Imperial College Union
Union Council / 27th May 2025
Blackett Lecture Theatre 2 / 1800 Hours
Agenda

Please note the change of venue.

		Item	Lead	Action	Time	Page(s)
Chair's business	01	Welcome, Apologies, Quoracy, Proxies, Seat reinstatement, Call for AOB	Anthea MacIntosh-LaRocque (Council Chair)	To note/ approve	18:00	/
	02	Approval of minutes of previous meetings		To approve	18:05	2-15
Procedural Motion	03	Motion to extend the meeting by 1 hour		To approve	18:08	/
Matters for Decision	04	Democracy Review	Camille Boutrolle (Union President)	To approve	18:10	16-46
Break					19:00	
Matters for Decision	04	Democracy Review	Camille Boutrolle (Union President)	To approve	19:05	
Break					20:00	
Matters for Decision	04	Democracy Review	Camille Boutrolle (Union President)	To approve	20:05	
Any Other Business	05			To consider	20:50	/
End of meeting					21:00	/

Council Attendance

Role	Name	Initials	Attendance
Officer Trustee - Union President	Camille Boutrolle	CB	Apologies
Officer Trustee - Deputy President (Education)	Emina Hogas	EH	Present
Officer Trustee - Deputy President (Welfare)	Nico Henry	NH	Present
Officer Trustee - Deputy President (Clubs & Societies)	Christian Cooper	CC	Present
Officer Trustee - Deputy President (Finance & Services)	Stephanie Yeung	SY	Present
Council Chair	Anthea MacIntosh-LaRocque	AML	Present
Constituent Union President - ICSMSU	Lilia Evans	LE	Present
Constituent Union President - CGCU	Daniel Zhuo	DZ	Present
Constituent Union President - RSM	Amelia Spindler	AS	Apologies
Constituent Union President - RCSU	Julia Purrinos De Oliveria	JPDO	Present
Constituent Union President - Silwood	Jana Braun-Wilson	JBW	Apologies
Management Group Chair - Arts	Nathalie Tedfors Lindell	NTL	Present
Management Group Chair - Community	Shahmir Durrani	SD	Absent
Management Group Chair - Culture	Sheshpriya Gadiya	SG	Absent
Management Group Chair – Knowledge	William Chen	WC	Absent
Management Group Chair – Recreation	Enzo Amaral	EA	Present
Management Group Chair - Sport	Junior Mbah	JM	Present
LCO - Black & Minority Ethnic Officer	Comfort Oluwakoya	CO	Apologies
LCO - LGBTQ+ Officer	Anson To	AT	Present
LCO - Disabilities	Maegan Spitari	MS	Apologies
LCO - Mental Health	Miriam Foulkes	MF	Present
LCO - Gender Equality Officer	Vacant		
LCO - Ethics & Environmental Officer	Hollie Meyers	HM	Present
LCO - Interfaith Officer	Ashay Divekar	AD	Present
LCO - International Officer	Yuanze Xia	YX	Apologies
LCO - Working Class Officer	Scarlett Kilford	SK	Present
Welfare Officer of CU - RCSU	Stefaniia Medvetskaia	SM	Present

Welfare Officer of CU - ICSMSU	Ketevani Asatiani-Kalandaze	KAK	Absent
Welfare Officer of CU - CGSU	Adrib Ahmed	AA	Present
Welfare Officer of CU - RSM	Gao Kamalanavin	GK	Apologies
Academic Officer of CU - CGCU	Linmo Lin	LL	Present
Academic Officer of CU - RCSU	Jack Swires	JS	Present
Academic Officer of CU - ICSMSU	Yousuf Yaqub	YY	Present
Academic Officer of CU - RSM	Emma Halford	EHa	Present
Postgraduate Research Academic & Welfare Officer (Engineering)	Yifeng Mao	YM	Present
Postgraduate Research Academic & Welfare Officer (Medicine)	Ruksana Begum-Meades	RBM	Present
Postgraduate Research Academic & Welfare Officer (Science)	Hengchang Cao	HCa	Absent
Postgraduate Taught Academic & Welfare Officer (Business School)	Reem Al Saud	RAS	Absent
Postgraduate Taught Academic & Welfare Officer (Engineering)	Injeel Syed	IS	Apologies
Postgraduate Taught Academic & Welfare Officer (Medicine)	Srimathi Lakshminarasimhan	SL	Apologies
PGT Representation Chair	Nakul Maheshwari	NM	Absent
PGR Representation Chair	Jing Xu	JX	Absent
Council Representative (UG Science)	Chloe Huang	CH	Absent
Council Representative (UG Science)	Elias Fink	EF	Present
Council Representative (UG Engineering)	Salman Khalaf	SKh	Absent
Council Representative (UG Engineering)	Alvaro Vicente Tarrago	AVT	Absent
Council Representative (UG Engineering)	Huaihou Yang	HY	Present
Council Representative (UG Business)	Sofia Hueffer	SH	Present
Council Representative (UG Medicine)	Haider Nazerali	HN	Present
Council Representative (UG Medicine)	Rohan Boyapati	RB	Present
Council Representative (PG Science)	Alex Auyang	AAu	Present
Council Representative (PG Engineering)	Deniz Etit	DE	Present

Council Representative (PG Engineering)	Hanqing Zhang	HZ	Apologies
Council Representative (PG Medicine)	Thea Jakobi	TJ	Present
Council Representative (PG Business)	Laotan Faji	LF	Present
Council Representative (PG non-faculty)	Jordon Milward	JM	Present
Council Representative (PG Business)	Akanksha Kumari	AK	Present

