

# Final President Report to Union Council – July 2021

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## Summary:

- So long, and thanks for all the fish

College Meetings & Prep	Student + Union Meetings & Prep	Operational work (day-to-day)	Project work (major goals)	Misc (mostly interview panels)
6%	35%	24%	12%	24%

This is the last paper I'm bringing to Union Council, having first joined this committee in 2016. As such, it's going to look a little different to normal.

## Regular Business:

To round off:

- The SRI recommendations have passed through President's Board
- I'm getting through final meetings with the College, including my final university Council meeting (alongside Lloyd) on Friday 16<sup>th</sup>.
- Handover will have started by the date of this meeting, and the current officers have spent time preparing documents and tying up loose ends before this begins.

## Final objectives update:

What follows is a table giving a final update on my key objectives for the year.

Objective	Update
<b>1. Working to ensure all relevant stakeholders are properly involved when the College makes decisions</b>	<p>This is more a guiding statement of principle than a specific goal – one I have tried to uphold and raise consistently, as I believe it is the key to making good decisions.</p> <p>Nonetheless, I am disappointed I was not able to spend more time advocating for this in particular e.g. focussing on the composition of decision-making bodies in the College. COVID-19 hitting precluded this somewhat, and some of our advances in this area e.g. to the Chair of Council have been deflected. However, there is some progress – I believe the new committee structure being planned for education under the Provost's Board will give student representatives a stronger voice within the College.</p>
<b>2. Setting a stable trajectory for the Union post-2021 (2021-23)</b>	<p>There were three pillars to this:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy redevelopment, which has successfully all but concluded.</li> <li>Avoiding a vacuum, which I would term a partial success. All major roles have been filled, which given</li> </ol>

	<p>the exhaustion the pandemic has caused among many volunteers is cause to be cheerful. However, three full-time roles were unfilled going into the summer, and many union volunteers feel quite disengaged. It is imperative that we improve this situation, and develop a stronger pipeline for students to become volunteers and for volunteers to seek increasingly senior roles.</p> <p>iii. Handover, which will be our core priority in the coming weeks.</p>
<p><b>3. Reviewing Union Governance/Democracy</b></p>	<p>There were four pillars to this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Reviewing the Felix Editor and DPFS roles, which has concluded.</li> <li>ii. Clarifying our relationship with constituent unions – we have held meetings and taken notes, but needs to be formalised on paper. If I can't finish this off before my time is up, I will make sure Lloyd and the new rep manager have the information they need to do so.</li> <li>iii. Reviewing Union Council – we decided to pause this during COVID, since we didn't want the sudden remote meetings at awkward times and the short-term effect on engagement to prejudice the outcome.</li> <li>iv. Supporting the MD on clarifying the relationship between Board, its subcommittees, and Union Council – the Union Council element isn't totally addressed, but much of the rest features in one of the other papers coming to this meeting.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Coordinating a review of our offer to postgraduates</b></p>	<p>This has now been initiated, though I will be passing the baton on to Lloyd to supervise its conclusion.</p>
<p><b>5. Ensuring the Union's staffing model is fit for the future</b></p>	<p>There were three pillars to this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Permanent staffing model – on reflection, discussion made clear that our current model wherein our staff are employed by the College has more advantages than initially thought. We are thus holding on to it, at least for the time being, albeit under a new structure which has been agreed by Board and Leadership.</li> <li>ii. Student staff – we are bringing in a real London Living Wage, amongst other things (easier access to permanent staff, formalised relationships etc.)</li> <li>iii. Staff who support student activities – Ross and I must pick this up before the end of our tenures, to give recommendations to his successor and the incoming</li> </ul>

	activities manager on how to manage staff who support student activities, short of full formal contracts.
<b>6. Supporting the Officer Trustee Team</b>	Part of my day-to-day responsibilities, though I could have certainly been more proactive on this particularly on the social side.

Further to this, working to improve the ethics of the College's investments was a key priority of mine on election to this role, and one in which there has been significant progress as discussed in this and prior reports to Council. I'm confident that this is in a position where work will continue beyond this year.

### Reflections:

All the officers have written lengthy end of year reflections for the Board of Trustees. Those that are interested can [find mine here](#), but in summary, I've discussed the following:

- How I came to be involved in the Union, primarily as an academic rep
- The operational challenges we faced in the first year, from an underperforming organisation, to kitchen closures, to staff changes
- The tense negotiations we've faced with the university on rent, responsible investment, and the safety net last year, and the more constructive conversations we've had which have markedly shifted the approach the College has taken on educational matters over the course of the pandemic.
- A whole bunch of recruitment, including for a new Managing Director
- Dealing with working under the pandemic

These areas are mostly positive; I'm proud of the changes we've achieved. We've worked to fix the Union, so that we're on a much more stable footing internally and better able to support students, perhaps best exemplified by the £640,000 grant increase we secured from the College this year. We've also challenged the university. We've pushed back on harmful changes, and worked to agree constructive alternatives. We have stood firm, but shown willingness to compromise and avoiding antagonising those on the other side of the table, gaining their respect. This has been a tremendous win-win; we've done more for students, and our esteem among College staff has actually increased. I hope this can continue in years to come.

There are, as always, some negative areas here too. Two which I would flag most prominently:

- I regret not having spent more time proactively lobbying the College to expand student (and even staff) representation on key committees/involvement in important decisions. We have raised this consistently on an individual basis, and reactively when e.g. new committees were formed to respond to the crisis. Nonetheless, though this has resulted in some gains, these could be swept away without proactive proposals coming from students. This point – arguing to expand the voices of those affected by decisions within College decision-making – is key, and I believe should be the central pillar of representation efforts facing the university. So often, influencing on the process can get you much further than beating the drum for some particular outcome. I'd encourage those of you in roles next year to consider this.

- I regret not having spent more time talking to and supporting individual student reps, including many Council members and in particular the constituent union Presidents. A combination of workload, and possibly my bad prioritising, meant I didn't speak to you guys enough, and I hope Lloyd does a better job!

I also wanted to share five **key takeaways** from my time in this role:

1. We must make **representation a higher priority in the Union**.
2. We need to work on **continuity**.
3. We **must not get sloppy**.
4. We must not **lose momentum with the College**.
5. We should work to foster **coordination in the College**.

You can read more detailed explanations of these points [in this report](#).

On the whole, this has been a tremendously positive experience, and I hope we've managed to convey that in our time in these roles.

Personally, I've thoroughly enjoyed my six years at this university, and getting involved in things beyond my degree has definitely been the highlight. These roles – full-time and part-time – give us the power to positively shape our circumstances, as well as those of others. It is a privilege to be able to do this, one which shouldn't be taken for granted, and one which all who are able should take advantage of.

I would strongly encourage anyone reading to keep engaging, and to encourage other good people to do the same. These, often relatively small contributions within our own communities, form the foundations needed to make the world a better place.

Thank you for reading, and good luck!

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