### Since the last meeting of the board:

* A restorative week’s holiday

**Guarantor Scheme Proposal**

* Making final finishing touches based on feedback from the Director of Finance and hoping to send round to the CFO and manager of the Student Hub who will hopefully be managing the scheme in the future. Pending their approval I’ll be submitting the paper for approval to the final Provost Board of the year. It generally seems pretty likely that the scheme will be approved and will go ahead for the 2017/18 academic year as a pilot. Nas has expressed an interest in the project so hopefully he will be happy to ensure proper implementation over the coming year.

**Higher Education White Paper**

* Leading the E&W team to respond to particular aspects of the White Paper via Department of Business Innovation & Skills technical consultation.
* I’m currently working on gathering student opinion on the proposals in the White Paper to feed into the response.

**EU Referendum**

* Marketing pushed voter registration heavily via social media and newsletters up until the registration deadline and will hopefully be pushing turning out to vote in the days leading up to referendum day.
* The EU debate was a great success despite a few minor hiccups. I was asked to chair by the students which was a new experience….
* Turnout was excellent and there was a lot of enthusiasm and engagement from students in attendance
* The debate continued until closing time at the Union Bar (which was packed) with two of our speakers staying around to have a drink and a chat with the students until after last orders.

**Academic Standards Framework**

* Attitudes and workflow at the Complaints & Appeals Task and Finish Group have both taken a huge step forward since the last board meeting and we have finally seen some tangible progress with regards to mitigating circumstances and academic appeal regulations.
* There is still no movement on appeals for postgraduate research students, interruption of studies or withdrawal of studies yet.

**Miscellaneous**

* I recently spoke at this year’s annual Student Welfare Seminar on the topic ‘Student Support: the roadmap to excellence’. Although we at the Union had many criticisms to make of the seminar itself, my segment went down extremely well and was met with a huge amount of positive feedback from just about everyone from the Vice Provost (Education) to members of counselling staff. A summary of the talk can be sound on my OT blog. Although I was afraid of rocking the boat a little too much, I feel I rocked it just enough and have hopefully set a precedent for the College to speak about student support in more sensible terms and to approach it in the same rigorous, quality oriented manner as teaching and research.

### A snapshot of the year so far:

**National Politics**

* I produced ICU’s response to the Higher Education Green Paper in January. The response has been highly praised within the College and highlighted the relatively unique institution-union relationship we enjoy; the relationship was clearly demonstrated by our response and the College’s referencing each other throughout. Hopefully this will resonate within the sector and the government and the future ‘Office for Students’ will be modelled on elements of our collaborative style with the College.
* I’m now leading on the Union’s response to the subsequent White Paper and technical consultation, which will hopefully incorporate as much student opinion as possible.
* I attempted to lobby(admittedly unsuccessfully) against scrapping of maintenance grants for undergraduates. Unfortunately MPs refuse to speak to a student representative who doesn’t reside in their constituency, despite having thousands of Imperial students in their constituency. Realistically the turnaround between the announcement of the plans and the decision in the Commons was very narrow, making it very difficult for anyone to do anything across the sector.
* I’ve been actively promoting voter registration this over the last few months working with the marketing team in the run up to both the local elections and the EU Referendum and aiming to provide students with all available facts empowering them to make an informed decision on poll day. This has included officer blogs about the importance of voting, the EU referendum debate and supporting student lead campaigning on campus for Leave and Remain.