In attendance [Students/Staff]

Helena Schofield (HS) – ICU Representation Manager [Union Staff]
Zahra Butt (ZB) - Democracy and Campaigns Coordinator [Union Staff]
Niamh Riddles (NR) - Programme Support Officer, Strategic Programmes & Change [University Staff]

1. **Welcome**

AML welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Apologies & Chair's Business**

Apologies received from:

Camille Boutrolle: Union President

Amelia Spindler – RSMU President

Srimathi Lakshminarasimhan: Postgraduate Taught Academic & Welfare Officer (Medicine)

Daniel Zhuo – for first half – CGCU Chair

Gao Kamalanavin: Welfare Officer of CU - RSMU

Remote attendance

Haider Nazerali: Council Representative (UG Medicine)
Reem Al Saud: Postgraduate Taught Academic & Welfare Officer (Business School)

Rohan Boyapati: Council Representative (UG Medicine)

Anna Cavalieri Canosa: Proxy for Jana Silwood Park Chair (Vice President Silwood Union)

3. **Council Seat Reinstatement**

None raised.

4. **Proxies**

Anna Cavalieri Canosa (Vice President Silwood Union) for Jana Braun Wilson Silwood Park Chair

Yemi Abe (BME Community Engagement Officer) for Comfort Oluwakoya (BME Officer)

Amy Lloyd Evans – for Meg Spiteri (Disabilities Officer)

5. AOB

- Mental Health Awareness Month
- Union Awards

6. Approval of minutes of the previous meeting

The following corrections were raised:

- Reem and Deniz, Laotan, Akanksha were in attendance on 4th March

- AOB

Summer Ball

Date for the event is 21st June, not 31st June

7. Action tracker

Date of creation	Action number	Council reference (if applicable)	Action	Owned by	Status	Update
7/11/23	1.5	Item 10, Resolve 10(1)	Demand that College: i) Make a public commitment to exclude all fossil fuel companies from their investment portfolio(s). ii) Introduce a publicly accessible ethical investment policy that explicitly excludes all fossil fuel companies.	CB	In progress	11/1/24 Reconvening SRI working group within College to tackle this 20/2/24 CB noted she sent a recommendation to the Provost and will give further updates in due time. 19/03/24 CB noted regarding Action 1.5 that a Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) working group has been set up and will hold a meeting on 10 May, and updates will be shared to Council afterwards.

			iii) Fully divest from all fossil fuel companies within 3 years.			28/5/24 SRI working group met on 10 May to assess whether they need to revisit the policy. CB noted there will be changes to the policy, but they are currently facing pushback on whether they're using the Imperial index to judge investments. CB noted the next meeting will take place in June. 1/11/24 College still disputing how they will roll out the Imperial Zero Index and this needs to be decided before it is applied to investments. Currently the College has no investments in fossil fuel companies, and this will not change in the time it takes them to decide on the Index 10/12/24 CB is still unsure as to when the university needs to decide on the Imperial Zero Index. The university has emailed her saying that they are in discussions, but they are still relatively cagey about this.
20/2/24	4.1	Item 8, Resolve 1	The Union will release a statement taking the position that part-time work as part of your studies is now a must for many and not a choice and offering support to students in part-time work.	CB, NH	In progress	1/11/24 CB: No Union-specific statement has been realised, but OTs have been advocating for more support for students working part-time with the College. 2/11/24 NH: Following my analysis of the bursary survey, which shows students have increasingly been working whilst at uni, we're working with the university to release this sort of statement.
20/2/24	4.3	Item 8, Resolve 3	To encourage Imperial to facilitate more academic-related employment opportunities within	NH	In progress	30/04/24 The OCs have raised the Item to college stakeholders, but are yet to finalise actions. They are also lobbying the

			the College for students that will further their career development and align with their academic pursuits by recognising the restrictions on work due to studying needs and their financial needs as these opportunities are often better renumerated.			College to create a platform to set up proper advertisements and increase students' awareness of work opportunities. 2/11/24 NH: I'm in the process of writing a recommendation document for each of the faculties to work on. This will show that the proportion of students working has been increasing every year for the past 5 years. I've already started the conversation, and everyone has been very open to this, I'm working with the careers service to finalise this and have conversations with each faculty dean on reducing the stigma of students working. This will lead to set recommendations on students working.
20/2/24	4.5	Item 8, Resolve 5	To collaborate with Student Services to review the indicators of financial hardship, particularly for hardship fund and bursary applications.	NH, JM	In progress	30/04/24 The OTs have raised the Item to college stakeholders but are yet to finalise actions. 2/11/24 NH: I'm working with student support services on this and increased communication on the available help at the university.
20/2/24	4.6	Item 8, Resolve 6	To meet with students and College to discuss expectations and impact of part-time work on studies.	NH, JM, NFL	In progress	30/04/24 JM noted regarding Action 4.6 that it was brought up in meetings with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QUAK) and the Early Career and Research Institute (ECRI), and discussions for expectations and impact of part-time work on students are in progress. JM noted it is an ongoing initiative on postgraduate and post-academic support by the university. 28/5/24

