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Executive summary

This paper is a summary of the Students' Union's current activity. The following areas are covered.

1. Sabbatical Officer Key Highlights/Priorities
2. Strategic Plan 2019-2022 update
3. Key Updates
4. Updates on recent work
5. Programme Representation
6. Union Advice Service update

Action(s) required from the Committee:

The Union would like Senate to note and discuss the report.

The table below outlines which committees/groups have already seen the report and the resulting outcome/action from discussions.

Committee date	Committee title	Outcome/action	Action date	Paper version number

Chair's Note: Senate October 2020, SU Standing Report

City Students' Union Senate Report | October 2020

City, University of London Students' Union is an independent charity that works in partnership with City, University of London. The Union is a student-led organisation, whose leadership comprises both sabbatical and part-time elected student officers with the support of a professional staff team to ensure we are positively impacting on the student experience. This report outlines the Union's current priorities and recent progress towards its objectives.

Sabbatical Officer Key Highlights/Priorities

The elected sabbatical officers, Saqlain, Ruqaiyah and Shaima, have been working hard over the summer to develop key priorities reflective of their manifestos and meet the needs of students at City. Below are some of the sabbatical officers' highlights and priorities.

	Heading	Information/Update
1	Black History Month (Strategic Priority 3)	To raise awareness of black history and celebrate cultural diversity at City, the Union have a planned series of online activities, panel discussions and promotions with a central theme that "Knowledge is power" as part of Black History Month in October. The month will have four areas of focus: Black students in Higher Education, wellbeing, Being Black in the UK, and #BLM.
2	Islamophobia Awareness Month (Strategic Priority 3)	The Union will be supporting Islamophobia Awareness Month in November. During the month, activities and events will focus on Prevent, Islamophobia, the student experience, and the Global pandemic of Islamophobia. The Union will be hosting guest speakers throughout the month and working with different Muslim societies to ensure a wide range of engaging activities take place.
3	Humans of City (Strategic Priority 4)	Led by the Vice President Community and Wellbeing, Shaima Dallali, the Union has recently launched its Humans of City campaign. The aim of the campaign is to bring students and staff closer together to support the development of an empowering, accepting, and diverse community at City. Further information about the campaign can be found here: https://www.citystudents.co.uk/student-voice/campaigns/humansofcity/
4	Assessment and Feedback (Strategic Priority 3)	Led by the Vice President Education, Ruqaiyah Javaid, the Union will shortly be undertaking work to understand the issues behind assessment and feedback (including inconsistency, past papers and module examples, lack of individualisation, time). Based on this work, recommendations will be presented to City.
5	Digital Inclusion Project (Strategic Priority 2)	The Union have been working closely with the University to support the launch of the Digital Inclusion Project. The project aims to ensure that all students have access to the correct equipment and technology that they

need to support their learning, as well as engagement in extra-curricular activity.

Strategic Plan 2019-2022



The Union launched its new Strategic Plan on the 1 August 2019. The plan was developed by the Union based on wide-ranging research engaging students via surveys and focus groups, canvassing key colleague opinion at City, and entering into dialogue with the Union Board of Trustees through a series of stakeholder interviews.

The strategy can be viewed at: www.citystudents.co.uk/strategy/

The strategy has provided the Union with a renewed focus on the issues and activities that students care about, which has led to four clear priorities:

- **Priority 1: Making you stand out from the crowd**
- **Priority 2: Making the most of your money**
- **Priority 3: A platform for driving improvements**
- **Priority 4: Health, happiness and community**

In light of COVID-19 and the closure of the University estate, the Union has revised the operational plans underpinning its strategic priorities. The revised operational plans were submitted to the Union's Trustee Board meeting in April and welcomed. The Union are now in the process of delivering year two activity to implement its strategy. The activity, which will be covered in further detail below, includes developing our academic societies provision offer, undertaking a democracy review to ensure students are able to make change easily, and employing an Academic and Money Advisor to support students to make the most of their money.

Key Updates

Executive Committee 2019/20

The last Student Executive committee was held on 28 May, attended by outgoing and incoming members. The meeting was both part of the incoming team's handover programme as well as a chance to discuss City's Covid-19 response and the group's achievements over the academic year.

