

Imperial College Union
An addendum to the paper 'Non-membership, non-course related clubs'
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The paper 'Non-membership, non-course related clubs' asks CSB to make a decision on the future funding model of the three motor clubs: CGCU VVMC, RSM Motor and RCS Motor. However, it does not explain why the clubs have been allowed to operate as non-membership clubs in the past, or provide any details about them.

This addendum has been produced by the clubs to provide CSB with suitable information on which to make a decision. We were only informed on Thursday that this was to be discussed at this meeting, so please accept our apologies for submitting a long paper so close to the meeting. We hope CSB will have time to read and digest the information before making a decision.

Why do the motor clubs exist?

Between 1934 and 1960 Imperial College students from the original constituent colleges (City & Guilds College, the Royal College of Science and the Royal School of Mines) purchased motorised mascots to represent their students and act as transport for their constituent union presidents. The motor clubs were subsequently set up as custodians of those vehicles, to maintain and preserve them for use by the student body.

This is a contrast to most clubs, which are formed to carry out an activity and then buy appropriate equipment. It is also part of the reason why the clubs have historically been afforded special arrangements regarding membership and grant. If any other club has a drop in membership, its equipment can be sold. If there is more interest in the activity later, more equipment can be purchased. Disposing of equipment owned by the motor clubs means getting rid of the motorised mascots, denying students the opportunity to use the historic fleet forever.

The motorised mascots cannot be replaced - they are repaired where necessary, usually in keeping with the original methods and design. Members of the motor clubs carry out these maintenance responsibilities.

The motor clubs endeavour to make the vehicles available to both members and any other student groups who want to use them. The clubs rely on the goodwill of student drivers and, where necessary, alumni to provide sufficient qualified drivers and crew to make them available at student events.

What do the motor clubs do?

Motor club activities fall in to 3 different areas:

1. Maintenance and legal operation of the motorised mascots (funded by Union grant, with equipment donations from alumni);
2. Operating the vehicles for student, College and external events (funded by donations from alumni, College and externals);
3. Social trips run by the clubs around London and to historic vehicle shows around the country (funded by the members);

The first of these, maintenance and legal operation, is similar to the work of the Membership Services department in keeping the minibus fleet operational. However, the maintenance requirements for the motorised mascots are extremely labour intensive and highly-skilled. The vehicles can't just be taken to the nearest Ford dealer if there is something wrong with them: students, assisted by alumni, have to repair the vehicles themselves, manufacturing new parts as necessary. Sadly Halfords do not stock spare parts for vintage cars and fire engines.

Donations are encouraged whenever the vehicles attend events run by students, College or external groups. The licensing exemptions and insurance conditions which allow students to drive the vehicles do not permit the club to charge for events. Alumni will frequently subsidise events with student groups by covering petrol costs. Many of the events with external groups are community based or charitable in nature, e.g. talking to nursery or school children about the vehicles, attending local school or parish fayres or being pulled around by the London Fire Brigade to raise money for charity.

The clubs also go on social trips once or twice a week, taking the vehicles out around the local area. During the summer they attend a variety of events around the country. The costs of these trips are covered by the members.

As can be seen from these descriptions, the Union grant ensures that the vehicles can be kept operational and made available to all students groups. The majority of the costs (predominantly fuel, entry fees at some events and certain items of equipment) are picked up by members or donations from alumni, the College and externals.

Why is there such low student participation?

There is a misconception that the vehicles are there purely for the enjoyment of a handful of students (the registered members of the clubs). In the first few weeks of each year hundreds of students participate in motor club activities and throughout the year the vehicles turn up for free to as many Union events as possible. They do this for the benefit of all full members of ICU.

