

# **Volunteer Strategy Research 2020**

## **1. Overview**

1.1. Our Vision

## **2. Research Methodology**

2.1. Internal Learning Needs Analysis

2.2. Volunteer Training Survey Results

2.3. 121's and Focus Groups Outcomes

2.4. Summary of Research into other Students' Union's volunteer schemes

## 1. Overview

Our volunteers remain the most valuable resource of the organisation and there is acknowledgement that all volunteers of Imperial College Union will repeatedly need to refresh existing skills and require new skills annually. The Opportunities and Development Department will continue with a co-production model of expertise where local expertise is housed both within Opportunities and Development and in other departments of the organisation.

The Opportunities and Development Department will also seek to gain input and evaluation from key student volunteers throughout the production and delivery of the Volunteer Strategy to ensure it consistently reflects their wants/needs.

## 2. Research Methodology

Research to shape the Volunteer Strategy has been split into four parts – Internal Learning Needs Analysis, Volunteer Training Survey Results, 121s/Focus Group Outcomes and research into other Union Volunteer activity. This approach was taken to ensure that key volunteer's experience and staff's expertise were valued within the process whilst considering other outputs from similar institutions.

All staff and students were asked about the key skills and knowledge areas they believe their volunteer positions would find Not Essential, Beneficial but not Essential or Essential. These skills and knowledge themes were taken directly from the current volunteer job descriptions available alongside the current training we offer. The Learning Needs Analysis and the Volunteer Training Survey also allowed staff/students to feedback on which policies are relevant to their position.

Whilst there were some minor differences in opinion when considering the core skills volunteers require, there were five major themes for core skills were:

1. Comprehensive understanding of GDPR and the implications on position held including personal responsibility.
2. Effective use of email, Office 365, Systems and eActivities.
3. Fairly representing the views of others in a diplomatic fashion that aims to influence decisions.
4. Managing relationships with peers and upwards, negotiation, obtaining approval for projects and changes.
5. Communication skills, questioning and active listening, networking, building trust, empathy and mutual understanding.

### 2.1 Internal Learning Needs Analysis

Staff and Officer Trustees from the Activities, Development and Representation departments were all asked to complete a Learning Needs Analysis of the range of volunteer roles we currently offer grouped into; CSPs, MG Committees, CU Committees, Liberation and

Community Officers, Council Representatives, Academic Representatives and Wellbeing Representatives.

For a detailed view of the Learning Needs Analysis that breaks the groups down into individual roles, [click here](#).

Skills and Knowledge

<b>GROUP</b>	<b>KEY SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE IDENTIFIED</b>
CSPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of Union Policy and Structure</li> <li>• GDPR and effective use of Office 365 and eActivities</li> <li>• Managing relationships and negotiating with peers and upwards</li> <li>• Planning, prioritising, time management, commitment to work/life balance</li> <li>• Creating inclusive environments for members</li> </ul>
MG Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of Union Policy and Structure</li> <li>• GDPR and effective use of Office 365 and eActivities</li> <li>• Creating inclusive environments for members</li> <li>• Effective use of Office 365, eActivities and Systems</li> <li>• Financial and Commercial understanding</li> </ul>
CU Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of Union Policy and Structure</li> <li>• GDPR and effective use of Office 365 and eActivities</li> <li>• Managing relationships and negotiating with peers and upwards</li> <li>• Planning, prioritising, time management, commitment to work/life balance</li> <li>• Creating inclusive environments for members</li> </ul>
Liberation and Community Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing relationships and negotiating with peers and upwards</li> <li>• Embedding inclusivity in all activities, emotional intelligence, tackling</li> </ul>

