

Operations Manager Report
A report by Robin Pitt

Trading

Despite the increased competition from College outlets and the broader economic crisis, Trading output from the Union has remained stable. As predicted in the Budget for 2009/10, bar revenues have fallen slightly year on year, this can largely be attributed to the poor state of the Union's bars and nightclub as well as the impact of the Eastside bar opening in October 2009. However this decrease is broadly in line with the budget.

Following a small re-structure of the catering team in December 2009, the Union's catering operation have managed for the first time in several years to generate a surplus for the months of February and March. This is a great achievement considering the breadth of competition now present on campus and the very poor state of the Union's catering facilities.

As discussed at the last meeting, for the new calendar year there was a management change in the Union's Retail operations. Following this change and a re-vitalised management team in that area, the shops and newsagent have been seeing steady month on month growth in sales and a spectacular 83% growth on Postgraduate Graduation Day sales year on year.

The performance of the Union's commercial operations so far this year give us a good platform for an excellent year next year in the refurbished building.

Building

The financial arrangements for Phase 3 of the Beit Masterplan were agreed by the Project Review Board in January and design work is well under way. RIBA Stage D was passed at the end of April and we are currently progressing through Stage E, which represents the detailed design phase of the process. It was discovered during the early design phases that a large supporting column existed in the nightclub area, which would heavily impinge on the new design for that area and undermine the business case, which focused heavily on our ability to successfully host live music at the Union.

The decision was made to undertake some major work to remove the pillar ahead of contractors starting the main body of work in June. Russell Cawberry (contractors from Phase 2) have been appointed to remove the pillar and to undertake some major enabling works, during April and May. It has been essential to get strip out and enabling work started at this stage as the overall programme for Phase 3 is incredibly ambitious, with a finish date of October 1st, in order for the venue to open for the new Academic Year.

To ensure that the designs for the new venues meet the expectations of the student body, a series of workshops have been held over the past few months and have proved extremely useful in providing some direction for the architects, these meetings will continue as we near the final design stage.

The original intention with Phase 3 was to build an extensive plant room on the roof of the building, to provide air handling, air conditioning and heating to the new areas. Given the location of the building and the sensitive nature of the conservation area and proximity to the Albert Hall, it was strongly suggested by Westminster Planning Officers that any application to alter the height of the building would be refused. Based on this advice and a re-assessment of the air handling requirements for the nightclub particularly, it was felt that the scope of Phase 3 should be altered to remove the plant room and seek alternative locations for the air handling units which will be less contentious. In addition to this, given that most of the main activity in this area is carried out during winter months the need for air conditioning was re-evaluated.

The tender process for the main contractors to deliver Phase 3 are underway and it is expected that an appointment will be made by the end of the week. Once they are appointed we will have a clear construction programme, enabling us to plan the phased shut down of the Union's bars and facilities

over the summer months. In order to maintain some level of revenue and to cater for the Proms trade, it is anticipated that a temporary bar/ café will be constructed in the Activity Spaces on the first floor and additional mobile bars placed in the Quad.

Charity Registration

Since the last meeting of the Trustee Board, further discussions with the College Director of Finance and Head of Central Secretariat have been held, to establish a way forward on registration. The Charities Commission have announced that Students' Unions can register from June 1st 2010.

Further discussions have been held with Horwarth Clark Whitehill, particularly around VAT implications of registration and our colleagues in Finance are working through the recommendations made.

It is anticipated that the process for registering will form a large piece of collaborative work with relevant College departments over the summer vacation period.