

50 years of international exchange

The Association Internationale d'Étudiants en Sciences Économiques et Commerciales – or AIESEC as it is better known nowadays – is the world's largest student organisation, a global network of 50,000 members at over 800 universities across more than 84 countries worldwide. **Sabine Ziem** explains the LSE links and celebrates a 50th anniversary.



AIESEC was founded in Belgium in 1946 by a handful of commerce and economics students to 'develop individuals, communities and cooperation through global exchange' – the students' response to World War Two and its aftermath. Today, AIESEC has evolved into an extraordinary driving force for global understanding through its international work exchange of students and graduates.

In the UK, AIESEC is a registered charity, the vast majority of members being student volunteers. AIESEC local committees operate from 23 campuses across the country, each coordinating international exchange on a local level. Each campus also has an assessment centre to recruit students and graduates to be sent abroad to work with businesses close to our universities.



'AIESEC broadened my horizons, provided me with social and cultural interaction with a large number of students from many different countries, and reinforced a lifelong belief in the value of personal experiences in furthering international understanding'

Lionel Simons (BSc Econ 1956)

'AIESEC is one of those rare things in a person's life where you are made aware of your potential and you are given the opportunity to realise that potential. For me, AIESEC shows the world that youth is a force, and that cultural differences can be overcome.'

AIESEC has the power to change young lives by giving them the tools, knowledge, and perspective to become leaders who will change the world for the better. I was originally introduced to

AIESEC by my father, who was a national president, and further drawn in by my sister, who was a committee president. Now I'm able to spread the joy of AIESEC to LSE students myself, which is just remarkable!

Ivana Todorovska, AIESEC LSE president

We also find placements for overseas graduates, and develop new members so that they can one day take over and run AIESEC themselves. We are all in it for something different: be it meeting people from all over the world, getting first hand management experience by running our operations, or meeting business people in small, medium or blue chip corporations. What holds us together is our passion and belief in the AIESEC vision.

AIESEC UK was founded in 1953 by Lionel Simons, then a first year student at LSE. In June this year he and many LSE alumni joined in the biggest celebration AIESEC UK has ever seen: its 50th anniversary party at the Tower Thistle hotel in London. More than 500 current members, alumni and sponsors came together to celebrate the efforts of the thousands of individuals involved in AIESEC UK over half a century. African drummers accompanied the champagne reception, and soon the rooms were charged with that energy and enthusiasm that is so noticeable at any AIESEC gathering.

Lionel explained that, shortly after arriving at LSE in September 1953, he had seen a note posted on the bulletin board of the LSE Students' Union asking if anyone was interested in following up an enquiry from AIESEC International. Because of his interest in international relations, he responded and set up an independent local committee, which started out as the British Economic Students Association. As with so many new ventures, money was a big issue at the start. The LSE Students' Union allocated £15 which, because of the independence requirement, was the last funding they accepted from the union during that period. Instead, Lionel managed to secure funds by persuading companies with AIESEC trainees to contribute the equivalent of a month's salary for each trainee to the AIESEC local committee. A similar system is still in practice today, even though exchange costs are now heavily subsidised by our national partners.

Not only in the business community but also within LSE, AIESEC quickly developed a good reputation through seminars for the student body co-sponsored with the Students' Union. Then and now, the organisational challenges of these events proved a practice ground for budding business people and an opportunity for them to develop leadership qualities.

After Lionel's speech at the 50th anniversary celebrations, many alumni thanked him for his



'I became involved with AIESEC because I felt it gave me a lot more than other societies, especially the opportunity to meet members not only from other UK universities but from around the world. The fact that you are given so much responsibility from when you first join is another reason. Within the first six months I attended a meeting with staff from NatWest bank, took part in a number of networking events, was elected as president for the next year and had the chance to work with some great people who were so passionate about AIESEC and what they do. I don't think I know any other first year students who have had these chances!'

Harsha Patel, AIESEC LSE President 2002-03

'I joined AIESEC to enhance my CV.'

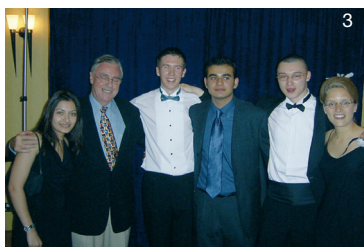
That goal was realised with an internship at Merrill Lynch, but I am convinced that it was not just AIESEC's name on my CV but also the skills which I learned through my active membership that allowed me to obtain the position. Now, after arranging for former foreign secretary Lord Howe to speak at the China networking event, I can certainly say that AIESEC has touched my life in ways that I could not have imagined.'

Stuart Millson, vice president incoming exchange



Picture 1: (left to right) Sabine Ziem, Ankit Sreen, Harsha Patel and Stuart Millson

Picture 2: recruiting new members at Fresher's Fair
Picture 3: LSE founder Lionel Simons (second from left) and AIESEC London coordinator Duncan Laing (second from right) with LSE members



work, saying their lives would have taken a different turn without AIESEC. 'I am where I am today because of AIESEC' is something members hear again and again. And it's not just business! We estimate that about one third of AIESEC members end up getting married to other AIESEC members. It was amazing for me to speak to Keith Taylor, an LSE alumnus and AIESEC UK's national president from 1967 to 1970, and his wife Sule Arkan, from the Turkish national committee 1969 to 1971. He said: 'When Sule applied for a traineeship in London in 1970, I was working that summer as reception director, taking care of incoming trainees and helping them to settle in. One night Sule attended one of our parties, in a grotty basement flat in Holborn. As soon as we met, that was that. We married the following July and now have two grown-up children and one grandson. None of it would have happened if we had not been associated with AIESEC. Draw your own conclusions as to the wisdom of joining this organisation!'

And what of AIESEC's future? Lionel Simons said: 'Fifty years on there is still the same relevance for AIESEC as when we founded it shortly after World War Two. It is still a valuable platform for launching students into the world of international relations.'

Our work would not be so successful without the support companies give us. The best way for companies to get involved is, of course, to use the AIESEC network to find highly qualified, motivated, cost effective and international short term employees as support staff during peak times or

projects. However, the possibilities are endless – from participating in our careers fairs to delivering skill sessions for students at LSE or other member universities.

In order to keep AIESEC growing, Lionel urged me to 'make a greater promotional effort to persuade the business community of the intrinsic value of exchanges and student interactions as being of vital national interest, if not of immediate profit interest to their individual companies'. We are doing just that in London at the moment, with Stuart Millson, our vice president for incoming exchange, and members of the national committee organising a March networking event aimed at businesses wanting to extend their presence in China, and more events to come in 2004. ■



Sabine Ziem

is a second year BSc Philosophy and Economics student. She is vice president for learning for AIESEC LSE, responsible for membership development, trainee reception and servicing, and alumni relations. Together with the executive board of AIESEC LSE, she is hoping to expand the local committee and increase AIESEC's presence and profile in London. See their website at www.aieseclse.org

Getting in touch

If you are a representative of a business, a current student at LSE, or a graduate, and would like to get involved in AIESEC, please email Sabine Ziem at s.ziem@lse.ac.uk

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'What has AIESEC taught me? More like what AIESEC has made us realise was there all along ... our capacity to learn and do remarkable things.'

Kelly Tham, incoming exchange team leader 2003-04