Some of the achievements by the 19/20 team included:

- Negotiating with the University to obtain a space on campus, which will be redesigned for students to socialise.
- Putting on a programme of events to celebrate Black History Month.
- Collaboration with societies over Islamophobia Awareness Month.
- Working with the University Library Services team to launch a new initiative; 'Liberating CityLibrary', which allowed students and staff to recommend books to help us improve the diversity of our collections.
- The launch of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower campaign.

Green Impact:



The Students' Union successfully completed the Green Impact Workbook for the 2019-20 Academic Year. Following the submission and an audit, City, University of London Students' Union received the 'Good' rating for the award. Our work this year has focused on educating and encouraging Programme Reps to engage with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and by providing Reps with a range of environmentally conscious incentives in 2019/20.

Other key areas that contributed to the achievement include the range of policies passed at our Student Members Meeting, such as creating an opt-out paper system and a policy on Climate Change.

As was noted by our auditor, we have been able to focus on sustainability education and our collaboration between the SU and Institution to embed the SDGs into teaching and practice. We are now focusing on extending the Sustainability Training for Programme Reps to all of our Student Leaders and to get more student involvement in our Green Impact work.

We have signed up to the 2020/21 Green Impact award and created a working group to begin work for the submission this year. The working group consists of the Ethics and Environmental officer and members of the Representation, Activities and Sabbatical officer teams.

The Students' Union is also going to be conducting some primary research into students' views on sustainability and are collaborating with other Students' Unions that are working toward the Green Impact award as part of the monthly SU Sustainability Forums.

This achievement also complements the Union's Strategic Priorities' Enabler priority 'A sustainable future', which is to work towards the Sustainable Development goals and be recognised as 'very good' in Green Impact by 2022.

(Virtual) Student Council

The final Student Council meeting of 19/20 academic year was held in May. It was the first time the meeting had been held virtually. Student Council is the highest representational body of the Union and sets the Student Policy of the Union. In advance of the meeting, eight motions were submitted, two of which were academic-related. One of the motions proposed an additional retake period and the other, free text-books for electives.

The ‘additional retake period’ motion proposed a simplified and accessible Extenuating Circumstances procedure for students. Currently, students who are affected by extenuating circumstances can only repeat their exams in August. The motion noted that this would have a serious impact on the affected students, including a delayed final transcript, limited contact with the lecturer marking the paper/exam for as many as 9 months before taking the exam (for 1 term assessments), and a large gap between the delivery of teaching and the resit. The motion also noted that students can miss the opportunity to gain work experience during the month of August.

If EC decisions could be ratified by an Assessment Board before April/March, and before May assessments, there could be an interim resit period in April or June. This would mean that, for most courses, the resit would be as close as possible to teaching, rather than months down the line. Providing an earlier resit period closer to the end of teaching on the module may increase student progression and attainment. Additionally, in case a student fails to claim EC within the timeframe appropriate to the assessment, this motion would avoid the delay until the release of results in June before the possibility of claiming EC via appeal.

The ‘free text-books for electives’ motion highlights the hidden costs in some courses. Currently, some elective modules have required text books that can cost over £30; despite the copies available in the library, these are, in most cases, not sufficient to equip the number of students per course. Students believe that, by providing free text-books (or e-books) to all students in electives where these are required, overall student satisfaction and grades would significantly improve.

Disabled students research project

In the spring, the Union completed a remote research project into the experience of Disabled students at City, specifically aimed at creating an accessible and supportive community that strengthens their voice as a group at the University. The project was enabled by a small pot of funding available through the Access and Participation Plan (APP) following a bid put in by the Union.

Work completed as part of this project included hosting a survey targeted at Disabled Students, facilitating a series of interviews with students who completed the survey, and writing a report on the findings. The next step will be to create a plan to set up a Disabled Students Network, which will be led by the priority four group.

Academic Impact/NSS Action Plan

Following a drop in City and the Union’s NSS scores for the second year running, a group was convened to create an action plan for improving next year’s results. An Academic Impact action plan has been developed to ensure the Union is closing the feedback loop and reporting back on activity that has had an impact on the academic experience at City. Some of the key features of this plan are:

- To build narrative and accountability around our Officers, i.e. what have they been up to, how are they representing students remotely.
- To tell the story of the Union, i.e. how our strategy is going, what new services we are launching, what we need help with.
- Monthly Officer updates.
- Wins from student leaders across the Union published across social media.

