Imperial College Union Communications Committee Report

Wednesday 14th March 2018

AGENDA ITEM NO.	
TITLE	Student Academic Choice Awards 2017-18: Lessons Learnt
AUTHOR	Nick Burstow, Deputy President (Education)
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	This report summarises the Student Academic Choice Awards 2017-18 campaign, covering the approach taken and contrasting this to previous years. The report includes a summary of lessons learnt transferable to other Union-led initiatives.
PURPOSE	To communicate 'best practice' on Union-led initiatives to committee members
DECISION/ACTION REQUIRED	To note the report and approve its recommendations

Student Academic Choice Awards 2017-18: Lessons Learnt

Introduction:

The [Student Academic Choice Awards](#) (SACAs) are an annual initiative run by Imperial College Union. The SACAs give students the chance to recognise and reward excellence amongst College and Union staff. Students are invited to nominate members of staff in a [variety of categories](#), including: Best Teaching for Undergraduates; Best Supervision; Best Support Staff; Best Teaching for Postgraduates. For each of these categories, a student panel[1] whittles down the nominees to a shortlist of six shortlistees and within this, one overall winner.

Traditionally, the nomination period spanned several months, with no clear, defined communications plan. The Union had always aimed for a target of 1000 nominations. For the previous five years the highest total of nominations was 831.

This year's iteration saw a change in the approach to the SACAs, which saw the 1,000 nomination target beaten for the first time, with 1868 nominations made by students – the highest ever total.

This paper outlines the approach that was taken, and provides 'lessons learnt' that may be applied to other, similar initiatives.

Discussion:

Differences in nomination numbers:

For the previous five years the number of nominations ranged between 556 and 831, with the then-highest total number of nominations achieved in 2016-17 **(Table 1)**. This year (academic year 2017-18) saw a record-breaking 1868 nominations cast.

Table 1: Total number of SACAs nominations made by academic year

Academic Year:	Total Number of Nominations:
2012-13	556
2013-14	564
2014-15	808
2015-16	614
2016-17	831
2017-18	**1868**

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[1] This panel comprises students who are either members of the: Academic Representation Network (Departmental and Faculty-level Academic Reps); Wellbeing Representation Network (Departmental and Faculty-level Wellbeing Reps); Constituent Union Presidents; Officer Trustees (who chair the panel)

Changes to the campaign timeline:

This year saw a change to the SACAs campaign timeline. In previous campaigns, the nomination period varied between one month (2012-13) and four months (2016-17).

In the 2017-18 campaign, we deliberately reduced the publicised nominations period to a defined three week period, between Friday 23rd January and Sunday 11th February, colloquially termed **'emerald city'**. We aimed to ensure SACAs were the primary focus of all Union communications during this three week period. However, nominations were opened before Christmas as part of a 'soft launch', as there were concerns that a nomination period of only three weeks could reduce the number of nominations.

Changes to the communications plan:

The 2017-18 SACAs campaign was meticulously organised. There were weekly working group meetings between the Education Team (Nick, Fran and Nayab) and the Communications Team (Keriann, Gareth and Irina). An action plan was drawn up, accessible to everyone on the OneDrive. This action plan detailed all the communications messages to ensure messages were coordinated **(Figure 1)**.

Figure 1: SACAs Action Plan

SACAs Digital Media Schedule

Newsletter	
19 January	Main news story in 'all-student email'.
26 January	Second news story in 'all-student email' (Main story: Imperial Award)
2 February	One-off email to all students (subject to approval from AK)
7 February	Second news story in 'all-student email' (Main story: Elections)
9 February	Main news story in 'all-student email'.

