



Imperial College Union Board of Trustees Report

Wednesday 23rd May 2018

AGENDA ITEM NO.	
TITLE	Imperial College Union Branding Strategy: ICU vs. I don't see you
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	The structure of Imperial College Union poses unique challenges, particularly with regards to 'brand recognition' and engaging with traditionally underrepresented groups, such as postgraduate students. Two possible approaches are considered: increasing Union direct presence ('ICU') and supporting constituent unions to share the Union's work ('I don't see you').
PURPOSE	Board members to consider the role of Imperial College Union as distinct from that of the Constituent Unions, and the implications this will have on future plans
DECISION/ACTION REQUIRED	Board members to consider whether we should actively seek to increase our presence at non-SK campuses and our engagement of postgraduates or support constituent unions to do so

Imperial College Union Branding Strategy: ICU vs. I don't see you

Introduction:

Imperial College Union has a unique structure. Whilst most other university students are represented by one 'students' union', students at Imperial College London are represented by both Imperial College Union (all students) and their relevant constituent union (ICSM, RSM, CGCU, RCSU, GSU or Silwood). This has the potential to cause difficulties with 'brand recognition', and it is often unclear whether students affiliate with the Union, or their constituent union.

Further complicating matters is the different roles the Union plays. Sometimes students will interact directly with Union services, and it is clear they are dealing with Imperial College Union. Other times, students will interact with services the Union provides through their constituent unions (Academic Representation, for example), and it is not clear to them that it is the *Union* providing this, rather than the constituent union.

ICU: Work to increase the Union reach with underrepresented groups including postgraduates and those at non-South Kensington sites:

There is traditionally lower engagement with the Union (gauged by the surrogate marker of voter turnout) with postgraduate students and those at non-South Kensington (N-SK) sites, campuses with high proportions of postgraduate students. One proposed way of addressing this is to increase the Union's presence at such campuses and to be more targeted in activities, services and representation of postgraduates.

The N-SK Working Group has made steps to deliver this change. Union staff have made visits to several N-SK sites, and run outreach and training sessions, aiming to increase student engagement with the Union through increasing Union presence at N-SK sites. Effective engagement of postgraduates is not widespread and would require a change in approach.

I don't see you:

An alternative method to increase student engagement with the Union has been to work with constituent unions to share our messages and increase our engagement, rather than increasing presence of the *Union* brand directly. This approach was demonstrated in the 2018 Student Academic Choice Awards, which saw the highest ever number of nominations – 1868. Rather than the Union solely publicising the scheme, constituent unions were involved, an approach which was viewed favourably by constituent union presidents¹:

¹ <http://felixonline.co.uk/articles/2018-02-16-sacas-see-record-breaking-number-of-nominations/>

“I think it was great to get the CUs involved, asking them to help advertise and also put in their weekly emails. I think that the Union would benefit greatly in actively asking us for help on more things, which in turn would strengthen the links between CUs and ICU.”

CGCU President

“[This] new grassroots method of achieving this excellent batch of SACAs submissions is to be applauded, and hopefully this signifies a major change in the way that Officer Trustees and staff engage critically with Union volunteers.”

RCSU President

In this approach the focus was not to increase ‘Union’ presence of our scheme, but to facilitate the constituent unions to share our message.

Conclusion:

With student numbers set to continue to grow within postgraduate courses and increasing numbers moving to sites beyond South Kensington, it is vital that we clearly articulate the role we want the Union to fulfil, as this will influence a huge part of our work going forwards, including our communications plan.

The committee are invited to address the following two questions:

1: What is the primary role of Imperial College Union as distinct from that of the Constituent Unions?

2: Given the answer to 1, should we be actively seeking to increase our presence at non-SK campuses and our engagement of postgraduates or supporting constituent unions to do so?