-2012 will be similar, if not higher than, this year.

Year	Subsidy	Number of MSc Students (not including PhD students)	Funds per MSc
2000-2001	Data unavailable	19	
2001-2002	Data unavailable	11	
2002-2003	Data unavailable	11	
2003-2004	Data unavailable	16	
2004-2005	Data unavailable	34	
2005-2006	Data unavailable	41	
2006-2007	Data unavailable	50	
2007-2008	3500	86	£40.70
2008-2009	4631	108	£42.88
2009-2010	3496	100	£34.96
2010-2011	2092	116	£18.03

As the number of MSc students has steadily increased, the amount of time required to manage events has also increased, as has the demand on equipment and facilities. If the numbers of students here is going to remain above 100 annually, the workload on PhD students to manage the social activities is too high. ICU and other University level management groups should take on some of the responsibilities for looking after students at Silwood.

Treasurer overview:

Jennifer Zanin

Silwood presents a unique case among the various ICU clubs and societies. This has, unfortunately, caused a variety of complications in terms of the finance over past years. Breakdowns in communication and bureaucratic process have caused issues both for Silwood and the main campus union.

This year, we were allocated £2,092.42 in Contingency funds, as a budget had not been submitted in the previous year. Budget requests for the running of Silwood's various activities was three times this value, at £6,294.00. In addition to this, the SGI fund was in deficit by £2,849.24, resulting from the merger of the various Silwood clubs to form Silwood Exec. Last term, we had to prepare a budget allocating the given contingency funds to the various activities, then free up said funds in a general meeting. Additionally, we have had to consider how to sure up the deficit in the SGI. So far, reasonable progress has been made in that regard.

With an intake of 116 Masters students, as well as new and existing PhD students, Silwood Exec has had to try to cater for all these students with very few funds per student (somewhere in the region of between £10-15, please see table above for values excluding PhD students). Suffice to say, providing a suitable service for students of Imperial College on such limited funds as been difficult, and we have been lucky that some of the students have been kind enough to volunteer their expertise. It is unlikely that the same will be able to happen in future years.

The social room was given a much-needed revamp, however funds were not provided to replace the old furniture, which is decrepit and no longer fit for purpose. The old sound equipment system has also broken down, and will certainly need replacing. This is because it is a vital piece of equipment, used by many of the activities in addition to events.

A budget has been submitted for next academic year. The amount requested reflects the expected needs of the students for next year, as well as the lack of investment in previous years, and presents a far more realistic value required in comparison to the amount received this year. Funds have also been requested to improve existing facilities such as to make them fit for purpose and bring them to the standards of ICU – for example, for the replacement of the sound system and decrepit furniture in the social room. Preparation of the budget has been difficult, as the online submission system is suited to the needs of South Ken clubs and societies, but does not reflect the needs of Silwood. Furthermore, as no previous budgets had been submitted, it has been difficult to gauge things like Contingency or additional costs. The amount of detail provided may be somewhat limited, as due to the high turnover rate at Silwood it is difficult to determine the exact requirements of the students and to extract exact details. While we understand that this may present difficulties, we hope that the unique situation at Silwood will be considered in the decision-making process.

Events and Activities at Silwood Park 2010-2011

Entertainments: **Thea Powell, Fran Sconce, Rosie Burdon, Sophie Bell**

Casino Royale

Friday 8th October

The final night of Fresher's Week, and a chance for the new students to dress up smart-ish and try their roulette and black jack skills.

Halloween

Friday 29th October

The MSc Men's debut gig in the Manor House, as around 120 students arrived in appropriate dress. Pumpkins and apple bobbing in the cobweb clad Great Hall made it a night to remember.

Bonfire Night

Friday 12th November

Despite having to be delayed by a week due to the proposed Fire Fighter's Strike in London, the bonfire and firework display went without a hitch. The winning Guy, made my some of the students, burnt nicely as the fire died back.

International Night

Friday 26th November

Posters by students about their home country were displayed in the Manor House, followed by a live folk music.

Christmas Revue

Thursday 16th December

The annual panto-style critique of Silwood life, that this year raised £157.90 Cancer Research UK.

