

Executive Committee

31 January 2013

Request to run a campaign  
against the closure/transferral of the Translation Studies Unit  
with the support of the Student Union

Paper provided to the Union Council  
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## The Case

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2012, the Head of the Translation Studies Unit (TSU), Dr Jorge Díaz-Cintas, was informed that the College Management Board has decided that TSU activities are not considered core to College strategy and that the Unit should be transferred to another institution. If this solution is not feasible then consideration will be given to discontinuing translation studies from the 1st October 2013.

The Head informed TSU students and staff electronically about the situation on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December. Students and staff were made aware that there would be a consultation period for staff from January 18<sup>th</sup> and, in advance of that, students were officially informed in a meeting that took place on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, after the staff first met on the 15<sup>th</sup> to discuss the situation with Eryl Price-Davies, the Head of the Centre for Co-Curricular Studies and the Representative of the Humanities Department in the Union.

## The Rationale

During all the above meetings and through the emails exchanged between students and staff regarding the situation, students were informed that:

- The high quality of the teaching offered by the department is recognised by the Management Board and that the TSU was examined and evaluated externally by other universities as an excellent department.
- The high standard of the research conducted in the TSU is recognised by the Management Board and throughout the world in both academia and industry. This is also proven by the collaboration of the TSU with the European Commission.
- Students' satisfaction has been proven through surveys conducted by College, although in general it is known that these surveys are not very positive for all the Imperial College departments/units.
- Recent evaluation of TSU by external sources has yielded very positive results in terms of research too.
- TSU is a profitable department, as the Head of our department explained, and this is recognised by the Management Board.

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Given the above, the reason for the Management Board's decision is unclear to students. Based on the College Strategy as provided by the College for the period 2010-2014, TSU does fit in the globalised environment of Imperial College, and the worldwide exchange of information and research material is one of the main stated goals of the College which is definitely fulfilled within the TSU.

### Students' Concerns

At the moment, the TSU accommodates 96 students (50 MSc, 22 PhD, 16 UCL and 6 undergraduate students). According to the letter that was distributed by Mark Shuttleworth, Head of the TSU from its establishment until December 2012, the Deputy Rector gave his reassurance that:

- All students currently registered (both MSc and PhD) will be permitted to graduate as Imperial College students;
- The majority of MSc in Scientific, Medical and Technical Translation with Translation Technology students (i.e. all full-time and second-year part-time students), as well as UCL students currently registered on MSc modules, will complete their studies before this decision is implemented;
- The College has undertaken to ensure that the necessary arrangements will be made for anyone still registered next academic year to complete their studies as Imperial students;
- After the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2013, supervision arrangements will be made for all PhD students still registered to complete their degrees as Imperial College students;

Further to the above, the programme for Academic Visitors is also likely to come to an end in the autumn.

However, students have expressed various concerns including the following:

- PhD students who have scholarships from various educational institutions around the world run the risk of losing their funding due to the loss in the validity of their research since it is accompanied by the closure of the TSU. In that case, the College should be responsible for their funding.
- PhD students will not be able to make full use of their rights, such as participation in the Erasmus exchange programme, academic visiting to other universities, funding for participation in conferences, areas which have not

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even been discussed by the Management Board. We have been informed that the visit of one academic visitor has already been cancelled.

- Arrangements for supervision and facilities for continuing PhD students and part-time MSc students are unclear and students fear they will be left with little support after 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013. If the Translation Lab is not available, students fear it will be impossible to fulfil their studies and make use of the software they need.
- PhD and MSc students fear that their degrees will be of low standard after the implementation of the Board's decision, which might affect opportunities for employment currently and in the future. Companies choose TSU graduates because they trust the level of studies provided in the unit. Most of the times, students are employed through our department's mail exchange with people who seek specifically for TSU graduates.
- MSc students have strongly expressed their dissatisfaction. They consider this decision deeply worrying because the MSc programme is training for professional translators and represents the beginning of their career in the translation industry. By the time they seek employment, they fear that their degree will be of little value. This is due to the fact that this field is very antagonistic and it is really important that one has a very distinctive degree in order to be able to have steady collaborations in the future.
- Regarding the TSU staff, students are very pleased and the tutors reassured us that they will help us as much as possible.
- We know that the department has been requesting to hire staff for years and that the College has put the Unit through many stages leaving it often outside the rest of the College and assigning its development and operation to the Library. We have been informed that tutors have also asked to hire staff to help them with PhD students supervision and teaching at the MSc and that the College has always been aware of the way TSU operates and has appeared to be in line with the principles of the TSU.
- PhD and MSc students believe that the College should have informed them before they were registered earlier in October. They have expressed great dissatisfaction towards this decision and the way it was so quickly implemented without providing any room for improvements in the department and without approaching students to discuss their concerns.

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## Request for Support

TSU students consider that the relevance to the College Strategy of the activities carried out by the TSU is clear in that:

- We are engaged in teaching and researching the communication of science, technology and medicine across languages and cultures in a manner that involves the intensive use of technology;
- This MSc is the only Masters programme in translation, in the UK and possibly worldwide, that focuses so clearly on translation within the scientific, technical and medical subject areas;
- The research conducted in the Unit emphasises specialised types of translation, such as audiovisual, scientific and medical, and also the use of translation technology;
- With a track record of 12 years of large-scale MSc teaching and PhD provision, the TSU has established itself as a strong player within the College, with very healthy recruitment, particularly of overseas students, at both MSc and PhD levels, and a strong provision of further complementary activities.
- This decision puts our careers in danger and threatens us with debts in case we lose our scholarships.
- We feel that we should have been informed about the reasons for this closure and that the department should be given the opportunity to enhance its practice if the only hurdle is harmonisation with the College strategy. We believe that students' satisfaction and safety is much more important.

Based on the above and on our belief that the work of the TSU is indeed fully in line with all the College's strategic aims, we would like to request permission to run a student campaign with the Union's support. In that way, students will be able to express their concerns and have indeed the right to support their studies and research.

We would like to ask the Union to support us in our fight against this decision. Students who registered with Imperial College chose TSU for the reasons stated above. After the closure of the Unit, their career in the translation industry will be at stake. We are asking for an opportunity to make our voice heard at Imperial, an institution which we have entrusted with our future.