TB/21-22/40



Imperial College Union Board of Trustees / 16 February 2022

Commercial Review

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Purpose: To set out a development plan for commercial activity that supports the implementation

of the organisational 'back to basics' strategy.

1. Context

In May 2021, ICU launched a new Strategy 2021-23 entitled 'Back to Basics'. This strategy is, as the name suggests, about refocusing the organisation on our core purpose as a students' union and making sure that we have effective infrastructure in place in order to facilitate strong services such as advice, representation and support for our clubs, societies and projects.

Part of this infrastructure includes a sustainable financial model, and we agreed a revised funding model with the College that repositioned our commercial operations as either:

- i. 'Core' we primary deliver these services to contribute to the student experience and with a priority on our mission to make a **positive** impact on the experiences and outcomes of **all** Imperial College students from **all** backgrounds.
- ii. 'Enterprise' although these services may contribute to the student experience directly or indirectly, we primary run them because they general surplus funds to support investment within the rest of the organisation.

The overarching commercial framework has been set by the Strategy 2021-23 and associated financial model: we will run our venues and events at breakeven as 'Core' activity with an ambition to maximise the contribution to student experience; retail and sales & external hire will be 'Enterprise' activity, generating surpluses but not in a way that generates conflict with our 'Back to Basics' agenda.

At this stage of the organisation's development, it is essential that we do not create 'mission drift' and must retain a focus on getting our basic services right first. This might mean we need to delay or deprioritise other opportunities (even if they might generate returns) in the short term.

To support the 'Back to Basics' strategy, we have undertaken a Commercial Review to help guide the development of commercial activity in this context.

2. Scope

The following key areas were initially considered in scope as part of this review:

- i. The feasibility of all current outlets and services, based on both past performance, future potential and alignment with College plans.
- ii. Alignment of our current offering within the College/campus 'market' ensuring student experience is considered in this context.
- iii. A review of our supply chain and key contracts to improve efficiency and service.
- iv. A staffing model for the operation that considers a requirement to significantly increase our use of student staff across the organisation.
- v. A formal pricing policy that aligns with the wider financial model of the Union.
- vi. How our services are delivered (online vs physical, fulfilment options etc).
- vii. How our commercial areas can directly support student-led activities (including CSPs).

Whilst the resultant development plan does consider these areas, it is important to note that there are still some areas where the longer term impacts of the coronavirus pandemic are uncertain and this may have an impact on the ultimate viability of the operation (for example, Shop Extra, which has been significantly affected by campus utilisation changes). Where this is the case, decisions on major changes will continue to assess this uncertainty.

The scope deliberately does not include building business cases for new activity. Any work that identifies potential new opportunities will be collated and considered separately. Whilst we must continue to be alert to opportunities, this should be in the context of 'Back to Basics'.

3. Streams

The streams of work/services considered within this review are:

- i. Food & Beverage
- ii. Events & Entertainment
- iii. Retail
- iv. Sales & External Bookings

It is worth noting that there was a common theme across the streams around our casual student staff and how we maximise the potential of this relationship, for both the individuals and ICU. A number of recommendations and therefore contained in a separate section reflecting this.

4. Outputs

The key outputs for this project will be:

- i. A two-year *commercial development plan* for the Union that articulates a clear strategic rationale for our operation of retail, food & beverage, entertainment, and sale & external bookings.
- ii. A vision, set of USPs and business model for each outlet / service that we operate, which clearly aligns with current and future student requirements, and the broader approach taken by the College.

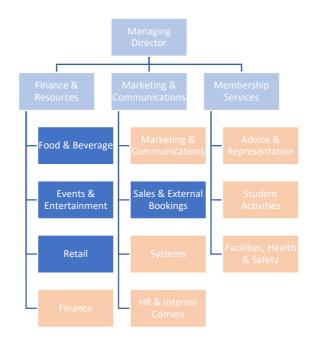
5. Measuring Success

As the purpose of the commercial review and development plans is to support the organisational strategy and delivery 'back to basics' in our commercial areas, success will ultimately be measured through the KPIs included in the strategy.