Pirate Party

Friday 14th January

To celebrate the end of January exams, a pirate theme fancy dress party was held in the Manor House.

Silwood Minibus:

Will Nash

In the academic year 2010-2011, the Silwood Park Minibus continued to pump pure life blood into the campus by running a twice weekly trip to a Tesco superstore on the outskirts of Bracknell. Beyond this crucial duty the minibus enhanced student life both socially and academically, allowing off campus trips to conferences, field trips, and even the cinema. The bus and its dedicated team of drivers plan to uphold this fine service, and ensure students enjoy a safe and reliable transit experience. Given the establishment of a cutting edge booking system, the bus has been placed firmly in the public domain and is primed to cater for a full range of societal and academic trips over the coming months. The bus has maintained its own revenue thus far, given a £1 a head charge for local trips, and per mile levy on those travelling further afield.

Welfare:

Diane Lawrence and Will Pearse

Like any postgraduate campus, the atmosphere at Silwood can be quite intense. In the past our welfare provision has been very reactive, so we have established systems to prevent problems occurring, as well as ensuring that everyone understands what to do when they do occur.

Silwood Parent:

We've started a scheme this year whereby every Masters student was given parent, who welcomed them, made them feel at home, and generally acted as a friendly face in Silwood. They are also an informal point of contact if they need any help or advice.

Counselling Services:

We were unhappy with the ease of access to councillors for Silwood students, and as such lobbied for a more local service. We were successful, and have had positive feedback about the service.

Welfare Survey:

Before Christmas we sent out a survey to see if there are any obvious problems that needed addressing, and have passed the results on to the rest of the student union.

Supervisor Contact:

We are currently lobbying for better systems of supervisor contact, to make sure that no students feel they don't have ready access to the supervisor during project write-up.

Currently there is no Welfare presence from the main South Kensington Union at Silwood Park. Students here rely upon volunteers among PhD students to look after their welfare.

International:

Cian O'Connor, Cat Karlsson and Andreea Gaitan

We had one event during the autumn where people made up posters with facts about their country, which were displayed in the Manor House. This was followed by a quiz relating to the posters and a live folk music act. There will be a similar event running later this term.

Tennis:

Alice Daish

The plan for this year is get a regular session of tennis enthusiasts to play singles and doubles matches. In the coming summer months we will get a scoreboard of singles women and men and mix matches, as well as doubles matches and awards some prizes at the end of the year. We have

four racquets and a number of tennis balls that can be borrowed, for any students just wanting to play a friendly game.

Rounders:

Thea Powell

Rounders is a great game for people of all levels of fitness. It builds teamwork, and really helps people on different courses and in different halls to have fun and exercise together!

This year we have concentrated on getting rounders as a regular once a week activity. We bought cones for bases, and encouraging everyone to realize the higher flexibility in a slightly less main stream game, often meaning slightly less competitive attitudes. We hope to do a tournament in the summer.

Football:

Mark Ramsden

Football has run every Monday night, continuing on from last year. After Christmas we moved this to the Harlington Sports ground, saving a substantial amount of money and improving the quality of pitch we play on. At the start of the year, Silwood entered a team into a 5-a-side competition in London, in which they came forth. We also held a friendly Staff V Student 11-a-side game in January (Students won 3-2), and have a second game planned for later this term.

Improvised Comedy:

Will Pearse

Since 2008, the Improvised Comedy Society has been improving the creative, public speaking and team skills of scientists at Silwood Park. Scientists rarely get an opportunity to actively create drama, let alone comedy, and it is refreshing to see just how good at it they are when given the chance! Weekly workshops teach students the basics, while hour-long shows and open mike nights give them an opportunity to showcase their skills. We have also been asked to run work-shops for the drama society in South Kensington.

We organise the annual 'Silwood Revue', a panto-style critique of Silwood life, raising £157.90 Cancer Research UK. The focal point of the Silwood calendar for both staff and students, it allows upwards of 30 students outside the society to act, direct, design costumes, organise props and generally enjoy themselves.