Social Media	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Snapchat	WeChat	CU newsletter	Dept. Comms
Monday 15 January						CGCU	
Tuesday 16 January	Image and quote	Image and quote					
Thursday 18 January	Retrospective Video	Retrospective Video					
Friday 19 January						ICSMSU	
Saturday 20 January	What to look out for next week						
Monday 22 January	Video message from a Sabb (Nick?). Talking about the upcoming three weeks activities.	Video message from a Sabb (Nick?). Talking about the upcoming three weeks activities.			SACAs overview article	CGCU	FoM: Martin Lupton
		Tea stand/GOAT video	Instagram story – Tea Stand/GOAT	Snapchat story – Tea Stand/goat			

The plan was for the action plan to be updated daily, with boxes changed to green when the task had been completed. Unfortunately this was not done consistently but the action plan nevertheless proved effective.

Changes to messaging:

Messaging was tailored to unique audiences. For example, Postgraduates received communications related to Supervision, whilst Fresher's received communications related to Pastoral Support (*"Who has helped your transition to University?"*) and Undergraduate teaching.

Toward the end of nominations, students received another bespoke communication: those who were yet to nominate were prompted to do so, whilst those who had already nominated were prompted to make an additional nomination(s), emphasising that students can make more than one nomination.

Communication streams:

The College:

This year I made a deliberate effort to engage with the Faculty of Medicine, whose students are traditionally underrepresented in the nominations numbers (especially given how engaged this cohort of students is in our elections cycles). SACAs promotions were included in the weekly Faculty of Medicine newsletters, including a message from the Dean of Undergraduate Medicine, emphasising the importance of the scheme.

The Vice Provost (Education) was also supportive of the SACAs, and sent an all-student email during the mid-point of the three-week campaign period, where there is traditionally a lull in engagement.

Constituent Unions:

I also made a deliberate effort to engage with Constituent Unions (CUs), as I believed communications would be more meaningful from CUs than the Union itself. We created bespoke messages for each cohort, and the CU Presidents kindly agreed to include this communication in their newsletters.

This approach was viewed favourably among the CU Presidents, with one stating: "*I think it was great to get the CUs involved, asking them to help advertise and also put in their weekly emails. I think that the Union would benefit greatly in actively asking us for help on more things, which in turn would strengthen the links between CUs and ICU.*"

The Union:

We varied Union SACAs communications between the Union (in newsletters and SACAs-specific mail) and the Deputy President (Education), to ensure students weren't overwhelmed with one source of information.

Lecture shout-outs:

As a final way of increasing awareness, the Deputy President (Education) and (Welfare) performed lecture-shouts across a range of subjects and years. This has been well received for multiple projects this year, although it is important we don't exhaust this communication channel.

Campaigning and campus visibility:

As part of the three-week 'emerald city' campaign, the Union set up a tea-stall by the Queen's Lawn. This tea-stall was SACAs-branded and gave away free tea to students. All tea vessels had the SACAs-logo on, in order to increase awareness. There was also a laptop on the stand, to encourage students to nominate.

There was a deliberate effort to increase visual awareness of the SACAs campaign during the three week 'emerald city' period.

Physical material: Posters, banners and stands were erected in key locations, including along the walkway. 'Table toppers' were added to table tops in SK and CX. Finally, SACAs stickers were added to the floor outside the Union.

Digital material: SACAs messaging material was added to all the Union's electronic screens, and those in the Library and select departments.

These methods ensured that no matter where a student was on campus, they were likely to see something publicising the SACAs.

Effects of these methods:

As mentioned previously, the defined period of campaigning for the 2017-18 SACAs was between Friday 19th January and Sunday 22nd February. This period saw nomination numbers rise from c.250 on Thursday 18th January to the final total of 1868, on Sunday 22nd February **(Figure 2)**, an increase of over 1600 (647.2% increase).