Under each 'stream', the relevant KPIs have been listed along with a small number of other measures that may be required – additional measures have been kept to a minimum, and where possible existing data used to avoid 'survey fatigue'.

6. Current Structure

For context, the current structure of how commercial activity fits within the organisation is shown below:





Food & Beverage

Vision statement: ICU will provide a range of quality food and beverage options that meet student needs and deliver good value for money. Our offer will be varied and serve all our members, including those that don't drink or have particular dietary requirements, by including them in the design of our menus and offering. Students will know exactly what they can expect of us and be confident that we deliver consistently high standards.

Evaluation of current position: We currently provide a good range of beverages across our venues, at prices considerably lower than local establishments providing our students with good value for money. Our food offer is restricted by a small kitchen in 568 and quality has been patchy at times due to the reliance of agency chefs. It is clear that there is strong underlying demand on campus and have the opportunity to offer something to our members that the London market does not. We have successfully launched an electronic ordering system that has created significant benefits and been well received.

Reynolds and h-bar have recovered from lockdowns slower than venues at Beit, partly due to not having outside space and partly because venues at Beit have been prioritised throughout disruption.

Deve	opment plan	
1.	Implement efficient, robust stock management, ordering and reporting systems to ensure target margins can be realised and wastage / loss minimised	 a. Launch new EPOS system – February 2022 b. Launch web-based ordering system – February 2022 c. Launch app-based ordering system – March 2022
2.	Overhaul our menu, with significant student consultation, to improve variety and value offered (including dietary allergen requirements offering)	 a. Undertake mass survey of catering feedback – Feb/March 2022 b. Form panel of students to help with focus groups / tasting – March 2022 c. Agree allergen labelling system with Campus Services to ensure consistency on campus – March 2022 d. Launch new menu – May 2022
3.	Develop a model to provide licensed bar services at the Union Concert Hall in conjunction with student performances and other uses of the space	 a. Trial plan developed for spring show season – February 2022 b. Review of trial and longer term proposal for consultation with CHUG – May 2022

4.	Relaunch an evening food offering in h-bar, working with Campus Services to ensure that this is compatible with their operations whilst still meeting student needs	a. Start exploring options with Campus Services – Feb 2022b. Evening menu launch – June 2022
5.	Launch a cyclical training programme for student casual staff to enhance consistency and transparency of expectations and training opportunities	Develop annual training matrix for each role, clearly articulating what skills and experience should be displayed to support promotions to more senior roles – March 2022
6.	Develop a sustainability plan for our food and beverage operation, with an ambition to eliminate the use of single use, non-composable plastics	 a. Project initiation as part of Union Sustainability project – February 2022 b. Development of Venues-specific plan - June 2022 a. Formal approval and implementation – July 2022
7.	Retender for our main beverage supplier, incorporating a panel of students to ensure that the range and price points best meet student demand	a. New contract start – August 2022
8.	Engage in conversations around College-wide bar provision to ensure that benefits to students are maximised	 a. Work with Silwood students to ensure that provision of their bar service can be maintained under an effective operating model – July 2022 b. Work with the College to ensure that any changes to their bar operations on campus reflect student demands – January 2023
9.	Review of license / safe retail of alcohol policy to ensure compliance and applicability to the operating model	 a. Undertake review of licenses for all venues – August 2022 b. If necessary, develop plan for applying for new licenses / variations, leveraging support of College – November 2022
10.	Develop a plan for the summer months to maximise commercial opportunities and maintain a service to students	a. Plan for summer 2023 developed – April 2023
Succ	ess Measures (KPIs)	

• No. of changes made within the venues linked directly to environmental sustainability

- Income and charitable expenditure (business as usual) income as a measure of demand and proxy for satisfaction
- % of users agree with the statement "the Union's facilities are high quality and fit for purpose"

- No. of complaints/feedback
- No. of refunds issues
- Level of stock wastage
- No. of staff training sessions & attendance rates

Events & Entertainments

Vision statement: We produce, curate and support a wide range of events that appeal to all parts of our membership. Students can simply participate, or co-create events with us and know that they can enjoy themselves, have fun and form communities in a safe and welcoming environment. We support our students who want to showcase their skills – both on and off stage.