Participation has been lower this year as Jezebel has been off the road with a major, once-in-20-years failure, greatly reducing the total number of students able to take part. However, in a typical year the motor clubs will arrange or be involved in events such as:

- Trips from halls to the Union Mingle (first weekend)
- Society pub crawls (various departments depending on the year)
- 'Taxi' service for student events, e.g. RCSU Science Challenge, postgrad evenings out (arranged by research groups, rather than the GSA)
- Parades, such as the Lord Mayor's Show

If it was practical to make everyone who travelled on the vehicles a member, by the end of welcome week the clubs would have membership figures in excess of 200. However, for most of these events the clubs know that they will be collecting people from certain student groups (e.g. halls in Evelyn Gardens, CivSoc), but not which specific people until they arrive

at a pick-up location. Electronic sign-up is not practical by the side of the road and paper membership forms have a tendency to blow away (and are now banned by ICU). Making 10 people fill in forms for each trip would also greatly reduce the number of students carried, as the vehicles tend to travel non-stop for several hours during these events.

Why is there no membership fee?

The motor clubs serve a number of roles (as a maintenance unit, a service provider and a social club), so a completely pay-per-play model has been used to this point. Membership is free, but activities beyond those relating to maintenance of the vehicles are not subsidised, meaning members carry the full costs.

As previously described, it is not practical to register everyone who makes use of the vehicles as a member (through the usual channels, at least). Consequently the only people who would pay the membership fee would be those working on maintenance and repair, or those taking part in 'away' trips over the summer (who already pay the full costs).

Why don't the alumni pay?

Alumni do in fact contribute an enormous amount to the finances of the clubs. They pay approximately three or four times the economic cost for each event they attend, currently there is over £15,000 worth of equipment in the garages donated by alumni and they provide invaluable expertise and training worth thousands of pounds completely free of charge (no motor club budget includes entries for instructors, despite the high level of training required to safely operate the vehicles).

The vehicles were acquired for students use. It would be a shame to rely completely on alumni to pay and take away the student-led focus.

How do the clubs keep costs down?

Due to donations of equipment by the College and alumni, the clubs have built sufficient maintenance facilities over the past 50 years to repair most mechanical problems at low cost on campus. They draw expertise from both current students and alumni to keep the vehicles running without having to send parts away for repair, except for very specialist jobs. The largest cost on most repair jobs is labour, which is not a problem when students and alumni are carrying out the work.

How would making them membership clubs affect them?

Using the standard membership model for the motor clubs would mean that the role of the clubs would switch from making the vehicles available to any student groups who want to use them, to maintaining them for the sole use of the members. There would no longer be an obligation to departmental societies or faculty unions to make the vehicles available for their events.

A dip in interest in the maintenance of the vehicles would cut off funding, leaving the condition of these invaluable vehicles in danger. Interest frequently runs in cycles: when a new batch of interested students started, substantial amounts would have to be spent restoring the vehicles to working condition.

Summary

The motor clubs have a number of roles, the principal one being to maintain the motorised mascots for use by students.

Under the current set-up, members pay for their use of the vehicle (e.g. petrol, part of the wear and tear, entry and travel costs on trips). External users (e.g. College) contribute to running costs for their events - e.g. money for cleaning materials when used at graduation. The costs required to keep the vehicles insured and mechanically roadworthy are covered by the grant. Without the grant they can't be safely and legally maintained, and no-one would be able to use them.

The amount of money required to keep the vehicles on the road is a fixed figure and is irrespective of the number of people doing the maintenance. Safe maintenance and operation of the vehicles are complex tasks. New members are trained by current students and alumni, who already contribute considerable financial, logistical and practical assistance.

The current membership model keeps the vehicles available for student groups to use, in the role they were originally purchased for, while making students who use the vehicles for their own interests cover the costs of those activities.

Consequently, we would ask CSB to maintain the current non-membership status of the motor clubs, to preserve the vehicles for the use by all students in the way they were intended.

Fun Facts

- The historic fleet covers around 2,500 miles a year on average.
- The youngest vehicle in the fleet is a sprightly 85, the oldest 108.
- The combined age of the fleet is 373 years, and they have been at Imperial for a total of 210 years.
- Boanerges, the 1902 James and Browne maintained by CGCU VVMC, is one of only two by that manufacturer left in the world, and was made down the road in Hammersmith.
- Jezebel, the 1916 Dennis Fire Engine maintained by RCS Motor, is the oldest surviving model in continuous service (most have been restored from scrap).
- Clementine, the 1926 Morris Truck maintained by RSM Motor, used to be a steam engine before the RSM wanted something capable of carrying more beer.