Figure 2: Total number of SACAs nominations made by academic year
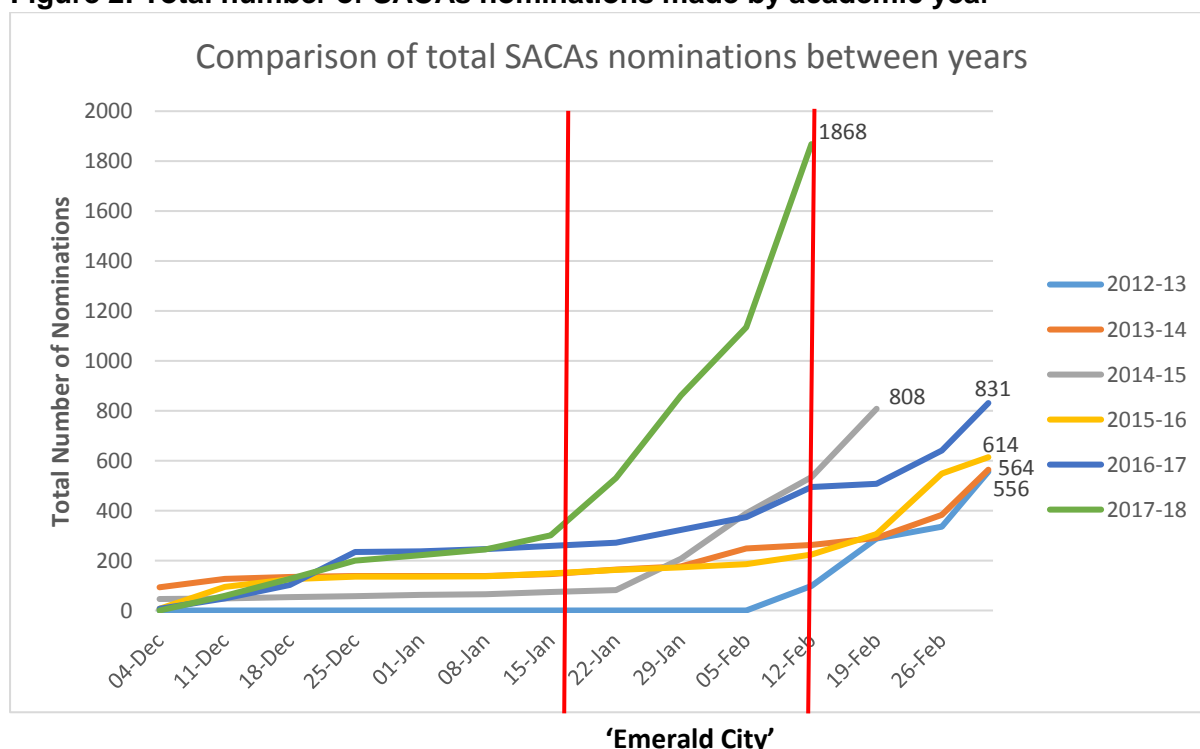
Conclusions:

The overall lessons learnt from this SACAs campaign are summarised in **(Table 2)**. Note that these lessons are applicable to other Union-led campaigns.

Table 2: Lessons Learnt from the 2017-18 SACAs Campaign

Domain:	SACAs Approach:	Justification:
Campaign timeline	Three week campaign, clearly defined and publicised	A short campaign is able to maintain momentum and interest. Where possible, the Union should focus on one 'big' campaign at a time for maximum effectiveness
Action plan visible to all stakeholders	Utilised an action plan, updated in real-time	Enables members across different teams to coordinate activity. Ensures messages do not conflict or overlap. Enables forward planning
Messaging	Bespoke messages for target audiences	Tailoring messages to specific audiences facilitates greater engagement
Communication streams	Communications through: the College; Constituent Unions; the Union; Officer Trustees	Diversifying the 'messenger' increases the likelihood students will engage with a campaign
Publicity material (physical and digital)	**Physical material:** Posters; banners; stands; 'table toppers'; floor stickers **Digital material**: Union and College screens	Consistent branding is essential for a successful publicity campaign. Diversifying the content across a variety of material increases likelihood of student engagement
Officer Trustee input	Deputy President (Education) was able to shape the approach to the campaign	Officer Trustees are able to offer unique and often 'fresh' perspectives. Enabling them to shape such initiatives can be valuable

Recommendations:

The committee is invited to:

- Endorse the 'lessons learnt' from the SACAs and apply these to future campaigns
- Appoint the Deputy President (Education) as 'lead' – i.e. 'first refusal rights' – for future SACAs campaigns
- Consider how we can improve our digital communications further