

Deputy President Education Report to Union Council

January 2021

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Highlights:

- Working on plans to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on assessments this year.
- Recruitment & other panels
- Planning work on student spaces
- Dealing with understaffing in the rep team

College Meetings & Prep	Student + Union Meetings & Prep	Operational work (day-to-day)	Project work (incl. NSS)	Miscellaneous
40%	30%	15%	10%	5%

Updates:

Plans to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on assessments this year

I am not calling this item “safety net” on purpose, because I don’t want anyone to be misled, but it is essentially what we have been talking about.

- With another lockdown and a ban on any in-person teaching for most courses for at least a few weeks, we have been receiving a lot of emails from students asking us about a new safety net policy.
- It is unlikely the College will introduce the same safety net as last year, regardless of how much we lobby them to do it. This is a Russell Group-wide decision, and it is very unlikely any other university will be introducing the same measures. This is mostly because:
 - There is not enough data for a lot of students to calculate the safety net mark
 - The universities believe they have been well prepared for the pandemic
- We are working with the College to ensure there are measures in place to ensure students are not disadvantaged by the pandemic. This could include better mitigating circumstances policies, ensuring marks are on average not lower than in previous years, and other measures – the package is yet to be agreed.
- Some universities call similar sets of measures a “safety net”, which we don’t want to do – it is misleading, given that most students’ understanding of that term is the specific set of measures that was in place last year.
- We have been in discussions with other SUs around the country to share good practice, see what is happening, and even coordinate a common response.

NSS response 2020

There has not been a great deal of progress with the NSS recommendations, as other work has taken precedence and Christmas has interrupted a lot of work as well (not just for us but also for those we work with in the College). Some brief updates:

- **Student spaces:** A budget of £3,000,000 has been made available by the College to be spent on improving student spaces. We are working with the College to identify where this could be spent best - unfortunately it has to be spent by the end of July so things have to move quite fast. We are thinking of spending approximately half on Level 4 in the old Chemistry building

(levels 5&6 already having work done) to make the space available to students – currently there is nothing of use there. There are some projects already planned which will also use a part of the budget. The rest of the money will be spent on smaller, quick projects – e.g. getting new furniture for student spaces or underused spaces that need it the most – which will be identified in collaboration with the reps.

- **Surveys/SOLE:** Unfortunately, the trial version of “a survey which might replace SOLE” could not run this term because of time constraints. This compresses the timelines a lot, and we’ll need to really push to make sure a new version is tried next time so we have enough time to learn from it and use it to inform changes to SOLE for next academic year. I’m still hopeful we’ll be able to do that.
- **Assessment & Marking policy:** initial meeting of the Academic Regulations Review group took place to discuss the focus of the review. Marking transparency was one of the topics agreed, including discussions about students having access to their exam scripts.
- **Management of staff:** We are now preparing to deliver some sort of presentation at the Heads of Departments lunch, but the timing will need to be quite delicate – there is a lot of focus on covid, lockdown and general firefighting and not a lot of capacity to think about other things around the College at the moment.

Rep support and training

- Unfortunately, after the departure of Gabi Fulton the representation team in the Union is currently without any staff members (if you don’t count me and Shervin...) so things are a bit slower on this front...
- We are still hoping to deliver training before student reps start in their role next year, but this might not be possible to do during Easter and might need to wait until the summer.
- In response to feedback I received, I am hoping to do more group meetings with the Faculty Reps (both UG and PG) instead of individual 1-2-1s this term to allow for more cooperation and sharing of good ideas. First meeting already in the calendar
- Offered another set of 1-2-1 meetings to dep reps in the weeks before Christmas but the take up was not great (only met about 5 dep reps), probably due to exams.
- Currently still planning on doing 2 Academic Representation Forum meetings this term (1 taught, 1 research) but might put in more extra meetings to discuss problems arising from lockdown.
- I have now met with the PGT AWOs who are also invited to all the Taught Academic Representation Forum meetings
- Have had a meeting with a researcher from University of St Andrews about PG representation which was very interesting and inspirational and might help us learn something from the research they are doing.

Recruitment

- I have been involved in the recruitment of the Head of User Services in the library, which was a great learning experience for me (and it was also a good opportunity to ensure the person in the role will care about students and what they need)
- We are currently recruiting for the Representation and Advice manager role, hoping to have someone in place by the end of February. Shervin and I are going to be on the interview panel and we’re really hoping we could get someone great in the role.
- We will also need to recruit for a new Rep Coordinator, although that will have to wait until the Rep & Advice Manager is in place.

Digital Education Recording Policy

- College noted the overwhelming support of students for recording all lectures, and we are in general agreement
- Some staff still have some objections to some aspects of the policy including recording everything – mostly regarding active learning, recording tutorials, and worrying about students not wanting to speak because of being recorded. It is possible there might be some extra definitions included in the policy to account for this.
- If agreement cannot be reached, the Provost's Board will ultimately decide what the policy will be.

Thanks for reading! If you have any questions, feel free to email me at dpe@ic.ac.uk, send me a message on Teams, or call me at 45646 (internal only, and it works only when I'm in the office, but if you're ever on campus then give it a try, maybe you'll be lucky enough and reach me). You can also send me a letter to the Union Address (I love receiving letters).