

**Imperial College Union  
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**Deputy President (Clubs and Societies) Reflections 2021/22**

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When I reflect on this year, from being elected over live stream, to bringing all the CSPs out of COVID, only to impose restrictions again a few months later, it feels like I've been doing this for far longer than 12 months. My focus has been different to what I expected, and things I took for granted become some of the most time-consuming parts of my job. It has been a learning experience, both in ways I anticipated and ways I didn't.

My objectives were, as one might expect from a DPCS, centred around the key issue of how the union supports clubs, through the processes, communication, training, sports provision, democratic structures, and finances. It is often hard to see how much change has occurred when things are changing slowly around you, but I am hopeful that students already see differences, and certainly by the start of next academic year it will hopefully be night and day.

*Processes and Operations*

In August 2021, arriving into the role, it felt like the processes lacked any structure, consistency and were generally not fit for purpose. The chaos was exacerbated by the lack of real use of these processes throughout COVID, or they had been reworked during Covid in such a way that was not practical for the levels of use in a normal term (thinking specifically of the risk assessment system, requiring multiple approvals. This made sense during covid but was tricky to phase out).

With Connor starting in September, I was able to take a step back from directly reimplementing a lot of this, and take a more high level view. I distinctly remember a mapping exercise with the team in mid September, sitting in the Union gym putting sticky notes on the mirror of everything the team needs to achieve in the year. For me, that felt like a turning point, where we got a wholesale grasp of what needed to be achieved. However, that is not to say that it was smooth sailing from there – the staff changes, the whirlwind of term meant that wholesale change was not immediate. Small changes such as drop ins, increasing the number of credit cards and reducing the many stages of approval for risk assessments were effective, but the most impactful changes are slow. The volume of work the team deals with makes it extremely difficult to make change with the number of people we have, but I am hopeful that we are on a trajectory of change.

*Communication*

Communication is strongly linked to our processes – it was in a slightly better state at the start of my year, with the newsletter in place, though it often slipped. The efforts of the activities team to ensure this is a clear and regular channel to our students have not gone unnoticed by CSPs. However, there are still on-going challenges with the email inbox. I distinctly remember a point in first term when the two inboxes directly managed by the team totalled over 1000 unread emails. The rate and variation of the emails received by the team contributes to the problem. With the advent of the helpdesk staff, this inbox is very successfully managed, generally completely empty. On the activities email, the team have

made plans, pledges and worked hard at keeping it rolling, but this email continues to be quite full and difficult to keep on top of. The new goal of a 5 day response time is promising – however I do think that the incoming DPCS will need to keep a close eye on it. The emails are surprisingly impactful on your day to day work- if the team aren't on top of it, large chunks of your day can be spent resolving these problems, as students are likely to escalate to the DPCS email very quickly, which of course makes sense.

Obviously, I originally thought a ticketing system was the answer to all these problems. It may still be, but the overhaul of the processes that is currently planned will provide a light version of this for the activities team – a whole system ticketing system is a huge project, that may be necessary, but I feel the Union needs to be in a more stable place with a clear scope if we want to do an effective implementation of one.

### *Sports*

Sports has been my biggest headache throughout this whole year. Its not something I wanted to focus on, as I've often felt in the past DPCSs have over focussed on sport, as it was generally their backgrounds. However, with Imperial Athletes, there were so many things going on that it would have been a disservice to the student, the union staff and the move team to leave it as it was.

I won't go in to detail on all the stages we went through but as much as they caused me and everyone involved headache after headache I do feel dealing with this has been one of the biggest learning points for me throughout the year. I've learned project planning, budgeting on a different scale (and pivot tables!), and most importantly, the art of the compromise. The outcome may not be exactly what I would dream up of how sport should be, but I am not the only stakeholder. In a lot of other projects that the DPCS might do, this doesn't hold.

### *Training*

I feel this has been somewhat neglected over the year – summer term and June snuck up on the team and with all the other work we didn't manage to really create a solid plan for this when I wanted it to be. I have always said I think training is best delivered in late June and then again in early September, but we just didn't manage to achieve this, with the work needed to overhaul the whole system it was not a priority in the summer term. I'm hopeful that the team be able to do this in the new academic year, and hope Dylan will be able to support this.

### *User Groups*

This was a more “nice to have” objective, rather than an essential, active issue. The plans have been laid, and it is clear what needs to happen for this to occur. If there is student demand for it, or if Dylan sees it as useful, I hope it will be taken forward. As it stands, I focused on other tasks.

### *Budgeting*

Budgeting actually went fairly well this year! We didn't completely follow the timings, but the changes made to the schedule were beneficial to the students, and doing the resolutions meeting outside of term time (but close to it) worked well too. I feel like funding was fairly

allocated this year, and I have had feedback from CSPB that they were mostly happy with how budgeting went out of all the things they have done this year.

Sport Budgeting was obviously not ideal due to the issues outlined above, but we made it work, applied a fair and consistent process across all sports, and was approved by CSPB at the final stage – a huge improvement on how the sport budgeting went last year. I am proud of the fairness in this process and hope it will be continued.

### *Wider College Impact*

Throughout my year, I've had the opportunity to sit on several college groups/panels whose remit sits beyond clubs and societies directly. I have found these extremely interesting, and the place where I found the most development of my skills and knowledge. The groups I'm specifically talking about are the President's Community Fund, the Exploration Board, and the History Working Group. I'll reflect on each in turn.