Student Voice 20/21

On 29 July, the University's Education and Student Committee received a Student Voice Paper. The paper was written in partnership with City and outlined the proposed approach to Student Voice and Representation for 2020-21 in relation to: i) Programme Representatives ii) wider student feedback mechanisms. The paper took into consideration changes to the design of the education and student offer from predominantly face-to-face to mainly online with some on-campus delivery for 2020-21. Key features of the plan included:

Online feedback form & issues tracker

To enable Reps to provide the Union with timely feedback, an online form hosted via Qualtrics or similar will be developed for both Reps and the wider student population. This will be hosted on the Union's website and will be included in Rep induction and staff resources. Information collected from this form will be used to populate an issues tracker to ensure students are up to date with what is happening with their issue.

Termly Student Voice Reports

Introduced in the 19/20 academic year, the Union will continue to create a termly Student Voice Report to be shared with University colleagues both centrally and in Schools. These documents will use data collected from across the term (online form, SSLC minutes, SEC minutes, survey information etc.) to summarise key issues, actions and wins.

Phone/video calls

The Union will increase its outreach work with Student Leaders and introduce a programme of randomised phone/video calls to Reps. The phone calls will focus on Rep wellbeing and act as a personalised touch-point for volunteers to share any concerns or frustrations they come across in their role. Calls to students who are not Reps will complement this activity to check feedback being raised is representative of the student voice. Much like phone/video calls to Programme Reps, students will be randomly selected for check-in phone calls and asked a series of questions to give their opinion on.

Online forums pilot

The Union's website has been redesigned with a new look launched in September. Part of this review will include the launch of online forums hosted via the Union's website for Reps. It is hoped the forums will function to allow students to ask questions, share their experiences and discuss topics of mutual interest.

Student 'Big Ideas' platform

MSL, the Union's website provider, has a function titled the Big Ideas Platform. This function allows students to table an idea they believe should be brought to the attention of the Union and of their fellow students. Once their idea is posted on the platform, they can then ask students to show support for the idea for it by voting for it. Equally, students who are not supportive of it can give it a thumbs down. This function will allow students to highlight issues and advance ideas whether on-campus or remotely.

Closing the feedback loop

Throughout our Student Voice work, closing the feedback loop will be essential in keeping students up-to-date with issues they care about. The Union's Annual Survey results underscored a need for this focus (NPS 52% agree the Union raises issues they care about, NPS 48% agree the Union takes actions on issues, NPS 43% agree the Union brings about change). Some of the ways the Union will seek to close the loop will be as follows:

- A weekly update from Officers on what they are working on to students; this is an initiative that was introduced during lockdown, achieving good feedback.
- A regular update via articles from Officers/Union Staff on reports and policy-lobbying activity.
- Updates to students on activity taking place in response to 'Big Ideas' submitted.
- Verbal updates through phone calls with students submitting issues.
- Ongoing communication of the Union's 'Academic Impact', i.e. wins relating to students' academic experiences.
- A reports page on the Union's site to publish research that is completed with groups of students/ Student Leaders. E.g. Disabled Students' Experience Report 2020.

Since the endorsement of the recommendations in July, significant progress has been made in a number of areas including:

- Extending returning programme reps' terms in office through to the end of the year in order to provide some level of continuity in student voice;
- working with Schools to host Programme Rep elections via our website;
- launching the Big Ideas' platform, allowing students to raise ideas and issues they care about to the Union outside of the traditional feedback mechanisms;
- Developing our academic communities offer by bridging the gap between Programme Reps and Academic Societies.

This work will be central in the Union providing useful and timely feedback on the student experience over this academic year.

Programme Representation

During the summer, it was jointly agreed by the Students' Union and University that all returning Programme Representatives would have their terms in office extended for the duration of the academic year. In effect, all Programme Reps that held the role in 2019/20 would be 'rolled over' for an additional year.

This change was communicated to schools and Reps via email and the Students' Union has created a number of guidance documents for the upcoming year.

First, Reps were informed of this change via an email from the Vice President Education and Students' Union Representation Team. This email explained that the decision had been made in order to ensure timely feedback can be gathered in light of the CoViD-19 pandemic and blended learning experience. The rollover is conducted on an opt-out basis, and this email statement to Reps contained the Opt-out form in order to clearly offer Reps the opportunity not to continue in their roles should they so choose. An election will be held where Reps have opted out, along with elections on all first-year courses.

