

# Student Experience Fund Report

Appendix 1 to  
**Imperial College Union**  
**Board of Trustees / 29 May 2024**  
**Student Experience Fund Update**

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*All figures in this report are accurate as of the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2024. For up-to-date figures, full data, and for any questions pertaining to this report, or the fund itself, please contact [dpcs@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:dpcs@imperial.ac.uk).*

## **Executive Summary**

The Student Experience Fund was designed to enhance student engagement by providing financial support for under-engaged students to participate in Union clubs, societies, and events.

This report details the implementation and utilisation of the fund over the 2023-24 academic year, to date, along with plans for its development.

The fund was allocated to all bursary recipients at Imperial College, with funds credited directly to students' Union accounts. This approach meant that recipients did not have to take extra steps to secure funding, however it has meant that only UK undergraduates in receipt of a bursary have been eligible this year.

As of 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024, 935 out of 2419 eligible students utilised the fund, with a total expenditure of £33,115.48, reflecting a moderate engagement rate of 38.7%. Utilisation was particularly high among first-year students. Feedback from students has been largely positive, highlighting the fund's role in enhancing the student experience, although it has also pointed to the need for improvements in payment flexibility and communicating the fund to students.

Looking forward, ICU aims to expand the fund's reach and efficacy. Plans include enhancing the fund's accessibility through targeted communications, training for club and society leaders, and improving technical infrastructure to allow split payments. Additionally, consideration is being given to extending eligibility to postgraduate and international students to ensure that the fund is truly targeting under-engaged groups. ICU intends to achieve this through a trust-based model where any student who does not currently receive the fund can self-declare their need and apply for funding.

## 1. Introduction

At Imperial College Union (ICU), we recognise the vital role that an active and engaged student community plays in delivering a world-class student experience. The Student Experience Fund (SEF) was developed to support this.

The SEF is not merely a hardship fund; it is our commitment to ensuring that every student, irrespective of their financial circumstances, is afforded the opportunity to fully engage with all that student life has to offer.

The Student Experience Fund embodies our core values of **innovation**, **inclusivity**, and **integrity**, directly supporting our goals to influence and advocate for all students, enhance wellbeing, and foster active, inclusive communities.

## 2. Implementation

In the first year of the fund (2023-24 academic year), eligible students were identified using the Imperial College Bursary Scheme. Utilising a data-sharing agreement with Imperial College, all bursary recipients were directly awarded a credit on their Union account which could be used to fund any club, society, or project product, such as a membership, as well as Union events. Union merchandise was not eligible.

### 2.1. Breakdown of Funding

The fund was awarded to students in accordance with the breakdown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Breakdown of Fund Allocation 2023/24

Annual Household Income	Funding Per Student
Up to £16,000	£65
Up to £50,000	£45
Up to £55,000	£25
Up to £60,000	£20

A total of 2419 students received an allocation of funding, and the total amount of funding allocated was £121,535.

The total funding of £121,535 is comprised according to the breakdown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Fund Composition

Donor	Amount Donated
Imperial College Trust	£40,000
Imperial College	£50,000 (+ £30,000) <sup>1</sup>
Imperial College Union	£20,000

The total amount of funding allocated is less than the amount committed due to the breakdown of bursary allocations made by Imperial College. The fund distribution was modelled on previous year bursary allocation, with an assumed increase, but the actual breakdown of bursary allocations differed slightly.

<sup>1</sup> Imperial College donation was split into an initial £50k and further £30k to be released when required, following a report.

## **2.2. Technical Setbacks**

ICU took the decision to implement the fund for the 2023-24 academic year.

A primary setback has been in the technical implementation of the fund. Due to the design of ICU's current student group shop, it has not been possible to allow payments to be split between the Student Experience Fund and other payment methods. As a result, recipients of the fund this year have had to choose between paying fully with their fund allocation, or another means of payment. This has had the unfortunate effect that products with a value above that of a student's allocation have not been able to be purchased using the fund. It is, however, our view that the impact of this has not been widespread, as most student group products have a value much lower than the funding allocated per student. Through discussions with the ICU Systems team, the move to SUMS will allow the current SEF platform to be migrated in its entirety, however split payments may not be initially possible. It is intended that we will reach out to SUMS to discuss implementing "gift card" functionality to SUMS.

