

**Imperial College Union
Board of Trustees / 13th July 2022**

Officer Trustee Reflection (DPFS)

Author(s): Sam Lee – Deputy President (Finance & Services)

1. Introduction

Firstly, where do I begin? I've had the pleasure of holding this post for 2 years now and I have enjoyed every single minute of that time, whether ups or downs the moments have given me experience of either dealing with tough challenges or embracing excellent achievements and I will always cherish all I have learnt through this role.

I think I'd be foolish to try and pretend it was smooth sailing the entire way, I've struggled with feeling that the work I have been doing has not been valuable enough or that I am too inexperienced in key areas to make strong ground, but I've always been propped up by excellent colleagues and friends. The Officer Trustee role is a tricky beast to juggle (especially at ICU), we have multiple hats to think through and balance, and I think it sometimes can be a lot to expect of people so fresh-faced to the world of work and – whilst I do not wish for some of the key experiences to be lost in the role – I think there is slightly more the Union can do to support OTs/ Sabbaticals who are less-experienced or weaker in certain areas and supporting all to manage workloads effectively.

I am particularly glad I ran (and was re-elected) into my role as I have had the opportunity to grow this role and develop the Union rather than firefighting. The Union has been my life for 5 years and I have made some of the greatest memories, friends and connections of my life for which I would like to thank everyone here now, and all those who have supported me outside of this role.

2. Personal Reflection

What went not-so-well?

- Objectives: I have really struggled to keep on top of all of my objectives, this falls down to a couple of factors:
 - Time commitment: It has been difficult to manage all of my objectives whilst doing day-to-day admin and all the other unexpected commitments (recruitment, disciplinaries, Council actions etc.)
 - Not aligned with Annual Operating plans: It is incredibly hard to make significant headway with some of my projects when they haven't been factored into relevant team's AOPs for the year. I think there was more I could have done at the AOP planning stages to ensure my objectives were effectively aligned with team AOPs but with a year where so much Back-to-Basic work needed to occur it was hard for my objectives to be prioritised over those. I think the Union could support OTs to ensure all of their objectives are somehow linked to a team's AOP (they could be separate teams for each objective), but it helps ensure there is staff support when needed.
- Moving forwards but still feeling back in the same place: When I look at where we are with the ICU Venues I cannot help but feel we haven't come as far as I would have hoped. The Venues have been a major focus of my year and trying to bring back a student-focused service has been a challenge (far more challenging than I would have anticipated). I still do not believe we have made a significant-enough dent in the lack of trust our students have in our Venues and our events, although I do believe the Summer Ball has started that

work and we need to ensure we develop a strong welcome week event offering that is varied and catering to all types of dietary requirements and communities (i.e. Postgraduates). I do on the other hand feel this is an area of expertise for Niamh and I feel that if anyone can help achieve this it will be her.

I think there is also still an incredibly large amount of work we need to do to work more collaboratively with the College on an operational basis to help deliver a more effective service to all students.

- **Time & Email Management:** This is something I have continued to struggle with going into this year, I do feel the DPCS & DPFS get an overwhelmingly large number of emails through their inbox and even with the best intentions it is always just a mountain to climb for one singular person. All too often I get fed the same line of “well you just need to get on top of it because it’s just the way it is” and I struggle to believe that there is nothing the Union can do to assist the DPCS/FS to make it easier. It may seem like a small thing but being behind on emails when such a large amount come through can become incredibly demoralising very quickly and lead to even worse performance. I also think soft skills such as time management, inbox management and workload management need to play a bigger part of not only the induction period but the support for OTs throughout the year.

What went well?

- **Summer Ball:** This is by far one of my proudest achievements of the year. The Summer Ball has been a wonderful success and, whilst I cannot take full credit for this, I think my experiences, my knowledge, and my drive to deliver high quality events was a key part of what was required to bring the Summer Ball back to its former glory. It wasn’t an easy journey and I’m sure all involved can speak to the level of stress that was felt delivering an event in a significantly shorter time-period; with few full-time staff team experience of an ICU Summer Ball; no prior useful documentation; and rebuilding College appreciation and support of the event. But, despite these barriers, the Union has employed some of the best staff in their relevant areas which enabled the event to be a rousing success, and to bring students along on the journey with the Summer Ball Events Committee ensured we were delivering an event students desired. There are a few people I’d particularly like to thank:
 - Rob Scully – Without Rob managing the event as he did, we would not have been anywhere close to where we needed to be, he was calm-headed, always keen to listen and learn and ensured the College were on board with everything we needed.
 - Roberto Sorrentino – Roberto was the real driving force behind the event being the success it was, he is incredibly detailed in his planning and ensured everyone remained on time and on schedule. His eye for understanding the key points for the event and his nature to want the event to be as perfect as possible are some of the main reasons he was so excellent in delivering the event to such a success.
 - DramSoc – I don’t think Board have ever been particularly aware of the work that one of our societies (DramSoc) put towards the Summer Ball, they work incredibly hard, are extremely dedicated, and are a clear example of just how impressive our students are in fields that have little-to-no relation to their degrees. To demonstrate an external rigging consultant came in to analyse the plans and implementation of DramSoc’s rigging design and could not stop talking about how impressed he was, how it was more detailed than anything he’d ever expect, and how he would like to hire some of our students on the spot. This is a real testament to DramSoc, but we shouldn’t forget this is the case across all our societies.
 - Student Events Committee – The volunteers who dedicated their time to hours of discussions about minor and major details to ensure the event was student-focused, student co-created, and student delivered.

