



# **Block Grant Submission and Union Plan**

## **August 2020 – July 2021**

**Authors:** Abhijay Sood (ICU President); and Jill Finney (ICU Chair of the Board of Trustees)

**Date:** March 2020

## 1. Introduction

Imperial College Union has been through a recent period of challenge and change. The previous Managing Director left the organisation in December 2019 and the Board have identified that there are immediate challenges that need to be addressed in the short- to medium-term.

With support from the College, an interim MD has been appointed prior to the appointment of a new permanent MD. Atkinson HR Consulting were engaged in January 2020 to provide outsourced Interim MD support. The interim MD has developed a 6-month interim plan which deals with the main concerns and challenges in the immediacy of this academic year.

The ICU Board have agreed that the interim plan should be followed by a one-year plan for the 2020-21 academic year, that will focus on ensuring the organisation builds solid foundations and that we can achieve our potential for the longer-term. Immediate challenges, including a small staffing reorganisation, are currently being addressed and the interim plan will be completed by July 2020. This will stabilise ICU and secure future sustainability of the organisation. As part of our interim measures there are a number of areas, such as health and safety, that require further investment to ensure the good work that is currently being undertaken can be sustained in the future.

ICU has the potential to be the kind of students' union that has a wide ranging and significant impact on the lives of Imperial students. Our students deserve a students' union that represents them effectively and supports the delivery of a world class student experience. It is hoped that this one year plan will lay the foundations for the organisation to be leaner, more efficient and ready to pursue an ambitious strategy to become an outstanding Union in the future.

Given the background and context, this block grant submission is focused on the next 12-months. It outlines the plan of work for the Union over the coming year including key objectives, deliverables and success measures. It attempts to paint a picture about the position the Union should achieve by August 2021, in order to begin building effective and innovative student representation, opportunities, activities, services and engagement. Within this 12-month plan, time will be allocated to the development of a longer term strategy involving key stakeholders and led by elected leaders and the new Managing Director. As well as ongoing funding, there will be a requirement to invest in a number of one-off infrastructure projects that will ensure the Union can achieve its potential.

The Union also recognises the challenging context within the College. In the midst of the current Covid-19 pandemic, these are clearly unprecedented times for the College, UK Higher Education and wider society. 2020-21 will inevitably be a year of rebuilding and getting 'back to normality' in many parts of the College. We believe the work of the Union will be crucial in supporting and re-establishing the Imperial community, particularly when we find ourselves in financially challenging times. We have aimed to submit a bid which is mindful of that context, whilst also being realistic about the funding needs of the Union, in order to build the infrastructure that will enable us to develop in the future.

This paper proposes a block grant level for 2020-21 of **£1,941,770**. This reflects a 3% increase of funding from 2019-20. In addition to this, we would request that the University considers funding a number of one-off projects, in order to facilitate the effective management of our plan. These costs are set out in section 9.

## 2. Context

There are a range of challenges and opportunities for development that have been identified by the Board and are being addressed in our interim plan. Some of these will be largely resolved by August 2020; others will require significant further work to embed a new, more accountable, approach.

The current position can be summarised as follows:

- Lack of strategic alignment between our mission, work and colleagues;
- Challenging financial position (both in-year and long-term);
- Lack of accountability and ownership of Health and Safety;
- Lack of effective organisational leadership resulting in diminishing trust from key stakeholders;
- Unclear decision-making frameworks, lack of accountability and weak prioritisation;
- Poor internal communications;
- Overly centralised relationship management – key partnerships are not dispersed throughout the leadership team;
- Disconnect with the wider students' union sector;
- Lack of effective data management, research or insight;
- Lack of a clear outlet by outlet commercial strategy.

We are making significant progress in these areas. However, some of these challenges will roll in to the next academic year and will require further attention in this 2020-21 plan. The priority for this 2020-21 plan will be to stabilise our foundations and get in place the right structure, culture, systems and processes that make us a more effective and efficient organisation. In turn this will enable the Union to develop, grow and strive for excellence in the future.

Despite the challenges we face, there are outcomes we have achieved over the course of the previous year and strategic plan 2017-20 that we should celebrate and be proud of. There are some areas of the Union such as involvement in student groups and elections which are sector leading and greatly enhance the holistic student experience.

