

**Imperial College Union  
Board of Trustees / 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

**Managing Director Update / Interim Managing Director Final Report**

Author(s): Tom Flynn (Managing Director)  
Graham Atkinson (Interim Managing Director)

Purpose: To report on the work of the Managing Director since the last Board meeting and consider the structure of the reporting template going forward.

To receive the final report from the Interim Managing Director.

**1. Key Projects / Work Delivered**

I joined ICU on a phased induction from June (1 day per week), July (2 days) and August (3 days). As of w/c 7 September I am now full time and have had a number of visits to the physical campus over the past month. As well as work reflected in the papers for the Board meeting, key projects I have been involved in include:

- i. Meeting Union staff: I have had introductory 1-2-1 meetings with all Union staff currently not on furlough, getting to know people and getting a sense of their ambitions and concerns. These have been received extremely well and have helped me get a good insight into some of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. I have moved the All Staff Meeting to every two weeks, which is now focussed on each team giving a 'heads up' on upcoming work, to help everyone understand organisational priorities.
- ii. Meeting key College staff: I have had introductory meetings with all key College staff and have started to build positive relationships with a number of individuals who will be critical to our longer-term transformation. This includes setting up regular 1-2-1 meetings with various Directors of Support Services and presenting at the July meeting on some of the key challenges we face. It is clear that this is a priority area for me over the next year, as well as ensuring that other Union staff (for example Tom Newman) begin to build similar relationships.
- iii. Office Trustee Induction: I delivered a comprehensive trustee induction for all new OTs as part of their wider handover / induction period. This is now being rolled out to other new trustees over the coming month.
- iv. Organisation restructure: I have been working closely with Graham to ensure this progresses as smoothly as possible, including involvement in various different consultations and decisions. A verbal update on the progress of this is contained on the full agenda.
- v. Term one planning and COVID-19 immediate response: as you would imagine, a significant amount of my time has been spent working on the organisation's response to the global pandemic alongside other team members. The summary of our service and activity plan is provided as a separate paper but is subject to change at short notice owing to changing government guidelines. Particular work has been required within Retail and the Venues, in order to establish an operating model for both that is safe and commercially viable for the coming year.

- vi. Financial context: I have been working closely with Jayne Hufford over the past two weeks to get a better picture of our financial context (as set out the various Board papers). We are now working closely with the College's Director of Finance and will be bringing a further paper on this to the next Board meeting.

## **2. Key (Short Term) Future Projects**

The Calendar of Business on the agenda sets out a number of key strategic projects (for example a range of policies that must be developed, and a number of different reviews) that will be prioritised over the coming year. A full planning paper on the latter will come to the next meeting of the Board. In the meantime, some other priorities over the next month include:

- i. Reorganisation outcome: the conclusion of the consultation will require a significant amount of time in order to embed staff into any new or revised roles. Handovers and debriefs with those who might exit the organisation will be crucial to ensure as much institutional knowledge as possible is retained.
- ii. Term one readiness: a key priority over the coming month will be to ensure we are ready for the welcome period, and term one beyond this. The plan is now in place, but there will be inevitable challenges as we are required to respond to changes in guidance, regulation, and crucially – student behaviour.
- iii. Financial context and 2020/21 budget: given our reserves position, it is essential that we now undertake further work on the budget in order to remove as much financial risk as possible for the coming year. This will be a priority over the next month, ready for a 'final budget' for approval in October. Part of this process will include a discussion with the College regarding potential additional financial support – which has already started.
- iv. Beit building: it is clear that the building still has a number of substantial health and safety risks within it – almost all are now related to the way it has been utilised by CSPs. We have already met with the Director of Estates to accelerate some remedial work that will be required.

