

Spring 2021 Felix Review – Report

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Purpose: To update the committee on this term’s review of the student newspaper, *Felix*. To provide context for the Bye-Law amendment paper, and to seek discussion on certain areas where decisions have yet to be finalised.

Summary

Following short-run and longer-term challenges faced by *Felix*, we have conducted a review over the course of this academic term. The review has involved consultation with a broad range of student stakeholders, past and present.

We make several recommendations, including maintaining the Editor role elected through a campus-wide ballot and weekly print issues when circumstances permit, but with significant changes to the processes by which the Editor is held to account (including contractual amendments) and the manner in which *Felix* is supported by the Union. We also captured some recommendations on the future content and format for the newspaper. The report concludes with some clear actions, including the introduction of a Bye-Law describing the Editor role, the drafting and adoption of a new constitution for *Felix*, and amendments to (or drafting novel) internal documents. This stream of work has brought into focus other related areas which require attention, which are also outlined towards the end of this report.

Contents

- 1. Motivation 2
- 2. Process..... 2
- 3. Recommendations 4
 - The Editor..... 4
 - 3.1 Maintain a full-time role 4
 - 3.2 Maintain the current selection process 4
 - 3.3 Improve training and handover 5
 - 3.4 Amend the editor’s contract..... 5
 - 3.5 Improve the in-role accountability process for the editor 6
 - The Team..... 7
 - 3.6 Formalise Committee Votes 7
 - 3.7 Split the Editor role 7
 - 3.8 Formalise Committee Membership 8
 - 3.9 Set Clear Mutual Expectations 9
 - 3.10 Improve Engagement with Student Writers 9

Content and Output	10
3.11 Improve the online offering	10
3.12 Retain weekly print issues	10
3.13 Analyse distribution patterns	11
3.14 Prioritise coverage on issues related to Imperial	11
3.15 Balance the interests of writers and readers – covering broader issues	12
Financials	13
Liability	13
Broader Union Support.....	14
4. Next steps.....	15
Directly related to <i>Felix</i>	15
Other areas motivated by the review	15
Acknowledgement.....	16
Appendix A – Felix Review Project Plan.....	17
Appendix B – Felix Mutual Expectations Document	20



1. Motivation

Over the past two academic years, concerns have been raised about the student newspaper, *Felix*. Inconsistency in the performance of the editor this year and last, as well as shortcomings in the tools to address this inconsistency, have been raised by several key stakeholders, from members of the Board to student writers for the paper.

In response to this, we decided to initiate a review of *Felix* in late January. Our aim has not only been to address the relatively short-run issues discussed above, but also more longstanding challenges. In particular, we wanted to explore ways to mitigate the isolation experienced by the editor of the paper and ways the Union support for *Felix* could be improved. Finally, we wanted to clarify the relationship between *Felix* and the Union, which has been a source of strain for several years. We approached this recognising the value a well-functioning student publication can have, and also with the view that students deserve an offer commensurate with the level of funding apportioned to *Felix* each year.

2. Process

The areas of focus we identified for review were as follows:

- The Editor
 - o Selection process
 - o Role description and responsibilities
 - o Support from ICU

- Accountability mechanisms
- The structure of the *Felix* committee
 - How it might be amended to be more effective, in particular to hold the editor to account
- The output of the paper
 - Online vs. print
 - The frequency and volume of print publication

We aimed to conclude the review by the end of the academic term, and the DRO agreed the election of the Editor should be paused while the work was ongoing, agreeing to run the position in the Summer Elections instead unless some alternate process was decided. This approach had the support of the current *Felix* team and Union Council. To oversee the project, we put together a project team. The membership of this team, and our project plan, is outlined in Appendix A.

The Project team agreed to a consultation process comprising:

- A survey, circulated to all students
- Discussions at *Felix* committee meetings (including elected committee members and largely appointed volunteer student editors)
- Focus groups with interested students and key student volunteers
- Discussions with past editors
- Discussions with student newspaper editors at other universities

Questions were tailored based on the group with which we were consulting. For example, with those who have not been directly involved in running the paper historically, less emphasis was placed on comment on the committee structure.

In addition to these points, we discussed the financial aspects of the paper going forward and the contractual relationship with the editor with the Union's Managing Director, Tom Flynn.

3. Recommendations

Through the above process, we have arrived at the following recommendations.

The Editor

3.1 Maintain a full-time role

There was a broad consensus that the full-time student role would be valuable to maintain; the paper would struggle to function successfully without it especially in the context of Imperial's subject mix and the intensity. Alternatives which we considered would likely either result in the paper not being able to offer substantial aspects of what it does currently (described below) or would require similar or greater resources from the Union (we have discussed ways this can be slimmed below too). Though Imperial is unusual in having a full-time Editor, we are not unique. Other institutions, including Newcastle University, have similar or corresponding roles.

However, it is clear that the role has not always succeeded in realising its full potential. As well as consistency around output and communication with the team, students raised that the full-time role could be used to address longer-term investigative pieces within Imperial, as has happened in more active years in the past. We have shaped our further recommendations with this in mind.

3.2 Maintain the current selection process

When concerns around *Felix* were raised last year, one of the key early recommendations was to transition the role from campus-wide election to a Union managed appointment process involving an interview and some engagement with the *Felix* team. This was initially our favoured approach. However, while this proposal does have some attractive features – there's a case to be made that it would reduce a barrier to entry for certain individuals, for example – actually attempting to design a fair process was extremely challenging. In particular, a Union managed interview process would likely be viewed with scepticism and could be abused given the inherent conflict of interest one has when appointing someone who is meant to hold them to account. Furthermore, it was difficult to envision ways the current committee, who have the most relevant knowledge to advise on appointment, could be adequately involved in the process without leaving open the possibility candidates would be treated unfairly for personal reasons.