Evaluation of current position: Our venues are relatively well-known amongst the student body, and we have a number of highly engaged students who support and enjoy events with us. Our spaces are in high demand from CSPs who wish to host their own activities. However we have an underdeveloped offering and a new team who have yet to forge relationships with students and CSPs.

We lack basic processes for taking and managing student bookings which leads to avoidable issues and patchy service standards. In our venues we have outdated tech and rely on members of DramSoc to support our events provision without a formal framework. We frequently receive negative feedback about the security provision at our venues and have struggled to improve this with two external contractors.

Deve	elopment plan	
1.	Review the support our Venues Team offer to CSPs and students, both in our own venues and more broadly	 a. ICU Venues booking process mapped for consultations with Student Activities / OTs – February 2022 b. Booking process launched to students – March 2022 c. Engage with Silwood students on plans for SilFest 2022, support the development of a sustainable model – March 2022 d. Consider, with Student Activities, the best model for support of student-led events in external venues, to utilise skillsets across the organisation – August 2022
2.	Undertake a Safety & Security Review which clearly sets out how we will operate our venues and the expectations we have of our members, customers and staff so that our venues can be enjoyed by all	 a. Agree project plan at Management Committee – February 2022 b. Launch review to student – February 2022 c. Consider operating model / launch retender for provision of venue / event security – March 2022
3.	Establish Events Committee to ensure that events programme is student-focused at all times, and much of the time, student-delivered (including external venues if appropriate)	a. Events Committee terms of reference approved – February 2022
4.	Establish a PG-focussed events programme	a. Plan for engagement of PG students in events planning developed – March 2022

		b. Events programme for summer 2022 launched – May 2022
5.	Full audit of tech in all venues and PPM / replacement plan	a. Tech audit and inventory list up to date – February 2022
6.	Successfully relaunch Summer Ball, offering an exceptional experience to members and planning in a way that can be used as a blueprint for future years	 a. Summer Ball tickets launched – March 2022 b. Summer Ball sold out – May 2022 c. Summer Ball success – June 2022 d. Review and wash up – July 2022
7.	With the College, secure funding for and deliver a comprehensive refurbishment of Reynolds Bar, resulting in a space that functions effectively as a bar and events venue but at other times provides a valuable space for medical students to relax and hang out	 a. Funding secured – March 2022 b. On-site work – June-August 2022 c. Project complete & Relaunch – Sept 2022 NB the timescales here are largely driven by ability to secure funding within College
8.	Define and agree our approach to enabling students to deliver tech support for events, balancing their interests and desire for experience with the need to ensure we are not completely reliant on student volunteers. Ensure that ICU retains adequate oversight and responsibility for health and safety matters.	 a. Consultation with students – April/May 2022 b. Development of framework – June/July 2022 c. 'Launch' a new approach – Sept 2022
9.	Agree a longer term operating model for Metric to increase utilisation of the space and student satisfaction	a. Agree new model – Sept 2022 b. Implement new model – January 2023

Success Measures (KPIs)

- Income and charitable expenditure (business as usual) event income, bar sales at events as measure of demand and proxy for satisfaction
- % of users agree with the statement "the Union's facilities are high quality and fit for purpose"
- No. of Union-run events
- No. of unique students attending Union-run ticketed events
- No. of CSP social events facilitated
- % of students agree with the statement "the Union provides services, activities and events that are entertaining and fun"
- % of students who use our venues agree with the statement "the Union's venues are welcoming and safe"
- % of students agree with the statement "Welcome Week helped me settle into Imperial College and have fun"

- No. of PG-focussed events
- No. of security-related incidents
- No. of complaints/feedback

Retail

Vision statement: To provide an enticing range of branded and sustainably sourced merchandise and to use our retail offer to complement the other offerings on campus, providing students with more choice. To do this whilst generating a surplus for the rest of the organisation to utilise for strategic developments.