						NFL noted regarding Action 4.6 that some revisions were made on adding some support to help students identify job opportunities within the College. It is now a requirement that the expectations document is discussed at the initial student-supervisor meeting as well as other regular checkpoints such as the Early Stage Assessment or Late Stage Review. NFL also noted they are acknowledging the need for part-time work and ways to recognise opportunities within and outside the college. 2/11/24 NH: I just presented data on working students and the trends over the past 5 years to the faculty deans and other stakeholders at APSG (Access and Participation Strategy Group). This was taken very well and we will be meeting starting next week to discuss expectations and impact of working students. 12/11/24: Writing recommendations on how to take this project forward
20/2/24	4.7	Item 8,, Resolve 7	To facilitate more accessible employment opportunities for students.	NH, JC, NFL	In progress	2/11/24 NH: I'm working with the university on seeing what jobs we can give to students, some faculties are creating more UG Teaching assistant jobs, there's also more well paid mentorship opportunities (up to £19 p/h), and I'm personally making sure all students are getting paid more than London Living Wage, I successfully lobbied the university into increasing the wages of students working for catering (~£3p/h increase). We're pushing the careers service

						and the university to create even more developmental jobs and opportunities. At the union we are also creating more jobs for students and this should be expanding even further in the next couple of months.
20/2/24	4.8	Item 9, Resolve 2	Lobby the College to support increasing the UKRI London allowance.	CB, NH, DE	In progress	28/5/24 AC noted Action 4.8 was raised in a meeting with college stakeholders, with the review of the funding structure to be completed in due time. NH noted that students that can vote should do so as they can impact student experience in the years to come. CB added regarding Action 4.8 she spoke with College staff who are happy to help with drafting papers moving forward. CB noted they haven't reached out to Unions, but they will be involved with the projects planned in the next year, where student lobbying will likely happen. 10/12/24 DE, CB and EH have met with other London-based Student Unions on lobbying to improve the UKRI allowance. A working group has been set up. 07/1/25 No substantial progress due to the Christmas break but EH expects to have an update by February. 29/04/25 EH CB and DE, Completed draft for the proposal to University sent out. 1,000 responses from survey data across the Universities who were collecting data on Postgraduate Research

						(PhD) Stipend and Cost-of-Living Prof. Hugh Brady and the College support the UKRI stipend increase. 15th May is the official signature collection
20/2/24	4.9	Item 9, Resolve 3	If the College does not support increasing the UKRI London allowance, then to form a student-driven campaign led by the paper author focussed on the issue of the UKRI London allowance, with the support of the Union President and Deputy President (Welfare).	CB, NH, DE	Incomplete	This is an action that cannot happen as the University Supports the UKRI London Allowance increase
20/2/24	4.11	Item 9, Resolve 5	To gather data regarding the financial circumstances of PhD students at Imperial.	NH	In progress	30/04/24 AC noted this has been raised in committee meetings but are yet to finalise actions. 2/11/24 NH: Questions around work and financial accessibility will be added to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). 12/11/24 NH: Keeping this action open until there is confirmation that this question will be added to the PRES 10/12/24 NH is attempting to update the PGR experience survey in order to reflect financial circumstances of PGR students. He has a meeting week commencing 9/12 and will update at the next council. 07/01/25 NH is meeting with the PRES Team to understand if this question will be added to the PRES. He chased this up on

						7/1/25 and is waiting to hear back. They are checking if they have this question and will add it if not.
	4.12	Item 9, Resolve 6	For the Union President and Deputy President (Welfare), alongside the paper author, to make efforts to form a working group with other London-based universities to lobby the UKRI to increase the UKRI London allowance.	CB, NH, DE	Incomplete	10/12/24 DE, CB and EH have met with other London-based Student Unions on lobbying to improve the UKRI allowance. A working group has been set up. 04/02/25 DE has met with UCL, marking the completion of the final meeting for the intial stage of the UKRI lobbying plan. All 5 London Russell Group Student Unions are on board, and they will talk to their university presidents and provosts, sharing information about the financial hardships of postgraduate students. A survey was created by CB and EH and disseminated the week commencing 27/1
	4.13	Item 9, Resolve 7	For the Union President and Deputy President (Welfare), to make efforts to form a working group with non-London-based universities to lobby the UKRI to increase the UKRI base rate.	CB, NH	In progress	1/11/24 CB: The UKRI has just completed a review of the UKRI base rate so we feel we cannot influence this but have much more scope for London allowance – potential to prioritise the London allowance.

AML noted the update of the action tracker and thanked everyone for their progress.

8. White City Consultation

i. AML introduced staff members CT/ NR who will be running the consultation today with students
ii. NR introduced the new development at White City and the proposed plans for what the space is used for now
iii. NR discussed that this is an opportunity to embed the student voice into the upcoming development and how the space can be shaped to include new features tailored to students based at White City
iv. NR talked through a presentation that showcased the areas for development in the space with new accommodation and a projection of the number of students on that campus.
v. NR reassured Council that the theme of accessibility will be woven into all the work carried out in the new development as is one of the main priorities.

Council worked in groups to collate their feedback on the usage and what the space can be using Padlet. The link to the Padlet is here:https://padlet.com/aem1418/padlet-rr6943q3nfjtbq8u