The list of Reps that have opted out was communicated to schools on the 28th September.

In line with the recommendations of the Representation Review, all Programme Rep elections in 2020 will be held online via the Students' Union online elections platform. Schools have been informed of the elections timeline and data needed from courses and nominees in order to facilitate online elections.

Finally, the Staff Handbook and other relevant resources such as the Code of Conduct and Role Description have been updated to include these changes and this has been sent out to schools as of the 21st September. The Students' Union is also holding five drop-in sessions throughout the week beginning 28th September to support staff with any queries they have.

Programme Reps will be elected between the 13th and 16th October and training will commence with induction training for new Reps from the 19th October.

Programme Representatives and Academic Societies

The Activities and Representation teams are working together to strengthen the relationships between existing Academic Societies, Programme Representatives, course staff, and students in each area. In addition to the relevant sessions over Welcome, the Union is analysing crossover between engaged students in these areas and creating guidance for University staff to help bridge these gaps.

Beyond Welcome 2020, the Union will be attempting to launch 'academic communities' in areas of low satisfaction according to the 2020 National Student Survey. This includes targeted messaging through Moodle and working with already-engaged members around starting new societies, promoting the City Fund for students to run course-based activity, and offering event support for communities at any level.

Programme Representatives will also be asked to ‘recommend a friend’ to start a new society on a course where there is none, in a similar scheme to election-based nominations that have previously been successful in the Union.

Union Advice Service Update

Union Advice service statistics

The service is currently in the process of filing all cases and collating data for the period between April and September 2020.

Early analysis shows a reduction in the number of cases. There appears to be a significant drop in Extenuating-Circumstances-related enquiries, which is usually our largest area of work. We believe this is due to the Supporting Your Academic Success (SYAS) and Contingency Regulations operating as intended.

Statistics for the service between April 2020 and the end of the academic year 2019/20 will be available early in Term 1 2020/21.

Advice Quality Standards (AQS) kitemark

Our AQS application was submitted in August and the Desktop Audit stage is underway.

The Desktop Audit is expected to take around 28 days, followed by a period of corrective action. We wrote, collated and submitted around 40 pieces of evidence and hope for minimal corrective actions.

Wellbeing and exam stress

We detected a potential increase in the number of academic integrity cases after studies moved online.

The service drafted web articles including advice in this area and are hosting Welcome sessions to brief students on the basics of academic integrity and misconduct.

Student Check-Ins (previously Wellbeing Checks)

Members of staff from across the whole Union have worked hard to plan and prepare for our “Student Check-Ins” activity. All Union staff, as well as trained student staff, will be supporting this activity.

The calls will focus on student preparedness for this academic year while signposting students to sources of support.

We aim to have meaningful, helpful conversations with a target of 5,000 City students over the weeks of 5th and 12th October 2020.

Feedback, data and other information from the checks will be collated and analysed with the assistance of our Representation team, with a report produced to help guide the work of the Union for 2020/21.

Money Advice service

Budget was approved for the service to recruit an Academic & Money Advisor post to support building this new service in 2020/21. Recruitment is now complete and a start date for the new Advisor is imminent.

As of 21st September 2020, the service will be able to offer advice on drawing up and maintaining a sustainable student budget. Students can be signposted to internal and external services for regulated advice.

All Advisors are now trained to the MAS Framework ‘Initial Contact’ level and have a basic understanding of money and debt advice to aid signposting.

The Advice Manager has drawn together an initial roadmap to train the Advisor to the MAS Framework ‘Advice’ level, as well as apply for, and obtain FCA authorisation to start providing regulated debt counselling advice. Planning will continue once the new Advisor has started.

Union Advice will be delivering a budgeting workshop during the Welcome period. A budgeting page on the Union website also points to good-quality sources of budgeting guidance, including budgeting tools and calculators.

Short-Term Loans

The service will administer a new Short-Term Loan scheme in order to help students with short-term cash-flow issues.

The scheme allows students to apply for a loan of up to £200. The loan is interest-free and repayable across 6 months. A budget of £5500 has been allocated for the loan.

The scheme launched on the 21st September 2020

Saqlain Riaz- SU President 2020/21