There was overwhelmingly strong feedback from ordinary students and Union volunteers favouring an all-student vote. Moreover, although they aren't a traditional representative, previous editors pointed out the mandate an elected Editor has aids in their credibility with students, the Union, and the College once they are in office.

Following this, we had some discussion around the prospect of pre-election candidate vetting, to ensure the candidate would have the appropriate skills to take on the role. However, given the relatively low number of candidates, the fact that many of the challenges with an appointment process would also apply to pre-election vetting, and the case against applying this to other full-time roles, this idea was dropped; the benefit wouldn't justify the cost. It is extremely rare for someone without lots of *Felix* experience to win election to Editor – the last time this happened was in 2013, in a close race where the more experienced candidate's campaign was suspended. Even then, the Editor was still able to produce a viable product with training and support.

In summary, we concluded that there wasn't a better mechanism; that our democratic selection mechanism for this role would perhaps be the worst one, except for all the others. One point that was made in defence of this position was that, although the performance of some of the Editors has been wanting, a different selection mechanism would have been unlikely to produce a different outcome. With this in mind, as well as the practical challenges with a different approach, we would suggest a 'carrot and stick' approach to moderating the performance of the *Felix* Editor, with better support and stronger direct accountability mechanisms respectively.

3.3 Improve training and handover

Through conversation with current and former Editors, as well as knowledgeable *Felix* team members, it became clear that the knowhow editors have had entering the role can be inconsistent, and that this knowledge can be crucial to succeeding in the role. We need to regularise the handover process, ensuring:

- That the Union has sight of some version of the *Felix* 'bible' – the master handover document – to help mitigate against issues which would arise if the outgoing Editor fails to deliver a proper handover.
- That during the month of July, the incoming officer spends time with their predecessor, and that some structure is provided for these discussions.
 - o In order to mitigate against personal isolation, and to encourage sharing of good practice, at this point it would be useful to ensure the incoming Editor is connected to a national network of student writers, and can access e.g. an external mentor who is a professional in the field and/or has good student media experience.
- That training in key areas, including libel law, relevant design skills, and broader leadership 'soft skills' is offered early on.
 - o The latter might mean crossover with training for the officer trustees. This needs to be considered more deeply and earlier on; beginning in Easter we should be developing a plan for this period which is inclusive of the *Felix* Editor.
 - o There should be scope for the *Felix* Editor to seek continuous support in these areas throughout the year; they should not be reluctant to seek support from the Union if they lack knowledge in a certain area.

It is worth mentioning there are currently internal discussions on developing a *Felix* Wiki – a repository of information accessible to all students describing 'how things work' in the paper.

This support can be aided by amendments to the contracted time for the officer.

3.4 Amend the editor's contract

Historically, the *Felix* Editor has only been on a 10-month contract, while other full-time officers of the Union have been on 12-month contracts. This has been to reflect the almost complete reduction in workload over holiday periods, particularly for a print-focussed publication. While some of the justification for this may weaken as the paper moves online, it is still true that workload in this role is likely to ebb and flow over the academic year.

This contractual arrangement has caused issues: the Editor would (at least in theory) not be working over August and April, which would make covering stories that **do** arise in that time challenging. Additionally, losing that first month over the summer has been deleterious to relationship building with other full-time officers and staff members more generally, contributing to the isolation of the role.

To mitigate against this, we recommend putting the Editor on a 0.83 full-time equivalent contract going forward, essentially equivalent to their prior remuneration. This would mean they work the full year, including the summer, but reflects the fact that their workload is lower at times. It is worth saying that under such a contractual agreement, the Editor would not be expected to work ~4.2 days a week, every week, but rather that they would have flexibility to work more or less each week over the course of the year, and based on precedent this is roughly where it should average out.

It is worth noting that this year, due to an administrative oversight, Calum Drysdale was contracted full-time for the whole year. Implementing this recommendation would thus result in a straightforward financial saving relative to this year without adversely impacting the paper.

3.5 Improve the in-role accountability process for the editor

Day-to-day support and accountability in this role should be divided into two categories – professional (behaviour as an employee), and ‘editorial’ (decisions taken as leader of the paper). Though there is some overlap, generally, one would expect the former to focus on things like work hours, booking annual leave, mediating interpersonal disputes with other staff, and supporting someone who is usually in their first substantive employed role. Meanwhile, the latter would relate to editorial decisions for the paper, coordinating student writers and editors, and some of the paper’s internal priorities e.g. whether there should be a new server for the website, what to do with the archive, etc.