Our key achievements over our last strategic plan include:

- Consistently strong turnout in Union elections and student-led democracy, our election turnout was the highest in any UK students' union in 2018-19;
- High engagement in student-led clubs, societies and projects. Our club and society membership has increased membership by 18% from 2016-17 to 2018-19 and now stands at 29,861 memberships (10,395 individual students involved).
- In partnership with the College we have established a student welfare representation network that is offering invaluable wellbeing support to students.
- Delivery of the Imperial Award, in partnership with the College.
- Supported record numbers of students through our advice service in 2018-19 (587)

Our achievements show that there is a significant opportunity to develop even more impressive outputs and outcomes if the Union can establish a strong infrastructure. We firmly believe that ICU has the potential to positively impact the lives of Imperial students and be a partner that adds real value for Imperial College.

### 3. The Case for a Strong ICU

The College have been a supportive partner for the Union, and this has been particularly apparent, and appreciated, during the period of change following the resignation of the previous MD in December 2019. This has included support from Jon Tucker assisting the Board, direct College support with immediate health and safety concerns, part funding of essential building maintenance and support from the HR team to facilitate the appointment of the Union's Interim MD.

This support has been welcomed by the Union and its trustees. It suggests that there is a good understanding of the potential, and importance, of a high-performing students' union.

Within the 2020-21 year, whilst we are addressing our infrastructure problems, we will also be developing a longer-term strategy (for 2021-24) that aligns and complements the College's strategy. Successful completion of an effective 2020-21 plan will enable the Union to articulate an effective vision for what an outstanding ICU can, and should, look like in the future.

We thought it would be beneficial to begin articulating our vision for what Imperial College Union can, and should, look like in the future:

- A. **Student Voice and Representation:** A students' union that is outstanding at representing all Imperial students. A Union that bases policy and feedback on strong evidence, and one that works effectively with the College as a partner to articulate students' needs, concerns and priorities. This will be characterised by higher levels of engagement in academic representation, balanced and clear feedback from the Union. This will support informed decision-making across the College and result in improvements across a wide range of student experience metrics for all types of students, including the Student Experience Survey and NSS. The Union will be a key collaborative partner in supporting the delivery of a world class student experience through positioning and empowering students as a partner able to shape their holistic experience at Imperial.
- B. **Student Opportunities and Development:** A students' union that fosters vibrant, exciting and inclusive communities amongst our students. Student clubs, societies and projects will be supported and empowered by their Union. These communities and opportunities will enhance student retention and wellbeing as well as help equip Imperial students with valuable leadership and life skills that will improve their outcomes as graduates.
- C. **Student Advice and Support:** A students' union that provides a strong, independent safety net when things go wrong for students. The advice service will deliver professional advocacy and support for students that need help in navigating academic regulations, complaints and disciplinary processes, or for students who are looking for external guidance in addressing grievances, concerns or issues that they have. The services will be proactive in identifying trends and helping both ICU and the College to address issues at their root causes. It will be valued by the students that use it and will help improve retention, academic performance and student wellbeing across the College, supporting students to do their best in their academic life.
- D. **Commercial Services and Events:** A students' union that offers a warm welcome to College-life and an inclusive social programme for students throughout their time at Imperial. Prospective students will see the Union as contributing to a positive all round, inclusive and diverse Imperial experience. Current students will recognise the impact of their social engagement in giving them a balanced and rich student experience.

We firmly believe that these goals are achievable, that the Union is uniquely positioned to deliver them, and our success will greatly enhance the ability of Imperial College to deliver a world class student experience. In some of these areas we are already delivering good work. However, clearly there are areas of underperformance. The ambition of the Union is to reach a position where it is delivering highly against all of these goals and it will require a focus on the foundations of the organisation over the next year.

#### 4. Alignment with College

We already feel that we add significant value to the College's mission and our students' experiences through our established representative structures and support services. We think there is more alignment that needs to happen over the next year between the College and ICU which will greatly benefit students. Whilst ICU clearly positively contributes to the Imperial student experience, we will need to improve our ability to better explain the value that we add and to be accountable for our performance.

