

Imperial College Union
Board of Trustees / 14th July 2021

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Purpose: A retrospective on my year as DPFS

Decision(s): To note

1. Introduction

My first year as DPFS has definitely been an interesting one, between the major restructuring we have undergone; creating a new strategy and financial model; and working through the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been a struggle to work on manifesto points and making the changes I had hoped I would have had the opportunity to do. Despite all of this, I am still pleased with the progress I have made this year, and going into the next academic year, I am well placed to make headway on the manifesto points I have been elected on.

2. Personal Reflection – What have I achieved

The nature of the DPFS role means the work you do can generally be quite varied year to year, it usually is the role where one year projects are the go-to, and long-term goals spanning multiple years of DPFS' are few and far between. I think we are starting to see a shift here especially as the DPFS role becomes more involved in areas relating to the College (i.e. Sustainability). I have benefitted from being experienced in many areas of the Union, especially in relation to Clubs, Societies & Projects (where there has been a whole host of changes and improvements that have happened in the last 12 months), and I think this year would have played out very differently for me if this had not been the case.

As I look back over the last 12 months, the main areas of work I have been involved in are:

- **Activity Registration App:** This is a piece of work I undertook right near the beginning of my role, as we were looking at COVID with no real way of tracking Risk Assessments for CSPs and their events. I have had many people tell me how good this app is, but truthfully, I think that it was a reactionary piece and would prefer to implement a proper systems project to include this, and hence why I have not included it in my objectives update. – ***I think this project was incredibly useful for CSPs and I definitely enjoyed doing it, but we seem to be making a habit of building one-off side projects completely out of the Systems' team and this is definitely causing (and will continue to cause) many headaches.***
- **COVID-19 Operational Challenges (Venues):** It is worth noting the many hours within the first half of the year, were spent working with the MD and Venues & Operations Manager to get the venues up and running under restrictions, I also did a lot of work to get our mobile ordering app setup for the bars. – ***Due to the nature of the pandemic, I ended up being involved quite operationally here and (again) it was incredibly useful and eye-opening, but upon reflection, we needed at least one more member of full-time staff in this area because it was too much to ask of one person to re-build and re-frame the Venues in such a short period of time.***
- **COVID-19 Operational Challenges (CSPs):** I did a lot of work with the Student Opportunities & Development Team & DPCS to enable CSP activity to occur (and safely) under restrictions. In both these areas, we kept having setbacks due to constantly changing restrictions, and had to keep changing our approach in these areas. – ***Truthfully, I think we did an incredibly good job here given the constantly changing guidance, I really struggled keeping***

motivation because it always felt like the work we were doing was not worth it as the government guidance changed so frequently. Obviously, the work we did had incredible benefits to CSPs and we did a lot more than most other SUs, but I would like to see myself remember the impact I am having on students'/CSPs experiences.

- **Concert Hall Redevelopment:** This project, when I inherited it, was nowhere near the level of improvement students wanted or were expecting as per the original plans. I worked closely with key student stakeholders, College, and Union staff to realign this project to being something students would be proud of, especially given past projects on the UCH were similarly bad in nature and did not incorporate student expectations as it should've done. – *This is probably my personal biggest achievement, I have been involved in small ways since the project was started nearly 3 years ago, and we have had many redevelopments of the Concert Hall that have been handled badly and caused more issues than they solved. Our ability to take this project and re-focus with the student users' input has been a critical turning point for us, and how we handle projects of this nature. We need to keep students involved with major building/ space changes, as we have learnt that we are not always fully aware of how our spaces are best used, and we definitely do not have the knowledge our students have about our buildings and spaces. We need to be better at finding out this information and retaining it, but due to the impressive nature of some of our students, they will always be one step ahead of us and we need to utilise this.*
- **CSP Process Changes:** BACS payment run changes has taken a lot of the CSP financial processes away from OTs and moved back towards the finance team to allow for more agile and faster approval times. Sponsorship contracts process has been changed which should see faster response times for CSPs. I also have more aims for this to still improve with a more automated system, which I will be looking at over the summer. Kicked off a piece of work looking at CSP refunds (another major time sink for my role) which should enable more staff and departments to be involved in refunding their relevant products. Worked closely with Systems and College ICT to initiate a review and new implementation for how CSP role accounts are handled, which will mean they don't expire and potentially lose important information. – *These changes will be some of the most important for our CSPs, it has always been our weakness, we create great systems for some things and leave other things very much in the past. These are the changes students have been wanting to see for a long time and are were most of our complaints and response times are worst. There is still a long way to go with some of these things, but we've made a good start and set ourselves on the right path to continue those.*
- **Sustainability:** This year we have seen many sustainability changes within the College, arising from their launch of a Sustainability Strategy. I was also asked to sit on the Grantham Advisory Board (to advise on prioritising issues within the Grantham Institutes – within both Imperial and LSE; and advising on the strategic direction of the Institutes). Campus Services are also making some positive changes to the sustainability of the catering the College provides, and I have been involved in these discussions and helped prioritise the work happening there. *Sustainability is becoming one of the most important areas that the College and the Union needs to make changes in. We need to do a lot more in this area, the Venues are the most discussed area by students in relation to sustainability, but this is a Union-wide issue and all departments need to have consideration of sustainability (i.e. printing etc.)*
- **CSP Training**
- **Table service portal for venues**
- **Finance policies (Investment papers, Reserves Policy etc.)**

