

# President Report to Union Council – January 2021

Abhijay P. Sood

## Summary:

- New year, new lockdown
- COVID-19 response – rent and assessment.

College Meetings & Prep	Student + Union Meetings & Prep	Operational work (day-to-day)	Project work (major goals)	Misc (mostly external meetings)
11%	49%	27%	0%	13%

## Regular updates:

- **COVID-19 Response** – we are still holding meetings about this on the College side, working to minimise the negative effects the national health situation worsening might lead to.
  - Safety Net – although an algorithmic safety net along the lines of last year’s is likely to be impossible to implement for practical reasons, we have begun working with the College and student representatives on principles which should be implemented to ensure assessment is fair this year. We are also talking actively with our counterparts at other institutions, to share knowledge and support efforts at the Russell Group level.
  - Rent – Shervin and I had useful conversation with Campus Services in the first week of the new year about rent waivers for term 2; we were able to convince them to make the process less onerous for students than initially intended. We are reasonably happy with the outcome for the time being, although we will need to remain vigilant as extensions to the waiver period need to be considered, and the practicalities around invoicing need to be challenged.
- **Bullying Scandal** – many of you will have seen our [back and forth](#) with the College at the end of last term, which formed part of the pressure which led to their [publication of the recommendations](#). We still have concerns about the College’s approach here, which we are continuing to raise with the Chair of Council and the Provost.
- We have had productive conversations with the **ICSMSU** President about the evolving circumstances in Medicine and the support we can offer (e.g. Ross will be supporting efforts to ensure student society-organised mock exams can go ahead safely).
- In light of the new lockdown, lots of reactive work has taken place over recent weeks (including meetings over the Christmas period); this means that some previously planned project work may be delayed.

## Upcoming:

- **Socially responsible investment** work is continuing, with a consultation likely to be announced by the College in the near future (or recent past depending on the timing of this meeting). We have now collected interested individuals in an informal group to support this work and help ensure it continues after I leave. If anyone is particularly interested in joining this, please let me know.
- **Refugee/asylum seeker access to study** – those of us who have been working on this are hoping for a tangible proposal to come to the next meeting.
- Further work encapsulated below.

### Key objective updates:

Following from my first report, I would like to share the following updates on my objectives for the year:

- i. **Working to ensure all relevant stakeholders are properly involved when the College makes decisions** – This work will begin with me developing a relationship map, including our current level of representation within College committees, ideally by the end of this month.
- ii. **Setting a stable trajectory for the Union post-2021 (2021-23)**
  1. **Strategy** – a specific subgroup of the Board of Trustees has been tasked with overseeing this process. It has met twice, and outlined a consultation procedure, including consulting with this committee, over the coming months. We are organising consultation meetings on aspects of the strategy with key student volunteers at the moment.
  2. **Handover process** – work on this will take place from March onwards
  3. **Avoiding a vacuum** – we have begun work on this. If anyone is interested in running for a role, full-time or otherwise, feel free to contact me.
- iii. **Reviewing Union Governance/Democracy**
  1. **Examining the Felix Editor and DPFS roles and clarifying the relationship between OTs and staff more generally.** – Changes to be discussed with other papers.
  2. **Clarifying our relationship with constituent unions.** – Since the last GIB meeting, we have held individual conversations with each of the CU Presidents to discuss suggestions for Council and CU support. We are aiming to collate these in advance of the next GIB meeting, to take forward.
  3. **Reviewing Union Council** – as above
  4. **Supporting the MD in clarifying the relationship between Board, its subcommittees, and Union Council** – This process will commence as a piece of work led by the MD.
- iv. **Coordinating a review of our offer to postgraduates** – I have held an initial conversation with the GSU President and will now proceed with collating information about PG engagement from prior surveys/work. Since I'm not anticipating any major centrally motivated governance changes, and with some of the key services I had in mind in an uncertain position due to the pandemic (h-bar) this will be more of a focus for term 2, with some actions left to my successor.
- v. **Ensuring the Union's staffing model is fit for the future** – meetings are scheduled on this – I may be able to provide a verbal update in the meeting
- vi. **Supporting the Officer Trustee Team** – part of my day-to-day responsibilities. I will be supporting the DPFS on work relating to SSB, the DPE on the NSS response, and the DPCS on aspects of the annual budgeting process in the coming weeks. The DPW and I have primarily been working together on matters relating to rent, representation, and communication.

Things are somewhat worse at the moment than we might have expected at the end of term 2, but the vaccines give us something to be helpful for. I hope we all stay safe this term, and that we don't give in to despair at this time; the end is in sight.

Abs

union.president@ic.ac.uk | 020 7594 8060 | IC ext: 58061