We're conscious of the College's strategic intent and the aim to deliver a world class, holistic student experience. The Union is already an important partner and through our development we can further enhance the College's capability to deliver its aims. This will either be as an effective partner providing evidence-based feedback to enhance College decision making or as an organisation responsible for the delivery of certain core services that have a measurable positive impact on students' experience.

The Learning and Teaching strategy is centred on students as partners in their education, with a strong emphasis on inclusion and diversity. Both our academic and wellbeing student rep systems contribute vital feedback across departments to support the delivery and enhancement of academic and pastoral support provision. As student demand and need evolves, the Union will continue to be an important partner in ensuring students are able to meaningfully shape their education. The College's Student Support Strategy is underpinned by a partnership with the Union and embedding students in our joint student support offer will be fundamental to our success to support student's welfare.

The College is emphasising the delivery of a broad range of activities that complement and enhance the academic provision. We engage over 10,000 students per year in our array of clubs and societies providing life enhancing opportunities for personal and skill development, social and wellbeing support and a development of a strong sense of belonging at the College.

We believe firmly that an effective Union with strong foundations will be crucial in the achievement of the College's ambitions.

## 5. 2020-21 Objectives

The overarching aim for the Union in 2020-21 is to lay the foundations that will ensure that ICU is a lean, efficient and effective organisation. This in turn will put us in a strong position to improve, develop and become an outstanding students' union capable of delivering in partnership with our institution a world class student experience.

The specific objectives and outcomes that will underpin this aim are:

### **Membership Services** (Student Opportunities, Development and Representation)

- Empowered student leaders that are supported through coaching, training and streamlined systems and processes;
- A high-quality, inclusive experience for members of student groups where we measure and evaluate the impact;
- Student reps that are supported to provide evidence-based insight and feedback to improve the quality of education and student experience;
- Liberation and community officers who are supported, through newly established networks, to advocate for minority groups at Imperial;
- A high-quality advice service that is valued by users, has high levels of awareness amongst the wider student population, and informs policy change at ICU.

### **Commercial**

- Focused commercial strategies for each outlet that will give clarity around how we'll improve performance and financial contribution;
- Excellent customer-service across all outlets, driven by improved recruitment, induction and training of staff;
- A clear partnership approach with the College that drives mutually beneficial results for our services and operations;
- A feasibility study undertaken and business plan developed to outline the Union's desired and proposed presence at White City.

### **Central Services**

- Further embedded our strong relationship with the College, articulated in a suite of simple and focused Service Level Agreements (HR, Facilities, IT, Health & Safety, Student Services etc);
- Fully reviewed systems and processes that make it easier for people to do great work and enable the organisation to achieve our purpose and ambitions;
- Effective performance management systems across the organisation to enable a high performing and inclusive culture;
- Financial stability including clarity around our financial modelling and a year-end surplus;
- A Health and Safety culture with strong accountability and a new H&S management system operating effectively.

## 6. Success Measures

The following are the KPIs and important milestones that will determine the effectiveness of our 2020-21 plan.

By August 2021, we will be able to demonstrate:

### Membership Services

- 70% of students agree that 'ICU is supporting students through the academic, emotional and social challenges of studying at ICL' (currently 60% in Student Experience Survey);
- 70% of student leaders would 'recommend us to a friend' (currently unknown);
- 5% increase (both UG and PG) in the number of students involved in clubs, societies and projects (currently 10,395);
- An increase in the Union National Student Survey question 26 satisfaction score (currently 51.4% in the 2018-19 NSS);
- 25% election turnout for major Union officer positions (currently 14.7%);
- 50% of students believes that ICU 'helps and supports students in need effectively' (currently 32% in Student Experience Survey);
- 80% satisfaction from users of our advice service (currently unknown);
- 75% of Academic and Wellbeing Reps trained (currently 58%);
- 60% of students say they have noticed the impact of Liberation and Community Officers (currently unknown);
- Over 100 quantifiable changes or improvements within the College as a result of student rep feedback (currently unknown);

### Commercial

- 2% increase in retail revenue and surplus (currently £1.38m and £212k);
- A commercial strategy in place for each outlet setting out one of the following approaches: growth, cost reduction, partner or exit;
- Commercial services to return an overall contribution when central costs factored in (currently £25k deficit);
- 5% increase in marketing and sales revenue (currently £140k);

### Central Services

- A year-end surplus achieved;
- Improve overall staff engagement score to 75% (currently 66%);
- Reduce total salary / fixed staffing costs to below 70% of block grant;
- 80% satisfaction with new Board induction and Sabbatical Officer induction;
- A suite of SLAs in place and agreed with the College;
- All key processes reviewed and handbooks / process maps in places in all appropriate areas (Finance, Operations, Systems etc);
- 100% of staff have clear objectives, personal development plans and monthly 1-2-1s.