## **3. University, Sector and other Updates**

### 3.1 Sector

It is clear the wider HE sector is grappling with the COVID-19 impact as much as anywhere else. There has been guidance produced by both SAGE (3 September) and most recently the DfE (10 September) on this topic:

- i. SAGE guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/principles-for-managing-sars-cov-2-transmission-associated-with-higher-education-3-september-2020>
- ii. DfE advice: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>

The former very much focusses on what is needed on an aggregate level, whilst the latter provides very little further clarification for institutions on what they are required to do on an operational basis. The two key aspects for the Union are:

- i. We are being encouraged to open social facilities (such as 568 Bar), in order to manage safe socialisation within the student population under government guidelines. These must operate under the 'rule of 6'. This is consistent with our current planning.
- ii. Where activities are 'reasonably necessary for the purposes of education', this allows groups of up to 30 to meet under our social distance guidelines. Our charitable purpose as enshrined in law is 'the advancement of education for students at Imperial College Union'. This means any core purpose activities by the Union or CSPs can legally operate in this way. However, our intention is to remain virtual where possible, in order to reduce the risk of transmission.

In addition, the DfE's recent announcement regarding a review into 'reducing bureaucracy' within higher education will have an impact on the Students' Union – most notably the 'root and branch' review of the National Student Survey.

Across Students' Unions, there is broadly similar planning being undertaken across the sector. A number of large commercial Unions are in a similar if not identical position to ICU, with both Leeds and Sheffield (consistently cited as the two best in the sector) currently running their own substantial reorganisation processes in order to mitigate the reduction in income forecasted this year due to COVID-19. It should be noted that Imperial has comparatively late term dates, which means we are in a position to potentially learn from other Students' Unions as they reopen their campuses for more activities in line with the start of their undergraduate sessions.

### 3.2 College

The OTs can provide more detail regarding how the College is currently planning for a blended mode of teaching during term one. In terms of major changes to note:

- i. The ICT restructure has been particularly contentious but is now largely complete. This has been based on a desire to change rather than a financial imperative.
- ii. The Campus Services restructure consultation is now live. This is similar to ours in scope (though obviously not scale) and rationale.
- iii. There is now work being undertaken to bring together a 'super directorate' of Academic Services under a single umbrella. This is being led by Richard Martin, who is currently consulting widely on proposals – a key one of which is a much closer and integrated relationship with the Union.

## **Interim Managing Director Final Report**

### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to provide a short narrative overview of my work, outcomes, challenges and progress in relation to the interim management project at Imperial College Union. It should be read alongside the interim plan and is designed to give a final progress report regarding my work, as well as alerting the Board to any other strategic issues arising since the last Board.

### **2. Overview of Work to Date**

Since the last Board on 8 July 2020, I have now formally handed over Managing Director responsibilities to Tom Flynn (as of 20 July). In July, I completed a final 12-days' work for the Union as Interim MD and have subsequently, through August and September, been providing ongoing project support in relation to the proposed reorganisation. My work since the last Board meeting includes:

- Involvement in weekly Leadership Team meetings, fortnightly managers' and fortnightly all staff Town Hall meetings up until 20 July;
- Final meetings with key contacts within the College including John Neilson, Jane Neary, Sarah Walsh, Shola Alabi, Luke Blair and Harbhajan Brar;
- Induction / handover meetings with the incoming Managing Director and sharing all relevant documentation and files from last 7-months;
- Contributing to induction sessions for incoming Sabbatical Officers;
- Completing performance review / appraisal with Head of Membership Services and handover 1-2-1s with Marketing and Communications Manager and Systems Manager;
- Managing furlough updates and changes up until 20 July;
- Finalising all documents and communications relating to the proposed staffing reorganisation including producing a detailed communications plan.

### **3. Proposed Reorganisation**

At the point of writing, we are approaching the last week of the ongoing consultation process with staff, including 26 colleagues at risk of redundancy. The consultation commenced on 4 August 2020 and will conclude on 18 September 2020.

To date, the process has been relatively smooth and colleagues have been professional, constructive and balanced. Most people understand the business case and recognise the challenging position that the Union is operating in.

