

NSS Response

2013



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Introduction

Whether we like it or not, the National Student Survey (NSS) has become embedded into higher education in the UK. The NSS results have a strong impact on league tables and potential students are looking at these more and more when deciding which university they will choose. The results are however a useful indicator of student opinions, and a reminder that students do matter.

We want Imperial's NSS scores to be as high as possible, but this should not be our primary objective. Our primary objective should always be to ensure that every single one of our students has the best possible experience at Imperial; enjoying not only their course, but also their whole university experience. If we achieve this, the NSS scores should rise to reflect this increase in student satisfaction.

▲▲
We want Imperial's NSS scores to be as high as possible, but this should not be our primary objective

This year we have created a completely new set of recommendations, and have only included recommendations in areas where they are needed. In some areas the College performs well, and where Imperial features in the top quartile the message from us is to keep going with what is currently happening.



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However, we want to stress that outstanding recommendations from the previous two years should not be forgotten, and those recommendations that remain uncompleted should still be focussed on. There has been great progress made on many of these previous recommendations, and we want to thank everyone at the College for all the work they have put into achieving these.

With increased efforts from both the Union and College, turnout increased to 81% for the 2013 survey; a huge 10% increase on last year. This marks Imperial's highest ever NSS participation rate, and is higher than any of our direct competitors. Overall satisfaction with Imperial increased to 87%, while satisfaction with

Imperial College Union increased 6% from last year, cementing our status in the top quartile and putting us in the Top-20 Higher Education Institution's Students' Unions in the UK.

▲▲
We need to constantly think of ways to enhance the educational experience at Imperial

There are some fantastic results to celebrate; Earth Science and Engineering have showed us that 100% is possible, while Chemical Engineering students at Imperial are the most satisfied Chemical Engineering students in the country. At the other end of the spectrum, Assessment and Feedback scores are still 5% below the sector average.

We acknowledge that any improvements and new initiatives put in place by College will take a few years to appear in NSS results, however in the current Higher Education environment we cannot afford to sit back and wait for these to show as we will be left trailing behind the ever-improving sector. We need to constantly think of new ways to enhance the educational experience at Imperial, and we are looking forward to working with College to ensure improvements continue to be made.



Important note

Throughout this report, we have used the JACS Level Three classification system for academic subjects, as available in the collated NSS results. We refer to the JACS Level Three academic categories using the most appropriate Imperial College London departmental name in this report for ease of reading. These figures differ very slightly from the course or department-specific figures also found in the results.

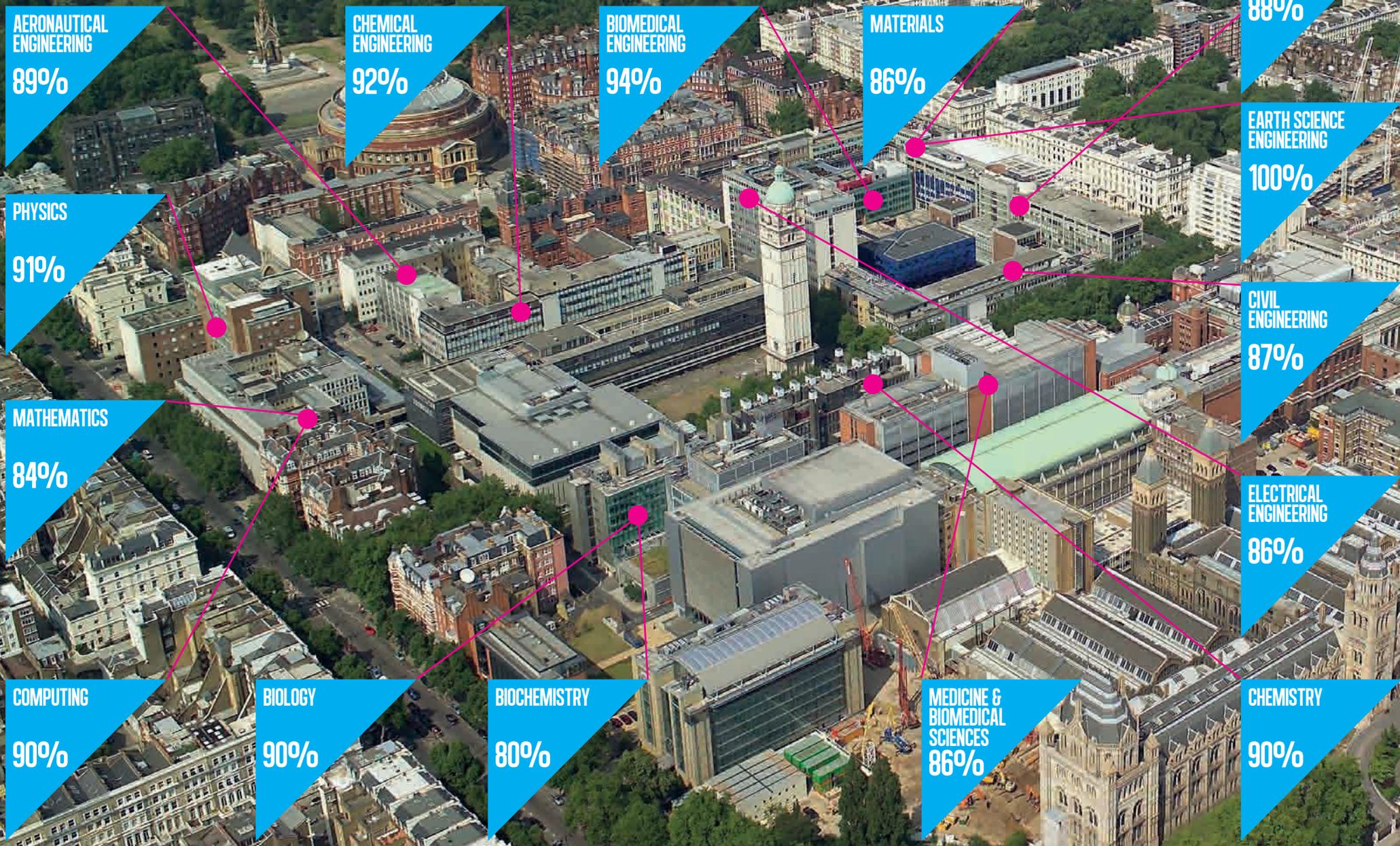
For a digital copy of this report and accompanying information go online to

imperialcollegeunion.org/nss2013



All information correct at the time of going to print October 2013.