Our expectation will be that our long-term KPIs (to be agreed with the ICU Board) will include strategic success measures that give an overall indication of the performance of the Union. These will likely include future targets around NSS Q.26, elections turnout, number of participants in student groups / opportunities, number of changes as a result of Course Rep feedback, student satisfaction with our services etc.

## 7. Financial Implications

The Union continues to implement immediate change that will improve our financial performance in the current 2019-20 financial year. As an early part of our interim change process, we have started to improve the way we analyse, assess and use financial information. Our current situation and financial plans can be summarised as follows:

- A. In 2019-20, the Union's expenditure on its core membership services offer (student activities, voice, representation, advice etc plus 50% of essential central services like finance, systems, marketing) is **c.£2.25m**. This outstrips our block grant funding by **c.£350k**.
- B. Also assuming a 50% share of our Central Services costs go towards our Commercial Services they are not currently, as a whole, profitable. They were budgeted to make a £25k loss in 2019-20. Some outlets in isolation generate a surplus but we do not yet have an outlet by outlet strategy;
- C. If we exclude club and society grants (£420k that we pass on directly to student groups), then our spend on fixed salaries within Membership Services equates to 98% of our block grant. Within Commercial Services, our fixed salary costs are 78% of Gross Profit. Across the organisation, our fixed salary costs are too high, resulting in little opportunity for one-off investment, flexibility, projects and contingency;
- D. By August 2020, the Union will have reduced our salary costs to below 70% of our block grant. This will allow the Union to produce a balanced budget in 2020-21.
- E. The Board have also agreed a future financial model whereby our core, Membership Services activity should be wholly funded by the block grant. Any surpluses generated by our Commercial Services will be used to reinvest in our facilities, equipment and systems; or be used to rebuild our reserves; or be used to fund one-off projects and activities. Over time we will seek to move away from a position whereby commercial activity is used to subsidise recurring Membership Service costs.



## 8. Projected ICU Income and Expenditure Headline Summary 2020-21

	Projected Income FY 2020-21	Projected Expenditure FY 2020-21	Budgeted Income FY 2019-20	Budgeted Expenditure FY 2019-20
<b>Membership Services</b>	<b>£2,086,730</b>	<b>£1,643,732</b>	<b>£2,031,587</b>	<b>£1,780,964</b>
Block Grant	£1,941,770		£1,885,213	
Student Opportunities and Development	£144,960	£976,561	£146,374	£1,083,045
Student Advice and Representation		£667,171		£697,919
<b>Commercial</b>	<b>£4,006,207</b>	<b>£3,582,872</b>	<b>£4,038,134</b>	<b>£3,564,355</b>
Bars and Catering	£2,208,266	£1,968,830	£2,276,563	£1,984,215
Retail	£1,418,107	£1,201,712	£1,390,301	£1,178,006
Venue Hire	£233,306	£152,544	£231,720	£149,914
Sales and Sponsorship	£146,528	£44,448	£139,550	£43,154
Commercial Admin and Marketing		£215,338		£209,066
<b>Central Services</b>	<b>£64,244</b>	<b>£885,519</b>	<b>£74,379</b>	<b>£997,012</b>
Finance	£25,011	£214,923	£41,685	£306,378
Systems		£243,232		£238,183
Admin and Governance	£39,233	£260,759	£32,694	£265,441
Leadership		£186,605		£187,010
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£6,157,181</b>	<b>£6,112,123</b>	<b>£6,114,100</b>	<b>£6,342,330</b>

These top level figures assume:

- 3% average salary increase for staff;
- 5% average reduction in variable costs (from budget 2019-20);
- c.£250k salary savings achieved as a result of proposed staffing changes within interim plan;
- 3% reduction in bar and catering revenue;
- 2% increase in retail and 5% increase in marketing / sales revenue;

On this basis, ICU is requesting **£1,941,770 annual block grant** (3% increase on 2019-20).

