



Imperial College Union Board of Trustees
8 July 2021

AGENDA ITEM NO.	12
TITLE	ICU Roadmap: Our Journey to August 2021
AUTHOR	Dr Tom Flynn (Incoming Managing Director)
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>This paper is a discussion document that sets out initial thinking for the next 12 months of ICU's transformation.</p> <p>Key questions for Board members to consider are included at the end.</p>
PURPOSE	<p>To set out some initial thinking regarding the next phase of ICU's transformation, breaking the process down into three core phases that take us to August 2021.</p> <p>To set out some initial thinking regarding phase two of this programme, as we look to develop a new strategy and associated operating model for the organisation.</p> <p>To consult on a number of key questions in order to shape a final version of this paper for approval by the Board of Trustees in August 2020.</p>
DECISION/ACTION REQUIRED	To consider

1. The operating context

ICU is currently in a period of significant change driven by two catalysts. It is imperative to understand the ramifications of both in order to map out a path to August 2021. The first of these catalysts are internal factors, where the Board has made an explicit decision to deal with a lack of organisational performance and clear strategy for the organisation. The improvement plan developed and delivered by the interim MD has made good progress in addressing some of the most critical issues, but there is now a requirement to go beyond 'crisis transformation' and start to plan out the long-term future for the organisation. The second catalyst is an external shock that poses a threat not just to ICU, but to the College, the sector, and society itself – the COVID-19 pandemic. These respective catalysts both point towards transformation, and it is crucial that over the next 12 months ICU navigates a path that draws on both – using tactical change to enable longer term development.

Over the next three months the Union will be required to initially prioritise responding to the second of these catalysts, whilst ensuring it puts itself in a strong position to switch to the first. The budget and staffing model proposed by the Interim MD delivers what should be viewed as our 'core operating model' – giving ICU the ability to continue delivering many of our key charitable services, albeit through different channels or mechanisms. It also gives us a period of time to pause and reflect on the viability and operating model of our commercial services and build a business plan that makes the entire operation more relevant and more financially sustainable for the organisation. This will need to be done in conjunction with the College.

2. Our theory of change

When developing a strategic plan, it is important to be clear about the assumptions upon which it is based. A 'theory of change' is a specific and measurable description of a social change initiative that:

Shows a causal pathway from A to B by specifying what is needed for any goals to be achieved.

Requires the articulation of underlying assumptions which can be tested and measured.

Starts from 'what you want to achieve' and then works backwards in order to understand what tactics and actions are required to deliver this.

For almost all Students' Unions, the underpinning architecture is broadly the same – and can be set out in four basic propositions:

- i. Imperial College Union should have a positive impact on the experience and outcomes of all Imperial College students from all backgrounds.
- ii. Positive impact is delivered by a combination of service provision (doing things for students, or helping them do things for themselves), and advocating for students (representing their interests to others).
- iii. Providing services for students can be done via direct delivery (doing it ourselves), in partnership with another organisation (most often the College), or via third party commissioning. The appropriate model will differ depending on the nature of the service and where competitive advantage lies.
- iv. Imperial College Union must be a sustainable, effective and credible organisation in order to provide services and advocate for students' interests successfully. Legitimacy must be earned and will be a key driver for success in both areas of impact.

3. Planning the plan

It is clear that ICU needs to view the next 12 months in three key phases. The current working assumption is that we are likely to continue experiencing significant impact from COVID-19 for the entire academic year, with some prospect of business as usual returning in May to August. As the year unfolds, we will

have to revise and adapt our expectations on this, and it may be that by January 2021 we are having to consider longer-term changes to the organisation through this lens.

Phase	Expected Period	Description
One	August to October	Tactical change driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring ICU to temporarily shrink to a core operating model. Continuation of 'business as usual' under social distancing and other associated regulations.
Two	October to April 2021	Major strategic consultation and engagement period, looking at the future of ICU and building a shared vision that resonates with all our stakeholders.
Three	April to August 2021	The planning and commencement of an agreed 'transformation programme' based on a strategic plan that will likely include significant changes to the operating model of the organisation.

4. Phase two: building back better with a clear strategy

The most important element of phase two will be the development of a new strategy for the organisation. Given the context in which we find ourselves, it is more important than ever that this is built in a structured and consultative manner. The uncertainty of the current operating context will naturally create nervousness amongst both students, staff and the College – we need to be clear that everyone will 'get their say' and work hard to find consensus.

The exact timeline will need to be further refined by the Leadership Group, but at minimum the development should include the following stages:

Stage	Description	Outputs
One	Desk based research and identification of future challenges	MD, President and Chair of Trustees to compile briefing note on the current performance and challenges facing ICU, setting the context for the new strategy and posing a set of key questions.
Two	Stakeholder one to ones	MD, OTs and key staff to undertake structured one to one interviews with various stakeholders using pre agreed questions. These will look at 'what makes Imperial special' and gain more insight into the challenges we face.
Three	Student insight	ICU to launch a student facing piece of insight (likely a short survey) that directly engages our members in the review. It will ask about our future priorities and what students think we should be focussing on.
Four	Green paper	MD and OTs will launch a 'green paper' that broadly summarises the key findings of the consultation (likely to be in December), setting out expected themes and priorities. This will pose a number of key questions, and explain trade-offs that might be required.
Five	Stakeholder consultations	ICU to run a number of 'deliberative events' on the Green Paper, refining the language we use and focusing specifically on tangible work that the plan would underpin.
Six	Approval and dissemination	Student Council and Board to approve. Formal dissemination to all stakeholders.