Key themes, comments and feedback from the process so far include:

- A range of questions and clarifications about the process (i.e. timescales, assessment process etc) – we have circulated an FAQ document that responds to the most common queries.
- A desire to understand more information as soon as possible about any plans to reopen and where possible, a desire to make a case for retaining some posts within bars and catering if they can be utilised upon reopening;
- A range of offers to reduce working hours and levels of pay if it would help to minimise the number of redundancies;
- A counter-proposal from the Events and Conferences Manager that outlines a case for retaining the role;
- A number of requests for the Union to pay for any untaken holiday. We have rejected this request and stated that we'd expect colleagues to use up annual leave during their notice period, even if on furlough.

Since commencing the consultation, a member of the Student Opportunities team has handed in their notice, which will create a vacancy in the organisation. All 'at risk' staff will have the opportunity to express an interest in, and be assessed against, this role before we consider advertising externally. There are likely to be a number of staff interested and this may well be considered suitable alternative employment for some of them.

We have organised a session with those at risk on Friday 11 September to update them about preliminary ideas and plans around reopening for Freshers. We are clear that, at this stage, reopening is likely to be on a minimalist basis and is, sadly, unlikely to have any impact in protecting jobs that are at risk of redundancy.

We will not make any final decisions on changes to the original proposals until after 18 September, but we may be in a position to share initial thoughts verbally with the Board about any options that may have potential to protect jobs whilst still delivering our business objectives.




#### 4. Interim Projects

The below objectives were agreed as part of the Interim Plan. They were due for completion by end of my term as Interim Managing Director. Given the substantial disruption caused by Covid-19 and furlough of staff a number of these projects were paused, although we were able to complete some of them when colleagues returned from furlough. The following gives an at-a-glance summary of progress with a RAG rating.

Strategy and Alignment	NOTES	
1) Begin to develop and assemble robust and comprehensive evidence-base that will underpin the Union's next strategic plan – plans will be in place but any primary research will need to be undertaken in October / November 2020.	This project was being led by the Head of Comms and Systems who had an extended period of absence and is now furloughed. This project will integrate with the work now being led by the new MD on 'Transforming ICU'.	Red
2) Have in place an effective one year Union Plan that takes the Union through until August 2021. This plan will have a clear and compelling narrative that staff can connect with.	Completed and submitted. This has been reviewed in light of Covid-19 with revised KPIs agreed.	Green
3) Ensure robust department plans that identify clear success measures and work priorities.	Draft plans completed although need further work to realign with October-readiness work.	Green
<b>Leadership and Accountability</b>		
4) Support the recruitment of a new Managing Director that is capable of driving change and leading ICU in the future.	Completed.	Green
5) Prepare a detailed and robust induction programme for a new permanent Managing Director.	Completed and an extensive phased induction has been completed.	Green
6) Build a senior staff team that have clear responsibilities and accountabilities aligned to their strengths and the needs of the organisation.	This work was completed although has been overtaken by the need for further restructuring and change.	Green
7) Provide coaching and management development for senior staff across the organisation to enable them to thrive in their roles and manage colleagues effectively and consistently	All SMG supported to undertake 'Lead Like Mary' remote leadership programme, regular 1-2-1s and coaching with Interim MD and development plans in place.	Green

