

Imperial College Union
Board of Trustees / 16 February 2022

Board Effectiveness Review

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Purpose: To approve the proposed approach to reviewing Board effectiveness and consider the timeline for the process

1. Background Context

Our corporate governance review action plan (set out on the basis of the key themes identified in the Charity Governance Code) was last reviewed by Board in September 2021. One of the actions was to include a “Board effectiveness discussion’ on the agenda at the midpoint of the academic year, including consideration of external observation and an individual reflection exercise”.

2. Proposed Approach

We propose to use an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) organisational development model for an individual reflection exercise. Cooperrider and Srivastva describe appreciative inquiry as a means to promote collective reflection on what is working well in order to look towards creating a desired future state¹.

Rationale

We have chosen to propose this methodology for four reasons:

- i. We have seen AI used successfully for other board effectiveness reviews
- ii. We do not want to replicate the work or methodology of our Corporate Governance Review
- iii. We want this review to be focused on people and their experiences
- iv. We want this process to be a positive one and therefore focused around continuous improvement

We propose to undertake the four phases of AI:

Phase One: *Discovery* (Written Data Collection)

Phase one is appreciating and valuing “the best of what currently is”. We will invite trustees to offer written feedback on positive aspects of Board business, interaction and discussions by utilising the following prompts (to be circulated via email):

- i. I know things are working really well when...
- ii. My favourite sort of Board meeting/discussion is...
- iii. I really enjoy Board meetings/discussions that...
- iv. I am proudest of our Board/it feels great when...
- v. On a good day, we/our Board...

Phase Two: *Ambition* (Consultative Calls)

This is usually known as the *Dream* phase of the AI model, but we are using the terminology of ambition as it seems a better descriptor of what we want this phase to be about (and is indeed one of our organisation’s values). We propose to hold 15–30-minute phone calls with individual trustees for considering “what might be” and envisioning processes that would work well in the future.

¹Cooperrider, D.L. & Srivastva, S. ‘Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life’. *Research in Organizational Change And Development*, Vol. 1, 1987, pp. 129–169.

Phases Three and Four: *Design and Delivery*

Responses from the written feedback and phone calls would then be analysed and summarised for the May 2022 meeting of Board so that trustees may be empowered to plan for and commit to collaborative change towards further effectiveness via a summary report and proposed action plan.

3. Outputs Timeline

- Responses to the written prompts will be sought between 14 and 28 February 2022
- Calls with trustees will be held between 7 and 18 March 2022
- A summary report with actions will come to the next Board meeting on 18 May 2022