Evaluation of current position: The Union shop currently offers an extensive range of branded merchandise and gifting options at excellent value for money. We have successfully refreshed the shop and created a well-received environment which provides our students with a memorable customer experience. The online shop is currently providing a basic range of products and method of fulfillment/delivery as well as practicability of the online platform is restricting us to meet the demand from students and alumni.

The range in Shop Extra has been adjusted as much as possible to meet the rising demand of gluten free, vegan and vegetarian food to go as well as fit in with campus market. The lack of footfall, however, makes procurement of a cohesive range difficult whilst being profitable at the same time. The need for other products such as stationery and essentials are clearly there but a reviewed range plan is yet to be delivered. There is a need for a clear identity and solid marketing to capitalise on our unique position on Sherfield walkway.

Deve	lopment plan	
1.	Undertake a review of Shop Extra, supported by significant student insight, to ensure that we are delivering a service that meets student demand and fits with the campus market	 a. Launch review – March 2022 b. Business plan for 'new' Shop Extra approved – May 2022 c. Launch 'new' Shop Extra – September 2022
2.	Consider best model of delivery of an online store, maximising demand from students and alumni globally	a. Project launch – April 2022b. Solution go live – August 2022
3.	Improve range of vegan, veggie, halal and gluten free provision in Shop Extra	a. Updated provision – April 2022
4.	Work with our Constituent Unions to develop range(s) specific to their identities	 a. Conduct research with each CU to evaluate demand – April 2022 b. Design potential range for each SU – May 2022 c. Consult and agree ranges – June 2022 d. Launch – July 2022

5.	Develop a sustainability plan for our retail offer, reducing impact on the environment and increasing the use of sustainable materials	 a. Project initiation as part of Union Sustainability project – February 2022 b. Development of Retail-specific plan - June 2022 c. Formal approval and implementation – July 2022
6.	Review our supply chain and consider whether participation in a purchasing consortium or other solution could enhance our ability to offer value for money	a. Plan for review/tender – April 2022 b. Decision - July 2022
7.	Through a wider review of student casual staff, integrate retail student casual staff with the wider organisation and student staff teams	a. Engagement with student casual staff review – Feb-Aug 2022
8.	Agree a pricing strategy and consider whether differential pricing / student discount would add value to students whilst maintaining financial performance	 a. Draft policy and consult – July 2022 b. Update prices in line with policy – September 2022
9.	Develop a longer term plan space plan for retail, including a cyclical capital replenishment programme to develop and maintain a high quality physical retail space that complements the quality of the Imperial brand.	a. Plan agreed with College estates – September 2022
10.	Undertake a review of the branding of our retail offer in line with wider organisational branding, maximising our ability to leverage brand location on Sherfield walkway	a. In line with wider organisational branding review- November 2022
11.	Look to leverage shop expertise for other areas, particularly CSP procurement	 a. Work with Student Activities to understand CSP needs – November 2022 b. Trial initiative with small numbers - January 2023 c. Evaluate – March 2023

Success Measures (KPIs)

- No. of changes made within Retail linked directly to environmental sustainability
- Enterprise surplus and charitable expenditure (strategic investment)

• % of users agree with the statement "the Union's facilities are high quality and fit for purpose"

- No. of CSPs supported by Retail
- No. of new lines co-created with CUs / CSPs

Sales & External Bookings

Vision statement: To efficiently deliver strong commercial relationships with external partners that generates additional funding sources without conflicting with our core purpose or our ability to meet student needs, by making use of the resources we have when they are otherwise unused.

Evaluation of current position: We are currently able to deliver a relatively stable income stream from a number of established external clients / activities (including Welcome Fair, advertising packages etc). This is fairly low maintenance and is considered 'low hanging fruit', but service is patchy due to a lack of organisational infrastructure supporting the role that is responsible.

We have a strong platform on which to build a proposition in terms of good facilities in an extremely desirable location and a student audience which is in high demand from our commercial partners. There are opportunities to grow income streams in this area by expanding our opportunities for external hire or increasing the volume of commercial advertising, however there is a risk that this could conflict with other commercial and non-commercial priorities in the organisation such as maximising opportunities for our students and improving how we communicate our 'core' offer.

