

Cover Note to the Governance Committee: Felix Policy Redraft

Alex Savell – Deputy President (Finance & Services)

Apologies for the length of this, I felt it was the easiest way to summarise the current situation and lay out my position rather than spending a long time talking about how and why certain parts of the policy are as they are during the meeting.

At the final Trustee Board meeting of last academic year the Board of Trustees chose to renew the Felix Policy. There was some broad debate about the policy and I have felt for some time that it was not the best policy that we could have for the governance of Felix. In particular, I have worried that it has not made sufficient commitment to the guidance and support of Felix, particularly in terms of what is appropriate to publish or not. It was also discussed at the Board of Trustees last time that in exceptional circumstances we would be able to rescind the policy in order to halt the publication of Felix – I felt that reserving this right but not being transparent about it was not fair to Felix.

As such, I have sought to create an improved draft of the Felix policy, I consulted closely with the Felix Editor and the new Head of Student Voice as well as some key volunteers in Felix. It quickly emerged that there were also priorities that we felt could also be addressed in a new policy. As such, you will see that this is the first time that a Felix policy has laid out principles for why the Union supports Felix and the Felix editor and objectives for what we feel Felix should be trying to achieve. While there are good reasons for doing this in its own right I also feel this sets a much better remit for the Felix Editor.

This Policy was presented at the most recent Board of Trustees and generated a fair amount of debate. They referred it to an additional meeting of the Governance Committee for decision. Two particular points of contention were – a reference to Appointments and Remuneration as taking decisions over whether the Felix Editor is failing in their mandate and whether some of the principles described were correct. I seek to address those here.

Firstly, the Appointments and Remuneration mistake has been corrected – it was supposed to be changed in the final draft. It's inclusion was a practical issue; in the event that there was a serious breach by Felix that we were aware of – for instance printing something defamatory or something that would put a student at serious risk – it would be our duty as trustees to step in, however as a board we are unlikely to be able to form a meeting, or even a quorate vote, in some of the timescales involved. Equally it would not be correct (in my opinion) for this decision to sit with just one person. As such I previously mentioned A&R as a subset of the Board that might be able to move more decisively followed by a review by the full board. I have now amended this to be a special case of Chair's action which must be taken with the agreement of the President and one External or Student Trustee. I feel that realistically a group of 3 ensures that this can occur in a useful timeframe but ensures due consideration is given by those with several perspectives.

The second, and perhaps more complicated debate is that of the principles stated. Particularly highlighted to me was 2.4 which suggests we believe a sabbatical position to be essential in running Felix. It was mentioned that these principles have not been generated based on direct interaction with the majority of the readership of Felix and that they may not actually be the right principles. Debate continued along the grounds of the sensitive nature of the Union asking students questions that could be perceived as 'attacking the Felix Editor'. I

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22 July 2015

have not made alterations to the Policy to account for these discussions and instead offer the following opinions.

While I am happy to admit that the Felix Policy presented here may not be perfect I believe that it is a very significant step forwards compared with previous versions. I do not believe that the fact it may be possible to improve it further after a period of extensive consultation should prevent us from taking that step forwards. Among other things, we cannot easily test whether the principles we are using to justify Felix are correct without at some point writing them down and allowing Felix to work towards those goals before asking students to judge.

In addition, I believe the principles, particularly 2.4, reflect the status quo. They are what the Union currently states to be the reasons for funding Felix and particularly a Felix Editor. As such I think our Policy should reflect this as we are not in a position to make a major change to those principles as we stand. I would support mandating Felix to use next year to gather information on what the Student Body thinks Felix should be and why it is important, however I would like to point out that there are flaws with that as our sole evidence for change: Student opinion of Felix is influenced by their experience of it – that means that you could both argue that a good year will make students feel there is no other option than the current way of doing things and a bad year could have the opposite effect. In addition, in any survey you are likely to get those with a strong opinion or investment in survey providing the majority of responses; casual readers or those that don't read Felix are much less likely to offer their thoughts and there are circumstances where we, as trustees, must chose based on factors that include but are not limited to student opinion; for example students may read Felix primarily for entertainment but we might still consider its informative content to be an important service even if it is not the 'favourite' part of Felix' offering.

Felix Policy

Proposer:
Alex Savell – Deputy President
(Finance & Services)

Seconder(s):
Philippa Skett – Felix Editor

Contributors:
Alex McKee – Head of Student
Voice

Policies affected/related: -
Policies superseded: Felix Policy

1. Objectives:

- 1.1. To outline the relationship between the Union and its Student Newspaper, Felix
- 1.2. To denote the responsibilities of each to one another
- 1.3. To define the purpose of Felix and its objectives and the principles behind why the Union supports it

2. Principles:

- 2.1. The Union is committed to producing, and appropriately resourcing, a student led, editorially independent Student Newspaper
- 2.2. We believe that a high quality student newspaper is an important service for students not only to keep them informed of news in the Union, at the College and the wider world but also to hold those bodies to account and to raise and publicise issues that are of concern to our members
- 2.3. In order to achieve this the Student Newspaper **MUST** remain editorially independent **AND** student led
- 2.4. To achieve this the Union believes a Sabbatical Position (Felix Editor), elected by a cross-campus ballot, is the best way to ensure that a student with a strong democratic mandate will have the time, backing and resources to lead the paper
- 2.5. We believe that a successful paper will be a forum for the diverse range of viewpoints held by our members, that the newspaper will be a powerful mouthpiece for the Student Voice that both College and the Union must respect and respond to
- 2.6. We will take as indicators of this success; that students feel that Felix represents their views and the views of other Students, that our members feel that Felix amongst the best avenues to get information about issues that will affect them as students, and that students know how they can contribute to the paper
- 2.7. The Union will strive to celebrate and highlight these successes as one of the key ways we achieve our objective of Amplifying the Student Voice