4.1 What should a new strategic plan include?

There are lots of different ways for organisations to set out their strategy. For ICU, given its current operation, the most appropriate would be the more conventional approach adopted within the charity

sector. This will ensure clarity and accountability, as well as build credibility that we are taking the transformation seriously.

Agree a clear mission:

The previous strategy did not articulate ICU’s mission in a single statement that is both easy to understand and simple to apply. This is particularly important for Students’ Unions, where we operate such a diverse range of services that need to be conceptualised under a single banner. We must recognise that different groups of our members often view the Union as something very different – which means a unifying mission is essential. It is also the case that Students’ Unions across the country share similar (if not identical) missions – largely driven by the Education Act 1994 and Charities Act 2011. Some relevant examples are:

Leeds	To help you love your time in Leeds
Nottingham	Our key aim is to be where you, our students, are. We want to be right at the heart of student life representing, supporting and involving all of you, when you need us.
Loughborough	To be the driving force behind the UK’s best student experience
Manchester	To amplify student life
Sheffield	To represent, support and enhance the lives of University of Sheffield students
Royal Holloway Leeds Beckett / Huddersfield	To make student life better

Deconstruct this mission into core aims

Once we have set a clear mission, this needs to be broken down into core aims – that importantly must be focussed on the impact we’re going to have on *all students from all backgrounds*. This section must also be articulated in language that our members understand so it can be used to drive our communication and impact reporting. The previous strategy conflated this section with enablers – making it difficult to draw lines of accountability and report performance effectively. There are lots of different ways that Students’ Unions across the sector do this. Some the most common themes are:

- i. Education or academic experience
- ii. Wellbeing and non-academic support
- iii. Fun and enjoyment
- iv. Community building
- v. Civic responsibility
- vi. Employability and professional development
- vii. Internationalisation

Identify a set of internal enablers which will support the deliver of these aims

Just as aims are outward facing, enablers are the reciprocal and should focus on the things we need to do in order to deliver this impact for students. These are often more operational and associated with standards and resources. The previous plan (under the section Your Union) does not go into sufficient detail or provide adequate structure for further planning. There are lots of different ways that Students’ Unions across the sector do this. Some the most common themes are:

- i. Resources (financial and physical)
- ii. Commercial services
- iii. People and culture
- iv. Democracy and governance
- v. Digital capability
- vi. Communication
- vii. Research and insight

Define our values which will guide all our work

The previous plan does define a set of values which are essential as they govern how we should act – our behaviours, rather than what we’re doing. As a political organisation with lobbying objectives, ICU must put our values at the heart of our operation – it is what makes us different from the College and other charities. However, it is important to understand whether these are still the most relevant for all our stakeholders, and whether the language resonates with students.

Create a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Once we have stated our mission, aims and enablers, it's then important to set clear targets for where we want to be in 2025. These should include a range of perception-based factors measured by an annual membership survey, as well as concrete indicators based on participation and engagement. Baseline data will need to be established for 2021 (adjusting for COVID-19 where appropriate).

Ensure alignment (where possible) with the College strategy

Whilst we operate and are governed independently from College, it is imperative to note that we are also partners in delivering an experience for students at Imperial. Given that College are our biggest funder (both financially and in terms of other resources), our strategy should be supported by a document which clearly maps the alignment to their own plan. This will ensure legitimacy and credibility, and will be crucial for obtaining further support for our development.

4.2 How should we communicate?

It cannot be overstated just how important effective communication for the development of a new strategy will be. The legitimacy of any plan, and therefore the ability to use it to drive change, will depend not just on the quality of the ideas contained within it – but also the buy-in we achieve from our stakeholders. To do this, we need to be:

- i. Honest about the need to change: demonstrating why it's important that ICU must transform to become a more effective organisation.
- ii. Clear about our process: helping stakeholders understand how they can get involved, and why their voices are so important.
- iii. Proactive with our messaging: showing that we're taking these steps from a positive place, owning the process and championing it.
- iv. Unequivocal about our end goal: to be the best Students' Union in the country – a Union that Imperial students deserve.

One suggestion would be for ICU to wrap this project into a broader online communication hub called something like 'Transforming ICU'. This would be used to house all projects that are linked to the development of the strategy over the next 12 months – making it clear to everyone involved that each strand is part of the larger, longer term transformation. Imperial College Professional Services are about to undertake a similar scheme, so the timing aligns nicely with this.

Some examples of other universities and students' unions who have done similar projects include:

Warwick	'Simplify, Collaborate, Deliver'	www.warwick.ac.uk/services/sg/spd/scd
UCL	Transforming Professional Services (TOPS)	www.ucl.ac.uk/transforming-our-professional-services
Nottingham	Union Refresh	www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/unionrefresh
RHSU	Union Upgrade	www.su.rhul.ac.uk/upgrade
Leeds	Union Upgrade	Website no longer active

5. Key questions for Board

There are a number of key questions that Board might want to consider at this initial stage, in order to shape the final version of this paper in August.

- i. Does the theory of change make sense, or are there elements missing from it?
- ii. Are there any other stages in the strategy development that you would wish to see?
- iii. What 'intelligence' exists within ICU and the College regarding the student experience, and areas it is strong or weak?
- iv. Which stakeholders would you identify as critical? What are the best ways to engage them?
- v. Particularly with reference to the 'enablers', are there any missing from this list that you think are particularly relevant for ICU to consider?
- vi. What are trustees' views on the current set of 'values'? Are these bold enough?
- vii. How would you summarise ICU's mission in one sentence?