Deve	elopment plan		
1.	Develop comms with clients, ensuring that basic service is delivered at all times and high levels of customer service is the norm. Understanding our clients though the implementation of a CRM.	a. b.	Create a database of all current clients that can be shared with colleagues to support client service – April 2022 Consider whether a more sophisticated system would provide good value for money to manage sales & external bookings (in line with 5) – July 2022
2.	Increase level of service for bookings with clear agreement on who is responsible for ensuring spaces are high quality, laid out correctly, clean etc	a.	Create and internal RACI matrix for external bookings to ensure that engagement across relevant teams is effectively managed – April 2022 Agree expectations / service standards with other departments to support delivery of client service (eg room standards, booking procedures, issue management etc) – April 2022
3.	Review set of principles, owned by Management Committee, for what external bookings are should be taken and when, clearly prioritising student need but also enabling income generation	a.	External Booking Principles document approved by Management Committee - April 2022

4.	Clarify what our offer and proposition is, and which markets we want to work in, ensuring that opportunities are considered in the context of what we good at delivering.	a. Develop set of core proposition documents (eg services, rate card etc) – May 2022 (for sales in 22/23 academic year)
5.	Consider opportunities to utilise commercial expertise to support CSP sponsorship activities	 a. Working with the Student Activities Team, launch a consultation with student leaders on what support they would like to receive in approaching and managing sponsors – June 2022 b. Consider whether sharing of data with Student Activities around external clients and CSP sponsorships would provide opportunities to support CSPs and/or generate additional income opportunities – July 2022
6.	Review relationship with Felix and other student media outlets to ensure that advertising opportunities are maximised and delivering on expectations.	A Student Media Advertising Principles document approved by Management Committee and media editors – August 2022
7.	Explore opportunities to work with College conferencing and catering services	 a. Build strong relationships at various levels to ensure benefits and maximised b. Agree an approach to lead referrals or the provision of ancillary services (eg College provide catering in our spaces) – September 2022
8.	Develop a plan for digital messaging and advertising across our locations on campus, working with the wider communications strategy to ensure an effective balance between communicating core messages and income generation	 a. Conduct cost-benefit analysis of third-party contract for digital screens – June 2022 b. Serve notice on RedBus contract – June 2022 c. Undertake commercial tender exercise for third-party provider to replace RedBus in August 2023, or develop a project plan to bring this ability in house – January 2023

• Enterprise surplus and charitable expenditure (strategic investment)

- No. of complaints / feedback from clients
- No. of repeat bookings / referrals
- No. of / £ value of CSP sponsorships supported

Student Staff

Vision statement: Student casual staff are integral to the successful operation of our commercial outlets. As well as ensuring that we can provide a high level of service to our members when they are customers, directly engaging them as staff provides them with the opportunity to earn money and develop skills on campus. We want to be the most in demand place to work amongst the student body, known for treating our staff well and providing them with valuable opportunities, and student staff recommend ICU as a place to work.

Evaluation of current position: Our student staff are generally very committed to the organisation and have a diverse skillset. In some cases they act as the institutional member which creates challenges. We have historically struggled to engage student casual staff effectively and the perception of 'us and them' can still be felt at times.

Because our staff are highly engaged and talented, they want to be consulted on decisions and value transparency. In responding at pace to the challenges and uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic, we have not prioritised this engagement and there is a risk that this leads to a lack of trust. We are an attractive source of work for our members due to our competitive pay rates and flexibility, however we lack structure to recruit, induct, train and develop casual staff in a way that maximises their performance and skills development / experience.