- Professionally
 - Currently, the *Felix* editor formally reports into the Union President. While this arrangement has been adequate this year, we feel as though it would be beneficial for the **formal line manager to be a full-time member of Union staff instead**. This would mitigate a potential conflict of interest – since the Union President is much more often directly challenged by the paper, and senior staff members are appointed with an understanding that their roles have clear boundaries – while providing a more stable contact point between *Felix* and the Union, which would give the Editor the benefit of oversight and professional support from someone more experienced than another student officer. We believe this would consequently make it easier to hold the Editor to account as an employee. Our suggestion for the staff role here would be the **Director of Membership Services (DoMS)**, who oversees student activities, volunteer development, representation, and the Advice Centre within the Union.
 - As of this term, we have scheduled two sets of fortnightly catchups between the Union and the Editor: one with the Union President and DoMS discussing the paper, and a more personal check-in with the Managing Director. We recommend these are continued going forward. If the reporting line is amended as above, we would suggest setting aside time (possibly alongside the former meetings) for the DoMS and the Editor to discuss goal-setting, professional development, and other work related matters; it would of course still be useful for the Editor and President to meet, even if the latter would no longer have a formal role in the professional oversight of the former.
- Editorially
 - The committee and editorial team would likely be the first to notice if there were an issue with the paper.
 - We believe that these individuals should have somewhat more control over the paper’s destiny, and that they need clearer recourse when issues arise. Heeding feedback from the consultation, we are conscious that this needs to be done in a way that doesn’t deprive *Felix* of informality that might aid community building.

- We hope to provide these powers, while also making other positive changes to the committee structure of *Felix*, by making the amendments described in the following section.

In providing clarity between these areas, we want to ensure there is recourse to address issues that overlap between them – from student editors raising an issue of poor work attendance of the editor to the DoMS, to staff members advising on server migration during regular catch ups.

The Team

In order to support the mission of the paper, some changes to the *Felix* team are recommended, aiming to:

- Provide clearer accountability for the editor
- More equitably distribute work amongst volunteers
- Ensure the committee has the ‘right roles’ – not simply those that other CSPs might usually have
- Provide clearer pathways to engage in the running of the paper

3.6 Formalise Committee Votes

To act as a check on the editor, the *Felix* committee should have the power to take formal votes, including:

- Simple majority votes to indicate a preferred course of action
- Two-third majority votes on censure and no confidence

A vote of no confidence from the Felix committee would trigger the Union President (or Council Chair, where there is a conflict of interest) to bring a similar motion to the next Union Council meeting, informing Council of the vote and rationale, in order to formally approve (effectively ratifying) the removal of the Editor from their role.

- Given that the role would be elected in a cross-campus ballot, this ratification is necessary to limit the extent to which a ‘less democratic’ body would be overruling a ‘more democratic’ one.
- The Union should have a contingency for such cases, involving using funds saved in the salary of a removed officer to support the output of the paper for the remainder of the year (appointing a new Editor mid-way through the year is likely to be infeasible).
- The precise process for this would require ironing out in the *Felix* constitution, but for censure and no confidence motions we would recommend a similar process be adopted within the club as applies more generally at Union Council. The committee would need to agree to meet at regular intervals for this to be workable.

With this pathway in place, students who are most knowledgeable about and affected by decisions taken by the Editor will have a more direct say over their actions. This would help balance formally the competing concerns of the volunteer team, the Editor, and the Union.

3.7 Split the Editor role

In order to ensure votes can be managed fairly, we recommend splitting the Editor role. Currently, the *Felix* Editor acts formally both as chair of *Felix* as a student society and editor-

in-chief of the newspaper. We recommend introducing a separate student volunteer role – a chairperson – to chair meetings of the *Felix* committee and to support and advise the full-time editor. We believe this division of labour would also help ensure the Editor can focus on the productive output of the paper, while a current student could prioritise managing the society in the manner done for all other student groups. To a large extent, this function has been performed by the Deputy Editor (or some other particularly driven/experienced committee member or section editor) in the past, so this is not as radical a shift as it may seem.

3.8 Formalise Committee Membership

What constitutes the *Felix* committee has always been somewhat ‘fuzzy’; this would need tidying up if the above recommendations are to be adopted. In the past, there has been a division between committee roles elected democratically by the *Felix* society membership (usually roles which exist in most clubs, e.g. treasurer), and appointed student editors for various sections (e.g. News, Comment, Science). There is nothing precluding individuals from holding roles on both sides of this fence. It is worth mentioning that this year, *Felix* has operated with a ‘steering committee’ including people from both sides of the fence described here.

There are two key issues with this way of organising the *Felix* team. The first is that those holding certain roles in this structure, particularly traditional committee roles, can be left with relatively little to do in their remits. While there is plenty of work to do, the current committee structure does not result in this work being distributed very well. The second is that, particularly if we want to give more power to students within the team – in particular section editors – the process around appointing them needs to be clearer. There is no problem in principle with a relatively relaxed appointment process for these roles, especially as students may engage more or less over the course of the year, sections may change as editorial teams come and go, and flexible selection for talent and interest is important. However, if section editors are to play a slightly more formal role in the accountability process for the full-time Editor, any process for appointment would at least need to be set out in writing.

Our proposed approach would approximate the following:

- The Editor has the authority to appoint new section editors¹
 - o This authority may be delegated to existing section editors
- Once appointed, section editors would have equal power to vote as democratically elected committee members. However, the existing members of the committee would have an opportunity to block their appointment and remove them once they are in role.
 - o This mechanism would be there to prevent the committee from being packed with e.g. personal friends of the Editor. The precise threshold for a vote to block or dismiss a section editor would be laid out in the constitution; it would likely be two thirds of the current voting membership of the committee.
 - o In order for this to be workable, the *Felix* Editor would be responsible for informing the committee on a regular basis to any changes in who holds section editor roles.
 - o Obviously, committee members would be precluded from voting on matters relating directly to their appointment or removal.
 - o Provisions applying to the removal of editorial team members from the committee should extend to democratically elected committee members.
- A current list of committee members should be held by *Felix* and updated regularly when changes are made. Responsibility for maintaining it should be assigned to a

¹ What applies to section editors here would extend to similar student editorial roles

specific member of the committee. We recommend such a list be reviewed in detail roughly at the mid-point of the academic year. The Union should be able to access a list of this form for information – it is reasonable for the Union to know who comprises the team running the student newspaper – and to mediate disputes if necessary.

