



FELIX EDITOR

COUNCIL REPORT

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Foreword by the Editor-in-Chief

Felix entered the 2021/22 academic year in its worst state for many years. By the end of term 3 of 2020/21, the previous Editor was producing short issues of Felix almost entirely by himself, an operating procedure which proved not at all sustainable, as I'm sure you're all aware.

I began the year working by myself, save the handover, to get things running and assess the state of the paper at that time. A survey of last year's editors showed that only 38% were staying on with the paper, either because they were graduating or due to lack of interest. This exodus hit certain sections harder than others: the Music section went from 5 editors to just 1, Arts went from 4 to 1, Science went from 3 to 0.

The pandemic has had the extra effect of meaning that everyone who joined Imperial since it began has had almost no exposure to the paper. In my first year I was not at all involved in the paper, but I knew

and would recognise the name if it was mentioned. Current first and second years, for the most part, have literally never heard of Felix, and many editors who are holding the sections together by themselves are in their final year now.

Luckily, the people who are still involved are great and competent at what they volunteer to do, and we were able to put out a substantial first issue, with continued commitment going forward. Teething issues occurred on multiple fronts, as is to be expected, however at this point I see the paper in an almost exclusively positive light and I feel that we will grow significantly through this year.

There were some issues in handover and the passing down of information and tradition, which will all be addressed in my objectives this year. I also note with great relief that the cat remains free.

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Objectives heading into the new year - back on campus

► Rebuild the Felix Community

Felix is dissimilar from other student newspapers in a number of ways. Primarily is the role of a paid Editor-in-Chief, which exists only at a handful of other UK universities. This adds an interesting dynamic to the paper's operation where the EIC is not really able to ask anyone involved in the paper to do something they don't want to - the EIC is paid, they should do the un-enjoyable tasks.

Secondly there is the general attitudes of students to the paper. I will take the University of Bristol as a comparison, the newspaper of which is called Epigram. The Epigram website lists 88 people involved with the paper who are at least at the level of "sub-editor", which suggests that there are hundreds of students who contribute or are otherwise involved in the paper. In comparison, at the time of writing, after the Welcome Fair, the Felix CSP club has 72 members. Membership is free, and would be expected to outweigh the number of people who contribute quite significantly. I have heard anecdotally that, at other universities, it is quite competitive to get the title of "staff writer", highlighting a contributor who regularly writes for one section.

Felix currently has Section Editor positions on tap. It is a sad downside of our STEM-only university that students simply are far less interested in journalism than elsewhere. These factors need to be considered when assessing the success of rebuilding the paper.

We have had a very good response from the Welcome Fair - over 60 people signed up and let us know which sections of the paper they were interested in, and I have had a constant stream of people emailing either me or the section inboxes, asking to get involved in one way or another.

Sections have grown from nothing to quite substantial in the beginning weeks of term. The Science section now has four editors and numerous contributors - we produced a five page section in the most recent issue, which would have been impossible in week one. Sections such as Environment have also gained significant traction. Environment now has 3 experienced editors.

Furthermore, the office has reopened and some of the tech and equipment we had previously has been replaced. The rest is pending Union

financial approval.

Contributors come down to the office to work on non-Felix related

tasks, which suggests to me that the community is being properly rebuilt. I am nothing but hopeful for the future.

► **The Felix Podcast and Phoenix**

THE FELIX PODCAST

The Felix Podcast is a new endeavour, never previously undertaken by an Editor. It focusses around interviewing well-known or influential academics at Imperial College, partially on their work, partially on them as people, as well as touching on topics in politics and the wider world. At the time of writing 2 episodes have been recorded, with Professors David Nutt and Jake Baum. They are roughly half an hour in length and will be available on all normal platforms (Spotify, Apple Podcasts etc.). So far I have been the host, however other contributors to Felix will be taking over certain episodes in the future. Episodes will be released semi-regularly and the frequency will be determined further down the line where the balance of timing podcast and newspaper work can be more accurately assessed. Two contributors have so far expressed interest in editing the podcast and work on the first episode has begun, however this process takes far longer than I had anticipated. Multiple episodes will have been released by this year's second Felix report.

PHOENIX

Phoenix is Felix's predecessor, originally formed in 1904 off the back of H G Wells' creation the Science Schools Journal. Today Phoenix provides an outlet for the literary side of Imperial students and is available to facilitate the publishing of anything creative, including but not limited to short stories, poems, screenplays and illustrations. From what I can see on the records, Phoenix has been periodically restarted and shut down during the 21st century, depending on the enthusiasm of the Editor and contributors in the given year. The idea of restarting Phoenix was already in full swing when I took over the paper, and is now being jointly overseen by myself and the unofficially appointed Phoenix Editor. Advertising for Phoenix has begun in a rather rudimentary form of posters around campus. We will soon be running a series of social media ads for the magazine, and hope to publish the first issue at the beginning of term two. From this point on, we will publish once per term, assuming the contributions allow this.

THE FELIX PODCAST



The Felix Podcast Logo

► Reassessment of the Distribution Network

One of the most significant things I noticed upon starting the Editor job was the lack of structure to the distribution run. The so called “Bible”, a handover document compiled by a particularly diligent Editor some years ago, lists a very sweeping distribution summary based on what he used to do, however the number of copies in each location and the locations themselves are not justified or evaluated against changing consumer behaviour.