Deve	lopment plan	
1.	Conduct a review of the employment status of our student staff (currently casual workers), run a consultation with those staff and explore whether this is the right model.	 a. Launch review – February 2022 b. Consult with existing staff and College HR – Feb/March 2022 c. Implement changes (if necessary), and include in MoU with HR – August 2022
2.	Develop an annual framework of recruitment and promotion, so that staff with ambitions to progress are well supported	 a. Draft framework – February 2022 b. Management Committee consultation – March 2022 c. Implementation – April 2022
3.	Review the way shifts are advertised, allocated and swapped, and how timesheets are recorded and approved for payroll	 a. Undertake review of current system and initial options appraisal – February 2022 b. Consult with College CWT on options for implementation and compliance – Feb/March 2022 c. Implement new solution – April 2022

4.	Review the role descriptions of all student staff roles in the organisation to ensure they are consistent – with leaders amongst the student staff team where appropriate	a. Review complete and new JDs implemented – August 2022
5.	Develop a standard set of training for each role, build in to annual plan and budget	a. In line with JD review – August 2022
6.	Develop framework of support for staff to be able to articulate the skills and experience they get with us in applications / interviews for future roles	a. November 2022
7.	Develop, with staff, a charter of expectations (two-way) to support higher standards and greater consistency, and build trust with the student staff team	a. All casual staff training and development session – February 2022

Success Measures (KPIs)

- % of students who use our venues agree with the statement "the Union's venues are welcoming and safe"
- % of student casual staff would positively recommend ICU as a place to work
- % student casual staff retention rate within the Union
- % overall positive score in the equality, diversity and inclusion theme in the staff engagement survey

- No. of training sessions delivered / attendance rate
- No. of complaints / conduct matters



8. Interdependencies

A number of the action points contained in the development plans rely on, or would be significantly supported by, actions of other teams or areas, or by external factors. An initial review of these is contained in the tables below:

Food & Beverage	
1 → Systems Team	Implementation of the EPOS system will require a substantial amount of systems support (already programmed)
2 → Recruitment of chefs	We are currently relying on agency chefs to staff the kitchen, menu development will be easier with a permanent team
3 → CHUG	Provision will need to consult with, and meet the needs of, CHUG
4, 8 → College (Campus Services)	We will require the agreement of Campus Services for h-bar food provision or other bar provision
6 → SSB / DPFS	There is a wider sustainability project owned by DPFS / SSB that this action needs to be integrated with
7 → Retail – 6	There may be opportunity for consideration of venues and retail supply chains to be combined.
9, 10 → Licensing Authorities	Any changes to our licenses will need to be approved by local councils

Events & Entertainment	
6 → Licensing Authority	We require a license for the Summer Ball which is granted by RBKC, City of Westminster Council
2 → College (Silwood Campus); Licensing Authority; Student Activities	Sign off from Faculty and H&S representatives, license would need to be approved by local council. Coordination with Student Activities to ensure joined up approach to CSP bookings
3, 4, 9 → Student Insight	We would require the support of the Representation and Marketing teams to ensure decisions are informed by robust insight into our members
5, 7, 9 → Funding	Our ability to replenish tech, or significantly change Metric would require funding to be secured. Reynolds Bar refurbishment is entirely dependent on College funding being secured

Retail	
1, 8, 10 → Student Insight; Marketing	We would require the support of the Marketing team to ensure decisions are informed by robust insight into our members, and follow organisational lead on branding
2 → Systems Team; external supplier	Any new / change to the online store will require Systems Team input and if third-party supplier is used

	this will require clear requirements and strong relationship
4 → Constituent Unions; Faculties	We will need to work with CUs to co-create ranges, and build relationships with Faculties if using their brand assets
6 → F&B - 7	Review supply chain opportunities alongside Venues Team
9 → College (Estates); Funding	Adequate funding will need to be secured for any investments, College Estates will need to be engaged early on design and feasibility

Sales & External Bookings	
2 → Student Activities; Venues Team; Facilities	Will need to agree with other building users the processes and expectations. Other teams may be requested to take actions to support bookings.
5, 6 → Student Activities; Student Media Teams	Would need engagement from SA and student leaders in Media groups to inform decisions and proposals
7 → College (Conferencing & Events)	Relationships with College team working with external bookings key to maximising referral opportunities

Student Staff	
1 → College (HR)	Will need to engage with College HR to gain their support for any changes
3 → Supplier	A third-party supplier may be required to deliver an effective solution. Clear specification and strong relationship will be required