Tom Flynn spoke at the VIP guest reception about how students probably won't realise how thankful they should be to specific people for making the event such a success, but I can be thankful to all those above (as well as everyone else who supported the event) and I will forever be thankful for the hardwork that was put in.

- Union Concert Hall Refurbishment: The UCH is a flagship space for the Union and has a significant amount of history within its walls, but after many years of just being "maintained" it didn't really stand up to its history or the world-renowned institution we are. The installation of a proper foyer, rake seating, and proper tech-control positions has enabled us to provide an incredible space that we can utilise to better student performances from a massive range of our societies.
- Sustainability Drive: Sustainability has been a big push of mine this year and is becoming a more and more major part of the DPFS role as each year passes by. It is a critical thing that we need to continue developing, improving, and lobbying as it is such an important lobbying area from the student body. I have been very vocal about our need to improve sustainability in our Venues in particular and we have definitely made some headway (although there is definitely more to do – more on that later).
- Recruitment: The Union has seen an incredible amount of recruitment this year and I think we have done an excellent job, being involved in panels ranging from College staff, to Union staff to Union Trustees has been an incredibly interesting, insightful and personal building experience that I'm incredibly glad I (and the other OTs) get the opportunity to experience.

3. Union / Role Reflections

- Staff Experience: I have loved every single second of being a staff member for ICU, I think we have built an excellent team who enjoy delivering a student-focused service and feel like they want to work here. This is a stark contrast to how I felt the staff team looked prior to when I was starting. I feel there is more we need to do to give staff personal learning and development experience as it sometimes feels that there are certain staff who are given more opportunities than others, but I feel with a now complete HR and internal comms team this will naturally start to happen.
- College Integration: It feels like the DPFS role is probably the role least connected to the College, I was still not kept in discussions with senior College staff despite numerous requests and discussions about it and my biggest real discussion point with the College (Sustainability) there isn't really anyone in the Union staff team who can provide support or the knowledge to assist the role with that. The DPFS should have significantly more contact with the Estates & Campus Services teams and whilst there are useful adhoc discussions regular meetings are non-existent which can leave the DPFS out of key and crucial topics where I only hear about these changes second-hand through Senior Managers who are the ones having these meetings. The Union needs to do more to engage a joint approach of both an OT and a Senior Manager in these areas otherwise we play into the College's opinion that students shouldn't be involved in discussions that do not surround education.
- Sustainability: I briefly alluded to this point in my earlier points, but I feel the Union is fundamentally lacking in any real resource behind sustainability. It is one of the most critical student lobbying areas and we have no staff expertise, external support or financial support and it makes it incredibly hard to make any real lobbying effort within the College without it. Sustainability is one of the big topics of not just Imperial students, but the rest of the

sector, the rest of the UK and the rest of the world. Truthfully, I think the College are shockingly bad with their approach to sustainability, it has been almost entirely devolved down to Estates to manage (including the new sustainability roles being line managed by Nick Roalfe) and everyone is left to their own devices to make anything occur. We need to be pushing for a more centralised approach to sustainability within the College and the College need to be doing more, bringing more students into discussion areas and providing more resource. We are a world-leading institution that delivers world-leading research into sustainability, yet we implement next to none of what we preach. Unfortunately, it is really hard to make any actual change as DPFS in this area and I really wish Niamh the best of luck in making better headway than I did, and implore the Union to take a more active and supportive stance with her to make more concrete changes within the College.

4. Conclusion

This year would not have been the success without a few key mentions of people I'd like to thank:

- Tom (Flynn) has been an excellent MD from day one, when we were in the challenging position we were when I started, he felt like the guiding light (having only started a few weeks before). He is one of the most resilient, kind-hearted, supportive and impressive people I have had the pleasure to work with. He has always been someone who will tell me everything straight, give me advice I needed when I needed, and help me feel proud of my achievements and I would not have survived last year or this year without him.
- Rob has been my biggest supporter this year, he has helped me through all the difficulties and has always made time to listen to me whether it's about work or my personal life. I've always been able to count on him and when you are in a role such as DPFS where you're not really sure where you fit in within the Union, he has made me feel like I have a voice and that I am making real and important change.
- Lloyd has been a great President this year, his eye for detail and ability to write excellent papers is something I am still amazed by and I have been in awe of him for what he has achieved and what he stands up for. (P.S. I know you like to be called 'Dr Lloyd James' blah blah blah, deal with it I didn't write anyone else's titles...)
- As you are all aware, India is more than just my colleague or friend and I could not have survived this year without her support, she has been one of the best (if not the best) DPCS I have seen in my time at Imperial, and it takes an impressive amount of work to stand up and make systematic change like she did for Imperial Athletes. She has supported me with my work and I could not have asked for a more supportive or better person to sit opposite me and help with all the challenges of CSP-land.
- Nathalie & Daniel have been excellent OTs and I'm so amazed at their resilience and hardwork they have shown all year round, it is not easy coming into an OT role when you don't know the people in the team or you don't feel like you have the experience to do the job, but you have both smashed the jobs and I'm so looking forward to all of the amazing work Nathalie will continue to achieve in her 2nd year.

I could sit here and list loads more people who have supported me and how they've improved and shaped their roles, but I already feel like I've taken up enough pages of this reflections (for which I must also apologise).

Being DPFS has been one of the most rewarding, challenging, emotional and exciting times of my life and I want to thank everyone here for their support and giving me the opportunity to learn, improve and better myself. I wish the Union the best of luck going forwards and hope Niamh and the rest of next years Sabbatical team have as brilliant an experience as I have had.