Overall Satisfaction by Department



Teaching

88%
2013

86%
2012

86%
2011

87%
SECTOR AVERAGE

89%
RUSSELL GROUP
AVERAGE



Some staff have been excellent teachers, who show enthusiasm for students and learning

BIOLOGY STUDENT



Some lecturers displayed a high degree of dedication, and most teach their subjects well

AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT



The course was intellectually stimulating. Great experience to attend classes by college lecturers/guest lecturers who are senior researchers of specialised fields

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT



Lecturers don't explain, they just reiterated what's on slides, so we have to do all the learning by ourselves

EEE STUDENT



On the whole, lecturers have been knowledgeable and helpful, and were able to effectively communicate difficult topics and make the subject interesting

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT



Undergraduate labs, especially third year, were uninspiring and I do not feel I gained much from them

PHYSICS STUDENT



Some excellent courses (especially in third and fourth year), taught by inspiring lecturers who explained concepts clearly and made the subjects very interesting

PHYSICS STUDENT



Unfortunately, some lecturers are very poor at teaching. It is obvious that they are experts in their fields, but some simply haven't put much thoughts into their lecture and course structures

EEE STUDENT



The course has often felt like a heavy overload of information and facts in the shortest time possible. It's been difficult to have enough time to process and fully understand something before moving on to the next lecture

BIOLOGY STUDENT

Although Imperial has improved in this area to a satisfaction rating of 88% and is now above the sector average (87%), the College still needs to improve to reach the top quartile which currently begins at 90%. There are many positive comments about teaching at Imperial; however there are also plenty of respondents who felt like their lecturers didn't really want to be teaching them.

We need to ensure that the many great teachers we have at Imperial are celebrated, and rewarded through measures such as the Union's Student Academic Choice Awards.

Imperial scored highly on providing intellectually stimulating courses, with many respondents appreciating that they are taught by world-leading experts on a range of fascinating topics.

As ever, sharing best practice across departments should be encouraged, as departments who are falling behind can learn from those who have high levels of student satisfaction for teaching.

Research-Led Teaching

The lowest scores in the teaching section were for the question "Staff have made the subject interesting", showing that this is an area for improvement. The College strategy states that at Imperial we want to reduce the time it takes for research to leave the lab and enter the undergraduate syllabus, and with a renewed focus on research-led teaching this can be achieved. Saying this, researchers also need to know the importance of teaching. There is a perception amongst some respondents that some academics don't want to teach, or that teaching is a secondary priority to their research. Lectures can be inspiring, but those delivering them are the key to ensuring this happens.

Recommendation

For the College to promote a renewed focus on research-led teaching.



Intellectually stimulating, with access to excellent teaching and material from staff members who are experts in their field

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT



Top-notch research creates a stimulating environment

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Departmental Teaching Champions

From the free-text responses respondents feel like they are low down on Imperial's priority list, and that they take a back-seat to research. Appointing Departmental Teaching Champions would show all students that Imperial takes teaching seriously, and confirm to students that they are a top priority.

These champions would also help the sharing of best practice, by creating a network of people who are really enthusiastic advocates for teaching. Teaching Champions could also promote the School of Professional Development and Educational Development Unit, encouraging other members of staff in their department to utilise the training and development opportunities that are available to them. Furthermore, Teaching Champions could support the raising of standards to improve the quality of teaching in their departments, and negotiate constant development targets for members of teaching staff.

These positions could provide recognition for those members of staff who are really passionate about teaching, and will hopefully be seen as a reward for their strong teaching abilities.



Our lecturers are researchers who have been told they have to teach. Therefore, they don't care or have the enthusiasm for teaching you would expect. This makes Imperial a very hard place to learn

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Recommendation

Appoint Departmental Teaching Champions in every department.



Lecturers often seem more interested in their research than teaching. As a result, the course is very much "self-taught"

MATHS STUDENT



The general vibe that Imperial gives is of its preoccupation with its status as an institute for research; it feels like the undergraduates are somewhat unimportant and are even sometimes a necessary nuisance to some researchers who are required to teach when they do not wish to do so

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT

Intellectual Motivation

The first of this year's optional question banks related to Intellectual Motivation, where Imperial scored a satisfaction rating of 78%, below the sector average by 3%, and particularly badly on the question: "My course has stimulated enthusiasm for further learning", which showed a 74% satisfaction rating. It is not clear whether this low score is because students do not feel motivated enough to continue further learning, or simply because they do not want to carry on with further study.

However, we do have some concern about the perceived lack of information available for those who want to continue on with further study, as opposed to the citing of

good careers advice that the majority of students receive. The College strategy states the aim to increase the number of Undergraduates progressing to Postgraduate study, so improvements in this area are necessary to ensure that this is achievable. Imperial also seems to be underperforming in keeping students motivated, with numerous respondents commenting that doing the same type of assessment over and over again can be monotonous as opposed to stimulating. These low scores could also be linked to the perceived heavy workload, and this burden of work sapping students' interest in their subjects. More discussion on workload is provided in the next section.

Further work in this area

As these are an optional set of questions there is no data from previous years to compare them to, and so not many conclusions can be drawn at this stage. Therefore, we recommend that the College and Union work together to investigate the results on intellectual motivation further.



While Imperial does indeed offer good career advice in terms of jobs, they do not have adequate support for those wishing to stay on for postgraduate study. The opportunities are hard to spot and I wish there was more communication out there specifically devoted to this

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT



The course has been intellectually stimulating and stretching, the topics have been interesting and relevant to industry

AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Recommendation

The College and Union should work together to investigate the NSS results on intellectual motivation further.



The emphasis on assessment in the first 2 years really detracts from the actual understanding that one can gain. Provide less lab assessments and make the assessments more stimulating and interesting - not simply ticking boxes to get marks - we need tasks that encourage more engineering creativity!

EEE STUDENT

Workload

Imperial scores below the sector average on all four of the questions in this section, with an average score of only 60% for the section as a whole. Only 61% of respondents felt they had enough time to understand everything they had to learn, which is a worrying statistic. Almost half of all respondents believed that there was unnecessary pressure put on them, with this statistic rising to over 60% in some departments. Again, nearly half of all respondents felt that the volume of work was too heavy to complete every piece of work to their satisfaction. The recommendations in this section are designed to ensure students feel supported during their time at university, and that measures are taken to relieve anxiety.

Recommendation

The Union and College work together to develop research in to student mental wellbeing.