It was the view of the Union that the advantages of implementing the fund this year outweighed any potential disadvantages caused by setbacks, therefore the joint decision was taken to proceed with the implementation of the fund.

### 3. Current Use of the Fund

#### 3.1. Spending Overview

Table 3 outlines the overall fund engagement.

Table 3 - Engagement Overview

Accounts Having Spent	Engagement Rate
935 out of 2419	38.7%

This rate indicates a moderate level of engagement. While not low, there is clearly room for improvement to ensure the fund reaches a broader segment of the student population.

Table 4 outlines the total spending and average spent per student.

Table 4 - Spending Overview

Total Amount Spent	Average Spent per Student <sup>2</sup>
£33,115.48 (27.25% of available)	£35.42

It is likely that the slightly lower-than-expected average spend per student is due to a combination of the inability to make partial payments (due to be implemented by August 2024) and some students wishing to save their funds for late-year purchases, such as tickets to summer events.

#### 3.2. Utilisation by Demographics

Initial data shows substantial use among first-year students, with noticeable declines in later years, with 1<sup>st</sup> year spending accounting for £10.8k out of £33.1k. Whilst this shows a positive update with new students, this does somewhat hinder our ability to analyse the effect of the fund, as there is no data to compare new students with. Table 5 details spending by year group for current SEF recipients.

Table 5 - Breakdown of Spending by Year Group for Current SEF Recipients

Current Year Group	Total Spend (prior YTD 22/23) (£k) <sup>3</sup>	SEF Spend (YTD 23/24) (£k)	Total Spend (YTD 23/24) (£k)	Change in Total (%)
1 <sup>st</sup> year	4.1	10.8	80.8	+96%
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	60.8	6.6	47.0	-29%
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	54.8	6.9	48.3	-13%
4 <sup>th</sup> year	40.1	4.4	49.7	+19%
5 <sup>th</sup> year	19.4	1.4	12.2	-59%
6 <sup>th</sup> year	10.5	2.7	13.9	+25%
Other	1.8	0.4	2.1	+17%

Overall, spending has increased significantly since the prior year to date. This is the case for both SEF recipients and all students. A key point to note is that, on average, spending decreases

<sup>2</sup> Average spent per student who has made any payment, not per all recipients.

<sup>3</sup> Spending in the prior academic year, over the same period (1<sup>st</sup> Aug – 15<sup>th</sup> May), for the same group of students.

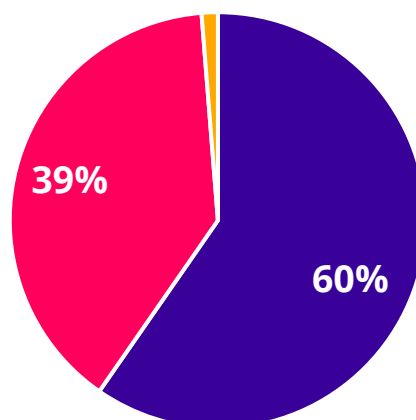
by 40% between 1<sup>st</sup> year and 2<sup>nd</sup> year, for the whole student population, and a similar trend is seen between all year groups. For SEF recipients, however, this **reduction in spending between years has been significantly reduced.**

Table 6 - Changes to Spending Compared to Prior Year to Date  
(Where the student attended the College in the prior year)

<b>Mean % Change in Spending</b>	+82%
<b>Median % Change in Spending</b>	-10%

The high positive mean percent change in spending indicates that fund has had a positive effect in encouraging students who may not have spent their funds to do so. The slight negative median percent change in spending reflects general trends that students spend less as they progress through their studies.

Figure 1 shows the portion of students who use the fund, grouped by primary campus of study. The data shows that despite medical students making up only 16% of the undergraduate population, they comprise 39% of the fund utilisation.



■ South Kensington ■ Charing Cross ■ Other

Figure 1 - Fund Utilisation by Primary Campus of Study

High uptake amongst students based at Charing Cross can be explained two-fold. Firstly, students based at Charing Cross are more likely to be fund recipients due to General Medical Council quotas on home students means that a large number of bursary recipients are medics.

Secondly, medical students are a higher-engaged group of students overall, with approximately 70% of Charing Cross-based students being a member of a club or society, compared to a rate of 40% for South Kensington-based students.

This suggests that the fund may be targeting already-engaged student groups. It is therefore necessary to ensure that future iterations of the fund consider how to reach less engaged students.