Film Club:

Stuart Young & Abbie Shaw

So far this term we've shown a film in the social room each week, and have done one cinema trip. We envisage showing a film a week for the rest of the year, and potentially further cinema trips.

Music Society:

Jeremy Cusack

The Society organises musical gatherings every Thursday evenings, during which keen musicians (mainly classical) come and play together and form groups. There is also a bands, The MSc Men, which practices separately and has performed at several events this year. We organised one Open mic night at the end of last term, which was a great success.

Music gatherings on Thursday evenings will continue. Another Open mic night is planned for the start of February. Depending on the general interest, I may also organise a trip to South Kensington to attend one of the Imperial Symphony Orchestra concerts (again, classical).

Photography Society:

Jeremy Cusack

There have been a few photographic walks to Windsor Great Park and some around Silwood. A trip was organised to visit the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition at the NHM. There will be one photography competition during the second term and the winners will have their pictures framed and hung up on the student common room walls. So far, the dark room has not been used, due to its poor condition.

Jitsu Club:

James Probert

The Silwood Park Jitsu Club trains from 8 until 10 in the Manor House Great Hall every Thursday night. We had our first session on 28/20/2010 and have trained every Thursday since. I teach Jiu Jitsu, a traditional Japanese martial art which has useful applications for modern self defence. The organization I belong to is the largest martial arts organization in the UK with over 100 clubs and 1000's of members. Last term I focused on teaching basic self defence techniques against attacks such as wrist and body grabs, hair pulls, strangles, punches and bottles. A large part of Jiu Jitsu is throwing so having 8 mats delivered late in the term meant I could teach a wider variety of techniques.

In January I arranged for a guest instructor to come down from Oxford and teach the club. Different people use Jitsu in different ways so it's important that students are exposed to a variety of instructors so they can find how The Art works best for them. In this case the guest instructor is a 9-stone girl, contrasting with me, a 14-stone boy.

In mid February we hope to hold a regional event to take place at Silwood Park. This will involve the members of six nearby clubs coming to train with us under the instruction of a top sensei from Bristol. Regional events give students the chance to train with people from other clubs and ensure that their techniques work on different body shapes in a fun and relaxed atmosphere.

Finally there is a national competition I intend to take the club to at the end of February. Students will be split by belt and by weight and then compete one on one in ground and standing competitions. The event is held in Walsall over an entire weekend with training in the mornings, competitions in the afternoons and a party on the Saturday night. Each year there are over 1000 competitors from over 100 clubs in the UK as well as visitors from the USA, Canada, Australia, Holland, Cyprus, New Zealand and South Africa.

This national competition was recognised as a British University and College Sports (BUCS) competition last year and I'm hoping the club can win some medals.

The ultimate focus of the coming term will be the grading which is scheduled for the end of March.

Cricket:

Jacques Deere

Facilities

This year we have been informed that the cricket net hire is set to increase, as such we are asking for part of these costs to be covered in the budget. This is due to a number of reasons. Firstly, the costs to staff and students for net sessions are determined to ensure we can cover the net hire for a season, however, a combination of reduced participation (seen last year) and the need to potentially increase net fees due to low numbers will impact students financially and may lead to less participation. Our match fess are set in a similar fashion, however due to the higher costs of ground hire (compared to that of net sessions) our budget request is higher. Our aim is to ensure that, as a priority, everybody has fun and we would like to limit the cost to the students as best we can. We have seen from previous years that Masters students, in

particular, have struggled financially towards the end of their courses. As a result we have reduced the budget request for the net sessions and are asking that the ground hire budget be maintained for this years' budget to cover a greater proportion of the clubs facilities hire cost.

Safety Equipment

For the 2011/2012 budget we have also asked for a safety equipment budget. Most of the students that participate rely on the club's equipment; therefore we are responsible for their safety and have to ensure that the equipment is in good working order. Unfortunately two of our cricket helmets are in need of replacement as they are at a point where they are not providing sufficient protection (the same applies to our thigh pads). We are highlighting these points as many of the participants are inexperienced and so the need for safety equipment to be in good order is paramount.

