



Imperial College Union Board of Trustees

July 2020

AGENDA ITEM NO.	
TITLE	Deputy President (Finance & Services) reflection
AUTHOR	Fifi Henry
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
PURPOSE	To summarise the DPFS year and give recommendations for the role and the Union moving forward
DECISION/ACTION REQUIRED	None

This paper summarises my time as Deputy President (Finance & Services) 2019/20 at Imperial College Union, reviewing and reflecting on the past 12 months in key areas of work.

Overall, the Union has jumped from one problem to another, but miraculously has ended in a (debatably) better position than when we started. After a disastrous welcome week, the kitchens closing, a number of key operational staff (mainly in membership services) leaving and the Managing Director also leaving, all in first term alone, who would have thought we'd be hit with a global pandemic less than 3 months later. At the same time, the Union began a needed and long overdue restructure. This stretched thin those who already had gone above and beyond, and required the team to really pull together. The Unions finances are not where we want them to be, but are being handled better than ever, and gives hope for the years to come. I believe we've started to get the right people in place, and trust that next year will be successful with them at the helm (albeit through difficult and unprecedented times and scenarios).

Better student engagement and support

Coming into the role with a background primarily based from the three and a half years working at Beit Bars, I knew I wanted to find ways to improve the student experience through our services by engaging with all students and supporting them better, in whatever ways they interacted with the Union.

The DPFS role predominately has sat in a grey area between strategy and operational purview and, in some ways, this caused conflicts in the pre-existing structure. However, it also supported taking on the ownership of the Summer Ball and, as a result, has created many opportunities that have enabled a more strategic role review to form. The creation of a student-led Summer Ball Committee meant the Summer Ball, for the first time in a long time, actually listened to what students wanted. The new Services & Sustainability Board (SSB) was shaped by myself, and learnt and grew and changed by collaborating with students, such that a more effective committee can run in the future that better supports the Union becoming more sustainable. As part of the review for SSB, subcommittees grew with oversight over areas of Union services that have long needed better student input, including considerations towards the welfare and empowerment of student staff.

Another key area of engagement that has previously been essentially nonexistent is the support and outreach with campuses other than South Kensington. Through "Sabbs on Tour" and my own initiative, I have visited every campus at least once this year. A number of issues arise as soon as you start to talk to the students, who often point out that the Union all but forgets that students exist outside of South Kensington. With White City growing, and no Union presence, and our (to be frank) failure in overseeing and supporting Reynolds and Silwood, now is the time to engage with all students everywhere and build stronger presence and relations with our members and stakeholders.

It should also be noted that, with all that has been, and yet to be, done, comms need to drastically improve. It will make for better consultation and improved transparency, and overall better awareness of, and engagement with, the Union. I think it would be reasonable to say that the OT team came into the year with very good intentions to turn OT comms

around. Although we have managed some good things, such as “A Conversation With” in Felix, “Sabbs on Tour”, and important consultations for Halls Rent and a Safety Net Policy, there is still much room for improvement, and to reliably communicate with students through more regular and prominent updates.

H&S: lessons learnt

Going into the year, I, and the Union, did not foresee the extent of health and safety issues that would crawl through the cracks throughout the year. With no formal training, it was initially very overwhelming to be the lead OT on our H&S committee, as well as the Union representative at Colleges different H&S committees. However, I had a growing interest in the remit and enjoyed the challenge and responsibilities that came with it. As numerous problems came to light - from our kitchens closing to COVID-19 - it has been (dare I say) enjoyable being the lead OT.

Lots of progress has been made so far, including a re-evaluation of how our H&S committee looks, the pressing need for a Union operational committee, improved College relations, and the beginnings of a practical H&S Management tool that will be handed over to Sam for completion. This being said, I am wary of how the Union will transition from online to on campus services throughout the upcoming year, and how we will ensure the best possible experience can be delivered in a safe manner. The work to do so has begun, and it is pivotal to the success of the organisation that we navigate these challenges to the best of our capabilities, and that starts with much preparation.

Recruitment

This year I have sat on 7 different recruitment panels, from Receptionist to Finance Director. Overall, it has been a great opportunity for personal development, and generally very exciting seeing the appointed candidates at work. From a practical point of view, there is very little training on how to be a successful interviewer, but what has been worse are the evident inconsistencies between the individual recruitment processes. It is important to have a standard process that is consistent across the Union, and where differences in panels may lie should be known to all well beforehand. This is especially important for OT's, who may only spot issues in hindsight.

Other recommendations

With the impacts of COVID-19 likely to strongly impact the year ahead for the DPFS, the reform paper can be approached flexibly, with the operational responsibilities shifting in line with returning staff capacity, whilst focusing on wider strategic projects. The main ongoing projects that should not lose momentum include:

- Campus outreach and inclusivity
- *To build relationships with necessary stakeholders from College who are key in the development of White City*
- *Begin to be a part of the decision making for all satellite campuses*
- *Regularly be in contact with the appropriate students and staff for all campuses to not lose oversight.*

- *Begin work on what services need improving/are missing and how they cater to all members*
 - Improving the Unions sustainability, and actioning College to do the same
- *Continue to be the primary student representative on Greening Imperial Steering Group, Campus Services Going Green Group, and the Sustainability Strategy Advisory Board*
- *Continue relationships with Leader for Sustainability (Prof Paul Lickiss) and 'chair' of Greening Imperial (Dr Neil Jennings)*
- *Continue (and strengthen) relationships with key members from Campus Services*
 - Creation and implementation of a H&S Management Tool
 - Implementing the new 'Debt Management Plan" process to support CSPs in debt
 - Start adopting the DPFS role reform alongside the SODM and HoSE
 - New SSB
- *Trial and evaluate the success of the new SSB structure based off of the amended standing orders*
- *Represent all student staff and make sure their training and welfare are made more of a priority moving forward (also, there is permission to change the Food & Drink Policy once the kitchens reopen, so consult with student staff and the Operations Manager when appropriate)*

As a final note, it has always seemed to me that the people who care about the Union and its members, and want the Union to succeed, put in 200% of their time and energy, and pick up the slack for those that are here for the wrong reasons. It has been a pleasure to work with the people that care, and has really highlighted the importance of having staff invested in the vision. Thank you to all of them for making my year 10x better. I have grown a lot as a person, and have never felt so tired for doing so! Even with the wide array of hurdles, it has been an enjoyable experience overall, and I'm proud of what we have achieved.

Thank you