### 3.3. Utilisation by Activity

Initial data on spending preferences indicates active engagement in culturally enriching and community-building activities, which strongly aligns with the fund's objectives. Figure 2 outlines fund utilisation by product type.

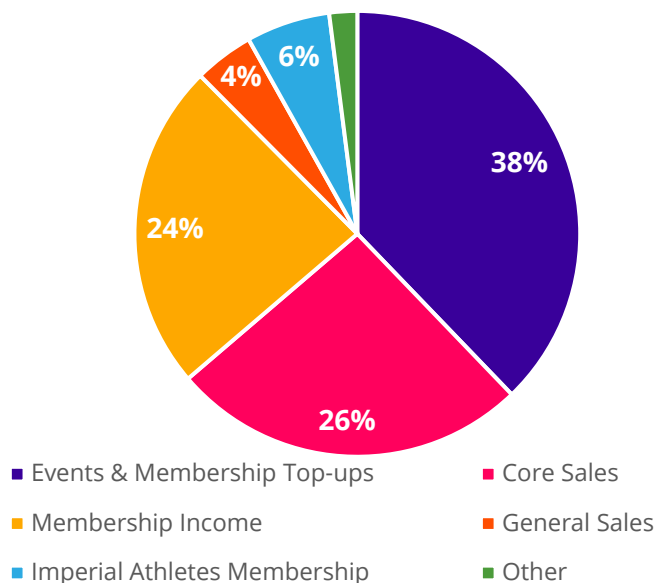


Figure 2 - Fund Utilisation by Product Type

It is clear from the data above that most funding has been used on core products, with only 12% of the funding being spent on non-core expenses. 40% of funding has been spent on tickets to society events and membership add-ons. Another 48% has been spent on memberships to societies and core sales<sup>4</sup>. This indicates that the fund is allowing students to access core services provided by clubs and societies.

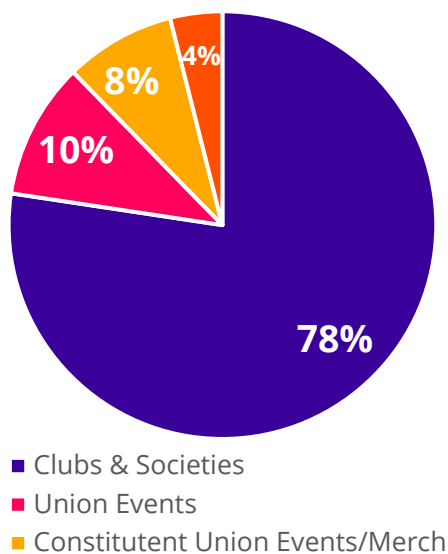


Figure 3 - Fund Utilisation by Seller

Most purchases using SEF have been made for club and society products, reinforcing the notion that students wish to engage with club and society activity.

<sup>4</sup> Core sales are defined as those, other than membership or event tickets, which are in line with the core aims & objectives of the club/society, as opposed to general sales which may be any other product a society wishes to sell.



### 3.4. Student Feedback

Student feedback on the fund has been overwhelmingly positive, whilst also highlighting some key areas for improvement. Student feedback was conducted anonymously via a form in which students can provide un-prompted feedback and was entirely optional.

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*“So grateful for it, I was able to have a lot more experiences I wouldn't have been able to afford without it.”*

*“Honestly I'm very grateful for the fact that this exists, so first of all thank you so much! You don't know how thankful I am that things like this are put in place at Imperial.”*

*“Super helpful in getting involved in new things! “*

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The feedback also highlighted the need for an improved payment system. This is due to be implemented for August 2024 – a significant achievement in improving the fund.

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*“In future could we please be allowed to use the fund to partly cover the cost of an item if its more expensive than the funds we have available”*

*“It is great but I would say there should be a way to use it to partially pay for something. For example if you have £20 in the fund you can't use it to help pay for something that is £30. It means that it gets wasted a bit because it becomes unusable at a certain point”*

*“I still have a lot of 'credit' from this fund that is left over and I can't use it to make a payment”*

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### 3.5. Key Findings

**Engagement** – Almost 40% of eligible students have claimed all or part of their available balance. While not low, there is clearly room for improvement to ensure the fund reaches a broader segment of the student population.

**Engagement** – Mainly engaged already-active student groups, which might not fully meet the fund's objective to reach under-engaged demographics.

