



Imperial College London

Silwood Park Students' Union Report

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1 Background

1.1 The Silwood Park Campus

The Silwood Park campus has been part of Imperial College London since 1947, when it was purchased as a field station largely to conduct large-scale agricultural studies that could not be done at the crowded South Kensington campus. Many of Silwood's older field experiments have been running continuously for more than 30 years, and Silwood is a globally important research site in the fields of ecology and conservation. Silwood has also been involved in other fields of research too, with the campus housing a small nuclear reactor from 1967 until its removal in 2021. Silwood is a research-intensive campus with around 20 PhD candidates and 90 master's students based on site. There are no undergraduate courses delivered at Silwood, and around half of the master's students at Silwood are international students.

Historically, the students at Silwood have been represented by the Silwood Park Students' Union (SPSU), which has historically acted independently of the Imperial College Union (ICU). The SPSU became a constituent union of the ICU in 2012, following a governance review. Clubs, societies and projects (CSPs) at Silwood are typically organized independently of any pre-existing CSPs at the ICU by both students and faculty members alike. Funding for these usually comes from ICU grants, with some additional faculty funding.

Silwood's distance from the main campus has led to many unique traditions and customs arising on the campus, but has also produced some Silwood-specific challenges. These mostly arise from transportation difficulties, and a lack of access to both ICU and faculty services that are available on other campuses. This semester, we have endeavoured to engage with the ICU on a range of topics and issues, from CSP facilitation to transportation.

We are confident that more dialogue between the SPSU and the ICU will go a long way towards remedying this, and that we can work towards resolving some of these long-standing issues.



1.2 SPSU Committee 2023/24

The elections for the SPSU committee for 2023/2024 were held on October 16, 2023 – roughly two weeks after the start of the Silwood academic term. Positions for election were: Chair, Vice Chair, Junior Treasurer, two Transport Officers, six Entertainment Officers, and two Chancellors of the Fur in charge of caring for the unofficial campus cat (Mr. Tinkles). Initially, all positions were filled apart from the Entertainment Officer team (four of the six positions were filled), and we allowed four Chancellors of the Fur due to high interest in the role and its honorary position. We have subsequently been able to recruit one International Officer, and two additional Entertainment Officers. The contact information for this years' committee members can be found on the Silwood Union web page (<https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/representation/a-to-z/silwood-park-students-union>).

Current SPSU committee:

Chair: Jack Arthur. **Vice-Chair:** George Kalogiannis. **Jr. Treasurer:** Jean Moorkens. **Transportation Officers:** Sinead Moss, Eimear Loughlin, **Entertainment Officers:** Daisy Mitchell, Ben Bennett, Emma Arulanantham, Tianle Shao, Sayuan Wang. **International Officer:** Feihui Yu. **Chancellors of the Fur:** Jemima Frame, Isobel Bender, Emmanuel Tibok, Sunny Gao.

2 CSPs and Union Services

Rolling and sporting societies have been allocated their annual budgets over the past few weeks. The permanent societies and Union Services budgets were allocated by the previous committee, and typically do not change year on year.

Rolling Societies

- **Performing Arts:** The Arts and Crafts society has been thriving and meeting every Tuesday at the Unit-A building after the weekly pub quizzes. There are usually around 8 people participating, although it varies. The meetings usually consist of playing instruments as well as all sorts of games and karaoke's.
- **Birdwatching:** The birdwatching society has been running Friday morning bird-watching walks on which they plan to continue. They also plan to hold one-off trips to local nature reserves and may organise a residential trip in the summer. The society currently has 9 regular members.
- **Quiz:** Quiz Society has run pretty much weekly bar a few exceptions, and we have played a series of quiz formats in Unit A including University Challenge questions, an online buzzer quiz and trivial pursuit questions. We've usually played with teams facing against each other but have occasionally played individually.

Sports Societies

- **Badminton:** The badminton and tennis societies have been having weekly meetups on Wednesdays to play their respective sports at Bracknell Leisure center. They are also thinking about doing a tournament in Spring. The meetings tend to be of around 5-10 people due to vehicle constraints.
- **Climbing:** The climbing society has been doing well with many recurrent members that have been going to oakwood climbing center every week, depending on driver availability. They have been using personal cars, but with access to the minibus, we will now be able to facilitate more people.
- **Tennis:** Currently the tennis society has been playing weekly every Monday on a local council court. The average attendance has been between 7-10 participants.

Permanent Societies

- **Chickens:** The chicken club has been meeting weekly to perform group cleaning and maintenance of the chicken shed, as well as take care of the chicken's various needs, whether medical or other. There have been daily shifts, twice per day to feed the chickens as well as collect their eggs for sale at the security office.

Union Services

- **Minibus:** The requirement to have a UK license with 2 years of driving experience has presented a problem with our limited, largely international, student pool. Given that at present we only have three drivers with varying levels of commitment, we look forward to engaging with the ICU and the faculty to find solutions.
- **Mr. Tinkles:** Mr. Tinkles, the campus cat and living legend (with honorary life meowmembership of the ICU), has been doing great! Despite his great age and bad habit of terrorising the local rabbit population, he has been staying healthy thanks to our chancellors of the fur who manage his care.

3 Silfest

Silfest is the annual music festival/celebration that occurs on the grounds of Silwood park during the summer. The summer 2023 Silfest was cancelled for a number of reasons, and we are determined to work with the ICU to ensure that Silfest 2024 is able to go ahead as planned. Silfest is run by a SPSU subcommittee, consisting of volunteers from the student population. So far, the Silfest subcommittee consists of 8 people and we are having regular meetings with the student activities manager, and other relevant personnel in the ICU, to ensure the success of this event.

4 Current Challenges

A prominent issue faced at Silwood Park is the lack of access to surrounding facilities and events. To alleviate this, a minibus has been made available for use by students who hold a British driving licence. However, this has not entirely resolved the issue, as not all societies that look to plan off-campus events have potential drivers in their membership. We look forward to working with the ICU and the Department to ascertain a pragmatic and lasting solution to this issue.

We also faced several issues regarding handover; It took a few weeks to get access to the role email inboxes which, as of the time of this report, still have the contact names of last year's committee members. However, we are actively engaging with union officials to remedy this for future years, and monthly meetings between the Silwood execs and the Student Activities manager at the ICU are actively helping to facilitate coordination between Silwood and the ICU. These will continue throughout the year, and we plan to make this a permanent fixture for future years.

5 Conclusion

The SPSU faces unique challenges, and we are confident that long-term solutions can be found. While we realize that it is a challenge to deliver all services available in South Kensington or White City to Silwood, students here do not have discounted tuition and still expect the high quality of service that their union fees pay for on other campuses. Therefore, it is important that problems be taken seriously by faculty and Unions alike, and lasting solutions can be found to improve the student experience on the campus. We look forward to working with the ICU and faculties, and will provide a further update in due course.