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## Bio & Policy Statement from A Nominee for President Board of Governors 2024-2025



**Lee WILLIAMSON**

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A year ago, I pledged to lead with pragmatism. I vowed to fully engage with the challenges that we face as a press club, while working to secure the long-term future of the FCC. I believe that I've been delivering on that promise.

Behind the scenes, I've worked closely with my board colleagues to get the work done properly—ensuring we have the right counsel, building useful relationships and tightening our governance processes.

Here are some of the things we have accomplished in the last 12 months:

- The FCC resumed issuing press freedom statements after a lengthy hiatus, thanks to a process that was put in place to overcome internal logjams that had resulted in a prolonged silence from the club. We have published eight press freedom statements so far this board year.
- We have also made our voice count in other ways. In February, the FCC made a submission to the Security Bureau on the Consultation Document of Article 23 of the Basic Law, suggesting the inclusion of a public interest defence in the ordinance. Last year, we also filed a written opinion in support of HKJA's submission as an interested party in the injunction to ban the song Glory to Hong Kong, which expressed our concern regarding the absence of provisions to protect news reporting.
- We've prioritised member recruitment, with a particular emphasis on bringing more young journalists into the club through initiatives such as the Young Journalist Training Programme, which has hosted five subsidised workshops so far this board year, and open-house evenings for early-career journalists.
- We're also working to bring back the FCC Journalism Conference for the first time in five years. With a theme of "Let's Get to Work", programming for the May 4th event is focused on helping attendees add to their skill sets and master the tools they need to be a journalist in 2024.
- The club also hasn't shied away from hosting discussions on the important topics, bringing newsmakers into the FCC to speak with journalists and debate the issues of the day. In the last 12 months, we have hosted talks on the District Council reforms, the National Security Law and Article 23 among others.
- Outside of press freedom issues, this Board also appointed a new general manager, David Brightling, after an exhaustive five-month search. David has a wealth of experience, having managed some of Asia's most eminent private clubs across a decades-long career. He's already made improvements to the member experience at the FCC, and we eagerly anticipate how he will use the results of the club's member survey to further enhance our offerings.
- I'm also delighted to see that the Charity Committee—which we reinstated after a long absence—is up, running and bringing members together in service of a greater good.

Maybe it's just me, but it feels like the FCC has been getting its groove back.

Last year, we celebrated our club's 80th anniversary. I want to see the FCC celebrate another 80 years in Hong Kong. As a board, our role is to be good campers—to leave the campsite better than we found it.

As one panellist put it just after our talk on Article 23: The FCC is the last place in Hong Kong where discussions like this can still happen. With dozens of civic society groups disbanding since 2020, they might be right.

That's a heavy responsibility to carry. For some people, we will never say enough, never do enough. My take: I don't ever want to see a Hong Kong without the FCC. That silence would be deafening.

It's still too early to understand the full impact of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance on the work of journalists in the city. One thing we do know beyond any doubt is that there has never been a more important time to be a journalist in Hong Kong.

That's why this year I make the same pledge. If re-elected as your president, I will continue to walk the new-normal tightrope—fully engaging in the issues, making our voice count and working to secure the long-term future of the FCC. While I can't guarantee particular outcomes, I will continue to strive for transparency and proactive communication with members.

As I stated in my recent President's Letter, the future of the FCC is inexorably tied with the future health of press freedom in the city. Both, therefore, are tied with the long-term prosperity of Hong Kong. I know that every member joins me in wanting nothing but the best for all three.