**Mental Health**

* I have worked closely with the head of Student Counselling & Mental Health this year and have helped recruit a huge number of new staff members to the team, including the College’s Mental Health Advisor. This was a new post which was made in response to last year’s Mentality Report. Although some members of the recruitment panel felt that it was more important for the post holder to have a wealth of experience in HE settings, I determinedly argued for some time that Higher Education can be learned, over 25 years as a mental health nurse cannot. The result of this, I believe, is that by far the best possible candidate got the job in the end.
* This year was the first year that Union volunteers received Mental Health First Aid training. We offered subsidised places on the half day courses for key volunteers, the course sold out rapidly and volunteers from all areas of the organisation were clamoring for more sessions of training. We’ve seen the impact of this with some officers finding themselves using the skills they learned on the course to direct distressed students within their communities to appropriate help and support.
* Also on the subject of Mental Health First Aid, as a result of some work I did very early on in my term, this year is the first year that wardens/subwardens in halls have received any training at all related to mental health. I was approached by a group of subwardens who were concerned about the ever increasing number of students reaching crisis point while in halls, particularly in the wake of a student taking their life in a hall the previous year. The subwardens felt that they weren’t appropriately trained before the incident, or supported after the incident. As a result I spent some time having to persuade the Director of Student Support that he should be funding this training and make it a mandatory part of warden/subwarden induction. The training was offered, but uptake was frustratingly low and feedback was that prior knowledge of mental health and managing difficult scenarios was alarmingly poor. Hopefully for the future Emily-Jane can continue building on this work to ensure that all front line pastoral staff are equipped with the necessary skills and given enough support to do their jobs safely.
* The biggest win for students to come from my year of membership on the College’s Mental Health Steering Group is to gain a commitment from the Provost to ensure provision of counselling and mental health support at other campuses. Currently the counselling service provides one counsellor for an afternoon at Hammersmith and Silwood Park and only provide their psychoeducational workshops at South Kensington. For several years there has been a desire among the student body for more counselling and workshops to be provided at the Hammersmith, which houses over 2000 students and to provide counselling sessions at Charing Cross, the base of roughly 2500 medical students. Currently the Counselling Service are working with the faculty of medicine to find space to provide these sessions, though I believe that a commitment from the Provost means that this will go ahead regardless of how difficult or inconvenient it may be.
* Leyla Okhai of the Equality Diversity & Inclusion Unit has recently secured funding to train up 3 new mental health first aid trainers and has suggested that one of these could potentially be a Union staff member.

**Student Funding**

* The primary reason I considered taking a sabbatical year was to campaign for fairer funding for students, specifically medics. Last year as ICSMSU Welfare Officer I published a report which found that over 90% of medical students in fifth and final year did not have enough money to cover their most basic living costs as a result of the change in funding model for the last 2 years of medical school. Students were going to very extreme lengths in order to make ends meet. These include but aren’t limited to skipping meals, not attending hospital placements due to travel costs, and working excessive hours on top of placements and studying. Anecdotally there is also a small but significant number of students engaging in sex work to support themselves financially. After over 18 months of me campaigning the College finally agreed to give students the option to receive their Imperial Bursary over all six years of their course rather than just the first four to help alleviate the huge drop in funding between year 4 and year 5. The College also negotiated a loan specifically for final years with RBS which allows students to take a loan of up to £5000 with a 12 month drawdown giving students a financial boost whilst on the home stretch without them having to worry about paying back until after they start earning. Although these are not fully ideal solutions, there are some major leaps forward represented by this work. To my knowledge Imperial is the first institution to recognise that funding for medical and allied health students is insufficient to live and are also the first to actually do anything about it. There is still a very long way to go, and it is unfortunate that the changes to the bursary will only benefit students starting after 2015/16. I’m hoping that someone in the early years of medical school is willing to step up and continue this campaign for fairer student funding.
* I produced the Union’s Imperial Bursary Survey Response this year which I presented to the Access Agreement Working Group and Vice Provosts Advisory Group for Education. The response was highly praised and highlighted some of the issues faced by students from low-middle income backgrounds to the College. Many key people in the College now recognise that insufficient funding for low-middle income students not only impacts on their ability to meet basic living costs (as with the medics), but also acts as a barrier to attainment, to club and society participation and to access to key CV building experiences like internships and summer research placements. The paper also highlighted quite strongly the fact that student debt and lack of funding is a major barrier to continuing onto postgraduate education. The proposal that the College and the Union should be looking at how Masters students are supported financially and considering the option for bursary schemes and scholarships.