8) Establish clear expectations around performance and behaviour across the Leadership Team and empower the team to hold each other to account against these standards	Expectations exercise undertaken and written up.	
9) Have effective performance management systems and objectives across the organisation (within departments and individual roles). Every team and colleague will have individual objectives, KPIs and development plans	Work undertaken by Admin Support Manager to review framework and agreed at PARC. Much clearer process for follow up and accountability. Reviews will still happen for colleagues at work but will not be able to happen for those furloughed.	
10) Introduce a new decision-making framework that brings clarity over decision-making roles, authority and expectations – this will likely include a new Schedule of Delegation and some tools and disciplines to improve decision-making	Project not completed and deprioritised due to refocus of time on reorganisation.	
<b>Culture</b>		
11) Improve collaboration across the organisation by reviewing our planning and project methodology and ensuring opportunities for cross-team working.	New methodology introduced and agreed by Leadership Team.	
12) Begin work around process-mapping that enables us to simplify processes where possible and ensure they are helping to make it easier, rather than harder, for people to do great work.	Project led by our Systems Manager and completed with a new process mapping methodology agreed.	
13) Refine and tweak our internal communications structures to ensure clarity of purpose and, where possible, reduce the number of meetings giving people greater capacity for delivery.	Adapted to work under remote working and appeared to be working well (managers meetings, Town Hall and Leadership Weekly). This has now been updated and refined further by the new MD.	
14) Deliver a project to reconnect ICU with the students' union sector and ensure we effectively benchmark, learn and are in touch with latest trends, good practice and opportunities.	Project led by the Student Opportunities and Development Manager. Anticipated work is in progress and some positive steps have been taken, but a final framework / plan yet to be completed.	
<b>Finance and Risk</b>		
15) Implement a financial recovery plan that improves 2019-20 in-year performance and places the Union on a more stable footing for future years.	Completed, albeit year-end position has now shifted due to Covid-19 closure.	
16) Deliver a successful block grant submission within agreed timescales based on improved analysis about our position.	Bid submitted – with confirmation of our funding for the year ahead received.	
17) Introduce greater clarity about our financial modelling and reporting.	New modelling agreed by Board and incorporated into budgeting for 2020-21.	
18) Review financial systems and processes to ensure they are fit for purpose and efficient.	To be led by Outsourced FD. Initial diagnostic work has been deprioritised to ensure planning for year end and focus on BAU.	

19) Reduce total salary / fixed staffing costs to c.65-70% of block grant.	Achieved within restructure, although this work has been superceded by separate staffing proposals.	Green
20) Assess our capacity and resourcing within the finance function to ensure the right roles focusing on the right work.	To be led at a future point by Outsourced FD.	Red
21) Implement a single Health and Safety plan that outlines all key H&S risks / activities and gives a clear overview of what, who and when	Completed. Health and Safety Committee have agreed plan and College representatives are pleased with progress.	Green
22) Review and agree an updated Health and Safety policy	Completed. Health and Safety Committee have agreed plan and College representatives are pleased with progress.	Green
23) Ensure clear accountability at senior staff level for all areas of compliance and risk	Accountability for Health and Safety rests clearly with Head of Commercial and Facilities – further work to consider other compliance related areas.	Yellow
24) Seek to codify our relationship and agreements with the College in key partnership areas (i.e. facilities, staffing, commercial etc)	Project initiated is being led by our Systems Manager. The work is ongoing and we have made significant progress in our work on an SLA with College Estates which now exists in draft form.	Yellow
25) Implement new commercial business plans for each outlet that will grow revenue and profit, reduce costs and identify a clear strategy (i.e. growth, partnership, subsidy, closure etc)	Work not completed and now outdated given our current context.	Red
<b>Governance</b>		
26) Introduce improved governance support / administration standards and ensure that papers are circulated a clear week in advance of meetings	The new Governance Officer has settling in well and is delivering excellent work. Standards within F&R, PARC and Board have improved to an extent but further work to do to embed this which will rest with new MD.	Yellow
27) To ensure that Board members are inducted, developed and have the required tools and information to effectively fulfil their duties and responsibilities as Board members	Significant work undertaken to ensure a quality experience for incoming officers and Board members. Some positive steps taken and will be good to hear feedback from new officers.	Green

-  = Completed;
-  = Some delays to progress / partially completed;
-  = Major delays and/or objective at risk of non-completion;

## 5. Final Observations

In my first Board report in February, I shared a detailed analysis of (my perceptions of) the strengths and weaknesses of the Union. I have recently been reflecting on this and thought it would be useful to share some final, personal observations and reflections on the position of the Union. Clearly, there will be far more detailed thoughts and strategies from Tom as he prepares to lead the Union through the next academic year, so I have focused these on .