Extra-curricular activities

Numerous respondents expressed their regret at not being able to take part in more extracurricular activities, and wish they could have joined a Club, Society or Project. They cite the heavy workload and assessment burden as reasons for not taking these opportunities. The Union strongly believes that all students should feel able to join a Club, Society or Project, or to participate in other extracurricular activities outside of the College. These activities not only ensure a healthy work-life balance, but also provide numerous professional development opportunities, which can be important to improving career prospects.



I wish I had more free time to participate in Clubs and Societies. One of the main reasons why I chose Imperial was the wide range of activities available, but I never had enough time to try and/or commit to everything/most of what I wanted

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES STUDENT

Recommendation

Workload should be reviewed and monitored, to ensure that all students feel able to partake in extra-curricular activities.



I would have become more involved in a union society. I could not due to commitments from the workload of my course

ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Personal Tutors

Many respondents expressed the need for more support and understanding from members of staff. They feel staff do not show empathy to those who are struggling or overwhelmed, and therefore feel as though there is no-one there to help them. We feel it is important that students know there is someone to go to if they are not coping well with the workload or pressure from their course. It is therefore essential that personal tutors are proactive in checking in with their tutees and monitoring how well they are keeping up, as well as ensuring their students are knowledgeable of all the support services available to them.



I think that students need to have more support so they don't feel overwhelmed

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES STUDENT



Far more support is needed from personal tutors - make sure they keep in touch with students and ensure they are kept aware of how their students are coping

MEDICINE STUDENT

Recommendation

Personal tutors should take a proactive interest in how their tutees are handling the workload.



The course is extremely pressurised and I have seen more than a few of my friends crumble under this pressure; if more understanding and support were available from staff, I think this would be more acceptable

CIVIL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Communication of workload

We appreciate that it takes a lot of hard work to gain an Imperial degree, and it is important students know that they cannot just coast through their time at the College. However, in some departments it seems this is not communicated in an effective way, with a number of students left feeling nervous, anxious or even scared about what is to come. The first few weeks at university are an important transition period, and particular

care should be taken when communicating with students during this time. The free text comments show the impact that these messages can have, and show why fear should under no circumstances be used as a tactic to communicate with students.

Recommendation

Guidance should be developed to ensure details of workload are communicated in a balanced way.



Lecturers at the start of first year quite frankly put the fear of God into me and many others: not a nice welcome to university! Almost a sense of feeling like you are not good enough to be there. Should be a slightly gentler introduction I believe

BIOLOGY STUDENT



There is too much work given to students in first year, especially the first term, when it is important to be settled in your new surroundings without having intense pressure to complete lots of assignments

BIOLOGY STUDENT



Better pastoral support would be appreciated in the first few weeks to help settle in, especially those students not from London (i.e., seeing Personal Tutor every week for the first month, then fortnightly etc.)

PHYSICS STUDENT



Being told on my first day that if you don't make your degree your life you wouldn't succeed was not the best introduction to university

CHEMISTRY STUDENT

Assessment & Feedback

66%
2013

62%
2012

54%
2011

71%
SECTOR AVERAGE

68%
RUSSELL GROUP
AVERAGE

With no good feedback, it's very hard to improve. Imperial's scaling in exams is horrendous as they feel the need to compare themselves to Oxbridge. I feel like my potential hasn't been reached and I am upset to leave a top class university which demands long working hours, harder content than most and less support with a low degree. I am therefore now less employable even though I've had to work a lot harder and put in a lot more effort

PHYSICS STUDENT

Coursework feedback took very long in first year but the departmental staff improved upon this after receiving critical feedback during the departmental survey at the end of the year. They've since implemented coursework feedback timetables, which usually provide marks to submitted work within two weeks

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Throughout the three years of study at this university, the staff and department has been trying to improve on unsatisfying aspect of teaching upon receiving student feedbacks on regular basis. The university/ department has not actually produced any results in their attempts at improving aspects of teaching that students feel unsatisfied about

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT

It's unclear where the marks come from. You don't get any feedback on the exams. It is unclear how they scale marks and you can't access exam papers. The general feedback is very bad on work

PHYSICS STUDENT

Unfortunately, we do not receive very prompt and detailed feedback on our work so most of the time I had to rely on a trial and error approach to work out what I am doing wrong and the best way to improve on my work

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT

Assessment and feedback remains College's weakest section, with a ranking of 131st out of 157 institutions and a satisfaction rating of 66%. This section poses a challenge for many Russell Group institutions, with the mission group receiving the lowest average (at 68%) of all mission groups and non-aligned institutions. While real progress has been made in this area in recent years, it will take a fair number of years at the current rate of improvement before Imperial's assessment and feedback results match those of the other NSS sections.

Recommendation

Scaling arrangements should be communicated clearly to students, including justification for their usage.

Scaling

A number of free-text comments specifically referred to dissatisfaction with the 'scaling' processes used by some departments when assessing coursework. While the justification and underlying policies for these practices do exist, the lack of explanation to the student body leads to mistrust and perceptions of unfairness. This can negatively affect how people see their feedback and assessment, and should be combated with clearer explanations of why such scaling is necessary.



The scaling of final year exam results is not fair to everyone. Typically, it disadvantages students who are marginally first class

EEE STUDENT



To have both third year lab and the essay project scaled down simply because "the overall average was too high" seems unjust. Why should my marks be penalised because in general the standard was high?

EEE STUDENT



Scaling down of marks in our department to fit the college scale was a bit unfair. In my opinion, scaling down shouldn't be made in the first place because it insults the students' hard work and achievement

MATHEMATICS STUDENT

Action Plans

A small subset of departments, including Life Sciences and Medicine, are significantly below the overall institutional score for satisfaction in assessment and feedback. Direct and specific action plans created by each department, and spearheaded by a single member of academic staff, should provide the impetus needed to bring these departments to a level of satisfaction more commonly seen with other departments.

Not surprisingly various departments score significantly above the average for assessment and feedback. The working practices and professional development techniques used by staff in the most successful departments should be captured, studied and propagated across the underperforming departments.



Poor feedback from exams. Delayed by many months, not very helpful when it did come. Doesn't seem to be much communication between the different lecturers on the same course

MEDICINE STUDENT

Recommendation

Departments with feedback scores significantly below average should create & implement action plans to increase their approval rates. Feedback methods and approaches used in highly-scoring departments should be propagated across College.