- In terms of quorum for formal votes, we suggest sticking to the normal 50% threshold, but implementing a similar rule to Union Council where if one has too many unexplained absences, one's voting rights at the committee are struck off. Precisely where this threshold should be would be agreed with the committee and written into the constitution; the current threshold for Union Council is missing two consecutive meetings.
- Even if they hold more than one role, committee members should only have one (non-delegable) vote.

Clearer written responsibilities for committee members and a schedule of delegation would also aid in the committee's efficacy.

All the changes mentioned so far would need to feature in the *Felix* constitution, which needs to be rewritten.

3.9 Set Clear Mutual Expectations

While some things should be set in stone, others may vary depending on the individuals comprising the team in a given year. When *Felix* ran into issues earlier this year, we worked with the committee to produce a set of **mutual expectations**, outlining expectations around communication, the frequency of formal meetings, and what sorts of tasks, in general terms, should be expected of whom. In particular, student editors and writers impressed on us the importance of being informed when things aren't going to plan e.g. if their articles aren't published for some reason. Our current expectations comprise Appendix B.

We would recommend the *Felix* team meet at the start of the academic year to set expectations going forward, and that the Union's DoMS should be present for the meeting to provide a framework for the discussion and to help advise on the feasibility of any suggestion (care would have to be taken to limit the risk of overpromising). These expectations would give the committee something to hold the Editor to, and the Editor clarity on what support they might expect from their volunteers and the Union. Expectations may be revised with mutual consent (with both majority committee vote and the approval of the Editor), and should be reviewed in January, once the reality of running the paper has set in.

3.10 Improve Engagement with Student Writers

The overwhelming majority of the paper's content is provided by unpaid students, most of whom are not even formal volunteers with the paper. Based on our review, we recommend:

- That the committee do more within and between sections to engage socially with (especially regular) writers, in order to build community.
- Establishing "regular contributors", so that regular student writers can be recognised for their contributions and to help provide a route to more formal volunteer roles within the paper
- That these contributors receive regular communications from the *Felix* Editor

Building a broad community is important for a positive atmosphere within *Felix*; ensuring there are positive ways for unfamiliar students to engage with the newspaper is what will keep it going in the future.

Content and Output

Over the course of the review, we gathered views on the medium through which they would like to interact with the newspaper, and the content they would expect from it. Recommendations we share here may be taken somewhat less prescriptively than others; we intend these as useful guidelines but understand that future *Felix* teams may reasonably come to different conclusions.

3.11 Improve the online offering

One key discussion point surrounded the online offering. Over the past couple of years, the website has been beset with issues. As these are surmounted, the following areas are worth considering:

- Streamlining the process by which editors and writers upload content to the website
- Ensuring the correct permissions are used for photographs and similar on the website, as this has caused issues in the past
- Whether there is scope for interactive online content to drive engagement

A majority of students favoured posting content to the website more than once a week.

We have been supporting *Felix*'s transition to a new server, while ensuring the systems team retains admin privileges so support can still be offered, and liability limited. When it would be appropriate to use such access should be the subject of a discussion between the DoMS, Systems Team, and *Felix* team; admin privileges would not normally be used unless there is some issue with legal liability or when help is requested.

3.12 Retain weekly print issues

Support for maintaining the weekly print publication was extremely high. Students from a broad range of academic departments conveyed the role *Felix* plays a locus for community over a Friday morning or lunchtime. In some departments, particularly the School of Medicine, this community spirit around the newspaper was weaker, suggesting scope for improvement. Across departments, we feel that *Felix*'s paper issues could play an important role in helping to reconstitute community at Imperial post-COVID.

In addition, though it's true that more national and international media is more heavily focussing on its online offering, we still feel that, as a membership organisation with a largely captive audience, the circumstances are slightly different. A print paper is easier to engage with for students on campus; put simply, they are much less likely to seek it out or interact with it at all if the offering were solely online. One facet of this was the puzzles section – one of the main reasons why the paper is picked up – is clearly much easier to interact with in print.

This is particularly striking given the level of influence the paper has within the College. The university take matters published in the paper seriously, perhaps even disproportionately so; for senior leaders, it is one of the main ways they get a sense of day-to-day goings-on. In this context, it is difficult to recommend reducing the frequency of publication, since this is the main manner in which College is exposed to the paper; its accessibility and visual prominence on campus makes it easy for students to promote their views. *Felix* offers tremendous 'soft power' to the student body at Imperial, and we would be extremely reluctant for this to be undermined.

Some individuals did raise the possibility of reducing the frequency of print publication to fortnightly. In discussions with them, the following emerged:

- That it would adversely affect engagement, and the role the newspaper could play in fostering a sense of community
- That some stories, especially news stories, might lose some of their currency
- That it would not prevent the 'crunch' in the run up to publication, since between students' natural tendency to leave things to the last minute, and the desire to publish the most up-to-date news stories, you would likely still end up with a glut of work in the 24/48 hours before print. The 'crunch' may even be worsened if more articles are expected to be included per issue in a two-week cycle than a one-week one.

A less frequent publication would represent a cost-saving, which we would partially recover by recommending printing fewer issues per week (2000 → 1500), on a slightly shorter average length (48→40). This would open the possibility that some content would be online-only, at the discretion of the Editor. This would also help meet a concern raised regarding environmental sustainability.

