



Silwood Park Students' Union Report

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Overview

The Silwood Park Students' Union represents the students based at the Silwood Park campus of Imperial. The campus is primarily focussed on ecology, evolution, and conservation, with nearly all students and staff working within the Department of Life Sciences.

We are pretty far outside of London, past Heathrow and Windsor, so getting here from South Kensington takes about an hour and 40 minutes. The distance makes it difficult for students based here to visit ICU at South Kensington, which is part of the reason why most of my predecessors have never made it to Council. Because of this, communication between us and the Union has been minimal over the past few years.



All of the students based here are postgrads, mostly one-year master's students with a few PhD candidates in the mix. This exacerbates the distance-based isolation as:

1. Postgraduates tend to be less engaged with ICU.
2. The committee positions in the Silwood Union are often held by one-year master's students who do not have experience in ICU and are unable to handover to next year's cohort.

Despite these hurdles, I'm optimistic about this year. The committee is strong and there is a real drive to change things at Silwood. Also, because I'm in the first year of my PhD, I should be able to assist future committees with the experience that I gain this year.

The Silwood Union committee was elected on the 18th of October. Unlike other CUs, because we are composed primarily of one-year master's students, we cannot elect our committee the year before. Our committee has 23 members, not including academic reps or society chairs.

Organization

One of the first orders of business was to create a proper repository of information for the committee. There may have been a google drive or other file system previously, but that has been lost over the past three years. We now have a new drive where we keep the available handover documents, meeting minutes, general admin information e.g. calendars, and a swanky new vector graphic version of our logo (props to Lloyd for that). In addition, we carried out an inventory of equipment (including sports, ents, and music) in our storage room.

New committee positions

This year we have also appointed international officers and a charities officer. We hope that this will improve the representation of all individuals on campus as well as improve our involvement with local charities.

Budgeting

Because we are far away from South Kensington (and there is nothing to do in Sunningdale), we facilitate many student societies. Most of them are run by master's students, which means that the list of societies we manage is constantly shifting. Therefore, during budgeting, we do not get allocated money for specific societies. Instead, students at Silwood decide to form societies and send us budget requests from the pot of money we get from ICU.

This year we have 24 societies and the budget requests totalled at nearly four times the value of our allocated pot. The allocations were decided on the 15th of November, and the information was disseminated on the 22nd. Now that the societies have some money to get started, hopefully they will begin running more events in the coming weeks.

Academic Games	Foraging and Fermentation
Anime Society	Garden Society
Art Society	Knitting
Basketball	LGBTQ+
Beekeeping	Music
Bird Ringing	Rowing
Board Games	Running and Outdoor
Brewing	Scottish
Choir	Self Defence and Boxing
Climbing Society	Squash
Cricket	Tennis
Football	Yoga and Pilates

Events

Given Silwood's isolation, running socials is an important aspect of our work. We've run an event practically every week, including pumpkin carving for Halloween, a table football tourney, and a few bar nights. Future events planned also include a masked ball, movie nights, and collaborations with international team to organise international-themed nights. Big props to the events and well-being teams for these events.



Goals

The issues presented at the beginning of this report aren't all easy to resolve. However, I have a few goals in mind for the year which could help improve things.

Create separate eactivities accounts for the societies that exist every year

Currently, all of our socs are informal and do not have a separate account on eactivities. This means that technically, a society can overspend from our main pot, making it a nightmare to keep track of each society's spending. To resolve this, we are working on getting six societies made into formal socs. These are: Climbing, Chickens, Brewing, Garden, Sports, and Beekeeping. In doing so, hopefully we can reduce the admin required to monitor each society's budget and give the clubs more autonomy.

Integrate Silwood elections into the Union system

Silwood elections are relatively informal and take place in an AGM style. Instead, I'd like the elections to run through the eVoting system to ensure that:

1. Nobody has to run the elections for the committee to be filled. Because the master's students leave every year, sometimes there is nobody from the previous committee to run the new election.
2. The election rules in the Bye-Laws are followed.
3. There are clear rules on manifestos, campaigning, etc.

However, while it does solve these issues, it will be important for ICU (and perhaps the department) to effectively communicate the election deadlines to Silwood students, otherwise this system may not work.

Improve handovers

About half of the positions this year had handover documents. I am going to create a template and strongly encourage everyone to produce one, as they have proven extremely useful for the individuals that have been provided one. This could help alleviate the “brain drain” we have every year with the loss of master’s students.

Investigate options for union management of the Silwood bar

We have a bar at Silwood. It’s one of a few social spaces that students have access to out here. Unfortunately, the catering company that manages it does not care much for it, as they don’t normally manage bars. There was an inquiry a few years back about the Union taking over management of the bar, which would allow for student staff and input regarding how its run. However, they did not follow through with this plan. Many of the students at Silwood are keen for Union management of the bar, and therefore I have asked for the outcome of that inquiry to be shared with me. If possible, I’d like to see the bar managed by the Union or allow for greater student input/interaction.



Obtain additional grant during budgeting

Living in Silwood is tough for many students. It takes about an hour and a half to reach a major city, and they do not have access to many services provided by the College or Union. The Silwood Union tries its best to fill these gaps, but we are still underfunded. Our budget is stretched very thin, particularly given that our students are on 12-month degrees and therefore must be supported year-round. We hope to obtain additional funds during budgeting, and bolster this with money from the department.

Set up lines of communication with the department

Strangely, I’m not invited to any meetings of the department at Silwood. I don’t really have a point of contact with them either, which seems counterproductive for both parties. Next week I am meeting with the deputy head of department Guy Woodward to discuss this, and several other issues that students have raised.

Thank you for reading. Feel free to email any questions to silpres@ic.ac.uk.