	<p>unconscious bias and how to be an ally/active bystander</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting your role, events and projects, including marketing and publicity</li> <li>• Effective campaigning, making an impact, how to galvanise students and create social change</li> <li>• Knowledge of project management and skills to deliver projects, scaling and evaluation</li> </ul>
Council Representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fairly representing the views of others in a diplomatic fashion that aims to influence decisions</li> <li>• Collecting effective feedback and delivering feedback</li> <li>• Managing relationships and negotiating with peers and upwards</li> <li>• Financial and Commercial understanding</li> </ul>
Academic Representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective campaigning, making an impact, how to galvanise students and create social change</li> <li>• Embedding inclusivity in all activities, emotional intelligence, tackling unconscious bias and how to be an ally/active bystander</li> <li>• The 5 R's, what is an SSC/SSLG and the Decision Tree</li> <li>• Collecting effective feedback and delivering feedback</li> <li>• Fairly representing the views of others in a diplomatic fashion that aims to influence decisions</li> </ul>
Wellbeing Representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective campaigning, making an impact, how to galvanise students and create social change</li> <li>• Embedding inclusivity in all activities, emotional intelligence, tackling unconscious bias and how to be an ally/active bystander</li> <li>• The 5 R's, what is an SSC/SSLG and the Decision Tree</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collecting effective feedback and delivering feedback</li> <li>• Fairly representing the views of others in a diplomatic fashion that aims to influence decisions</li> </ul>
--	---

### Policies

<b>GROUP</b>	<b>KEY POLICIES IDENTIFIED</b>
CSPs	Volunteer, Under 18s, Complaints and Discipline, Freedom of Speech and Events Approval, Room Booking, Safe Space, Transport, Publicity, Health and Safety, Equipment, Activities Development Fund
MG Committees	Volunteer, Complaints and Discipline, Activities Development Fund, Associate Membership, CSP Contingency, CSP Equipment, Freedom of Speech and Event Approval, Health and Safety, New Activities Committee, Room Booking, Safe Space, Tours, Use of Grant, Use of Harlington Funds, Web Conduct
CU Committees	Volunteer, Under 18s, Complaints and Discipline, Freedom of Speech and Event Approval, Health and Safety, Publicity, Room Booking, Safe Space, Use of Grant, Web Conduct
Liberation and Community Officers	Volunteer, Complaints and Discipline, Freedom of Speech and Events Approval, Preservation of Religious Observation, Publicity, Representation, Room Booking, Safe Space, Web Conduct, Web, Widening Participation and International Students
Council Representatives	<b>All policies</b> were deemed "Would be beneficial but not essential"
Academic Representatives	Volunteer, Complaints and Discipline, Higher Education, Preservation of Religious Observance, Representation, Safe Space, Web Conduct, Widening Participation and International Students
Wellbeing Representatives	No Drugs, No Violence, Volunteer, Complaints and Discipline, Higher Education, Preservation of Religious Observance, Representation, Safe Space, Web Conduct, Widening Participation and International Students

As you can see from both the **Skills/Knowledge** and **Policies** tables, there is significant overlap in the core learning that is needed by all volunteers. These crossovers will be compared against the Volunteer Training Survey, 121s/Focus Groups and Research into other SUs to design a core learning and development programme for all volunteers.

## 2.2 Volunteer Training Survey Results

The Volunteer Training Survey was launched in January 2020 and closed in March 2020. Working across departments (Activities, Representation and Development), teams were encouraged to share the survey with their volunteers regularly.

In total **208** students began the survey and **147** completed all 16 questions. The Union currently has between 3000 – 3500 volunteers, so it is fair to say that a relatively small percentage of the volunteer community completed the survey.

Whilst curating the survey, we made the decision to capture the data holistically as many volunteers have multiple roles within the Union. Therefore, all students were considering the skills/knowledge and policies for all their roles. Whilst this was to ensure students did not get fatigued by filling out the survey several times, it also allows us to consider their volunteer journey. Students with several roles attending similar training from three different departments may lead to a negative experience within the Union, especially if the training varies in quality.

The following section will review the data without taking into consideration different volunteer roles and directorates. Once the core skills are identified that are applicable to all volunteers, teams will be encouraged to use the data to look at specific role's needs in their own development strategies. A commentary will be provided alongside the data to indicate why there is possible differences in opinion between staff and student's perception of core skills/policies.

### Demographic

As we sought to keep the survey as short as possible, we focused on the level of degree which students were studying (UG/PG) and which volunteer positions they held. 80% of the respondents were undergraduates.