**Engagement** – Student feedback indicates very positive overall feedback but highlights some systems-focused issues.

**Spending** – Overall spending has increased significantly since the prior year to date. This is the case for both SEF recipients and all students.

**Spending** – Predominantly on core society purchases – in line with fund objectives.

#### 4. Future Development of the Fund

The following goals and next steps in Table 7 have been identified, some with relatively simple solutions, and others which require further research.

Table 7 - Goals and Next Steps

Problem	Goal
1. Only 38.7% of eligible students have utilised the fund.	50% of eligible students utilise the fund. (See Strategic Initiatives)
2. The system does not currently allow split payments.	Split payments to be possible for all purchases.
3. Only Bursary recipients can access the fund, all of whom are UK undergraduates.	Expand the fund demographics to postgraduate and international students.

##### 4.1. Engagement Initiatives (Problem 1)

The following strategic initiatives have been identified:

**Integrate the fund into all student welcome events** – Develop partnerships with the relevant Imperial College stakeholders and departments to ensure that the fund is publicised during welcome events, including to postgraduate and international students.

**Targeted communications campaigns** – Launch targeted email campaigns, social media promotions, and informational webinars specifically designed for under-engaged groups. This was intended for the current academic year, delivered through the Registry (due to data sharing restrictions), however this has not yet been done.

**Inclusion of fund details in training modules for student leaders** – Include modules on how to promote and facilitate the use of the fund in all training materials for student leaders (both society leaders and student reps), ensuring that they are well-equipped to inform students about the fund and encourage its use.

##### 4.2. Systems Improvements (Problem 2)

Systems improvements are required to allow for split payments to be made. Through discussions with the ICU Systems team, the move to SUMS will allow the current SEF platform to be migrated in its entirety, however split payments may not be initially possible. It is intended that we will reach out to SUMS to discuss implementing “gift card” functionality to SUMS.

##### 4.3. Expansion of the Fund (Problem 3)

The primary initiative for the 2024-25 academic year is to expand the fund to postgraduate and international students. The current fund is only able to be utilised by UK undergraduate bursary recipients and for the fund to achieve its aims of increasing student engagement, it must be open to all. Due to the complexity of this, full details have been included in Section 5.

## 5. Review of Fund Distribution Mechanisms for Non-Bursary Students

### 5.1. Means Testing

Means testing involves assessing a student’s financial need based on specific criteria, such as income, assets, or other financial indicators, before granting access to the fund. Means testing is also often criticised due to the fact that it attempts to define what “need” is, often not considering the many nuances of every student’s case.

Table 8 - Advantages and Disadvantages of a Means Tested Approach

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p><b>High Degree of Certainty:</b> Means testing ensures that funds are allocated to students who are most in need.</p> <p><b>Low Financial Risk:</b> By targeting students based on demonstrated financial need we minimise the risk of misallocating funds.</p>	<p><b>Resource Intensive:</b> Means testing requires significant administrative effort to verify financial status, process applications, and manage appeals or re-evaluations. ICU does not currently have the staff to facilitate this.</p> <p><b>Slow Access:</b> The necessity of verifying financial information can delay the allocation of funds, potentially deterring students from taking part in the activities for which they requested the funding.</p> <p><b>Application Process:</b> Some students may be discouraged from applying due to the complexity of the application process or due to privacy concerns regarding their financial information.</p>

### 5.2. Trust Basis

The Trust Basis approach distributes funds based on a simpler criterion, such as student status (e.g., enrolment in a specific program) or basic eligibility requirements, without a detailed financial assessment.

Table 9 - Advantages and Disadvantages of a Trust Basis Approach

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p><b>Resource Light:</b> Low administrative burden associated with verifying financial need, enabling more rapid response times and lower operational costs.</p> <p><b>Quick Access:</b> Students can access funds more quickly, which is particularly beneficial for timely participation in events and activities.</p> <p><b>Application Process:</b> The simplified process can encourage a greater number of applications, increasing overall engagement with the fund.</p>	<p><b>Lower Degree of Certainty:</b> Funds may not always reach students in greatest financial need, which could lead to perceptions of unfairness or misallocation of resources.</p> <p><b>Higher Financial Risk:</b> Without strict eligibility criteria, there is a risk of funds being depleted quickly by a large number of applicants, some of whom may not need financial assistance as critically.</p>

### 5.3. Conclusion

Given the nature of the Student Experience Fund, which aims to promote broad engagement rather than address deep financial need, the trust basis approach has been chosen. This

method is likely to increase participation rates, reduce administrative burdens, and align with the fund's goal of inclusivity and broad-based student engagement. Implementing regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms will remain crucial to ensure that the fund continues to meet its objectives effectively and equitably.