3. Statement of Purpose:

- 3.1. Felix has two (2) main objectives:
 - 3.1.1. Supply the Union's Membership with a student newspaper of high standard that informs them of news, events, activities and entertainment within the Union, the College and externally
 - 3.1.1.a. Particularly that which is relevant to them as Students of Imperial College and which might not be covered from such a perspective through other media
 - 3.1.1.b. This includes holding the Union and the College to account but also highlighting changes and events that are worthy of praise
 - 3.1.1.c. As part of this, highlighting student events and activities including Clubs, Societies and Projects should be considered of interest to our Membership
 - 3.1.1.d. In pursuit of making this a relevant and appealing publication it is recognised that some space for non-news related content will be required (e.g. entertainment, crosswords, comics, etc.)
 - 3.1.2. To provide a forum for any Union member to interact with student journalism and a platform for articles and content to be published

3.1.2.a. This does not mean that all content submitted will be published as quality is also a factor

3.1.2.b. However all content submitted should be considered on a fair basis

4. Felix as a CSP:

4.1. Except as outlined in this policy Felix is considered to be a Union Society

4.1.1. As such it is governed by all usual rules, regulations as other CSPs

4.1.2. Notably, for the purposes of budgeting, Felix need not have a membership fee or minimum membership target to be eligible to receive CSP grant as we consider it as a service to members

5. The Felix Editor:

5.1. The Felix Editor will be an Elected Student Sabbatical

5.2. As such, unlike other club officers they will be elected from and by the entire membership of the Union rather than the club membership

5.3. Whether they act as the club chair for Felix will be defined by the Felix constitution

5.4. They will be considered as a member of Union Staff in the same way as Officer Trustees

5.5. The Felix Editor will be responsible to the Board of Trustees and will have the delegated responsibility for producing the newspaper, its content and its distribution

5.5.1. This will include ensuring that relevant content published in the Newspaper appears on the Felix website

5.6. In pursuit of Felix's objectives the Felix Editor has the final say over inclusion of submitted material; they must be able to decide as to whether content has been submitted correctly, is of sufficient quality and is sufficiently relevant to students

6. The Union as a Publisher:

6.1. The Union is the publisher of Felix

6.2. As such therefore the Paper must meet certain criteria by which the Union is governed

6.2.1. Felix has a responsibility to act in the best interests of the Membership

6.2.1.a. This will usually mean informing the Membership of information pertinent to them

6.2.1.b. However, this will also include considering the Union's legal liabilities; such as (but not limited to) the protection of its staff or its potential liability to libel

6.2.2. The Felix Editor is expected and empowered to use their judgement on such matters

6.2.2.a. This will in some situations mean seeking advice from the Union

6.2.2.b. Equally the Union must therefore commit to supplying advice, which is unbiased. This should therefore usually be separate to whichever Union staff member is leading communications on any major incident

6.2.3. As such, the Felix Editor should be considered to have Full Editorial freedom within this mandate and will have the final say on all content to be published

6.2.3.a. No Union staff member or Trustee shall have the power to remove or insist upon the inclusion of any material

6.2.3.b. In the unlikely event that there is a question over whether the Felix Editor is failing in this mandate this should be decided by the Chair of the Board of Trustees in agreement with the President and one other Student or

External Trustee if there is an urgent need or at the Board of Trustees
Board of Trustees

6.2.3.b.i. This is designed such that decisions can be taken swiftly, it is extremely important that any such decision is reviewed by the Board of Trustees as an extremely serious matter

6.2.3.b.ii. In the event that the Chair or the President cannot be reached the Deputy Chair or the Council Chair may replace them

6.2.3.c. The Union should ensure that the Felix Editor receives appropriate training and professional support in particular with regards to legal issues related to publishing

7. Funding of Printing and Advertisements:

7.1. The Union commits to fund the printing of one (1) issue in each week of term with the exception of the final week of term as well as additional issues such that a total of twenty-nine (29) issues are published in the year

7.1.1. These issues should be of a size to be printed within the agreed Union budget for the year or further funded out of Felix's CSP funds

7.2. Felix will ensure that there is space to print advertisements in each issue

7.2.1. While it will be the Union's (Marketing's) responsibility to source advertisements Felix will also be empowered to sell adverts, the income from which will be continue to go towards the Union's Felix advertising targets

7.2.1.a. This does not cover sponsorship's which may include agreement for printed material at Felix's discretion or advertising through Felix's website, Mailing list or other media other than the physical media

7.2.2. The revenue from said adverts will be used to cover the costs associated with the printing of Felix

7.2.3. Each year a Service Level Agreement should be made between marketing and the Felix Editor which sets out at least the expectations on submissions of adverts to include at least:

7.2.3.a. A reasonable deadline for the submission of advertisements

7.2.3.b. Reasonable limits on the maximum percentage space allocated to advertisements in the paper and if necessary in specific areas (such as the cover)

7.2.3.c. Criteria for the Felix Editor to exclude adverts – this will usually only be on the grounds of a clear conflict of interest (such as running an article criticising a particular business at the same time as an advertisement for that business)

7.2.3.d. In addition discussions of how any arrangements that may be necessary for both the Union and Felix to sell advertisements without conflicting should be conducted – including how Student efforts for sourcing and selling advertising will be rewarded