Key ideas from questions:

vi. **Informal meeting, study and hangout spaces**
   a. There was a strong sense of more outdoor/green spaces on the campus for people to hangout on
   b. Multiple people put down the need for lockers in study spaces created
   c. Meeting pods and more bookable spaces were discussed as a priority
   d. A bar was used as an example of a space that is informal and would separate the spaces from feeling like a corporate space

vii. **Purpose- driven engagement, celebration of culture and activities**
   a. A union presence was mentioned to have a venue for people to socialise and for societies to run their activities
   b. Having a gym or sports facility was discussed that would have some bookable capacity so people could have a space for exercise
   c. People mentioned an Art Centre like space with different forms of art that rotate in the space, potentially student art and a bookable music room

viii. **Spaces to connect to people or organisations outside of Imperial**
   a. A job centre for people to speak to employers and career service staff
   b. A space to connect to people outside of their own departments outside of labs
   c. There were mentions of a mentorship space so that students could have prospective students to support and develop their teaching skills

ix. **Personal growth and exploration spaces**
   a. Once again having a diverse gym facility was mentioned that accommodated for dance and court space
   b. An Imperial College Union activity spaces so that students might be encouraged to not centralise all their activities on South Kensington
   c. Kitchen space so that people can have the freedom to warm up food and make small meals during the day
   d. People were looking for a comfortable space for commuting students to rest and relax

x. **Food and beverage**
   a. A request for adequate facilities for heating up food (microwaves) and to have a good distribution of water fountains across campus was a key theme
   b. Catering to a range of diets including halal food, vegan, gluten free and vegetarian options.

xi. **Spaces to engage with staff**
   a. People had recommended a department wide common area with staff and student access and some spaces potentially available in department foyers

xii. **Wellbeing and Mental Health**
   a. For wellbeing there are three particular zones people had discussed.
   b. Wellbeing zones: multiple smaller capacity but comfortable spaces to detox and rest up from the day, including some sleeping pods/sensory pods.
   c. Multifaith Provision in the space that accommodates a chaplaincy
   d. Technology free zones

xiii. **Library and quiet study spaces**
   a. Students wanted a space that had separated floors or zones that were clearly outlined to indicate quiet study and group/start up study

xiv. **Connection and storytelling**

a. Student/societies spotlight spaces such as a recognition wall was highly recommended

xv. Any other thoughts/ideas?

a. More frequent shuttle buses and additional cycling routes to link up the campus with other spaces
b. Ablution and Prayer room spaces to be considered

9. UROP Proposal

EH introduced the UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme) Policy Consultation. EH clarified that this is a space to raise issues/questions and concerns that EH can contribute to the changes happening.

Council worked in groups to collate their feedback on the usage and what the space can be using Padlet. The link to the Padlet is here: https://padlet.com/aem1418/urop-discussion-padlet-mr3f9tu9nk3tjyd3

i. **Question 1: "as a student, what are your thoughts on mandatory recommendation that every student registered on a UROP must be in receipt of a bursary (as result of the College's support of widening participationand removal of financial barriers to pursuing a UROP)?"**
   a. The common theme in this questions discussion was that there is uncertainty about the impact this will have on how many people will be offered a UROP and that it will disadvantage the departments that are funded less.
ii. **Question 2: "from the student perspective, how conducive is this approach in improving access to the UROP scheme, if at all?"**
   a. There were parallel discussions about how the improvements to the UROP scheme would increase accessibility if students had previously not applied for the UROP due to issues around pay but it also would decrease the overall opportunities available due to limited funding from particular departments
iii. **Question 3: "What are your thoughts on the recommendation that supervisors might be able to appeal (make an exception to) the mandatory bursary rule?"**
   a. There were suggestions that the appeal might be overused and create inequality between students and that it may undermine the bursary process
iv. **Question 4: "What do you think of the assumption that staff are more likely to supervise UROPs if they are approached by students rather than having to advertise an existing topic? Is this assumption reflective of what happens in practise?"**
   a. People discussed that this assumption was somewhat true as advertisements and published information was either out of date or not comprehensive enough. It is suggested that there is no clarity on the process.
v. **Question 5: "How do you see a student-led (student-proposed) approach impacting on student access to the UROP scheme?"**
   a. From discussions the concerns were mostly aimed at the fact students already
vi. **Question 6: "What do you think about UROPs 'looking' different depending on the department (different approaches to staff participation, advertising and the ability to secure positions)?"**
   a. The main discussion item for this question was the need for centralised access to opportunities and in advertising to allow the fairest way of showing what is available.

vii. **Question 7: "What do you think the College or departments should do to better manage expectations around the availability and accessibility of UROPs?"**
   a. The same theme around centralising processes, advertising and open access for student to view opportunities were highlighted

viii. **Question 8: "What are your thoughts on including a question on your ability to self-fund during a UROP (i.e. a question asking whether you are 'able to fund yourself' or 'require UROP bursary')?"**
   a. The consensus from discussions were that this seems like a good idea but might be difficult to implement.

ix. Question 9: "What are your thoughts on a University- run opportunity for students to showcase their work (i.e., a UROP showcase)?"
   a. People found the ideas of a faculty or univeristy wide project very interesting but would like to see how it would look in practise.

11. Clubs, Societies & Projects Board – Verbal Update to Council

i. CC explained that CSPB looked at annual budgeting but there was a slight delay to get some more perspectives

ii. CSPB main work has been to look at those allocations

iii. This year with Summer elections, CC explained that if you are a chair of a CSP to let the team know

iv. CC informed that the sustainability frameworks will be worked on and coming to the next CSPB

v. CSPB handover session will take place in June

12. Officer Trustee Update

i. AML to highlight some of the call to actions in the paper and the team agreed to take the paper as read

ii. SY spoke about Union awards nominations closing at 10am and reminded people to nominate

Iii. AA asked if the awards policy changed, AML said it is no longer a policy from last year as it has lapsed.

13. AOB:

MF: Mental Health Awareness Month

i. MF spoke about the upcoming events and asked for it to be shared amongst networks

CC: Union Awards

i) CC spoke about the nomination's deadlines for union awards
ii) Vacancy on one of the awards panels, dates 9th and the 16th may afternoons (for individual awards) get in touch with HS or CC.