**Sexual Harassment**

* This has formed a large part of my later work in response to some concerning cases which appeared in the Advice Centre. These cases demonstrated that the College has been utterly mishandling disclosure of sexual assault. Even more concerningly I have heard some very worrying opinions on the matter from the very people who are dealing with these cases. There seemed very little appetite among high ranking figures in the student support services to take ownership of or do anything about the problem that many women students were being sexually assaulted by other students, who were then getting off Scot free.
* As a result we have a commitment from the Provost and the Vice Provost (Education) to take action.
* The Provost will be mentioning the issue of consent in all his opening addresses to new students for the coming academic year and I am currently working with the Vice Provost (Education) and head of Strategic Planning to bring key figures (such as heads of department and wardens) on board with the idea of providing peer led consent education to new students. Funding is available for us to train volunteers to deliver this training and in the coming weeks we will be recruiting.
* There is currently absolutely no guidance available for anyone who may receive a first disclosure of sexual assault or harassment. This is being addressed as a matter of urgency by a management trainee based in Strategic Planning who is producing guidance and a policy for how to support students through these difficult times based on best practice and guidance from NUS and Rape Crisis. Hopefully this will be in place in time for the next academic year.
* Although we will not know the outcomes of the College’s financial planning round until August, the head of Strategic Planning submitted a bid to the planning round to fund future consent training and the recruitment of an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor who will be able to develop training for staff and support students and personal tutors.

**College Policies**

* I fought back strongly against previous iterations of the College’s Harassment, Bullying & Victimisation policy. The initial version was extremely pro-accused but did not enshrine support for victims at any point. The final draft approved by Student Support & Wellbeing Committee was far more balanced in its support and actually took victims of harassment or bullying seriously.
* Through my involvement in the Academic Standards Framework (specifically the Complaints & Appeals Task & Finish Group), I have fought strongly for fair mitigating circumstances and academic appeals regulations which are straightforward, fair and navigable for students and personal tutors.
* I spent much of the first part of my year involved in producing the Future Student Service Review. This looked at all the student facing services offered by Imperial (and the Union). The review uncovered a lot of concerning features in the conduct of College Tutors, and poor practice in terms of basic service delivery for certain services Its recommendations are mostly common sense but were endorsed by Provost Board, that said we are yet to see any impact. I have been slowly pushing to get the ball rolling on implementing some of the recommendations however I think this will be something that this sabbatical team hands over to the new team.

**Advice**

* The Advice Centre has been completely rebuilt from scratch this year. I cannot take much credit for any of this other than appointing Advice Services Manager Angela Urasala. At the beginning of this year we essentially had no advice centre, something which should have been at the core of all our activities from the formation of ICU. Now we have two staff members with a wealth of knowledge between them covering academic regulations, housing law, debt and consumer rights who are gradually seeing more and more students and feeding into College policy making. Although we are not quite on par with other advice centres yet, the Advice Centre has come an extremely long way in just 10 months thanks to the stellar work of Andrew Keenan and Angela.

**Liberation & Welfare Officers**

* Something which I have not necessarily been successful in this year is increasing engagement and support for liberation officers. Currently out of 12 officers we have two who have been highly engaged and effective in their roles throughout the year, one who has not responded to a single communication from the Union since he was elected and everything in between. Community & Welfare Board has not been quorate since its first meeting in October in part due to its perceived lack of power or purpose, something which I am keen to see fed into any reform of our democratic structures.
* Some projects which the officers have worked on this year include a mass campaign within the City & Guilds Union around sexual health, stress less puppy rooms, and a long running campaign for gender-neutral toilets in College, removal of titles from College ID Cards and delivery of a workshop to medical students on delivering healthcare for transgender people.