3.13 Analyse distribution patterns

Students are conscious that in some areas of campus, lots of the issues placed are never picked up. The concern around waste can be mitigated by reducing the overall number of copies published along the vein described above², and perhaps by doing a second distribution run moving papers from low- to high-traffic areas.

Once a modicum of normality has been restored to campus, we would recommend **conducting analysis on where papers are picked up** to ensure areas aren't being disproportionately focussed on or neglected; some discussion with students should also take place to establish whether any areas are being missed entirely on the current distribution route. While some adaptation to distribution locations should be made in the short term, it is difficult to conduct a holistic analysis fairly while COVID restrictions are in place, as this affects foot traffic on campus in a transient fashion.

3.14 Prioritise coverage on issues related to Imperial

Students who participated in the consultation process believe the main focus of the newspaper should be on matters relating to Imperial. We asked students to rank 8 key areas of business for *Felix* in order of importance (Table 1); holding the College to account and reporting on College life were clear favourites.

² The figure of 1500 for this is not completely arbitrary; it came pointedly from discussions with previous Editors and students with a high degree of familiarity with the paper.

Field	Mean	Std Deviation
Holding the College to account	2.60	1.72
Reporting on College life	2.62	1.55
Holding the Union to account	3.33	1.63
Providing a platform for student writers	3.51	1.79
Providing experience for student editors	5.09	1.93
Local news	5.92	1.59
Opinion pieces on national and international affairs	6.36	1.61
Reporting on national and international affairs	6.57	1.51

Table 1: Students' preferences for *Felix* priorities. Scores correspond to an average of ranks given to different areas by students (1 point if ranked first, 2 if second etc.)

News	3.53	2.08
Science (including Sustainability and Tech)	4.11	1.88
Clubs and Societies	4.20	1.97
Comment	4.23	2.22
Puzzles	4.26	2.25
Culture & Society (Arts, Music, Books, Film, Food)	4.49	2.11
Hangman	4.61	2.48
Sport	6.56	2.03

Table 2: Student interest in different sections of *Felix*; this was more bunched towards the middle than the table above, with interest in Sport somewhat lower among those surveyed than other sections (possibly due to COVID). Hangman is a satirical section usually comprising oblique references to Union politics and somewhat more pointed comment on the College.

Should the Editor ever have to decide what content to prioritise for print and what to have solely online, we recommend this form one key axis for decision making.

All the granular data which we collected over the course of this process, on this question and others, will be made available to the *Felix* team and to Calum's successor.

3.15 Balance the interests of writers and readers – covering broader issues

It was recognised that *Felix* does have a role to play in content which covers broader issues. There was a general consensus that, where issues don't directly relate to students, they

should be reserved for student opinion pieces rather than being a focus in the News section. In addition, there was an overwhelming view that **opinion pieces should be more clearly demarcated as such**. Students also made comment to the effect that where controversial issues are discussed in the paper, effort should be made to seek articles from “both sides”, providing doing so would not conflict with a core value of the Union; such determinations should be left to the editorial team. It is worth acknowledging that the paper has made efforts along these lines in the past.

One other point which was made quite cogently during our consultation process was that the paper is there not only for the readership, but also to give student writers an opportunity to express their views. As shown in table 1, this is understood to be a relatively important function of the paper. Ensuring student writers have an opportunity to see their work in print would be another axis on which the Editor could prioritise content for this format.

Financials

Making the aforementioned contractual change would realise a financial saving of between £7,000 and £8,000³. In addition, a significant saving would be realised by reducing the number and average length of print copies published each week. This saving would be on the order of £2,500, although could be greater if *Felix* is able to transition back to the printer it used before COVID struck; for practical reasons, a new, slightly more expensive firm, is being used.

As well as reducing cost, *Felix* team members have expressed some willingness to increase revenue. However, there is scope to increase advertising revenue. Currently, ad sales in *Felix* are managed by the Union, but are not a great priority for the relevant team. This is unlikely ever to be the case, given the difference in scale between the Union and *Felix*. We believe *Felix* could better realise its potential seeking ads and other forms of sponsorship independently, in the manner of other student clubs and societies. We recognise the committee may not be well-equipped to do so immediately, and that we may already have obligations which need to be fulfilled over multiple years. As such, we would seek to transition these responsibilities in a phased approach over 2-3 years, affirming whatever timescale we set with Calum’s successor.

We believe two principles should be held firm in this area, as follows:

1. The Union and *Felix* should draw a firm line **against the inclusion of sponsored content (paid articles)**, as we believe this would damage the integrity and credibility of the paper.
2. *Felix* should never be reliant on advertising to fund core day-to-day spending; there should be sufficient funding from the Union to cover the basic needs of the website, print editions, and the Editor’s remuneration. Sponsorship should fund “nice to haves”: longer issues, or higher quality paper, or specific medium-long term investments (e.g. in equipment or software) etc. This replicates the financial model the Union itself is bringing in with respect to the College.

Liability

Any publication comes with some risk of legal liability; this certainly holds true for *Felix*. With close contact between the Union and the newspaper team, we hope to mitigate against the

³ The amount an employee earns in an organisation, is somewhat lower than how much they cost that organisation, usually primarily because of National Insurance and pension contributions. The latter figure is what has been used for this approximation. The uncertainty stems from the fact that College pay scales rise with inflation annually, and the precise period of handover changes slightly depending on the calendar year.

risk. The contact points we are solidifying lend clear avenues for the Editor to sense check potentially controversial pieces with Union staff members, especially those related to the Union and the College. This year, we have begun keeping a media lawyer, experienced in advising student publications, on retainer. We recommend continuing this practice, giving another (more independent) route to receive advice.