Imperial College Union (ICU)
Union Council / 27 May 2025

Motion on ICU Democracy Review [2024-2025]

Proposer: Camille Boutrolle (Union President)
Seconders: Emina Hogas (Deputy President (Education))
Nico Henry (Deputy President (Welfare))
Christian Cooper (Deputy President (Clubs & Societies))
Stephanie Yeung (Deputy President (Finance & Services))

Union Notes

1. That a wholescale review of ICU's democratic and student representation structures has been undertaken this academic year**,** engaging stakeholders such as Imperial students, University staff and Union staff, with the assistance of a sector consultancy.
2. That a report with recommended solutions to current democratic deficits was circulated to Union Council members ahead of the 27 May 2025 Union Council meeting for consideration.

Union Believes

1. That in order to be effective, a student-led membership-organisation like ICU should periodically review the effectiveness of its democratic input mechanisms.
2. That changes proposed by the Democracy Review which are endorsed by Council should be taken forward.

Union Resolves

1. To endorse the recommendations of the Democracy Review appended to this motion (as approved/amended at the 27 May 2025 Union Council meeting), noting that final approval also requires endorsement from the ICU Board of Trustees to proceed.

Appendix:

Thematic Area	#	Council recommends...	Clarifications
1 Organisational Transparency	1.1	ICU holds annual general meetings to present activity and finances	
	1.2	ICU releases summaries of the proceedings of its Finance, Audit & Risk Committee in an easy-to-digest format	
	1.3	ICU publishes annual student experience reports	
	1.4	ICU ensures student facing teams have student feedback and input mechanisms	
	1.5	ICU holds effectiveness reviews of Council/democratic structures once after the first year of implementation of the democracy review, then every 3 years	
2 Officer Structure	2.1	Sabbatical Officers to be line-managed by the ICU Managing Director	This applies to sabbatical officers' responsibilities/accountabilities as paid/employed members of staff.
	2.2	ICU removes the DPFS sabbatical officer role	Sustainability and Union event offering scrutiny to now sit under President
	2.3	ICU renames DPCS to DP Activities and amends remit to contain community development for students (including student-led events, volunteering, reward and recognition, and skills development) with support from the ICU staff team.	
	2.4	ICU does not elect a fifth Officer Trustee for AY 2025-2026.	*# 2.4-2.6 only to be considered if 2.2 is endorsed by Council.* This would involve removing the DPFS from the Byelaws. Council and Board may jointly propose

2 Officer Structure			to add a fifth Officer Trustee to byelaws at a future point.
	2.5	that trustees give consideration to prioritising resource to support postgraduate community and representatives via additional staff support	*# 2.4-2.6 only to be considered if 2.2 is endorsed by Council.*
	2.6	that the Union further considers whether or not having a part-time or full-time PG Officer would be beneficial to improving PG representation at Imperial	*# 2.4-2.6 only to be considered if 2.2 is endorsed by Council.* To happen before next University block grant negotiation cycle commences.
	2.7	Officer Trustees be held to account at Council, and subject to feedback and deliberation at Council Committees	
	2.8	Officer Trustees have secondary portfolios	
3 Community Organising	3.1	ICU recruits part-time student staff to assist the delivery of community building and community organising initiatives	
	3.2	ICU delivers community organising training to all student volunteers	
4 Union Council	4.1	The creation of 4 committees of Council for deliberative matters and policy discussion spaces, with Council meeting at least termly.	The 4 Committees would be: i. Activities Committee (rename CSPB) ii. Academic Committee iii. Constituent Union Presidents Committee iv. Liberation & Wellbeing Committee
5 Constituent Unions	5.1	ICU and CUs co-develop partnership agreements	
	5.2	The creation of a CU Officer development programme	
	5.3	Postgraduate representation is embedded into CU structures	
	5.4	The introduction of an Imperial College Business School CU	Codeveloped with the Business School

6 Liberation & Community	6.1	The Liberation & Community Networks are elected altogether in Leadership Elections, and the network elects a lead LCO	
	6.2	The Liberation & Community Networks can substitute representation where necessary (e.g. when the LCO delegate from a particular community is unavailable to attend relevant University/union meetings)	
	6.3	That the Liberation & Community Networks report to the Liberation & Wellbeing Committee of Council	
7 Governance	7.1	ICU reviews the rights of associate members	
	7.2	ICU modernises its Bye Laws	
	7.3	ICU Election processes are simplified, with the removal of Summer Elections for leadership positions	

Imperial College Union
Democracy Review
CounterCulture and ICU Staff

Introduction

A democratic, student-led union is fundamental to ensuring every student has a transformational experience at university. It equips the Union to deliver truly student-centric services, while helping students build a stronger sense of belonging, develop self-determination, and feel genuine agency over their university journey. In its strategic plan, Imperial College Union (ICU) articulated its commitment to democracy as a foundational principle, its alignment to the goal of 'effective advocacy and influence,' and the importance of ensuring ICU members to drive the decisions made at Union and University level.

Many of the ICU democratic structures were developed over time – some dating back to the formation of the University, others were reviewed and amended over the Covid-19 pandemic – and many adjusted in between. However, it has, until now, been unclear how well students at Imperial understand or can access their union's democracy. Moreover, whether the University deems them credible or effective at influencing their decision making to make positive impacts for the student body at varying academic and non-academic levels.

This report is timely; there has not been a recent, holistic analysis of the Union's democratic processes, structures and offices in their entirety. Furthermore, as Imperial seeks to expand its provision across multiple campus and diversify its student body, clear and accessible decision making and robust evidence collection to influence choices across the university has never been more important.

