

# President Report to Union Council – February 2021

Abhijay P. Sood

## Summary:

- Felix Review
- College Council
- Petition System

College Meetings & Prep	Student + Union Meetings & Prep	Operational work (day-to-day)	Project work (major goals)	Misc (mostly external meetings)
21%	45%	21%	4%	9%

## 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 might lead to.
  - Safety Net – we are coming closer to a consensus on this, although some of the details are requiring careful negotiation.
  - Halls – conversations with the College on this are mostly looking ahead to the reductions and matching algorithms which may be applied for next year, although we’re still raising the experience and financial effect on current students.
- **Bullying Scandal** – at my instigation, supported by the elected staff member on College Council, an additional meeting of College Council was held to discuss this matter. This was the first time this matter has been discussed properly at this forum. The meeting was useful, although brief, and will need to be followed up by further discussion.
- **Felix review** – following concerns about both the short-term performance of the paper and some long-run structural issues which have been hitherto neglected, we have decided to pause the election of Felix editor to conduct a thorough review of the paper. This review has the support of the current Felix editorial team. We have a small project team comprised of officers, one ordinary Council member, and Felix committee members, supported by Union staff. See my **supplementary papers** for further detail. I may have more to say about this in the meeting, as our first project team meeting has yet to take place.
- The **College Council Away Day** is taking place on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> – I may have more to say about this in the meeting.

## Upcoming:

- **Petition System** – following a paper passed [at this committee](#) in 2017-18, I am keen to ensure this is taken forward before the end of my tenure. At that meeting, although we agreed to the principle of a petitions system, we did not agree to the specific form outlined in the appendix. I would therefore like to hold a specific meeting with any interested Council members to hone down on this – **please let me know if you’re interested.**
- **Socially responsible investment.** [There is a consultation seeking written responses on this matter.](#) I am also chairing [an event](#) on this matter – tomorrow (17<sup>th</sup> February) at 3pm.
- **Refugee/asylum seeker access to study** – those of us who have been working on this are working towards a proposal to come to the next committee meeting, in early March.
- **National Lobbying** – we are in contact with others in the sector about national lobbying efforts on issues which affect all students.

## Key objective updates:

Following from my first report, I would like to share the below updates on my objectives. These have taken a backseat this month as the Felix review and various short-term pieces of work have arisen.

- i. **Working to ensure all relevant stakeholders are properly involved when the College makes decisions** – I have begun work on the relationship map, although it is not yet complete. Governance changes, precipitated by both COVID and the scandal, may help here too.
- ii. **Setting a stable trajectory for the Union post-2021 (2021-23)**
  1. **Strategy** – we have conducted positive consultation on the values and aims of this piece of work with key volunteers and staff respectively.
  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.** – Governance level changes made to the DPFS role; Felix discussed above.
  2. **Clarifying our relationship with constituent unions.** – We have progressed this at GIB, although formal recommendations have yet to be solidified.
  3. **Reviewing Union Council** – We have taken a conscious decision to postpone any deep review until post-COVID; at this stage I think it would be best to preserve recommendations for Council as part of the work on handover, and perhaps hold a discussion here at the start of term 3.
  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** – Without any major centrally motivated governance changes, and with key services (e.g. h-bar) in an uncertain position due to COVID, this will be more of a focus after the elections, with some actions left to my successor.
- v. **Ensuring the Union's staffing model is fit for the future** – This trifurcates:
  1. **Permanent staff structure/employment relationship** – any question on this is being paused for the time being. Our current model is working reasonably smoothly, and any change would need to be developed over more time, and preferably handled post-COVID.
  2. **Student staff** – we have secured internal agreement to implement the London Living Wage in our 2021-22 budget. We will seek to formalise aspects of the employment relationship here.
  3. **Staff who support student activities** – thinking of coaches, conductors, people of that nature. Sam and Ross can speak to this better than I can; my understanding is that we would seek to ensure there are clear agreements without a formal staffing relationship.
- vi. **Supporting the Officer Trustee Team** – part of my day-to-day responsibilities.

We're now at the halfway mark of this term, and therefore of the academic year. It might be worth taking a moment to reflect on the positives, in spite of the pandemic. Personally, I'm quite confident things will improve going into the next academic term, and I'm looking forward to getting there.

Abs

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