Because of this, one of my main goals for term one was to accurately assess the distribution in an attempt to more efficiently supply papers, where more readers are reached, fewer copies are needed and therefore less paper is wasted. This task has proven far harder than anticipated. Stacks of papers are rarely found where they were placed the week before, making accurate numbers hard to record.

Despite this, we have rough recordings of copies left over for multiple runs, along with the average time taken to distribute to each part of campus. This has allowed us to reduce the copies printed per week without reducing the readership, therefore saving paper. Sadly, economies of scale in the print business mean that the money saved is negligible.

Distribution also now includes the White City campus, which receives copies each week via the internal postal service. Some post-graduate students at the White City campus have very kindly agreed to distribute there once the copies arrive.

Updated recommendations for distribution will be added to the new Bible, which is now in the form of a Wiki. This is addressed in the next point.

► Updating the “Bible” and Wiki

As mentioned previously, the “Bible” is a handover document compiled by an Editor a few years ago. It is exceptionally useful and provides a good point of reference to remind myself of things I can’t remember from the handover. This being said, it has some notable flaws:

- There is only one copy. This is a physical copy, as far as I’m aware it doesn’t exist digitally and so would be very easy to lose. Due to the state of the Media Hub, this did in fact happen and I didn’t have it for the first two months of my tenure.
- It cannot be easily updated. Other than scribbling out information entered previously and replacing it, standard procedure cannot be altered when processes change and information such as account passwords remain out of date and insecure.
- It is not searchable. Finding out a certain piece of info may require searching through the almost 90 pages of the document

In light of these issues, I have decided to make a new “Bible” in the form of a Felix Wiki. The Wiki is currently live

online, however is largely incomplete. It will continually be filled out through the year and will likely remain a work in progress for years. This has the added benefit of doubling as a style guide, which section editors working remotely can refer to to ensure they are formatting their section correctly for the print version. This process is heavily supported by the Felix Webmaster, without whom this would all not be possible.

The existence of the wiki should massively improve handovers, and mean that incoming editors can read over the information contained and familiarise themselves before the handover officially begins. With everything tabulated, it will also make it more likely that stylistic differences are spotted and a consensus can be more easily decided on.

The “Bible” has incredibly useful guidance in it, including the basics of media law and guidelines on reporting on specific topics such as suicide, which require very specific nuance that may otherwise be unknown to a new editor. This guidance will be verified by a media lawyer and updated where necessary by the end of the year.

► Website Audit

The club committee and I have spent time over the past couple of months assessing the website and deciding on changes we’d like to make to it,

prioritising these and evaluating the feasibility of ideas with the Webmaster. We have so far made multiple stylistic changes and changed how the website

appears on web browser and mobile. Challenges have arisen where trying to keep the website up to date now the print version is back. The website is massively less popular than the print version, judging by site analytics. Embarrassingly, pages such as “About Felix” sometimes feature on the trending tab, which is driven by actual popularity of the pages rather than selection by anyone in Felix. On top of this, most editors do not know how to upload to the website, and there is no

convenient time to get people to upload other than the Monday after we print, which is three days after the print issue is distributed across campus. The alternative is that I upload all sections to the site each week, which would take a significant amount of time which I’m not sure I have spare. This issue will hopefully be solved through development of the wiki, which will host clear upload instructions that section editors can refer to remotely.

► Advertising from Newspaper Stands

Through conversation with Union staff, Felix has secured a contract with the advertising firm RockBox for three newspaper stands with built-in screens used for advertising. Not only are these free, but Felix receives 25% of advertising revenue generated through use of the screens.

This provides Felix with a substantial, guaranteed amount of SGI each year which can be used to improve our facilities and fund socials and similar events. It also provides us with free advertising space on the screens which can either be sold or donated to the Union or other societies.

Aims going forward

► Drive social media engagement

We are now blessed with a very competent publicity officer and social media interactions have so far proven successful in recruitment and advertising events. Felix recently had a very successful social in The Union Bar, largely advertised through Instagram. It has also been very useful for sharing more prominent articles and advertising when a new issue is

out on campus. I hope to maintain this level of engagement and grow it through the year. We have started a writers’ group on Facebook in the hope of making it easier for section editors to retain regular contributors. So far writers have written just one or two articles, as opposed to every week, more often than we would hope.

► **Maintain quality**

Felix has managed so far to produce four issues this year, all of which I am more than happy with the quality of. We have received significant praise for aspects of each issue and I can only hope that this quality is maintained for the rest of the year. I have heard rumours and have seen first-hand that this job can lead to burn-out, which I

so far am not experiencing, however I am wary that we are only a fraction of the way through they year at the moment. One of the results of the Felix review was devolved but consistent Union oversight, for which I am largely grateful as I feel it goes a long way to mitigate such things happening.

► **Union Oversight and Future Changes**

The Felix review largely concluded that a working assessment of Felix's relationship with the Union over the next few years would be necessary. This covers aspects of funding, advertising and managerial oversight. I have so far enjoyed a close and collaborative relationship with the Union President, Deputy Presidents and senior management, with my official liason

as the Director of Membership Services. This relationship seems overwhelmingly productive and I hope it can be codified and continued in future years. This being said, changes to aspects such as the way the Editor is elected, print frequency and methods to mitigate the paper falling apart may be reassessed in the future, subject to Union consultation.