Following a competitive tender process, ICU commissioned CounterCulture to provide an independent perspective and wholescale analysis of the current systems and make recommendations based on their findings. In scope of this review were the following themes and areas:

- Sabbatical Officer positions/roles/portfolios
- Liberation and Community Officer (LCO) and network (LCN) structure
- Student-led campaigns
- Democratic/student policy-making bodies e.g., Union Council
- Constituent Union (CU) structure.

Context

Why a democracy review?
In 2023, ICU launched its strategic plan, which articulated a central mission to '…positively transform the lives of every student at Imperial' and a goal of 'effective advocacy and influence'[1]. Underpinning any effective advocacy is the need to deliver a 'strong, accessible democracy' which enables genuine student led change and impact for members.

Like many students' unions of longstanding institutions, the democratic structures at ICU have developed over time – aspects of this were first established in 1907 when Imperial formed into a as a singular university from independent colleges. As Imperial has expanded, so has the need for further additions – which has created some complexity, and, as a result, a lack of accessibility and transparency for both students and the University.

The last time a Democratic Structures review took place was in the academic year 2021-2022, undertaken by the Union President, resulting in several recommended changes. In scope for this review were: membership of, accessibility of and subcommittees of Union; democratic scrutiny of Sabbatical Officers; Constituent Union (CU) Governance; and student representation across Imperial's numerous campuses. Although this review was helpful in streamlining some processes, it was not able to be as holistic or wide reaching as an independent review could be.

This review represents a large, broad, and wholescale review of the entire representational functions and democratic engagement mechanisms of the Union. It aims to place the Union on a strong footing to support a growing student body across multiple campuses, placing an understanding of the depth and breadth of community issues at its core – responding to the challenges faced by a diverse, high-achieving, and high-expectation setting student population.

Data collection and analysis approach
Between September and December 2024, a comprehensive data collection process was undertaken by CounterCulture, ensuring diverse perspectives informed the review. The following methods were applied:

Surveys:

- Student survey: 457 responses gathered – exploring representation, decision-making, engagement barriers, and perceptions of ICU's influence and visibility.
- Imperial staff survey: 61 responses gathered – qualitative and quantitative feedback from University staff (predominantly situated in departments and central services) about ICU's professionalism, effectiveness, and engagement in institutional processes.

Interviews:
Over 90 one-to-one interviews were conducted with Officer Trustees, Academic and Wellbeing Representatives, Liberation and Community Officers, Constituent Union leaders, ICU staff, and senior Imperial academic and professional services staff

Workshops:

- Eight workshops held with key stakeholder groups:
    - Three student focus groups on under-represented groups and engagement barriers
    - Three workshops with Union Council members exploring governance, insight, and policy
    - One all-staff workshop involving ICU permanent staff

[1] ICU strategic plan, 2023-28

Observational Engagement:

- Attendance at ICUs autumn election promotional stall, where students shared informal views on democratic opportunities and barriers.

Desk-based Research:

- Review of ICUs strategy, governance documentation, byelaws, internal structures, and historical data.
- Comparative analysis of student representation models from similar student unions.

Analysis Approach:
Survey data, interviews, and workshop transcripts were triangulated to identify key themes, contradictions, and areas of opportunity. The process was grounded in appreciative enquiry, recognising and building upon ICU's strengths as a platform for student voice.

To support actionable change, data was also analysed through a SWOT framework (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), alongside consideration of external influencing factors (such as University structures and sector trends):

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
- Longstanding structures (e.g. CSPB, CUs) with strong cultural roots and capacity for student leadership. - Trusted partnerships with University leadership and presence on University committees. - Committed student leaders and staff working to build inclusive engagement. - Increasing appetite from students for co-creation and participatory models.	- Low visibility and participation in existing governance structures (e.g. Union Council). - Lack of understanding or support for postgraduates (PGs) and some unclear officer remits. - Fragmented systems for feedback, limited use of data, and weak community organising infrastructure. - Inconsistent support and accountability for Liberation and Community Officers (LCOs) and their networks (LCNs).
Opportunities	**Threats**
- Implement a simpler, more inclusive and evidence-led governance model. - Empower networks, CUs, and reps with greater autonomy and structured support. - Align sabbatical structure with strategic needs and increase PG support. - Build clarity and trust through transparent budgeting, reporting, and elections.	- Cultural resistance to change, especially in long-established structures. - Risk of burnout or disengagement if roles are not properly supported. - Operational capacity to deliver structural reforms across the Union. - Maintaining momentum and student engagement through transition.

Key findings

The following findings were established and aim to be resolved by this review.

- A lack of transparency in Union decision making: ICU must be transparent and clear about the services they deliver and decrease their reliance on a single elected officer or a small number of heard voices.

- A lack of trust in ICUs credibility from both students and University in influencing change: an over-reliance on a high engagement from a small minority of students, rather than broad representation of the wider student body, means that only 14% of students strongly agree that ICU advocate effectively on their behalf[2], and the university are not always convinced that ICUs inputs are genuinely representative.

- Unclear full-time officer (FTO) remits: the current remits of the FTOs do not reflect the needs of the 2025 Imperial population, nor the current capacity or purpose of ICU.

- Low PG engagement: PG students feel disengaged from the current structures, and there is no full-time Union support for these students, which limits the overall ability of ICU to understand and advocate effectively for c.48% of members.

- High bureaucracy and low impact of Union Council: Union Council is perceived as disconnected from the current student body and focussed on procedural or operational matters rather than on forward looking or cohesive policy development.