Unfortunately, we do not receive very prompt and detailed feedbacks on our work so most of the time I had to rely on a trial and error approach to work out what I am doing wrong and the best way to improve on my work. Also, we do not receive very clear objectives for a lot of our lectures and modules. This has a rather significant impact on the performance of students here

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT

Feedback deadlines

The text comments indicate that there are still cases of students receiving feedback too late for it to be used in the completion of the next assignment. It devalues the work of the student and of the marker if the feedback is received too late to be of any use; if there is too much coursework to be marked, leading to delays, then departments should consider reviewing either the staffing resource allocated to that work, or reducing the amount of coursework, rather than tolerating delays.



Feedback is still lacking despite efforts in our 5th year to provide feedback on our paces exam. Most boxes in my exam feedback sheets were not filled in

MEDICINE STUDENT



Little detail in coursework feedback. Coursework nearly always handed back late. Some lecturers difficult to contact. Personal Tutor never replied to emails

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT

Recommendation

College policy to be developed to require that no new deadline can be enforced before sufficient time has passed since feedback on a previous piece of related work has been received.



Very little choice in course modules. Poor feedback - can take months if it all, and is often vague and unhelpful

MEDICINE STUDENT



Insultingly bad feedback of assessed work, not representative of the time invested and often the only comments are contradictory and reveal that the marker hasn't read it properly

PHYSICS STUDENT

Innovative feedback methods

A marked improvement in feedback scores will not only come from tweaks to existing submission and marking schemes, but through new and innovative methods of communication between academic and learner. Methods such as personalised video feedback are cheap, simple and in fact take less marking time than current methods. These practices should be collected from other institutions and taught to Imperial staff through professional development classes.

Recommendation

Innovative feedback methods, such as video-recording, should be brought in from other institutions.



Academic Support

79%
2013

75%
2012

73%
2011

80%
SECTOR AVERAGE

80%
RUSSELL GROUP
AVERAGE



Actually having a personal tutor who knows me and cares about me

MEDICINE STUDENT



Little support in terms of study help and personal tutors were pretty useless in first and second year. I've had 3 personal tutors in my degree!

BIOLOGY STUDENT



I wish I had sought help from my personal tutor sooner as, since then they have been a great source of support

BIOLOGY STUDENT



There is lots of peer, unscheduled informal teaching from juniors but don't underestimate how good they are at giving lectures and tutorials

MEDICINE STUDENT



Good response from key departmental staff during periods of personal difficulty. Good personal tutor

BIOLOGY STUDENT



I appreciate the opportunity for networking and the possibility to have a personal tutor

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES STUDENT



My personal tutor has been excellent and has provided me with first class pastoral support

PHYSICS STUDENT



The ICSMSU and student led peer-to-peer teaching has been so good - I wouldn't have passed without them. The course leaders were enthusiastic and helpful

MEDICINE STUDENT

With an overall satisfaction rating of 79% in the 2013 NSS, the results from the questions on academic support are again the second weakest area. It should be noted however that the College has experienced a 4% increase from the satisfaction rating received in this area last year, significantly better than the overall sector increase of 1%; and a 9% increase from the results of the 2010 NSS.

The College is still rated just below average in the sector (80%) and falls short of appearing in the top quartile by 5%. The focus on work in this area over the past few years has shown progress in the increased satisfaction scores. It is hoped that over the next two years Imperial will feature within the top quartile in this area.

The questions in this section covered three areas: respondents receiving sufficient advice and support with their studies (receiving a satisfaction rating of 74%), being able to contact staff when they needed to (receiving a satisfaction rating of 88%), and having good advice available when they needed to make study choices (receiving a satisfaction rating of 77%).

It is interesting to note that the ability to contact staff was rated by respondents above the sector average of 86%, as was the question regarding good advice when making study choices, the question regarding sufficient advice and support was not.

Our belief as a Union is that the personal tutor system for undergraduates and a number of allied services are key to ensuring on-going improvements in this area. In the Union's response to the 2012 Student Experience Survey (imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/campaigns/responses) we made a number of recommendations regarding personal tutors, the Mums & Dads Scheme and other services which have the potential to impact on results in this section. We have not repeated these recommendations here as we are aware that a variety of work is in progress to implement many of them.

A number of the free text responses refer to their personal tutor's perceived lack of knowledge about the details of the undergraduate programme, particularly about specialisms beyond their own. We feel that personal tutors are an important way-pointing service for their tutees. While they might not be expert in answering all questions they should have a broad working knowledge of the complete undergraduate course content within their department, including appropriate knowledge of specialisms beyond their own, together with up to date information about the College's support services for students. Conversely the Union does appreciate that there are advantages in having personal tutors whose specialisms are different from their tutees.

Networking

The one recommendation we have made in this area concerns supporting and encouraging networking between year groups. A reasonable number of free text comments refer to the advantages of interaction between year groups.

Interaction is referenced by respondents in a number of different areas, from social opportunities meeting a range of new people, through informal peer-to-peer academic support and advice, provision of online repositories of teaching materials and exams from previous years, all the way to mock practical exams being organised by students in the Faculty of Medicine.

While the activities of some of these networks create some potentially complex questions our feeling is that within a cohort of undergraduates, activities of this nature are likely to just happen anyway, regardless of control measures put in place. Our opinion is that these networks should be embraced, supported and developed; with departments being a crucial element of a supportive learning community made up of both staff and students, rather than a potentially fragmented and closed network.



A good intellectual challenge.
Good lab experience. Nice people to share mutual pain with

CHEMISTRY STUDENT

Recommendation

For Departments to support and encourage networking between year groups.



Too many students lead to a lack of care and attention - we just teach ourselves. I feel alone and unsupported most of the time. Most helpful advice and teaching comes from older years or from external sources not related to Imperial

MEDICINE STUDENT

Organisation & Management

83%
2013

82%
2012

79%
2011

78%
SECTOR AVERAGE

82%
RUSSELL GROUP
AVERAGE



This final year has been much better organised than the previous two years

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT



Many lectures and practicals (e.g., dissection session) were cancelled and never rescheduled. Additionally, many lecturers seemed to be forced to give their lectures: they showed no enthusiasm, the lectures were barely organised and the resulting content was confusing

MEDICINE STUDENT



The course is generally not very well organised with lecturers not showing up because they have been given the wrong timetable. Personal tutors are approachable, but do not seem to care about our problems or be able to give helpful advice

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES STUDENT



Organisation of the department has been poor but is improving since first year

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT



Exceptionally poor student experience. Department is out-of-date and despite numerous student requests from a number of years, no change is made. E.g. lack of electronic timetable/personalised timetable that integrates with outlook calendar. Department said it would start recording lectures but no movement has been made in 2 years. Insultingly bad feedback of assessed work, not representative of the time invested and often the only comments are contradictory and reveal that the marker hasn't read it properly