<b>Volunteer Group</b>	<b>Number of respondents who hold a position from the volunteer group</b>
Council Members	8 (50%)
Welcome Week Volunteers	4
Liberation and Community Officers	3 (33%)
CSP Committee Members	47 (2%)
Constituent Union Committee Members	14 (9%)
Academic/Wellbeing Representatives	93 (20%)
Mums and Dads	32
Management Group Committee Members	5 (12%)
Halls Seniors	11 (13%)

As presented in the table, the Academic and Wellbeing Representatives had the highest rate of completion. This should be taken into consideration when reviewing the skills/knowledge and policies sections, as their volunteer role differs from the other positions due to the roles focusing mainly on representing the views of others.

### Policies

The purpose of policies and procedures is to explain to volunteers what the Union wishes to have happen and how it happens. An effective policy should outline what volunteers must do or not do, directions, limits, principles and guidance for decision making.

The Union is currently reviewing our policies, as a vast amount have lapsed or are no longer relevant. In this section of the survey, volunteers were asked which of the 33 policies listed on [www.imperialcollegeunion.org](http://www.imperialcollegeunion.org) they have used or referenced whilst being in their role(s). Below are the policies that 10%+ of the respondents have used or referenced.

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents who have used or referenced the policy in their role(s)</b>
Volunteer Policy	29%
Activities Development Fund	16%
Health and Safety Policy	22%
Higher Education policy	10%
Publicity Policy	14%
Representation Policy	16%
Room Booking Policy	38%
Safe Space Policy	12%
Tours Policy	12%
Union Awards Policy	14%
Use of Grant	14%

It is unsurprising that the most used or referenced policy is Room Booking, as most volunteers require this information to fulfil the core activities and duties in their role. **29%** of respondents said they have referenced or used the Volunteer Policy, which exists on the website despite lapsing in 2014. It is a strongly recommended, if this is the case, that this policy is updated and passed through Union Council as soon as possible.

**22%** of respondents said they have used or referenced the Health and Safety Policy, which perhaps would be higher if more CSPs completed the survey. This therefore reflects the high number of respondents who are Academic and Wellbeing Representatives, as they are not required to have a sound knowledge of Health and Safety to fulfil their role.

### Skills/Knowledge

<b>Skills/ Knowledge</b>	<b>Not essential to role</b>	<b>Could be beneficial but not essential</b>	<b>Essential to role</b>
Planning, prioritising and organising tasks and activities, time	8%	35%	57%

management for myself and the team.			
Motivation and leadership of committee and members.	12%	40%	48%
Communication skills, questioning and active listening, networking, building trust, empathy and mutual understanding.	3%	18%	79%
Handling grievances, discipline, helping and enabling others with challenges, resolving conflict.	18%	37%	45%
Effective use of email, Office 365, Systems and eActivities.	12%	35%	53%
Financial and commercial understanding (e.g. Annual Budget, profit & loss, budgeting, VAT, cashflow etc).	48%	32%	20%
Managing relationships with peers and upwards, negotiation, obtaining approval for projects and changes.	7%	24%	69%
Planning and running meetings with effective follow up.	16%	38%	46%
Business writing e.g letters, reports, plans, project plans, council papers.	44%	40%	16%
Elections and AGMs, including effective induction and handover.	31%	44%	25%
Creating and giving effective	30%	51%	19%



presentations/public speaking.			
Taking initiative, problem solving and decision making.	6%	33%	61%
Quality assurance according to quality standards and procedures.	41%	24%	35%
Comprehensive understanding of constitutions and Union policies.	24%	52%	24%
Comprehensive understanding of Health and Safety, Emergency Contacts and individual member's responsibility.	24%	53%	23%
Writing and submitting Risk Assessments.	64%	9%	27%
Event management, from idea to execution to evaluation.	37%	33%	30%
Working knowledge of BUCS and LUSL Policy and Procedure and how this relates to their CSP.	67%	25%	8%
Facilities and Space management, including booking space, usage of lighting and sound equipment, safe storage, maintaining and utilising space on and off campus.	36%	43%	21%
Basic First Aid training and Mental Health First Aid training.	39%	44%	17%
Promoting your role, events and project,	24%	41%	35%

