



Imperial College Union Communications Committee

24 April 2018

AGENDA ITEM NO.	6
TITLE	Strategic Communication
AUTHOR	Andrew Keenan, Head of Student Voice & Communications
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>A Strategic Marketing Plan will be implemented for 2018/19.</p> <p>Work will begin immediately through internal engagement and targeted research into student views.</p> <p>One specific outcome of the SMP will be to undertake research, supported by external consultants, to understand how our brand identity can be improved from mid-2019 onwards.</p>
PURPOSE	To inform the Committee on the progress made towards a strategic marketing plan and, in the longer term, work on our brand identity; to explain in greater detail the work that will be delivered in preparation for 2018/19 and how it will be embedded.
DECISION/ACTION REQUIRED	Commentary on proposed approach. Approval of suggested work and timeline.

Strategic communication

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Multiple stakeholders, including staff, Officers and Trustees, have requested a more strategic approach to our communication and marketing.
- 1.2. In brief, Imperial College Union produces a considerable volume of content across all areas of its activities; however there is room for development in ensuring all communication is controlled to ensure we are reinforcing a pre-agreed narrative and small set of messages.
- 1.3. Additionally, processes and mutual expectations for requesting and delivering collateral and content are often unclear, and the lack of a detailed ICU or directorate-wide calendar has hampered planning and forced teams into a reactive position throughout much of each year.
- 1.4. One of my SMG Objectives is to *incorporate a future brand & strategic communications review into 2018/19 budget and planning.*

2. Proposal

- 2.1. A small staff and officer group has met to expand my SMG objective into a defined output to tackle the above challenges for 2018/19. The outcome was three overlapping 'projects', collectively known as our *strategic communications* work.
 - 2.1.1. **Initial 'dipstick' research**
 - 2.1.2. **A 2018/19 strategic marketing plan (SMP)**
 - 2.1.3. **A thread of that plan that sets us up for longer-term brand work.**

3. 'Dipstick research'

- 3.1. Taking places from now to the end of May, this is envisaged as a short, surgical exercise of engagement with our membership, relying on email and online interaction over focus groups. The objectives are to establish a baseline of how we are perceived, and to inform the themes or 'wraparounds' we will choose for the 2018/19 SMP – the themes that all communications content must be framed within.

4. 2018/19 strategic marketing plan

- 4.1. Beginning now and coming into effect on 1 August 2018, this is an imperative requirement that the Student Voice & Communications Directorate must deliver; it has been a regular request of managers across ICU. Its purpose is to move us from tactical/reactive communications to planned and curated content, all written to support a small pre-determined set of messages ('wraparounds').
- 4.2. Method: Through the dipstick research, engagement with staff, and selecting the critical messages from our strategy, we will determine and agree a few key messages, that collectively will be our 'Union story' for 2018/19. This not only acts as a filter for suggested

content, but as frames for helping all teams recast the comms of their work into these messages. We will include baseline measures to enable verification of impact.

4.3. The SMP will include the following features:

- 4.3.1. Themes for message curation
- 4.3.2. High-level narrative for 2018/19 that covers our key events and projects
- 4.3.3. Brief, definitive toolkit of audiences, voices and channels
- 4.3.4. Clear procedures for requesting and delivering communication work
- 4.3.5. Brand identity research – see third project below.
- 4.3.6. An ‘editorial’ process that occurs on at least a weekly basis, so the M&C team can manage and prioritise short-lived content from teams and OTs ahead of time.
- 4.3.7. A clear communication and staff engagement plan (the comms plan’s comms plan)

4.4. The SMP can only be successful if it is embedded into our working practices, with all teams bought into its purpose. To achieve this, the SMP will be:

- 4.4.1. Approved by Communications Committee in a final 2017/18 meeting and reviewed at its meetings throughout 2018/19
- 4.4.2. Owned at SMG level by Andrew and led on an operational level by Keriann (Marketing & Communications Manager).
- 4.4.3. Referred to (when of value) at Leadership, SMT and other relevant staff and Officer Trustee meetings.
- 4.4.4. Carefully and consciously communicated to staff throughout the year, by being used as the backbone of the M&C team’s contact with other teams
- 4.4.5. Built around an ICU-wide messaging and events calendar accessible to all staff.

4.5. Measurement and evaluation

- 4.5.1. A baseline of student understanding and engagement will be established through a small basket of measures, such as results of the dipstick research, social media engagement figures, and other metrics.

5. Externally-supported research on brand identity

- 5.1. For clarity, our ‘brand identity’ is not just our visual language such as our logo and corporate colours. It is the *entire perception of Imperial College Union in the eyes of our members*; how we present ourselves, explain our purpose, demonstrate our impact, and communicate our personality and ethos in our work.
- 5.2. I am not aware of any fundamental reviews or changes to Imperial College Union’s brand identity within institutional memory; our brand identity is the unplanned result of many years of developing and growing activities. Our brand is not weak, but it is challenged; to leave it to continue evolving without planning is a significant strategic risk.
- 5.3. I believe that the key to breaking out of our current electoral engagement plateau lies in reviewing and improving our brand identity. Other organisational imperatives, such as commercial success and a strong relationship with College, will be aided by an improved

brand identity.

- 5.4. I feel that it would be highly risky for Imperial College Union to embark on brand work (of any meaningful scale) without first bringing in external expertise, such as a consultancy, to help us understand our current situation and the potential for improvement. The group felt that bringing in this expertise in the first term of 2018/19 would be more effective than doing it now, and would not prevent a summer 2019 launch of any resulting work, as currently expected.

6. Next steps

- 6.1. Arrange future meetings of a strategic communications steering group

- 6.2. Focus work of M&C Manager onto this task:

- 6.2.1. Initial focus on planning student research and ICU staff engagement

- 6.2.2. Then transition into drafting and testing a 2018/19 plan

- 6.2.3. Then begin to explore how in-depth our brand identity work needs to be

- 6.3. Estimate likely financial implications for 2018/19 and factor into budget discussions

- 6.4. I am keen to focus on *delivering* the SMP rather than getting caught in a groove of *planning* it, so I have committed to presenting an early draft of the SMP itself to the 15 May SMG meeting, which I will share with this committee.