Broader Union Support

In addition to what has already been discussed in terms of contact, advice, accountability, and knowledge-sharing between the Union and *Felix*, the following two questions are worth considering:

- Are there areas where **more staff time** would be of benefit to the paper? It was clear from consultation that Union involvement in supporting the paper has ebbed and flowed over the years. There have been years where, for example, the Editor has been able to receive more technical support and advice (e.g. on design issues) than they do at present. Realising this more, is a two-way street, requiring effort in communication and relationship building on both sides. Systems and sponsorship support are currently offered by Union staff, as mentioned earlier in the document.
- Should the Union introduce a **specific staff role supporting student media**? While we would not advocate for a staff member solely to support the newspaper, there is a broader array of student groups in this area who could well benefit. Our intention is to engage with these groups to see what (if any) support is desired.
 - o Such staff roles are common in the sector. This is perhaps unsurprising, as a role of this nature would sit at the intersection of student opportunities and development, and membership communications, which are both vital areas in organisations like ours.

One common thread with these points is that the support and level of engagement between the Union centrally and key volunteers and officers seems to have weakened as knowledgeable and experienced staff have departed, and relationships and knowledge has not been built back up. We should seek to remediate this; the effect it has goes beyond just *Felix*.

4. Next steps

Directly related to *Felix*

Action	Description	Key Individuals & Committees	Indicative dates
Bye-Law approval	As articulated in the paper, we believe the inclusion of a Bye-Law setting out the key responsibilities of the <i>Felix</i> Editor role is important. Given its prominence in the organisation, it strikes us as an oversight that this has not already been part of the Union's governing documents.	Union Council + Board of Trustees	23 rd -24 th March 2021
Felix Policy Amendment	If the recommendations of this report are accepted, and a new Bye-Law introduced, we should then amend the Board <i>Felix</i> policy to remove redundancies and ensure consistency (e.g. on our approach to sponsorship since we are recommending changing that)	Board of Trustees	12 th May 2021
Club Constitution	Taking further input from the current team and from Council and Board, we hope to take a new constitution for the <i>Felix</i> club to the first CSPB meeting in Term 3.	CSPB, Arts and Ents Management Group members, Felix Editor, Union President	9 th May 2021
Amending Felix Editor contract	We believe the contract should be amended to change slightly the total number of contracted hours and to shift the reporting line to the DoMS.	Managing Director, DoMS, Union President	May 2021
Formalise handover process	Work to ensure proper handover and training process is delivered to incoming Editor, preserving good practice for future years.	Managing Director, DoMS, Union President, Felix Editor	April-June 2021
Capture internal working practices	ICU should hold a document describing what is expected of it in relation to the paper. If these recommendations are expected, such a document could draw heavily from this one.	DoMS, Union President	July 2021

Other areas motivated by the review

Given the time and depth of this review, it is not surprising that it has touched on themes which apply beyond *Felix*. Although these were almost all on our radar already, this review has brought them into sharp focus.

Club Constitutions

These documents are not in a good state, with key provisions severely outdated (to the extent that they simply aren't followed) and with the Union centrally not having sight of them for all clubs. The Union President and DPCS intend to address this if time permits after Easter, with the support of the Student Opportunities and Development Team.

Union Policy and Governing Documents

These are not up-to-date on the Union's website, and in the case of the former could be more easily navigable. It would seem sensible to at least begin work on this before the current Union President's term of office is up.

Pre-Election Conversations

We deliberated on pre-election vetting heavily as part of this process, and ultimately decided it would not be useful (and could be quite damaging) to pursue. However, we do think some value could be drawn by candidates for senior roles having an opportunity (being strongly encouraged) to meet with a relevant staff member once they put themselves forward. This would likely help improve candidates' understanding of the roles, and what is feasible under them, before they run. It would also help the Union prepare for handover and induction which usually benefits from being tailored to fit individual skills and knowledge. This would help realise some of the benefits of pre-election vetting and could quite straightforwardly be implemented in the next academic year.

Votes of No Confidence

This is a key area where more clarity is required. In particular, it should be more obvious what would happen if full-time officer were actually removed from the role. Lack of clarity around this question acts as a significant disincentive to pursuing votes of no confidence, weakening a key mechanism by which full-time officers might be held to account.

In addition, our understanding is that there is currently a constitutional ambiguity in terms of when an officer can be "no-confidenced". Can an officer-elect be removed in this way before their role has formally started? If an officer has won re-election, but a vote of no confidence in them passes before the end of their first term, is the election re-opened? There may be answers to these questions, but they could certainly be more clearly laid out in writing if this is the case.

Support for Student Volunteers

As discussed at the end of the previous section, there are clearly areas where our support for student volunteers could be much stronger. Does the Union have the right roles to best support our students? Are we attracting candidates with the best relevant experience to do so? We hope the Union addresses these questions going forward, and gets progressively closer to realising its full potential.

Acknowledgement

We want to thank everyone who gave up their time to take part in this process, particularly Andy Wang, Isabelle Zhang, and Susan Rutter. Special thanks to Tom Newman for his support throughout.

We hope this project helps ensure Imperial students get the newspaper they deserve.