including marketing and publicity.			
Stage safety, including working at heights and using electrical equipment safely.	28%	43%	29%
Effective campaigning, making an impact, how to galvanise students and create social change.	57%	25%	18%
Duty of care for members when off campus, i.e on Tours and Trips including managing incidents.	55%	34%	11%
Libel, Social Media management and Press management.	61%	25%	14%
Sponsorship management, including acquiring sponsorship, maintaining relationships, delivering contracts and evaluating effectiveness.	44%	33%	23%
Comprehensive understanding of GDPR and the implications on position held including personal responsibility.	21%	35%	44%
Embedding inclusivity in all activities, emotional intelligence, tackling unconscious bias and how to be an ally/active bystander.	28%	35%	37%
The 5 R's, what is an SSC/SSLG and the Decision Tree.	10%	30%	60%

Collecting effective feedback and delivering feedback.	17%	45%	38%
Knowledge of the structure the position sits in (College and Union) and their role in it.	17%	46%	37%
Personal commitment to a work/life/volunteer balance and time management.	12%	35%	53%
Chairing a committee meeting and being an active member in committees, including reading and understanding papers.	30%	35%	35%
Fairly representing the views of others in a diplomatic fashion that aims to influence decisions.	15%	24%	61%
Knowledge of project management and skills to deliver projects, scaling and evaluation.	26%	43%	31%
Crisis management.	37%	34%	29%
Fundraising and Charity Law.	64%	27%	9%

The top skills/knowledge identified by students are **communication skills, managing relationships with peers, fairly representing the views of others** and **taking initiative/problem solving**. This is unsurprising given the high number of respondents who hold representation positions.

More surprisingly, respondents **did not value the financial and commercial understanding**, with only **20%** expressing that it is essential to their role. When taking into consideration the number of respondents who are from CSP Committees (**32%**) this is still lower than what we should anticipate.

#### Learning Styles

Currently there is no uniform way of deciphering whether a particular learning need should be delivered online or in person. It is widely understood that not all students learn in the same way, especially when the content being delivered covers policies and skills/knowledge. This section of the survey seeks to reveal students' own perception of their learning styles.

Students were given the opportunity to choose multiple options that covered a range of learning styles; Online Booklet, Online Quiz, Online Seminar, eLearning, Face to Face Workshop, Face to Face Lecture, 121 with a member of Students' Union staff.

### *Policies*

Volunteers opted for **online learning** for the delivery of policies, with **63%** choosing an Online Booklet, **52%** for eLearning and **46%** for an Online Quizzes. The least popular options were Face to Face Lectures (**12%**) and 121 with a Member of Students' Union staff (**8%**).

### *Skills and Knowledge*

Volunteers were less certain with how they would like to develop their skills and knowledge, with many opting for a **mixture of online and face to face learning styles**. **50%** of the respondents valued Face to Face Workshops, making it the most popular option, alongside Online Booklets (**40%**) and eLearning (**38%**). 121 with a Member of Students' Union Staff and Face to Face Lectures continue to be the least favourable options, both with **24%**.

### Rewards and recognition

Departments currently operate their rewards and recognition schemes internally, with no Union wide approach to ensuring all volunteer receive the same level of gratitude across the organisation. Respondents were asked to provide any feedback on the type of rewards and recognition they would like to see for the volunteer positions they hold.

The **most popular** type of reward/recognition that respondents would like to see is **volunteer specific events**, with many citing that the Christmas events for the Academic and Wellbeing Representatives was a good way to network with each other and feel appreciated. Respondents also highly valued **discounts/vouchers**, especially for the Union's services – bars and shops.

Volunteers also praised the current **Rep of the Month Scheme** and the **Union Awards**, although there was some criticism about poor advertisement and unclear nomination/shortlisting processes.

Many students expressed that they **did not want or need any reward and recognition**, as doing the role itself is rewarding. This perhaps suggests that if the Union can improve the support and training, students will feel a greater sense of appreciation without tangible rewards and recognition throughout the academic year.

## **2.3 121s/Focus Group Outcomes**

As part of the research, the Development Team offered all senior and entry volunteers the opportunity to attend focus groups so they could discuss at length the strengths and weaknesses of their volunteer experiences and offer suggestions on where we can make improvements. Alongside this, senior volunteers (CU Committee Members and MG Committee Members) were contacted directly and offered the opportunity to have a 30-minute coffee with

the Student Development Manager to provide feedback and feedforward into our volunteer strategy.

