



## Imperial College Union Board of Trustees

8<sup>th</sup> July 2020

<b>AGENDA ITEM NO.</b>	17
<b>TITLE</b>	Deputy President (Welfare) Trustee Board Report/Year Retrospective
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Deputy President (Welfare) – Shervin Sabeghi
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	A retrospective on my year as DPW: broad review of the role, key achievements, failures and some narrative.
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To update Board and provide a review of the year.
<b>DECISION/ACTION REQUIRED</b>	No action required.

## Introduction

This year did not go quite how I thought it would in more ways than I could have imagined. Staff turnover, picking up the slack for vacancies, a two month long negotiation with the College, some unexpected personal challenges and a global pandemic to boot – all things that have meant my roster of achievements isn't quite as extensive and complete as I envisioned it to be. However, I'm generally pleased with my progress in the role so far, I feel I've worked hard (if not always efficiently...) throughout the year and I look forward to building upon things next year even if it will still look different to how I thought it would when I ran again just 4 months ago.

## My role this year

The DPW role is quite broad, and sometimes it feels like a lot of the stuff that doesn't fall naturally in any other DP remit ends up under welfare. The key areas have been: student wellbeing and mental health, EDI/liberation, halls of residence, student recruitment and outreach, and campaigns. That being said, as one's wellbeing permeates all aspects of their life, I feel I've dipped into other areas that I wouldn't have expected, such as CSPs (particularly when it comes to discipline and conduct). Dealing with EDI matters is certainly a bigger part of the role than I thought it would be – I say I've spent more time on this than I have with more predictable 'wellbeing' related matters. In a long term vision of the organisation, I can see the potential for a separate OT dedicated to EDI.

If I look back on the year, my areas of main work has gone something like:

- August: finding my feet, NSS response, starting to think about Liberation Reform
- September: finding my feet (still), halls policies, preparing for Welcome
- October: Welcome, Wellbeing Coordinator recruitment, rep training
- November: rep + LCO training, halls rent (I), volunteer 121s, staying afloat (I)
- December: halls rent (II), internal/leadership work, staying afloat (II)
- January: Liberation Reform, halls rent (III), internal/leadership work
- February: 360 reports, work with CSPs (individual support + culture), internal work
- March: elections, C19: exams and assessments
- April: MD recruitment, C19: exams and assessments, C19: student recruitment
- May: interim projects, C19: ESOG, C19: Union October readiness, SCA panels
- June: SCA panels + ceremony, C19: Union October readiness, C19: ESOG
- July: C19: ESOG, C19: Union October readiness, Liberation Reform, handover, ?

## Key achievements

- **Liberation reform:** while this isn't all nipped in the bud as I was convinced it would be at this point, the wheels are set in motion for some impactful change. We will have nine Liberation and Community Networks in the new year which will allow for greater student-led EDI work. The current officers are very happy that this change is happening and think that it'll benefit their successors immensely.
- **Halls rent negotiations:** of course, this was a joint effort, but I feel a great sense of personal achievement here as well. I think either Abhijay or myself would have struggled to do this alone. I believe we really got the best outcome where we managed a tangible improvement for students, while also maintaining our integrity without fracturing with the College. Alas, the 'Cut the Rent' campaign we set up in the wake of the negotiations has been bulldozed by Covid, but it will be interesting to see if this is picked up next year.
- **Covid-19 representation:** again, this has very much been a joint effort. While Abhijay and I might be in all the meetings, reps at all levels across both networks have been instrumental.

Nonetheless, I feel like I've stepped up and taken the lead on matters such as introducing a proper safety net which means I can really pinpoint the positive effect my efforts have had on students. From both students and College staff, my efforts have been greatly lauded – undoubtedly more so than deserved – but I believe the real benefit here lies in how this has helped (re)build some faith from the student body and strengthened the partnership with College. My initial efforts here made me quite... popular on the other side of the road and I found myself very in demand very quickly. This was to the extent that I was invited to co-chair the weekly College Covid meetings looking at Student Experience and our paper to the first of these meetings is completely dictating the work of the group – which is very flattering.

### **Failures (or I should probably say 'Areas to Improve'...)**

- **Time management:** this is the crux to a lot of what I'd say has 'gone wrong' this year. Whilst undoubtedly there has just simply been too much to do at some points, I definitely have not fully utilised all the time I have. I have no doubt that a term of 7am-7pm days was not necessary, and this is an area to work on going forward. Whenever I've lost sight of the big picture, found myself in the weeds, felt like I've been neglecting an area of my role etc, inevitably it's a time/prioritisation problem!
- **Undeveloped Wellbeing Rep Network:** coming into the role, I felt I was wonderfully placed to lead, review and develop the WBRN. This hasn't quite gone to plan. I have mainly lost touch with the volunteers and the network lacks focus and purpose as a result. I've had a perpetually delayed project to review the network but it hasn't found its way out off the back burner and, realistically, won't for a while. Nonetheless, I plan to take a more strategic approach to managing the network next year.
- **Poorly defined Union wellbeing offer:** supporting students is one of our key purposes, yet I've not managed to properly get a handle on this. We have some elements of an offer here and there, but it's poorly defined and I don't think we're currently fulfilling this key function. Again, this is something I hope to get in order next year.
- **Neglecting comms:** admittedly, this hasn't been a complete failure. We put things in place such as Sabbs on Tour and had some more presence on social media, and I managed to get a fair number of blogs out there. However, our grand ambitions for OT comms didn't really come together. This definitely needs addressing as a team next year, and Abhijay and I can learn from this year.
- **Halls of residence:** this has been a real issue throughout the year. There are some serious issues with our relationship with Halls, particularly around the management of the social fund, which I really should have resolved by now. The work that did happen in this area probably put us backwards a bit and it's not been picked up since. Again, another thing to improve for next year.

### **Conclusion**

There's a lot to be getting on with next year! Given the position the organisation (and the world, for that matter) is in, I'm glad to be sticking around to help move things to a better place. It has been a challenging year, and no doubt we're entering a challenging period but I'm excited for it and excited for change. I have learned, and continue to learn, a lot in this role and feel I have a strong base to take things further.