- **Staff Discount Policy**
- **CSP Development Plan**
- **Services & Sustainability Board Changes**
- **DPFS Role Review**
- **Recruitment (Web Developer, Director of Finance & Resources, Multiple Venues Roles)**

3. Personal Reflection – What do I need to do better

- **Inbox Management:** One of my biggest failures of the year, is my ability to manage my inbox. I have been overwhelmed all year with the sheer number of emails I receive, and I have not been very good at managing that volume. Emails have fallen to the side, refunds have taken too long for students, and contracts have taken too many weeks to be signed. Part of the issue here is that the operational tasks of some of the processes we have should not sit solely with the DPFS and can very much become a single point of failure, especially when you're the single point for multiple processes. Most of these processes have been shifted to be shared with multiple staff over the last couple of months, and CSPs should see significant increases in response times in general. But, I still need to be more effective in my management of queries and my inbox and I am looking into some training and better ways of managing an inbox.
- **Comms:** Comms to students has not been at the forefront of my mind for most of this year, and I think this has been quite detrimental as it can be difficult for people to be aware of the challenges we have faced and some of the changes we have been through. I need to think about setting some time aside regularly next year to write some sort of regular comms, as much to remind myself of the things I have been doing and the difficulties you face as an Officer Trustee.
- **Services & Sustainability Board:** Chairing SSB this year has been a challenge for me, mainly due to my lack of experience chairing a committee, but also because we were discussing things for the sake of discussing things. SSB could be an incredibly positive and useful place for students to make positive changes to the services we provide and the sustainability issues we face, but it is still very new and has no real plan or direction. I am looking to work over the summer to create an annual calendar of business for the committee. My biggest difficulty with managing this board is the lack of support anywhere for it. I am incredibly grateful to Victoria for her time supporting the board, but I have had little-to-none support here and was provided with absolutely no training in this area.
- **Speaking Up:** As an Officer Trustee, you are the student voice to big decisions, and I have sometimes felt too unsure of myself and my experience to speak up against decisions I feel are incorrect or need some minor adjustments. Most of this stems from a quite significant lack of self-confidence in some of these areas and would benefit hugely from more personal development in this area. It can also feel like a struggle speaking up sometimes as reactions to certain opinions have sometimes been met with quite strong and negative responses that makes it difficult to counter to or have a discussion over. I need to be more willing to challenge (and be better at challenging effectively), but there needs to be more support in this area too.

4. Conclusion

We are in a much better position as an organisation now, we are doing many things so much better than we were pre-pandemic and the new strategy and financial model are going to be so critical to us succeeding. I do think we have taken some steps backwards in other areas (staff development, EDI, student training and development, OT support, to name a few) and I think we need to consider these areas more effectively going forwards and we need to do this sooner rather than later.

I am thankful to everyone for the work they have done this year, and I have learnt so much this year as an OT, but I know I have a lot more learning to come. I am very grateful I have the opportunity to stay on for another year, and I hope we can make even more changes in the new academic year.