### Focus Groups

Attendance at focus groups was incentivised by offering £5 Amazon Vouchers to each participant. Over a three-week period, we offered eight opportunities for students to attend a 1-hour session. In total, we had thirteen participants who signed up to three sessions who were from a variety of volunteer roles – Silwood CU Committee Members, Halls Seniors, Management Group Committee Members, CSP Committee Members, Disability Officer Council Rep and Wellbeing Reps. Whilst these numbers are relatively small, there was similar themes and narratives throughout from all volunteer positions.

- Lots of students haven't received training for their roles, or the training they received wasn't the learning and development they needed
- All attendees said they would prefer the training to use real life examples and have practical elements
- The Union should consider process efficiency, as this is a key area that makes students' lives difficult
- Students want reward and recognition from their own members, not the Union
- Finance training needs to be reviewed and easier to access for every volunteer, especially making claims and using the Credit Card function

### 121s with Senior Volunteers

In the same three-week period, we offered all senior volunteers the opportunity to meet with the Student Development Manager to discuss their training and support wants/needs, reviewing what they have received previously and how this can be improved. Three students met with the SD manager and one sent recommendations via email.

- Most MG Committees and CU Committees haven't received any training, just handover training which varies from "basic" to "very good"
- All committee members expressed that finance and eActivities training would be beneficial to their roles
- Annual Budgeting training should be available at all times of the year and explained in detail
- All senior volunteers interviewed would like to be involved in more decision making within the Union

## **2.4 Summary of Research into other Students' Unions**

The Union values the unique offering we provide of volunteer opportunities, especially in terms of the scale and breadth. However, it is noted that often we seek to eliminate challenges through new policies and procedures, rather than taking advice and learning best practice from other Students' Unions who provide similar services to us.

The Student Development Coordinator conducted two pieces of research – one into training opportunities at other Students' Unions and another into their Rewards and Recognition Schemes. The Students' Unions reviewed in this report are Leeds SU, Leicester SU, Kent SU, LSESU, Sheffield Hallam SU and LCSU.

### Key ideas from Training Opportunities research

- **All committee positions given access to all obligatory/fundamental training.** This allows students to support each other in their roles and gives all students a hub for accessing information, with the aim of reducing the chance of miscommunication.
- **Online training is a successful alternative for induction:** using an online platform to give all training gives students the ability to revisit their training through the year and is accessible for students who do not live on campus (See Leicester Union, Leeds Union). Induction training can be created through Programmes such as Oppia (used by Leicester: Free software) and Love2Learn (Leeds University Union). These programmes could be updated annually.
- **Integrate Leadership Training into CSP/Rep complimentary training:** Automatically enroll volunteers in leadership positions giving students workshops in working as a leader, effective teamwork, resolving conflict, confidence, inclusivity and public speaking in order to better equip students to fulfil their roles. This could also innovate a recognition scheme for Volunteers in order to log their responsibilities and achievements – recognizing effort and giving students tangible ways to reflect and state after graduation how they have developed desirable skills for employability.
- **Encourage Students to bring in external training for specific training needs** Like LSE, students could be encouraged to find their own training opportunities for non-essential training.
- **Offer essential training to media roles:** Defamation/libel/press training for Media chairs/Felix Editor/ICTV President

### Key ideas from Rewards and Recognition research

- **Volunteer/Volunteer Group of the Month** (with special privileges giving them more visibility at the College; Instagram/Facebook takeovers; blog spots; all society emails advertising events) This could be calculated from nominations (allowing for percentage of members)
- **Pizza/Food Evenings** for Volunteer Departments
- **Networking evenings** for volunteers within specific departments; e.g. same role in different societies
- **Congratulations emails** sent to volunteers after hosting events, follow ups to find out how events went
- Potentially Advertising **Imperial Award Programme** as a way for all volunteers to get recognised for their work via reflecting on their time volunteering.

For the full report on Research into Training Opportunities at other SUs, [click here](#)

For the full report on Rewards and Recognition at other SUs, [click here](#)