

Union Council, 7th November



Opening Report, Union Council
7th November

Luke McCrone, President

Alexandre Adler, Vice President (Representation)

Paul (Weifeng) Wan, Vice President (Operations)

Get in touch: gsu.president@imperial.ac.uk

Introduction

Since starting the year as an executive committee, we are excited to be able to share many updates with Union Council. The GSU committee initially consisted of myself (President) and two Vice Presidents: Alexandre Adler, Vice President (Representation) and Paul (Weifeng) Wan, Vice President (Operations). Operating with three members of the committee has admittedly been challenging and has somewhat hindered our ability to organise anything meaningful ahead of Postgraduate Welcome Week, something which I feel needs to be addressed moving forwards. There is certainly a need to have a larger committee elected sooner.

Most of our recent efforts have therefore been invested into enhancing our marketing, including the creation of a new logo, promotional flyer and website, as well as the initial development of a strategy and event plan for the year ahead. Our choice to invest most of our energy into how we market ourselves as a Constituent Union is tied not only to laying an important foundation for the year ahead, but also in promoting both GSU committee positions and Academic & Welfare Officer (AWO) roles to the new postgraduate cohort. One of our initial objectives has therefore been to improve postgraduate engagement and involvement with the Union elections.

Welcome events

I-Connect Fair

This event took place in Queens Tower Rooms, South Kensington on Monday 2nd October. The GSU was granted a stall near the entrance of the QTR. The event saw a surprisingly high number of PGT students which posed a unique opportunity to explore what PGT students desired from us as a GSU. We encouraged students to share their thoughts on post-it notes, data which has gone on to inform aspects of our strategy. We also used this as an opportunity to distribute flyers for the sake of promoting the elections and our activities over the coming year.

Freshers Fair

As per last year, the GSU were positioned in the College main entrance shoulder to shoulder with the other Constituent Unions. Our stall saw a good mix of postgraduate taught and research students which allowed us to further promote elections and the Postgraduate Mingle event. We encouraged people to share their email to allow us to send important follow-up information; we found this worked well for later kindling interest in our activities.

Postgraduate Mingle

The GSU were approached by the Union events team over the summer who invited us to help promote the Postgraduate Mingle event held on Saturday 7th October. Our promotional efforts paid off, helping to secure the highest advanced ticket sales ever for this event. I would strongly advise the GSU to take a similar role with promoting this event through its communication channels in future to ensure PGs get the welcome they deserve.

Anecdotally speaking, the event was well received by postgraduate students who attended. Many have shared a yearning for similar events in future.

Union Council, 7th November

Welcome talks

As President, I was invited to deliver verbal welcome talks at the following events:

- PGT Welcome and Welfare Talk, Great Hall, South Kensington, Saturday 30th September
- Silwood PGR and PGT Welcome Talk, Silwood Park Campus, Friday 6th October
- PGR Welcome Reception, Queens Lawn Marquee, South Kensington, Friday 20th October

Alexandre has also delivered departmental-based talks to Masters students in the interest of promoting the GSU and academic representation positions. He also delivered a talk at Hammersmith campus on the same day I travelled to Silwood Park.

PRES Response

We have relished the opportunity to work closely with Nick Burstow – Deputy President (Education) – and others in compiling this year's [Postgraduate Research Experience Survey](#). This is an important opportunity for us to connect with the real issues facing our research members in an evidence-based way. It also ensures that we approach our representation work for the year in a structured manner by working towards the set of recommendations outlined in the response document.

These recommendations have manifested as an action plan which we can hold College to account on; we have also ensured partial alignment this year between the recommendations set out in our own PRES Response and those which have resulted from the Graduate School's World Class Research Task and Finish Group work. We hope this alignment will ensure a constructive approach to solving the bigger issues facing PGR students.

Postgraduate Hub

This initiative was largely born out of the Graduate School who wrote a proposal to College asking for a space allocated solely for postgraduate students. The GSU, along with members of Imperial College Union, have supported the proposal and are currently in the process of speaking with College members who manage space on all campuses. There is scope for a space review taking place in the Sheffield Building which could lead to a space reallocation exercise which would repurpose different spaces. An important aspect of this proposal for us as a GSU is the potential to receive office space as a Constituent Union, something we are inconveniently having to make-do without.

GSU President Remuneration

Imperial College Union have long recognised the poor support in place for the GSU President. The challenges faced by Ahmed Shamsu, an engaged outgoing President, has really shone a light on the unfair demand placed on any full time PhD student who must sacrifice time (and therefore research funding) to complete the role. Having no financial compensation in place for this sacrifice is concerning and only exacerbates the quality of postgraduate representation at Imperial when an individual undergoing the President role begins to disengage due to a lack of incentivisation and support for their activity.

Union Council, 7th November

Imperial College Union, Ahmed Shamsi and I presented a proposal to College to seek financial remuneration for this role in future. The Graduate School agreed to retrospectively pay Ahmed whilst arranging a set stipend for all Presidents in future. This will entail a change from a volunteer role to a part-time model where the President is expected to commit 1.5 days of their week to GSU work. The GSU are incredibly pleased at this outcome and believe this to be a crucial step forward in improving postgraduate representation and provision at Imperial. The Graduate School will have published a news piece by the time of the Union Council meeting which we encourage you to read for more information.

Elections

We are both relieved and excited at the thought of having an elected committee to begin working with for the year ahead. Positions were more contested this year than I have seen in my 5 years at Imperial. I worked with Andrew Keenan from Imperial College Union to add the following committee positions, based off feedback from the outgoing committee:

- Website Officer
- Sponsorship Officer
- Outreach Officer

All but two of our positions were filled. The expansion of our committee should hopefully allow us to better manage and keep on top of our representation and operations activity.

GSU Strategy

We have recently compiled a strategy for the year ahead which includes our vision, events plan, representation plan and our idea of what success looks like. We look forward to sharing this with members of Council and further afield, especially as we realise that working with others is key to achieving our aims and objectives for the year.

As a GSU, we will primarily aim to establish a unique role at Imperial College London where we work to bring together postgraduate communities, including those divided by nationality, discipline and culture, to improve the range and diversity of opportunities available for all of our postgraduate members.

Reflections so far

Ahead of being elected into this role, I promised the student electorate that my work as GSU President would culminate in a review of postgraduate representation and provision at Imperial based on my experience of the current structures in place. I aim to provide my continued thoughts in future Council reports.

Our ability as a Constituent Union representing 7000-8000 students to organise and host events in Welcome Week is completely limited by the initial size of our committee. We recommend that the timeline of elections is amended so that the GSU have a sizeable committee elected ahead of Welcome Week in the same way ICSMSU have.