Appendix A – Felix Review Project Plan

1. Overall Details

Project Title:	Felix Review		
Project Manager:	Tom Newman (DoMS)		
Project Sponsor (Senior Leader):	Tom Flynn (MD)		
Lead Officer:	Abhijay Sood (Union President)		
Start Date:	01/02/2021	End Date:	24/03/2021

2. Project Rationale

Brief Project Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term structural issues, brought into sharp focus by short-term challenges, have prejudiced the ability for our student newspaper to succeed. Our goal here is to address these issues, informed by clear consultation, in order to ensure the output of the paper is more consistent, improve morale within future editorial teams, and instil confidence in <i>Felix</i> for the future.
What is the business problem or opportunity this project is trying to solve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Inconsistent quality and quantity of output, which is deleterious to student engagement with the paper (writing and reading) o Issues with the role of editor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inconsistent performance for postholders over multiple years ▪ Lack of accountability ▪ Lack of clear expectations ▪ Lack of clear support from the Union, both formally (directly contributing to the above) and informally (contributing to personal isolation, and thus indirectly to the rest) - Opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To enhance positive aspects of <i>Felix</i>, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The production of relevant content for the student body o The furthering the students' interests by challenging the university and holding elected representatives to account o Providing a platform for students to share their views o Helping to develop individual skills: from writers to content and copy editors o Contributing to a sense of community across our campuses <p>All of these areas contribute to furthering the Union's charitable objectives. In addition, this project aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Restore confidence among students, Union officers, and the Board of Trustees, that <i>Felix</i> remains a worthwhile investment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Preserve and further the positive traditions and history of this institution, from HG Wells to <i>Phoenix</i>.
What change will this project deliver to meet that need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High performing paper, includes editor with clear expectations/accountability, cohesive team, consistency in the quality/output - Organisational/student buy in - Higher engagement/readership of the paper, meaningful content in the interests of the student body

3. Project Plan

What are the objectives for the project?	<p>To review, and establish clearly in writing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Details regarding the editor, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The selection criteria - The role description and responsibilities - How they will be held to account - How they will be supported by the Union 2. The structure of the <i>Felix</i> committee 3. Recommendations regarding the future output of the paper, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The frequency and number of print copies - The digital future of the paper - The place of <i>Phoenix</i> in the future – deprioritised given the specificity of this point relative to others
How will we measure the success of the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short-term: - Producing tangible deliverables with buy-in from relevant stakeholders, particularly the <i>Felix</i> team and the Union's Board <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We should aim for a high degree of consensus, though not necessarily unanimity, over the trajectory we choose. - The experience and output of the editor - Stakeholder buy in (Editor and <i>Felix</i> team, board) - Readership – without tying to counterproductive metric (engagement, interest, volume) - Interest in editor role - Longer-term: - Whether the business problems and opportunities listed above are addressed. - We should measure the experience and performance of the editor, and track whether this improves - Interest in the editor role in future - Student engagement – number of writers, volunteer time, readership – we can consider metrics for these that are meaningful without engendering perverse incentives (e.g. a raw readership total that incentivises yellow journalism). <p>As the project develops, we may wish to discuss more specifically how success might be measured into the future.</p>
What will be the project deliverables (i.e. documents, training, presentations etc)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Selection process (election/appointment) clearly laid out in writing - Role description for editor in appropriate place in Union structures (e.g. overview in Bye-Laws, details in Policy) - Written accountability/support process from Union - Clarity in <i>Felix</i> constitution/regulations or similar on committee roles and responsibilities, how these may be changed, schedule of delegation etc.

	- Written record of any consultation conducted (e.g. on the output)																																	
Who is on the project team?	Abhijay Sood*, Tom Newman, Calum Drysdale, Sherwin Sabeghi (didn't join the meetings in the interests of time) , Isabelle Zhang (<i>Felix</i> Deputy Editor), Andy Wang (<i>Felix</i> Publicity Officer/Webmaster), One nominated member of Union Council (Susan Rutter)																																	
What actions and tasks are required?	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>What?</th> <th>Who?</th> <th>When</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Meet <i>Felix</i> Editor</td> <td>APS/TN</td> <td>01/02/2021</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Meet Leadership</td> <td>APS/TN</td> <td>02/02/2021</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Finalise project brief & team and arrange first meeting</td> <td>APS/TN</td> <td>05/02/2021</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree concrete steps for consultation</td> <td>Project team</td> <td>First team meeting (w/c 08/02/2021)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other steps to be agreed by project team</td> <td>Project team</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Draft outcomes prepared</td> <td>Project team</td> <td>02/03/2021</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Paper submitted to Union Council</td> <td>APS/CD</td> <td>16/03/2021</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Paper submitted to Board</td> <td>APS</td> <td>17/03/2021</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Union Council meeting – date amended to reflect scheduling change</td> <td>--</td> <td>23/03/2021</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Board of Trustees meeting</td> <td>--</td> <td>24/03/2021</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	What?	Who?	When	Meet <i>Felix</i> Editor	APS/TN	01/02/2021	Meet Leadership	APS/TN	02/02/2021	Finalise project brief & team and arrange first meeting	APS/TN	05/02/2021	Agree concrete steps for consultation	Project team	First team meeting (w/c 08/02/2021)	Other steps to be agreed by project team	Project team		Draft outcomes prepared	Project team	02/03/2021	Paper submitted to Union Council	APS/CD	16/03/2021	Paper submitted to Board	APS	17/03/2021	Union Council meeting – date amended to reflect scheduling change	--	23/03/2021	Board of Trustees meeting	--	24/03/2021
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Appendix B – Felix Mutual Expectations Document

Felix Mutual Expectations – January 2021

Abhijay P. Sood – Union President

In response to concerns about the performance of the Editor and the output of the paper, the Union President joined a Felix editorial team meeting on January 22nd, in order to facilitate a discussion on mutual expectations for the editorial team and Editor going forward. The need for a more comprehensive review was also discussed. The outcomes of the meeting follow.