PHYSICS STUDENT



Course management, organisation and communication, and helping with problems are amazing. I would find it difficult to suggest areas of improvements

GEOLOGY STUDENT



Poor organisation relating to clinical placements. Clinical timetabling at the central sites is especially poor

MEDICINE STUDENT

Learning Resources

95%
2013

92%
2012

90%
2011

85%
SECTOR AVERAGE

88%
RUSSELL GROUP
AVERAGE



The resources at Imperial College London are excellent, including the library resources and lab equipment

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT



Fantastic library resources, open nearly 24 hours a day

BIOLOGY STUDENT



Very good I.T. support and library facilities

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES STUDENT



Lots of computers & facilities

CIVIL ENGINEERING STUDENT



Good lab facilities and had opportunities to see some equipment and techniques that would normally be unavailable to undergraduates

BIOLOGY STUDENT

The College scores an above average satisfaction rating in this section at 83%, compared to the sector average of 78%. Previous recommendations in the 2012 NSS Response have centred on improvements to the calendaring system, prompt notification of cancellations through apps, and the creation of a formal system of student consultation to prevent misunderstanding and dissatisfaction. Progress has been made on each of these areas and the Union has been advised a number of projects will come to fruition during the 2013/14 academic year.

A number of negative feelings are expressed in the free text comments about timetabling and the communication of timetable changes. Additionally a number of respondents commented negatively about timetabling arrangements where insufficient time was allowed for travel between campuses. The departmental satisfaction scores in this area reflected this sentiment, with medicine scoring the weakest with a satisfaction rating in the sixties.

The College's strongest results in the 2013 NSS were seen in the Learning resources section. The section received an overall satisfaction rating of 95%, compared to a sector average of 85%. Imperial's satisfaction rating in this area increased by 3% in line with the sector overall. Imperial also remains comfortably in the top quartile of institutions in this area and the results are a credit to the excellent facilities provided by the institution. Many comments made by respondents reflect the quantitative results.

The only negative comments in this area relate to areas in which work has been undertaken to rectify the situation over the past few years, for example the temperature of the Library. No issues have been identified from our analysis of the results to suggest substantive new work could be undertaken.

This section contains three questions: Library resources and services, access to IT resources and the ability to access specialist equipment, facilities or rooms when respondents needed to. Of the three questions the third (access specialist equipment, facilities or rooms) scored the lowest at 93% satisfaction.

Combined with the fact that the lowest departmental scores in this area were at 90%, together with numerous scores in the mid-nineties we feel we don't need to make specific recommendations in this area. The College's services in these areas are clearly serving the needs of the undergraduate student population well from the feedback received in this survey.

Personal Development

84%
2013

83%
2012

80%
2011

82%
SECTOR AVERAGE

81%
RUSSELL GROUP AVERAGE

Academically there are plenty of modules offered by other departments that could be useful to students pursuing my degree that would more enable me to follow my interests

AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Very good research/opportunities to see research in the department

PHYSICS STUDENT

The careers opportunities that come with being a student at Imperial are brilliant - particularly the links with industry through design projects and careers talks etc

CIVIL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Very good career building atmosphere, for whatever field one is interested in. Staff are very open to conversations regarding future study/PhD or industrial work

AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

[Imperial does] not have adequate support for those wishing to stay on for postgraduate study. The opportunities are hard to spot and I wish there was more communication out there specifically devoted to this

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

I believe that the department as a whole is as concerned with my personal development as it is with academic achievement. Imperial College ... has [prepared] me well for the future, and more importantly, it developed my interpersonal skills, which will be valuable in the future

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

I particularly enjoyed the Humanities course as it showed us a broader view of what we could do with our degree. I do not think I would have considered a career in Science Communication otherwise (it is one of my options for next year)."

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES STUDENT

Imperial scored above the sector average within this category by 2%, and showed a 1% improvement in satisfaction on last year, demonstrating success in ensuring students develop valuable transferable skills within their degrees. Satisfaction scores within this area were substantially lower within a number of Faculty of Natural Sciences departments compared to other faculties.

The introduction and expansion of the Imperial Horizons scheme has been a positive move to

provide students with opportunities to develop their transferable skills. This was a previous recommendation in the 2012 NSS Response which we hope to see continue and thrive. The introduction of this scheme is expected to improve student's views in future years. In light of the College's ongoing strategic aim to ensure scientists are enabled to bring their findings to a wider audience, we hope that this emphasis on communication and other transferable skills will continue.

Careers

One of the optional banks of questions in this year's National Student Survey concerned careers. Respondents to the survey felt that the advice relating to both careers and further study, and their employment prospects at Imperial were good, at 83% satisfaction. This was above average for the sector and Imperial was in the top quartile of institutions surveyed. The vast majority of respondents (92%) believed their career prospects have been improved by attending Imperial. These are encouraging trends.

A number of respondents expressed an interest in extra-curricular opportunities

related to their course, placements, research experiences and the chance to study academic modules outside of their department. The availability of these would arguably assist those who wished to pursue particular careers or further study opportunities to realise their aspirations. There is also room for improvement in ensuring advice for students interested in future study is sufficient for their needs. Imperial College Union has made a number of recommendations in the International Mobility Survey 2012 and in our 2012 NSS Response to this effect. (imperialcollegeunion.org/responses)



As one would expect with a survey of soon to graduate students, especially one given such credibility institutionally and nationally, a variety of free text comments were received which were not directly related to the educational experience. However, it is useful to consider the question which was asked: "If you were given the opportunity to change one thing about your **Imperial Experience**, what would it be and why?". When the subject matter of the answers which do not relate directly to the educational experience are considered they reveal some interesting insights into what respondents thought about life at Imperial. While some answers can be dismissed as general disgruntlement we must remember that the respondents have given these answers in the context of providing one thing they can change about their whole university experience in a national university leavers survey.

Not unsurprisingly affordability of accommodation, together with living costs featured heavily. While a number of comments cited Imperial's location in London as being a positive part of their university experience, many took the opportunity through this survey to express their arguably negative opinions on these subjects. While the College cannot reduce the cost of living in London a number of comments relate specifically to student facilities and accommodation provided by the College. In the Union's response to the 2012 Student Experience Survey (imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/campaigns/responses), as well as through the #AgainstAction campaign (imperialcollegeunion.org/againstaction) earlier this year, the Union has published a number of recommendations in this area.