ICU has also sought feedback from Imperial College on this topic, through the Student Experience Forum, chaired by the Vice Provost (Education & Student Experience), through which the Imperial College donation was secured. The forum, and the Vice Provost, have given support to ICU in pursuing the trust basis approach.

#### **5.4. Implementation**

ICU will maintain the current allocation process for bursary students and conduct further research into the implementation of a trust basis approach and design the portal through which to conduct it.

Whilst the approach will be trust based, students will still be required to fill out a basic application outlining why they would like access to funds, after which funding will be granted. This is to ensure that students applying know the purpose of the fund and can self-assess eligibility. Furthermore, a basic application form will allow ICU's Advice Service to contact applicants and signpost towards additional College, and external, sources of support.

## 6. Summary of Key Data

Below is a summary of all relevant data.

Table 10 - Accounts Breakdown

Total Accounts	Total Accounts Having Spent	Total Account Having Spent (%)	Average Spend per Account (£)
2419	935	38.7%	35.42

Table 11 - Total Funding

Total Received (£)	Total Spent (£)	Total Available (£)	Total Spent (%)
£121,535.00	£33,115.48	88,419.52	27.3%

Table 12 - Spending by Committee Type

Committee Type	Total Transactions	Total Amount (£)	% Amount
CSP / MG	1884	25,582.25	77.3%
Union	337	3,369.00	10.2%
Constituent Union	146	2,761.23	8.3%
Halls	132	1,403.00	4.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2499</b>	<b>33,115.48</b>	

Table 13 - Spending by Expenditure Type

Expenditure Type	Total Transactions	Total Amount (£)	% Amount
Ticket Income (Events & Membership Top-ups)	951	13,158.41	39.7%
Goods & Services	652	8,828.04	26.7%
Subscriptions Income (Base Memberships)	599	7,204.00	21.8%
Sales General	109	1,620.77	4.9%
Imperial Athletes Membership	153	1,510.00	4.6%
Other (Travel Income, Donations, Rental)	51	794.26	2.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2515</b>	<b>33,115.48</b>	

Table 14 - Spending by Primary Campus of Study

Campus of Study	Total Amount (£)	% Amount
South Kensington	19,758.89	59.7%
Charing Cross	12,814.59	38.7%
Unknown	297.50	0.9%
Other Medical School / Central Faculty	244.50	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,115.48</b>	

Table 15 - Spending by Management Group / Constituent Union

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Total Transactions</b>	<b>Total Amount (£)</b>	<b>% Amount</b>
Arts & Entertainments Sector (400)	247	2,642.64	8.0%
Community Sector (755)	170	3,486.50	10.5%
Culture Sector (300)	147	952.50	2.9%
Knowledge Sector (200)	28	274.00	0.8%
Recreation Sector (100)	178	2,279.59	6.9%
Sports Sector (000)	339	4,766.64	14.4%
CGCU (City & Guilds College)	151	2,580.18	7.8%
ICSMSU (School of Medicine)	676	9,526.48	28.8%
NAI (New Activities Incubator)	14	76.50	0.2%
RCSU (Royal College of Science)	83	1,162.48	3.5%
RSM (Royal School of Mines)	40	595.97	1.8%
Other (Union/Halls/Imperial Athletes)	442	4,772.00	14.4%
	<b>2515</b>	<b>33,115.48</b>	

Table 16 - Breakdown of Spending by Year Group for Current SEF Recipients

<b>Current Year Group</b>	<b>Total Spend (prior YTD 22/23) (£k)<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>SEF Spend (YTD 23/24) (£k)</b>	<b>Total Spend (YTD 23/24) (£k)</b>	<b>Change in Total (%)</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> year	4.1	10.8	80.8	+96%
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	60.8	6.6	47.0	-29%
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<sup>5</sup> Spending in the prior academic year, over the same period (1<sup>st</sup> Aug – 15<sup>th</sup> May), for the same group of students.