The Presidents Community Fund, a funding pot for community driven capital expenditure, highlighted to me the college's process of allocated funding, and the different sources of funding available to departments to enact change. I valued the student collaboration that was encouraged on applications, and I wish this was more well publicised to the student body, particularly reps within departments. The cocreation aspect could be used more effectively to improve student experience, just by advertising it in more detail.

The Exploration Board, a support board and funder for "adventurous" students to go on trips, outside of CSPs, was the one of the three that I felt most out of my depth in. I am not an experienced adventurer and so have little idea what goes into organising a trip like those that are proposed. However, it was fascinating to see what our students get up to, and amazing that the college provides such a valuable resource, not just in terms of finance and equipment, but also the wealth of knowledge and experience the committee provides. I hope next year the constituent union positions will be more filled, as out of 5 student positions on the board, only two were filled.

The History Working Group, the Implementation group for the Presidents Board's History Report, was the most surprising of the groups I ended up sitting on. It is not something that has normally sat within the remit of my role or existed before. I have been generally pleased with how it has gone, despite them consistently scheduling meetings while I'm on annual leave. I'm proud of how I was able to show that students categorically did not agree with dual naming, and essentially tell them we'd prefer to renaming. The jury's out on whether college will elect to follow the advice, but I'm glad we made it clear.

### *Being a staff member*

I think this area is where I have learned and developed the most through my year. While I have held jobs before, they were mostly solitary in that a project was completely mine to complete. Figuring out the boundaries of who should be doing what, especially as someone with somewhat controlling and perfectionist instincts, was a really valuable lesson. Developing plans and structure to achieve your goals, but in a collaborative way, is a life skill I will take forward.

There was also a huge element of self-accountability throughout my work. You have fewer people chasing after you asking for a specific piece of work, and so you need to personally

balance what needs to be done. I sometimes fell into the trap of (and still do) prioritising what I enjoy doing.

### *CSPB and the subcommittees*

The Clubs, Societies and Projects Board generally went well. It's been reported back to me that students felt like they knew what their responsibilities to the board were, and what they could achieve. Staff support was strong, even when it transitioned between roles. The only advice I have on this area in further is to think about how what happens at CSPB is communicated out to wider student community, as it often is a bit of a mystery to them.

As part of CSPB, there are the three subcommittees. These were a bit more of a struggle this year, as it is a significant amount of work to get through. Staff support for this was tricky, as those who previously supported the groups either left or had their roles transition away from this support. The level of administration that comes with the subcommittees makes it prohibitive for the DPCS to do them all themselves, especially since it ends up feeling like you are constantly processing them, as there are three, that would ideally happen multiple times per term. Working on them felt like pulling teeth at times, and has been what I feel one of the barriers to achieving my objectives as fully as I wished.

### *Finance*

I feel the administration of finance is becoming less and less of a barrier to the work of the DPCS (and DPFS). I felt the amount of time I spent on eActivities approvals and contract signing was reasonable, at least after Connar started. From my perspective, there is still work to be done in communicating to students who to contact about delays with financial things, as something its approval, ie Connar, Sam and I, sometimes it's the finance team (Ira has helped a lot with this!) and sometimes its other students.

### *Board of Trustees*

Board was in general an interesting and useful learning experience across the year. I think the effectiveness review in the middle of the year was very useful and has made an impact. I think there could be a few small changes to the staffing team handle pre board – primarily a clear discussion and knowledge of what is coming to the next board, either at management committee or the Officer Trustee catch up. It often felt like my awareness of what was going was very last minute, even when I was expected to be writing a paper. This is definitely at least partially due to the way being a busy OT works out but I think the staff team thinking about how they can support the officers with that would be valuable.

The above comments also apply to the subcommittees of Board, in particular Finance, Audit and Risk. Due to not sitting on FAR, I felt several extra steps behind know what was coming and when, as well as the general discussions that occur. Due to the varied pots of money the DPCS is responsible for, as well as the whole budgeting process, led by the DPCS and reported into FAR, I believe it is crucial for DPCS to be present at that board as more than an attendee. I will caveat that with I am aware that there are peripheral issues that meant this wasn't possible this year and won't be next year, but I feel it necessary to make it clear that I feel it is important for the role to sit on FAR.

### *The DPCS Role in relation to other OT roles*

Each of the Officer Trustees, and indeed the sabbatical officer roles, are unique in their challenges and role requirements. I thought it would be worth highlighting some of the ways the DPCS role is different, as this has been one of my key challenges and frustrations this year.

One of the key things I feel makes this role different is the amount of mandated/ required work. While the President, DPW and DPE have a significant amount of regular meetings they need to attend, the DPCS has a lot of process work that needs to be done. I've touched on these above, but they are primarily eActivities, emails and CSPB and its subcommittees. The DPCS receives more emails than all the other OTs (except perhaps the DPFS, who I would put on par with them). Adding this to the already large amount of operational work, as well as regularly being pulled in to fix urgent society issues, means they have less time to work on their objectives than some of the other OTs, and certainly have less control over what they spend their time doing. I felt that most of what I was doing, I was doing it because the role required it, not because that was what my goal was when I started this role. This was a source of frustration for me throughout the year.

### *Conclusion*

This turned out longer than expected! I have enjoyed my year as a Sabbatical Officer, for all its trials and tribulations it has taught me a lot of skills my degree didn't.