- Inconsistent support for CUs, driven by a lack of formalised relationships with ICU: CUs are detached from ICU, activity is often duplicated, and their collective advocacy power is weakened, alongside their trust in ICU as an umbrella body.

- Low engagement from under-represented groups, and limited visibility, accountability and support for LCOs: the LCOs and LCNs operate in isolation to other representative structures, and it can be challenging to articulate their roles. As a result, students from under-represented backgrounds do not engage with the networks, and this can lead to a lack of visibility of the needs of this student body.

- Complex structures and processes creating inaccessible governance: overly prescriptive byelaws, frequent elections and confusion around the rights of different types of union membership leads to inaccessibility for all students.

The review is structured into seven key themes, explaining the findings and a series of recommendations – with a clear description of how this will be operationalised, and its impact. These themes are:

1. Organisational transparency
2. Officer structure
3. Community organising
4. Council reform
5. Constituent Unions
6. Liberation and Community approach
7. Governance

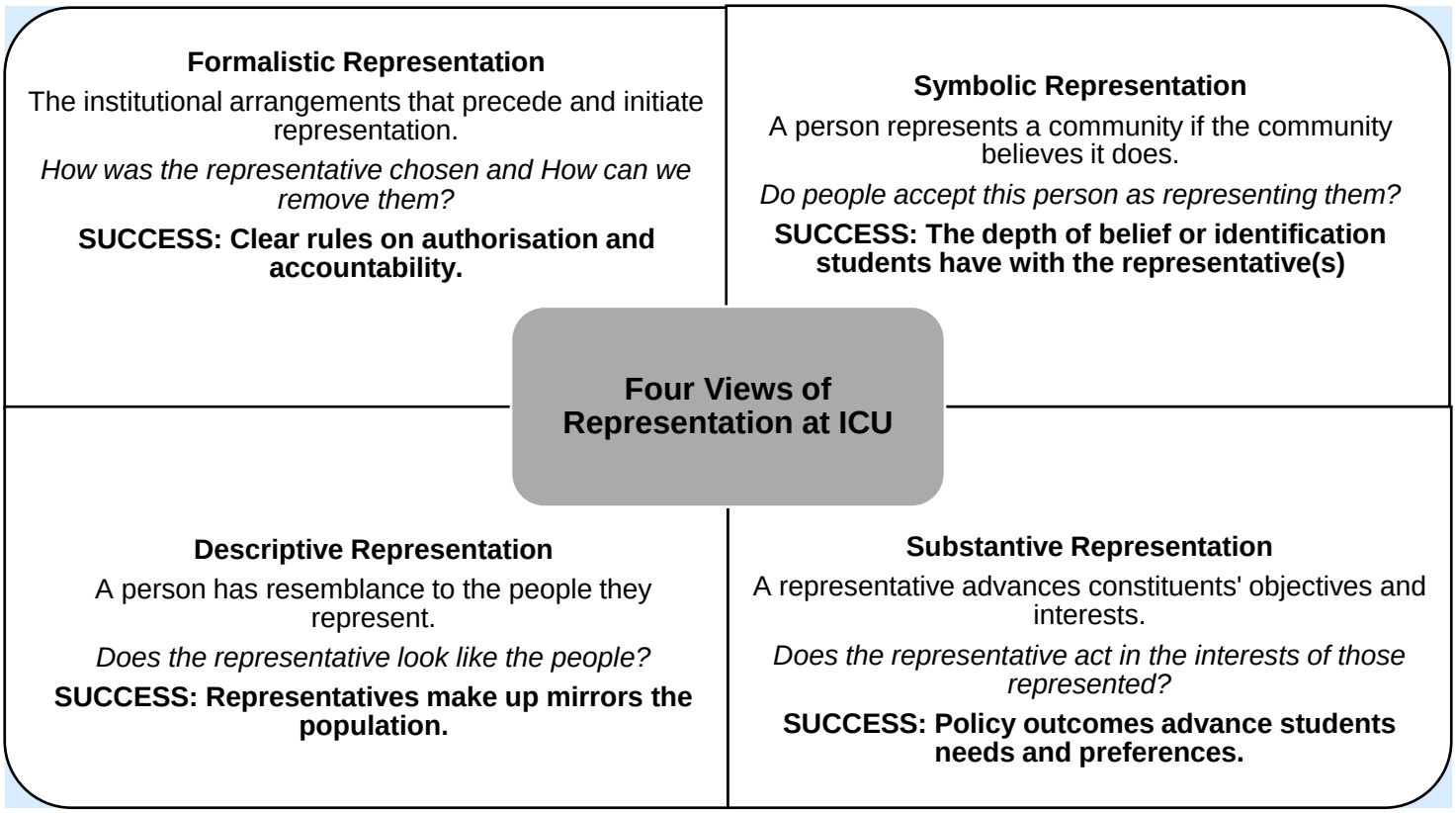
[2] Student Experience Survey (2025)

Underpinning theory, principles, and approach

Theory

Underpinning the democracy review, a central theory of representation has been established. This is not only to ensure that solutions to the problems found through the research are met, but that a new structure, changes, and recommendations are anchored into a credible theory. This is especially important, given that only 26% of surveyed staff agree that ICU can tell them something they don't already know about their department or their work.

In her seminal work, *The Concept of Representation*, Pitkin identifies four views of representation: formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive.[3] This model supports ICU to ground its structures in a clear theory and ensure the Union is successful at delivering representation.