Food attracted a number of comments, both the quality of the food available and the price. While food can be a very emotive subject and it is probably impossible to please everyone it is clearly an important factor for a number of students.

The final area of other subjects of feedback could potentially be related to the educational experience, and is focused on culture. A number of respondents cited the concept of learning for the exam, rather than developing a broad understanding of the subject. While some learning just for the sake of exams is an inevitability there may be a question to consider about whether the educational culture within the College is being tailored towards a situation where learning just for an exam is considered the norm by the undergraduate body.



Too many students lead to a lack of care and attention - we just teach ourselves. I feel alone and unsupported most of the time. Most helpful advice and teaching comes from older years or from external sources not related to Imperial

MEDICINE STUDENT



Student facilities should make living in London affordable, and provide students with value for money rather than ripping off

PHYSICS STUDENT



Living in London has been great

PHYSICS STUDENT



No one really cares or knows you. It feels very impersonal

PHYSICS STUDENT



I feel like a faceless student. The personal tutor system needs to change. They don't value you as a student

MEDICINE STUDENT



The overall quality of the food in the college does not match the value/price. When I pay over £5 for a meal, I expect food of a higher quality than that of the food that is currently on offer

BIOCHEMISTRY STUDENT



I have not been able to enjoy myself. They give you exams right after you get back from Christmas meaning you can't enjoy the holidays. The next module begins the day after (or the Monday after) your exams. Life is very miserable here and the staff couldn't care less. They just want to tick boxes. The atmosphere is depressing. The students have been worked so hard that they have no more enthusiasm for their courses. Also, it's miserable, miserable, depressing, sad, horrible, miserable, lonely, boring

BIOLOGY STUDENT

Question 23 in the National Student Survey relates specifically to the Students' Union. The question refers to terms such as 'academic representation', 'activities' and 'support'. In the survey results, 77% of respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the Students' Union, a 6% increase from the previous year. This result is ahead of the sector average result of 68%, and places Imperial College Union well within the top quartile of students' unions in the UK; the top quartile starting at 71% satisfaction. Six students' unions of institutions within the Russell Group have a satisfaction score greater than Imperial College Union. This is a very gratifying result and one which we hope is reflective of work undertaken over the previous few years. Earlier this year the Union published its strategic plan for the next three years. Within this plan was the aim that Imperial College Union would be within the top twenty Higher Education Institutions' students' unions in the UK for the satisfaction score to question 23 in the NSS.



A very good Students' Union with lots of clubs and societies

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT



Union creates a very unique and happy sense of community which I have really enjoyed being part of

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

The Union still has work to do to solidify this position for future years, but has work planned in a number of areas which we feel will contribute to an improved satisfaction rating in this area.

The Union's strategic plan (imperialcollegeunion.org/strategy) outlines aims within a variety of themes including: enhancing the student experience, amplifying the student voice and building a student community. Each of these areas has a number of strategic goals attached to it, resulting from a wide range of research conducted over the previous two years through consultation with the student body. Many of the activities undertaken in the 2012/13 academic year are reflected upon in the Union's 2013 Impact Report, which can be found online at (imperialcollegeunion.org/impact). Our planned activities for the forthcoming year are outlined in our operating plan which is reproduced on the following pages.



The people I've met, the things I have done especially the clubs societies

MEDICINE STUDENT

Enhancing the Student Experience

The Union has clear plans for the coming year to develop the support we have available to our Clubs, Societies & Projects, with objective of increasing the number of memberships once again – hopefully leading to over a decade of increased participation in this area. In Welcome Week the Union launched Imperial Plus, our first scheme for accrediting the experience, achievement and skills our volunteers develop while participating in our activities. At the end of October the Union will launch its consolidated Community Volunteering Scheme, bringing a wider range of volunteering opportunities to the student body. Alongside these projects work is being undertaken to develop a strategy for greater engagement of postgraduate students in the life of the students' union as well as work towards achieving Investing in Volunteers status.

Amplifying the Student Voice

One of the Union's primary functions is to represent our members to the College and wider community. Our aims for this year include increasing the amount and proportion of students who take part in our elections from an already sector leading position. Engagement of students in the Union's governance and decision making is currently under review, with proposals to maximise student engagement due in early 2014. The spring of 2013 saw the Union launch the Student Academic Choice Awards for the first time, giving the opportunity for students to praise excellence in teaching and research supervision. These awards are returning this year with the aim of increasing the number of applications received. Our network of Academic Representatives are wonderful at providing an important link between students and staff on issues affecting their education and research, this year will see increased support including the Union's first Rep Conference. Representation of our members doesn't stop at the exit to the classroom or laboratory, in the coming year our intention is to support more student-led campaigns than ever before as well as taking our the opinions of our members beyond that walls of the College. We intend to develop the number of responses we give on behalf of the students to external bodies as well as developing our relationships and lobbying credibility with local MPs, members of the London Assembly and representatives of local authorities.

Building a Student Community

Our belief is that any students' union should be the hub of a student community, something we firmly intend to realise at Imperial over the next few years. Imperial College Union believes that the student community should be diverse, welcoming and non-discriminatory and in this vein will be beginning a major researched-based piece of work in this area early in 2014. The academic year has already seen a transformation in the way the Union contributes to the welcome experience for new students, with a review of this year's activities already underway we intend to build feedback into significant changes for new students in 2014.

Student life at Imperial is often considered to exist only in South Kensington, it is fair to say we feel that the Union has neglected its role in supporting students at the other campuses for some time, and this will be rectified over the coming year. On a daily basis the Union is providing advice and advocacy to students across a number of subjects, over the coming year we intend to detail more fully how we can encapsulate the trends we see within our advocacy work into political action for the benefit of the student body at large.

Reflecting on their experience

In the free text results a number of students cited regrets that they did not participate in the activities offered by the Union either earlier during their time at Imperial or not at all. The positive nature of participating in Clubs, Societies & Projects in particular is exemplified by numerous methods to new and continuing students alike, by both the Union and the College. There is still work to be done in ensuring that all students benefit from the activities offered by the Union during their studies and don't leave Imperial having regrets.