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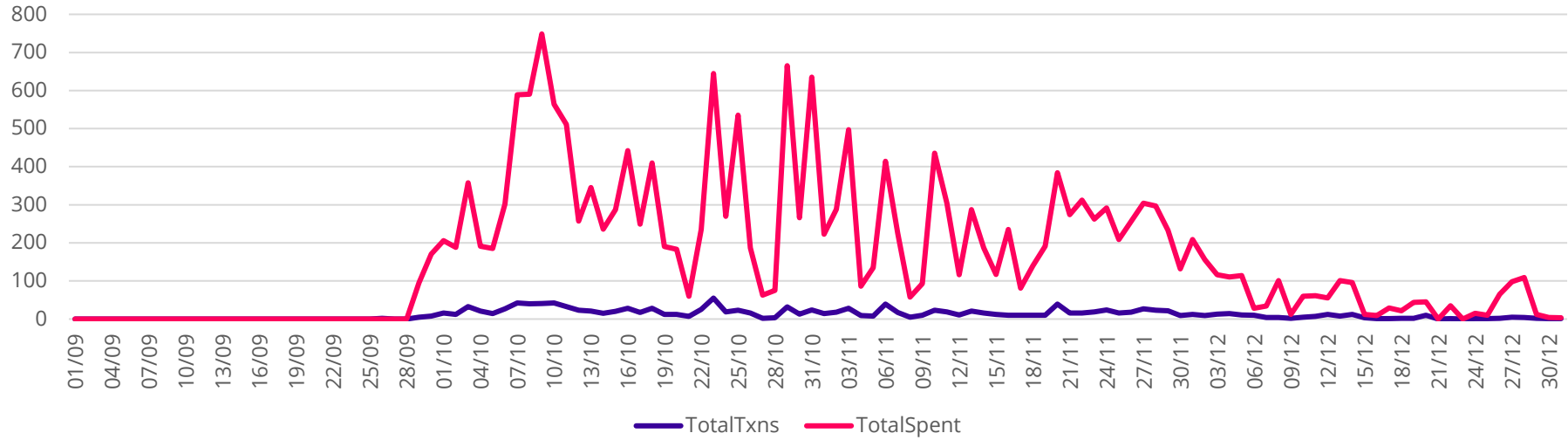


Figure 4 - Autumn Spending

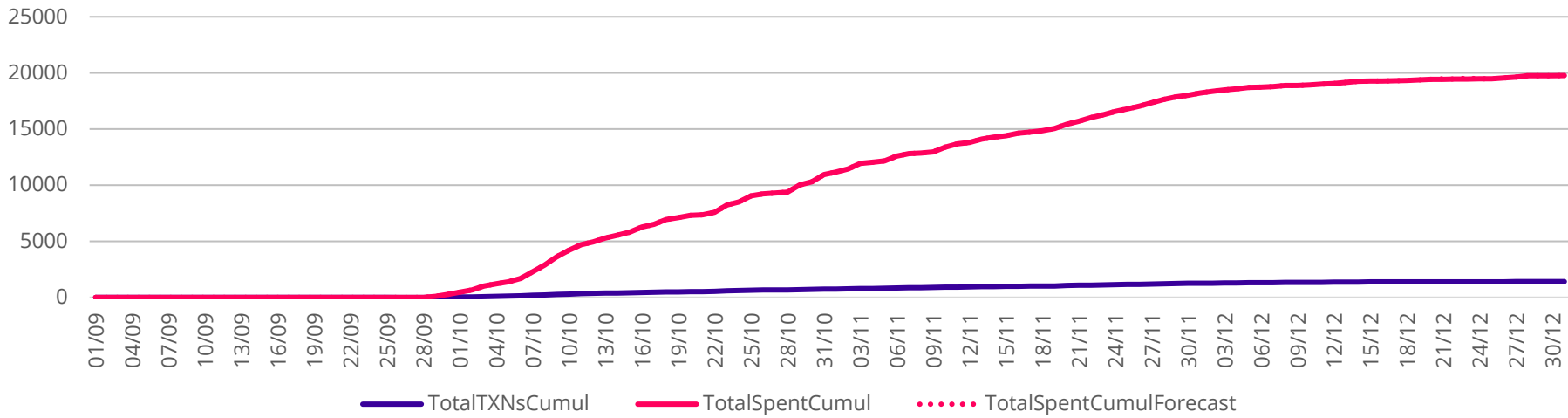


Figure 5 - Autumn Spending (Cumulative)