## 9. One-Off Capital Expenditure Requests

In addition to recurrent block grant funding, we would like to request support and one-off investment in the following areas:

Priority	Item	Description	Rationale	Cost Estimate
	<b>Clubs and Society Storage</b>	Deep clean, repurpose and refurbish	Identified as Health and Safety concern in 2019 audit	<b>£20,000</b>
	<b>EPoS</b>	Procurement of new system as current system not fit for purpose	Improve commercial stock management, financial data and reduce staff costs	<b>£35,000</b>
	<b>Metric</b>	Sound, lighting and essential equipment in the venue	Equipment is old / broken and in urgent need of replacement	<b>£135,000</b>
	<b>FiveSixEight Awnings</b>	Connecting up electrics and completing previous work	Ensure Beit Quad is light enough for use in evenings and ensure safety of area	<b>£25,000</b>
	<b>Outlet Seating</b>	Outlet seating in state of disrepair and requires reupholstering	Currently a fire risk plus seating needs to be repaired to a suitable standard for customer use and comfort	<b>£15,000</b>
	<b>Reynolds Cellar Cooling</b>	Replacement of cellar cooling system	Cellar needs to be kept at constant temp for product serve and Health and Safety	<b>£5,000</b>
	<b>Reynolds Sound and Lighting</b>	Upgrade of current system	Current equipment is old and needs renewing / replacing	<b>£4,000</b>
	<b>CCTV Upgrade</b>	Upgrade existing system / cameras to digital	Ensure effective security and Health and Safety throughout building	<b>£6,500</b>
	<b>FiveSixEight Shutter Repair</b>	Replacement of shutter engines	Shutters provide security of bar and kitchen stock and equipment	<b>£4,000</b>
	<b>Membership Research Exercise</b>	Commission external research partner to carry out detailed student research	Inform new strategy and ensure student-focused approach to service development	<b>£9,000</b>
	<b>Upgrade and Update Building Signage</b>	Renew and improve current signage and fill gaps in signage	Ensure Health and Safety plus improve building use and brand awareness	<b>£12,000</b>
	<b>Equipment and Furniture in Social Spaces</b>	Basic refresh of all social / commercial spaces to upgrade or replace broken / work equipment and furniture	Ensure safe and comfortable environment for customers across all venues	<b>£45,000</b>
	<b>Enquiry Ticket System</b>	Procurement of new system – none currently in place	Enable improvement to customer service across all services	<b>£15,000</b>
	<b>Reynolds Painting &amp; Decorating</b>	Superficial works to ceiling, walls and woodwork	Space is in a state of disrepair and needs to be a more inviting and comfortable environment	<b>£6,450</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>£336,950</b>

■ = Urgent / High Priority

■ = Medium Priority

## 10. Conclusion

It is a challenging, yet exciting time for Imperial College Union. We have embarked upon a process that will help to stabilise the foundations of the Union, enabling us to move forward in future years and become the kind of students' union that Imperial students need and deserve.

We are very grateful for the support already provided by the College, which has been pivotal in enabling us to reach a position where we have implemented a change programme that will enable the Union to deliver the step-change required.

Throughout this plan and block grant submission, we have aimed to outline the priorities and deliverables for the Union from August 2020 until July 2021. We have also strived to give an indicator of the potential of ICU and the position we are aiming to reach in the long-term.

In order to support the transformation that the Union is undertaking, we have requested block grant funding of **£1,941,770** for the Financial Year 2020-21. In addition, we have also requested one-off funding of **£336,950** as capital investment. This money will be spent on improving our physical spaces to ensure they are safe and in line with the brand image we wish to create. We would also have an urgent need to invest in our systems to ensure they support our journey to become leaner and more efficient.

We believe that there is a strong understanding across the College of the importance, relevance and need for a strong students' union at Imperial College London and we hope that this submission provides reassurance about our direction of travel and clarity about the level of support we'll need over the next year in order to maintain the pace of this change process.