**Housing**

* See above for details of a housing guarantor scheme to support overseas students looking to rent in the private sector.
* In the early part of the year I spent some time gathering as much student opinion as possible on their experiences with private housing in London. I gathered opinion from over 150 students through face to face conversations, online surveys and going around freshers fair with a flipchart gathering small soundbites from students. I took this to a meeting of West London Citizens and presented the main themes of this research to ensure the student agenda featured heavily on CitizensUK’s list of housing ‘asks’ for the London Mayoral candidates.
* Lucinda and I spoke at the annual Private Housing Evening, giving first years all the facts for moving out of halls and into the private sector. At the associated exhibition, the Advice Centre distributed over 500 leaflets on housing rights and our services.
* As much as I would have loved to actively campaign against Imperial’s postgraduate accommodation GradPad, there was not enough time available and it was considered politically difficult while I was trying to get a lot of other major projects through the College. Fortunately I have resubmitted the original paper from a few years ago to Council; if it passes this will give next year’s Officer Trustees a mandate to actively campaign on GradPad.

**Student Activism**

* Imperial has never been seen as a hotbed of activism and its students are considered to be very politically apathetic. I believe I have started to change this culture this year.
* I took an unexpected number of students to join several thousand students from across the country to march against the scrapping of maintenance grants. Although we had by far the smallest group from any students’ union, it was a start and I honestly did not expect to be marching with more than a handful of people.
* Following on from that the Ethics & Environment Officer Mike Norman took even more students on the People’s Climate March in November.
* Right at the beginning of my term in August, shortly before the start of the Junior Doctors’ Contract dispute, I was contacted by an Imperial student and one of my predecessors who wanted to organise a demonstration of medical students and healthcare professionals around the time of the first vote of no confidence motion against Jeremy Hunt as Health Secretary. This was blocked from within the union as it was felt by a small minority to be partisan, however it was heartening so early on to see that students at Imperial wanted to get involved in national politics and take action on issues close to their hearts. Supporting this was enshrined in the 2013-16 strategy and will likely feature heavily in the future strategy so it is a shame that this could not go ahead.
* However shortly after that the DDRB report was released and medical students and doctors across the country were primed for the upcoming industrial dispute. I am proud to have been closely involved in the organisation of the first demonstration against the new junior doctors’ contract alongside medical students from Imperial, UCL and Barts. Until that point ICSMSU believed that a students’ union had no other function beyond providing entertainment and had no place in politics or activism, and my work in bringing them on board was vital to ensuring that ICSM was by far the most highly represented medical school at this first demonstration drawing several hundred ICSM students to join the thousands of other students and doctors who came out. Following that, ICSM students have been highly represented at all subsequent demonstrations and have been heavily involved in pickets and Meet the Doctors events on strike days this year.

### Personal Gains

It’s difficult to work out exactly what I’ve gained from my year in ICU while I’m still in the middle of it and haven’t yet had a chance to truly reflect on the lessons of the year.

I think it’s safe to say that this year has given me a huge boost in confidence. I never would have believed a year ago that I would be approached by students I barely know to cite me as a role model and credit me with inspiring them to run for local council positions and Union positions. Nor did I ever think that I would deliver a talk to be met with a Faculty vice dean grabbing me by the shoulders and calling me ‘extraordinary’. This is a very strange experience for someone who was told frequently to sit down and be quiet, whose opinions were not taken seriously and who was told that girls like her don’t amount to much in school.

Imperial was never particularly accepting of me as a community. I was in a strange minority from day one as one of the few people I met who didn’t go to ‘the right sort of school’, being a woman and being from the North (where very few people have even heard of Imperial strangely enough). This place wasn’t particularly friendly towards me, someone who could easily have been described as ‘a gobby cow from up North’ and I find it strange that I am just as vocal and make the same arguments now that I have for the last six years, and for some reason now I am finally taken seriously. I sincerely hope that the mark I leave on Imperial is an institutional recognition that you can go to your local comprehensive, have a regional accent, not subscribe to all accepted dogma and still be highly successful.

When all's said and done I’m very much looking forward to returning to medical school (which I’ve missed a lot this year) and translating a huge variety of skills (which I’m yet to fully identify and reflect upon) into my future medical career.

So long, and thanks for all the fish.