Expectations

The overarching feedback was that the Felix Editor should be significantly more communicative, in order to make it easier for the wider team to do their jobs. In particular, concerns were raised about instances where volunteer effort has been sought, been provided, and then this has failed to result in a visible outcome (e.g. where articles or whole editions have been submitted and edited, but not published). In such cases, the Felix team would, entirely reasonably, expect a proper explanation.

The Felix Editor will:

- **Respond to queries within two working days**
 - o Short queries should be directed to the Felix Editor Teams account or the role Facebook account (rather than Calum’s personal account). Lengthier queries should be emailed to felix@imperial.ac.uk.
 - o Live/fast moving news stories may necessitate more rapid responses; messaging on Teams would be best for such instances.
- **Keep regular work hours of 9am-6pm on weekdays**
 - o Non-urgent queries may not be addressed outside these hours
- **Arrange virtual “office hours”** (Action 1.2 – see below)
 - o This will allow team members to e.g. “drop in” to a Teams call where the Editor may be present and working, where they can pose casual questions or initiate casual conversation. This is intended to replicate the serendipitous interactions which would occur under normal circumstances.
- **Write to the editorial team once a week** to share updates on that week’s work
 - o These may be brief and relatively informal but should ensure the committee is aware of what the Editor is up to, while making opportunities to support such work clearer.
 - o These updates should be shared in advance of the Friday evening editorial meetings.
 - o A version of these notes should be shared with the Union President and Union Director of Membership Services (Tom Newman).
- **Offer a proper explanation if things go wrong**
 - o It’s impossible to guarantee that the paper will run perfectly well. In cases where work falls short of expectations, or unforeseen problems arise, the Felix editor will **proactively communicate the reasons why** to the Felix team, the Union President, and the Director of Membership Services, and will suggest an approach for overcoming such challenges.
- **Provide a clear schedule of delegation** to make responsibilities between different team members clearer and to ensure work can continue should he be indisposed (Action 1.3)

- This schedule should reflect the fact that those the Editor might delegate to are all volunteers, so expectations on them should not be too high.

The Felix team will:

- **Attend the weekly editorial meetings**
- **Stick to a mutually agreed workflow** (Action 1.4)
- **Voice frustrations directly**
 - Where individual team members have specific grievances, they will raise these with the responsible party. In the first instance, this should entail writing in private or meeting on a one-to-one basis.
 - If the response has not been satisfactory, the matter should be escalated to the Editor.
 - Where the responsible party is the Felix Editor and the response has not been satisfactory, or where the Felix Editor has failed to handle an internal matter satisfactorily, the matter should be escalated to the Union President.
 - The Editor is committed to being more responsive to these sorts of queries in particular going forward.
- **Direct inquiries about social media to the Deputy Editor (IZ) and the Games Editor/Social Media Officer (AD) in the first instance, rather than the Felix Editor.**

The Union President will:

- **Meet with the Felix Editor at least once a fortnight**
- **Make himself available to meet Felix team members where necessary**
 - For example, if grievances cannot be resolved internally, or if members don't feel their voice is being heard adequately.
- **Provide further support at the request of the Felix editor or the Felix team** depending on availability.

Actions:

No.	Action	Responsible	Due date
1.1	Provide further training sessions on the new website	Calum D. Andy W.	25-26/01
1.2	Schedule office hours and communicate to the team how these will work	Calum D.	25/01
1.3	Write a draft schedule of delegation for responsibilities within the team*	Calum D.	29/01
1.4	Draft a clear workflow, in writing, for the paper under present circumstances*	Calum D.	05/02
1.5	Speak to the Systems Team about server challenges and get more information on way forward, exploring possibility for independent hosting; update Calum, Andy, Ahmad on this	Abhijay S.	01/02

*To be discussed and agreed at an editorial meeting. All team members, including the editor, will abide by what is agreed at these fora, or will explain why they have not been able to do so.

Further Outcomes:

In addition to the above points, and in light of the challenges the paper has faced in recent months, a Felix review for 2021 was discussed. There was broad agreement behind the need for a review, covering:

- The selection criteria for the role of editor
- The structure of the committee
- The way the role is supported by the Union/where it sits in the Union's own structures
- The operation of the paper and its output

To give time to conduct this work properly, it would be necessary to delay the election for the role of Felix Editor. This would give time for a thorough review without forcing us to delay necessary changes until the next academic year.

The Union President's proposition is for a genuine, substantive consultation process on the above elements. If the Union's Board of Trustees, the Felix team, and the wider student body cannot reach a reasonable degree of consensus around an alternative selection process, the role would be run in the Summer elections by default. There was agreement, or at least no dissent, for this course of action at the meeting.

Acknowledgement

I want to thank all the volunteers who attended and contributed to the meeting; your commitment to the paper is clear as it is welcome, and your dedication will ensure its success. I also want to thank Calum for being forthcoming about challenges and previous shortcomings, and for the willingness he has expressed to work to surmount these.

I hope that, under these terms, we can work together to restore Felix to its proper place at Imperial and secure its position for the future.