

**Imperial College Union  
Board of Trustees / 14 July 2021**

**Student Trustee Reflections**

Author(s): Kelvin Zhang (Student Trustee)

Purpose: To provide Board with a reflection on the year as a Trustee of Imperial College Union.

**What have you learnt during your time as a Trustee and what went well?**

I have greatly enjoyed understanding and being part of the world of charity and student union governance. Despite no prior trusteeship experience, by taking part in scrutinising papers and witnessing the contributions of more experienced trustees, I have gained an appreciation of the key areas to consider to ensure papers are effectively scrutinised – a skill which I hope to build on in future governance work. Most exciting, however, was understanding the Union from a top-down view and reconciling this view with my experience as a CSP volunteer. With this learning, I have particularly enjoyed contributing to policies which aim to address issues which have affected student volunteers for years, detailed in the question below.

**What did you particularly value being part of the Board as a Trustee and why?**

I have particularly valued the breadth of being able to contribute to both the high-level and the specific. At a high level, I have enjoyed being able to add a perspective to both routine and substantial items in Board, especially with the much-needed *Back to Basics* strategy. Then, in F&R meetings, I have greatly enjoyed contributing to low-level discussions, such as improving the sponsorship contracts process and discussing issues surrounding imprests, knowing that these discussions will have a major effect on CSPs as they navigate out of COVID-19.

**Did you experience any challenges as part of your role? If so, what were they?**

The role was largely expected in scrutinising papers and overseeing the strategy and finances of the Union, particularly thanks to the comprehensive training Tom Flynn provided during the trustee induction sessions. However, the main challenge was that the shift in focus to stabilisation and recovery from COVID-19 meant that there were fewer opportunities to contribute tacit knowledge from CSP leadership. Likewise, with virtual meetings, I felt more hesitant to contribute smaller points during larger board meetings, which was a big contrast to having organic discussions during in-person meetings where knowing when to come in to a discussion is the norm. However, this was less of an issue for smaller F&R meetings, and a return to an in-person format will mitigate these issues, particularly for new trustees.

**What recommendations would you make for areas of improvement for Student Trustees in the future?**

Although student trustees directly bring current student experiences to the Board, they should recognise that their experiences within Imperial are still within a bubble (UG vs PG students, IC vs ICBS, and South Kensington vs White City are a few examples). I have found myself realising at times that I did not critically think about the impact beyond my bubble enough. Given the operating context of the Union, I think it will be a useful exercise for student trustees to identify blind spots in their knowledge of the student population and aim to resolve it through continuous learning (i.e., informal meetings with wider student groups).