Equipment

Given that most of the students that take part do not have their own cricket equipment there is a significant amount of wear and tear on club equipment, cricket bats especially (a single bat can be used by at least four per match), on an annual basis. As such every second year or so many of the cricket bats tend to show significant damage (through proper use) that often cannot be repaired. We have had two bats which have had to be discarded as they have been damaged during the season and will need replacement. As part of the 2011/2012 budget we are asking for funds to have these bats replaced.

Other costs (Consumables, Competition Fees and Travel)

The remainder of the costs fall into three categories, Consumables, Competition Fees and Travel. We generally do not incur many consumable costs, however the one costly part is the purchasing of match balls. We are required, by League Rules, to supply *new* match balls for all our home games as well as to ensure there are spare balls available in the event the balls are lost or damaged during a game. All participants in the Berkshire Research League are required to pay a mandatory admin fee, hence the inclusion in the budget request. Travel costs also contribute a major part of our annual costs as the majority of the Masters students do not have their own transportation and require the club to get them to practice sessions and matches. Where we can players with their own transport try and assist in travel to reduce costs; however this is very sporadic as we cannot guarantee enough private transportation for every practice session or match. Moreover, we often have less private transport at hand come the start of the new season as many senior players (from the previous cricketing season) tend to move on and we will then be more reliant on the union bus and the travel budget.

Squash:

Jenni Fincham

This year so far a squash ladder is available for anyone who wishes to participate, squash equipment has been made available for hire and concerns involving lighting on the court have been addressed. For the rest of the year we are looking to improve the equipment and encourage the squash ladder and possibly have a small end of term competition.

Yoga:

Justine Alexander

Yoga classes run each Tuesday evening in the Manor House, and have proved very popular with the students. The classes will continue to run each week for the remainder of the year.

Allotments:

Maria Dickinson

The allotment club is an expanding club at Silwood Park. For the time I have been organising the allotments (from 2008 to now), year on year take up of allotment plots has increased. The allotments were in a state of disrepair pre-2008 so much work has been done and remains to be done to improve the site and facilities. This includes (i) repair/replace outer deer/rabbit fence; (ii) maintain/complete rabbit fencing of individual plots; (iii) repair/maintain tools; and (iv) planting communal fruit and herb perennials in areas that are currently weedy.

There are also year on year expenses on materials that are used up, such as seeds and compost. There is the annual expense of the Summer Fair. Although this is a social event, past years have shown that having a Summer Fair/vegetable competition at the end of the season keeps people involved throughout the summer months when work commitments pile up.

The club does raise significant amounts of funds through charging an annual subscription (£10 per plot). The level of this subscription was raised from £3 in 2008. The figure of £10 was chosen as a figure that was affordable to all students. The estimated subscriptions total included in the budgets for 2010-11 and 2011-12 is based on the number of plots x £10 per plot. This therefore represents a maximum subscription collection. The balance sheets from previous years show that this amount is never collected. The shortfall is due to students who sign up, don't pay (despite being asked many times), then give up their allotments too late in the growing season for someone else to take them on. This problem is being tackled this year by reassigning the plots of those who have not paid in early spring.

Chickens

Alex Lord

We have a brood of about 20 chickens, kept next to our bees. Students volunteer to take turns in manage the brood; clearing the runs, feeding them, looking after the chicks and selling eggs.

Chess

Gebre Asefa

The chess club meet once a week to play.

Summary

To conclude, we are aware that we have submitted a substantially greater budget request than Silwood has received in the past. This reflects the increase in number of students here, and the poor condition of much of the vital equipment necessary for keeping our students sane. We are an isolated campus, and if we are to ensure the students have the best possible experience we need sufficient funds for activities and entertainments.

We feel that it would be to the benefit of both ICU and Silwood Students if a permanent ICU staff position was in place with responsibility for Silwood union activities. This would not necessarily be a full time role, but would help with continuity if they were based here for at least a portion of their time. This would also relieve the pressure on PhD students.

When the number of students at Silwood was lower, it was feasible for PhDs to take on organisational and pastoral roles. Now we have fewer PhD students, and more MSc students, ICU needs to realise their responsibilities for events and welfare of their members at Silwood.