I would have got more involved in clubs and societies

GEOLOGY STUDENT



I would make being a member of a club/society compulsory. After the second year, I dropped out of all the societies, and, looking back, I now wish I had stayed with at least one

COMPUTING STUDENT



I would have got more involved with more clubs and societies during first and second year to try different things out and allow myself to further develop these skills in later years

CHEMISTRY STUDENT



ENHANCING THE Student Experience



SE

Code	Strategic Objective (by July 2016)	Year One Outcome (by July 2014)	Year One Objectives (by July 2014)
SE1	Continue to grow membership in Clubs, Societies & Projects each year of the plan and develop the support available to them.	Grow year on year membership in Clubs, Societies & Projects by July 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete written development plans for 100 CSPs by April 2014 2. Support the delivery of ReFreshers activities by February 2014 3. Produce development strategies for Student Media and Arts by November 2014 4. Review Finance Support system by January 2014 5. Establish financial KPI reporting system by May 2014
SE2	Introduce a Volunteering Accreditation scheme, which is recognised by the College, and helps students identify the skills they gain through their involvement in our activities.	Launch Volunteering Accreditation scheme (Imperial Plus) and ensure 300 students partake in scheme in year one.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Launch Tiers 1 and 2 by November 2013 2. Develop and deliver marketing and communications plan and materials by November 2013 3. Undertake termly reviews in December 2013 and March 2014 4. Agree year two plan by June 2014 5. Ensure 200 students complete Imperial Plus Certificate (Tier 1) by July 2014 6. Ensure 100 students complete Imperial Plus Certificate (Tier 2) by July 2014
SE3	Increase the number of students employed by the Union in each year of the plan.	Increase the number of students employed by the Union compared to previous financial year.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruit staff for Student Activities Centre and Minibus team by November 2013 2. Implement Student Duty Manager role within Licensed Trade by November 2013 3. Recruit and train Student Trainers for Imperial Plus scheme by October 2013

Code	Strategic Objective (by July 2016)	Year One Outcome (by July 2014)	Year One Objectives (by July 2014)
SE4	Introduce and establish a Development Programme for key volunteers and provide formal volunteering management qualifications.	Review provisions and launch Imperial Plus qualifications pilot scheme by July 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify key volunteer groups by November 2013 2. Review training and development provision by January 2014 3. Develop Imperial Plus Tier 3 scheme by February 2014 4. Start first cohort of Imperial Plus Tier 3 in June 2014 5. Review IT provision and launch version 2.0 of Imperial Plus by June 2014
SE5	Achieve Investing in Volunteers status.	Achieve Investing in Volunteers status by July 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete self-assessment and develop action plan by January 2014 2. Arrange for assessment by May 2014 3. Achieve Investing in Volunteers status by July 2014
SE6	Grow our Student Volunteering scheme and increase the amount of students volunteering in the outside world.	Launch new Community Volunteering scheme and increase the amount community volunteers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Launch Community Volunteering scheme by November 2013 2. Pilot brokerage service, engaging 10 organisations and review by December 2013 3. Ensure at least 250 opportunities have been published through the scheme by July 2014 4. Organise 10 one-off volunteering opportunities by March 2014 5. Hold volunteering fair by July 2014 6. Ensure at least 200 students register with the Community Volunteering scheme by July 2014
SE7	Develop and publish, in the first year of the plan, a Postgraduate Student Engagement Strategy, in tandem with the College's review of Taught Postgraduate provision	Develop and publish engagement strategy for postgraduate students together with an action plan for implementation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gain agreement for Postgraduate Student Engagement Strategy at Board of Trustees by November 2013 to include action plan 2. Deliver year one elements of action plan by July 2014
SE8	Ensure that the Union delivers at least three key contributors to the College's Graduate Attributes project.	Conduct background work to establish where the Union's role within the Graduate Attributes project lies.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify which contributors to the College Graduate Attributes project the Union could be engaged in by February 2014 2. Gain agreement for which contributors to the College Graduate Attributes project the Union will be engaged in and publish plan by May 2014

Code	Strategic Objective (by July 2016)	Year One Outcome (by July 2014)	Year One Objectives (by July 2014)
SV1	Increase the amount and proportion of students who take part in the Union elections during each year of the plan.	Increase the amount and proportion of students who take part in the Union elections.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop engagement plans for International students, PGR and PGT students by January 2014 2. Complete review of eVoting system and elections process by February 2014 3. Review involvement of commercial departments in elections process by January 2014 4. Review and deliver training to Big Elections Candidates by March 2014
SV2	Review our democratic structures to ensure that they maximise engagement and add value to the Union's decision-making, and put proposals to decision making bodies within the first year of the plan.	Complete Democracy Review and publish proposals by March 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete desktop research of other institutions by November 2013 2. Complete scope of review, establish project team and agree project plan by November 2013 3. Complete review and publish findings by February 2014
SV3	Continue to be a champion of academic best practice by developing our Student Academic Choice Awards scheme, with more than 1,000 students submitting nominations during the final year of the plan.	Deliver a revised Student Academic Choice Awards programme with greater participation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop implementation plan by November 2013 2. Ensure at least 700 nominations are received from at least 400 individual students 3. Ensure at least 50 nominations in each category 4. Hold awards ceremony by June 2014 5. Conduct review of year two by July 2014
SV4	Continue to publish an annual Impact Report detailing the positive changes the Union has made through officers, representatives and initiatives.	Review the background processes for capturing information which contributes to the annual Impact Report and communicate Impact regularly to our members.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Publish quarterly impact report from November 2013 2. Revise the system for capturing anecdotal information by March 2014
SV5	Develop our engagement with local MPs, members of the London Assembly and representatives of local authorities, publishing the outcomes of these discussions to our members on an annual basis.	Establish processes and relationships necessary for political lobbying and begin regular meetings with relevant politicians.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop plan for engaging with local and national politicians by October 2013 2. Publish areas for research and lobbying work by December 2013 3. Hold at least one meeting with MP, LA member or Councilor per quarter

Code	Strategic Objective (by July 2016)	Year One Outcome (by July 2014)	Year One Objectives (by July 2014)
SV6	Continue to develop relevant response documents, and in particular to respond in detail to the College's consolidated annual Student Survey and the National Student Survey during each year of the plan.	Deliver at least four responses to Internal and External Consultations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop response to Student Experience within 10 weeks of receipt of data 2. Deliver responses to two external consultations of interest to Imperial Students by July 2014 3. Publish a response to the 2013 NSS within 10 weeks of the receipt of the data
SV7	Support 10 student-led campaigns with demonstrable outcomes each year by the end of the plan.	Support six student-led campaigns by July 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop specifications for eActivities functionality to support student led campaigns management by January 2014
SV8	Develop the support available to Academic Representatives, including the launch of an annual Representatives Conference, and increase the number of students in these roles supported by the Union in each year of the plan.	Launch Annual Representative Conference and increase the amount of course rep positions filled by July 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organise and deliver rep conference by April 2014 2. Fill 100% of UG and 85% PG representative positions by December 2013 3. Increase awareness of Reps to 85% for UGs and 70% for PGs as measured by the Union Survey