Strengths	Challenges
<b>Leadership and Management</b> - following the reorganisation there will be the core of an	<b>Leadership and Management</b> – to rebuild and take advantage of the opportunities presented by

<p>extremely capable and effective leadership team and wider operational management team. Whilst there remain one or two managers with some concerns, the vast majority of the team have significant potential.</p>	<p>Covid-19 will require enormous skill and leadership capability. The team has significant potential but investment in their ongoing development will be critical as will making the right appointments, at the right time, to join the management team. It will be particularly important for the Board to ensure the right development and support for the new MD, who is starting during a global pandemic and will (at least initially) only have one other experienced senior leader to provide support.</p>
<p><b>Culture</b> – whilst the current reorganisation was not anticipated even as recently as 4-months ago and will clearly leave some residual challenges and problems, it will have the positive impact of enabling the Union to ‘press the reset button’ on its organisational culture.</p>	<p><b>Culture</b> – it is inevitable that there will be some residual bruising from the change management process we’re currently going through. Even great people may feel some ongoing concern and lack of security and will need to be aligned behind, and inspired by, plans for the future.</p>
<p><b>Governance</b> – the quality of people on the Board and elected to student leadership positions is of a very high standard. I have been continually impressed by the commitment, intellect and care that people show for the Union. I believe that this is an asset that shouldn’t be taken for granted.</p>	<p><b>Governance</b> – a full governance review will be an important exercise for the Union in reflecting on what works well and what could be improved. My assessment remains that the structures are too cumbersome and too operational and that there is an opportunity to have fewer, more impactful committees as part of our governance.</p>
<p><b>Starting to Reconnect</b> – from a position seven months ago where the Union was very disconnected from the wider Student Movement, I think there has already started to be a significant shift in attitude towards a much more outward-facing perspective and this will only grow stronger with Tom’s leadership.</p>	<p><b>Decision-Making</b> – whilst I think we’ve achieved a lot over the last seven months in rebuilding trust and confidence between officers and staff, I think there is still significant work in really understanding what student leadership means for ICU and identifying where boundaries and delegated authorities should sit.</p>
<p><b>College Relationship</b> – I remain highly impressed by the level of goodwill and support on offer from senior colleagues across the College. The Union has a lot of allies and a lot of people willing to share time and resources to help develop the Union. At the same time, it is well known that there are a small number of blockers and detractors, but overall the positives outweigh the negatives.</p>	<p><b>Level of Influence</b> – despite the level of goodwill and support from senior College stakeholders, the Union remains in a position where we are not as influential as we would wish to be in the future. There is significant strategic work to ensure we are considered seriously in major College decisions and where we are truly trusted to represent the student voice in a balanced way.</p>
<p><b>Opportunity to Innovate</b> – Covid-19, in my opinion, will present enormous opportunities for organisations like ICU to innovate and revolutionise the way we operate in the future. As identified in a previous Board paper, these range from redesigning services to fundamentally rethinking parts of the operating model. With the intellectual capacity of our officers, Board members and staff I am certain that ICU is well positioned to be sector leading in reinventing the way students’ unions work.</p>	<p><b>Financial Constraints</b> – clearly the financial position and stability of the Union are more vulnerable than many of us thought 6-months or even 3-months ago, albeit we have taken decisive action to protect our position and future. None-the-less it’s a disappointment and regret that future plans for growth and driving improvement will have to be built on prudence rather than opportunities to invest significantly in the areas that need it the most.</p>



## **6. Conclusion and Summary**

I have thoroughly enjoyed my seven months working with Imperial College Union. I have learned a lot about the Union, and institution, and hope that I have added value to the organisation and provided some continuity and stability during a very challenging time.

I'm very grateful for the opportunity to work with the Union and hope to get the chance to work with many of you again in the future. A big thank you in particular to the Chair of the Board and the Union President for your continued support, challenge and encouragement over the past seven months.

Finally, I'd like to wish good luck to Tom Flynn in his role as Managing Director. It is a significant leadership challenge joining an organisation during the current pandemic, but with the right Board support and development, I believe Tom will be able to work with officers, staff and the Board to help build an outstanding students' union. It's an enormously exciting time for the Union and I think with excellent leadership, I can see a very bright future for the organisation.