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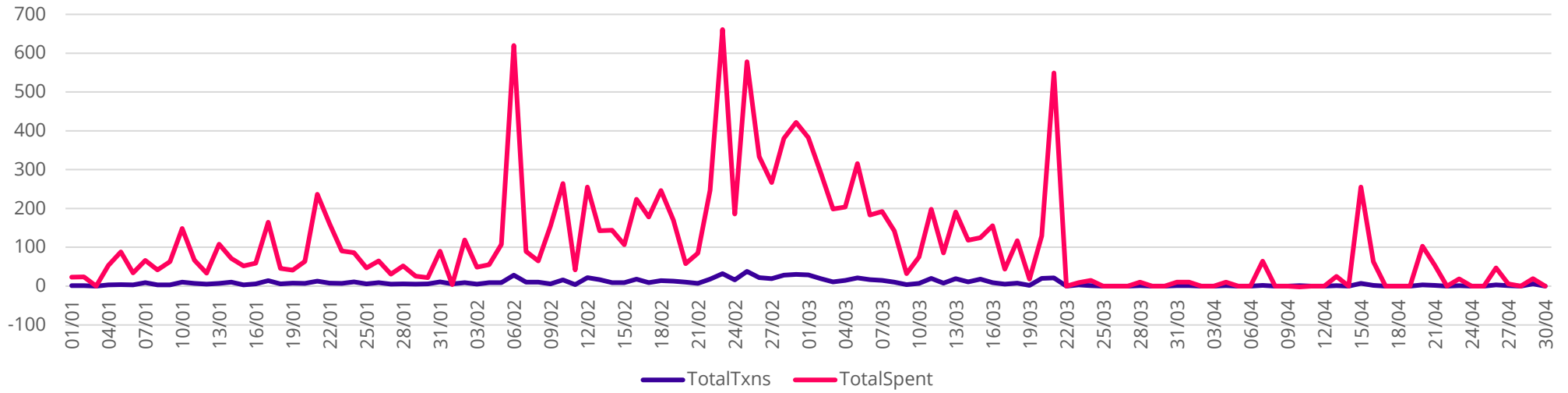


Figure 6 - Spring Spending

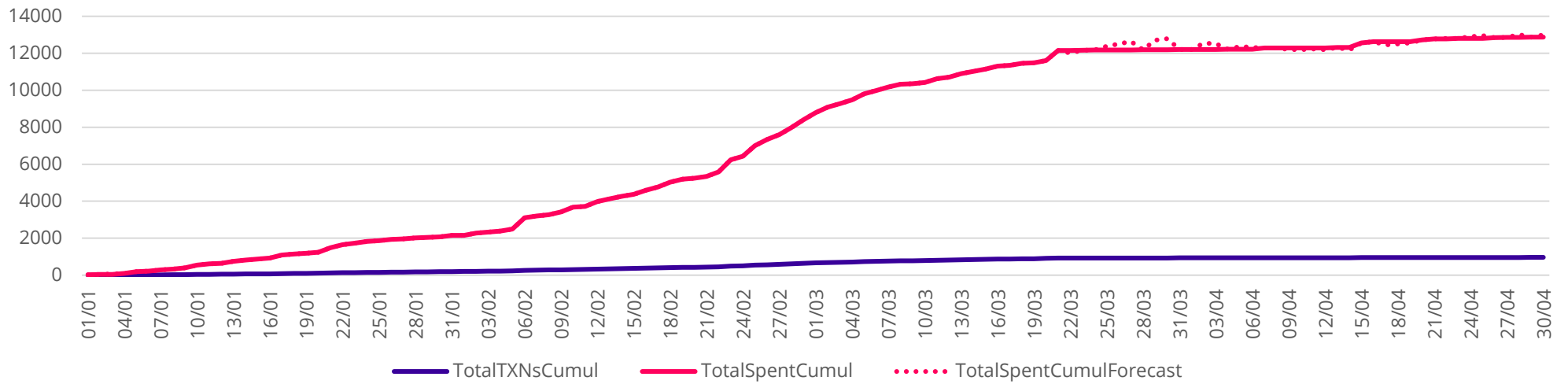


Figure 7 - Spring Spending (Cumulative)