Code	Strategic Objective (by July 2016)	Year One Outcome (by July 2014)	Year One Objectives (by July 2014)
SC1	Publish an annual 'Advocacy to Action' Report, detailing how our advocacy, representation and campaigning work combine to improve the lives of students.	Establish processes for creating an annual Advocacy to Action report and deliver first report by June 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design processes for converting casework issues to political action by December 2013 2. Evaluate and record impact of campaigning and lobbying on a monthly basis 3. Publish 'Advocacy to Action' report by June 2014
SC2	Review the advice provision available to students on campus, including our own Advice Centre service and make recommendations to the College and the Union's Board of Trustees.	Launch review process of advice provision by June 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree scope of review in liaison with College by January 2014 2. Develop project plan by May 2014 3. Launch review process by June 2014
SC3	Work in partnership with the College to review and improve the 'Welcome Week' provision through a review of the Union's activities and advising the College on how to improve their own arrangements.	Run successful Welcome Week and review, and complete full review of approach for 2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruit 1000 parents to buddy scheme, improve satisfaction rating and review by December 2013 2. Recruit and Train at least 30 Welcome Week Volunteers, assess satisfaction rating and review by December 2013 3. Launch specific Welcome section of the website by October 2013
SC4	Complete a research-based report on Diversity, Inclusion and Liberation on campus, including Union activities and to develop a Union action and lobbying plan in response to the findings.	Agree plan for research based report on Diversity, Inclusion and Liberation by January 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree research plan and establish project team for report by January 2014 2. Host a week of activities to promote international culture in the College by March 2014

Code	Strategic Objective (by July 2016)	Year One Outcome (by July 2014)	Year One Objectives (by July 2014)
SC5	Review the Union's processes for recognising students' and volunteers' achievements, including a review of the Union Awards scheme.	Complete review of Union awards scheme and gain agreement for proposed changes by April 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish review group and agree review process by January 2014 2. Produce recommendations and receive assent from appropriate committees by March 2014 3. Provide for significant changes in 2014/15 budget by March 2014
SC6	Develop, publish and deliver a Campus Outreach Plan which outlines the Union's activities and objectives for providing services and representation to students who study at outlying campuses.	Agree Campus Outreach Plan together with an action plan for implementation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gain agreement for Campus Outreach plan at Board of Trustees by November 2013 to include action plan 2. Deliver action plan by July 2013 3. Launch Give it a Go scheme by October 2013 4. Run campaign on service provision at non- SK campuses by March 2014
SC7	Publish a research-based report on 'Student Journeys' highlighting the various changing demographics, trends, behaviours and needs of our members to inform our approach to representation, services and activities and deliver an action plan as a result of the findings.	Agree scope of project and establish team by January 2014.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Publish involvement statistics report by November 2013 2. Assess extent of College involvement in project by November 2013 3. Scope research work and establish project team by January 2014

Code	Strategic Objective (by July 2016)	Year One Outcome (by July 2014)	Year One Objectives (by July 2014)
SO1	Secure a funding agreement for the years following 2016, with a real-terms increase in the total level of funding from the College for each year of the agreement.	Demonstrate value for money and develop key relationships within the College	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain regular meetings with Senior College Finance staff 2. Circulate Impact Report, Strategic Plan and Annual Report to senior College staff
SO2	Review our approach to customer services in all parts of the Union and implement Customer Promises in all of our student-facing services.	Develop and launch Customer Promise scheme and review by end of year	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Run Staff Development Day themed on Customer Services by September 2013 2. Develop and publish customer promises for all areas by January 2014 3. Establish monitoring system to include mystery shopping by January 2014 4. Review and implement improved offer for Associate Members by February 2014
SO3	Demonstrate our commitment to being an excellent employer by securing and retaining Investors in People status.	Undertake initial IIP assessment and prepare for achieving status by 2015.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gain 'Working towards' IIP status by October 2013 2. Develop Action Plan for IIP by December 2013 3. Undertake external assessment by June 2014
SO4	Grow our reserves and strengthen our balance sheet by generating a surplus in each year of the plan and ensuring that our capital expenditure is outweighed by our depreciation repayments.	Deliver Operating and Capital budgets through focus on financial reporting, cost control and revenue growth.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and deliver Retail development plan by May 2014 2. Redevelop and relaunch retail section of the website by November 2013 3. Ensure all cost centres and commercial outlets achieve bottom-line budget targets by August 2014

Code	Strategic Objective (by July 2016)	Year One Outcome (by July 2014)	Year One Objectives (by July 2014)
SO5	Receive and retain full assurance from internal auditors.	Achieve 'substantial' rating from internal auditors.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop action plan in response to audit by October 2013 2. Discuss on a monthly basis at SMT meetings 3. Review Union finance systems in conjunction with College and produce report by February 2014 4. Complete Internal Audit by May 2014 5. Achieve 'Substantial' rating by July 2014
SO6	Complete a review of our organisational structure, including consideration of incorporation or forming of a subsidiary.	Research and develop options paper for Trustee Board.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop options paper for Board, containing legal advice as necessary, by July 2014
SO7	Develop and publish our first Corporate Social Responsibility Policy.	Draft first Social Responsibility policy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop learning points and legacy document following Green Fund submission. 2. Draft Corporate Social Responsibility policy for consultation by June 2014
SO8	Engage with the development of any new College strategy and increase the number of positive references to the Union compared to the current plan.	Develop institutional relationships and gain support for inclusion in College's plan.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop 'relationship framework' document to outline key College relationships, linked to themes and key Union personnel, by January 2014
SO9	Develop and publish a Communications and Social Media Strategy	Develop and publish Communications and social media strategy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop first draft of Communications and Social Media strategy and consult by November 2013 2. Publish final strategy following approval by January 2014
SO10	Ensure that at least 1,000 students respond to the annual Union Satisfaction survey to ensure that the strategic measures generated in this survey are sound.	Ensure that 1000 students respond to the Student Satisfaction Survey.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop timing, incentive and marketing plan by November 2013 2. Produce analysis of survey data within four weeks of survey completion 3. Develop 'You Said, We did' campaign in response to survey data

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