Principles

As well as a clear theory for delivering representation, it is also important to articulate a set of values and principles for how ICU create and operate democratic structures. As well as aligning with the Union's strategic values, it is important that these principles deliver against the overarching intentions of this review. As such, the following principles for democracy have been defined below:

- Integrity**:** The Union's democratic structures must serve as a genuine and transparent channel for student voice, reflecting students' views and enabling real change.
- Inclusivity**:** All students, from all backgrounds and levels of study, must be able to access, understand, and influence ICU's democratic processes.

[3] Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation (1967)*

- Innovation**:** ICU should not replicate tradition for tradition's sake. Democratic structures should be forward-looking, adaptive, and imaginative in responding to students' changing needs.
- Simplicity and efficiency: The structure should be easy to navigate, limit duplication, and make good use of time and resources for both students and staff.

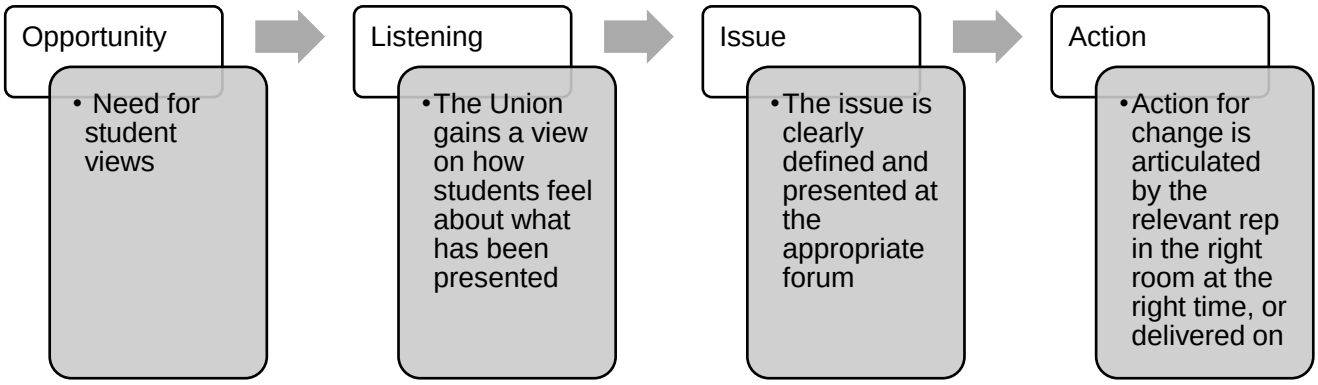
- Impact and accountability**:** Participation must lead to real outcomes. Students should see their input reflected in decision-making, and officers and representatives must be held to account.

Approach

To deliver against an underpinning theory and clear principles of an effective ICU democracy, there needs to be a process for influencing change on behalf of students. There are two ways in which this can be successful:

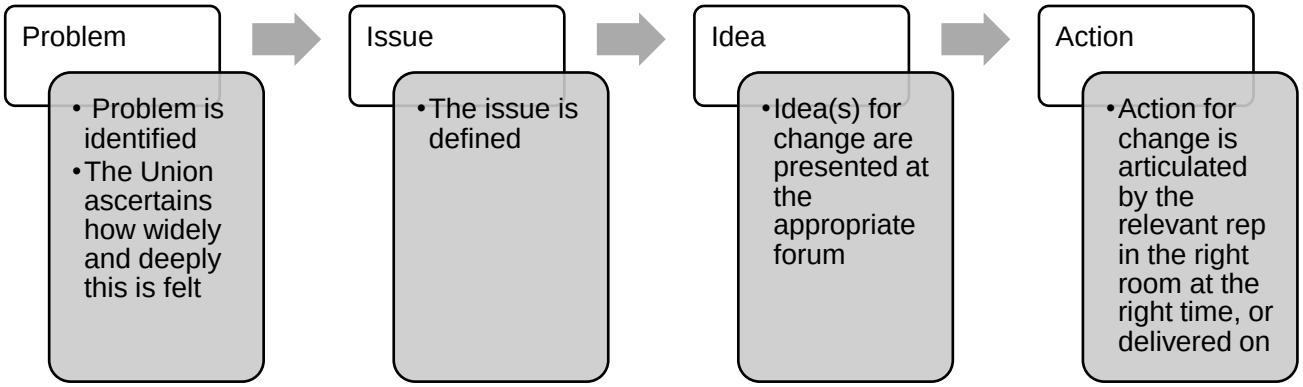
Top down/opportunity led:

The University or another decision-making body presents an idea, plan, concern or risk to the Union which requires consultation.



Bottom up/data driven:

A student or a collection of students are experiencing a problem which requires the University (or a sub-section) to change their practices or policy for an improved student experience.



ICU democratic structures sit at the heart of these processes, to ensure that the problem/opportunity is truly understood, that the issues are well defined, and effective action is articulated to the relevant body (usually the University) as a result. If it requires the Union to make a change, that change is delivered. Each of the suggested recommendations will link back to the theory, the principles and the process to demonstrate how these intersect.

Theme one: Organisational transparency

Findings

ICUs mission is to be 'a high-performing students' union run by and for students, with exceptional services and people, which positively transforms the lives of all Imperial students.' Ensuring a multiplicity of students influence the services ICU offer is fundamental to achieving this mission.

However, to do this effectively, ICU must first be transparent about the services they deliver. The review demonstrated that it was evident students did not understand how ICU prioritises resources, and, in turn, how this benefits the wider student body. The Union has not communicated a student-facing impact report since 2019, and there is no central approach or clear intent for gathering feedback on services which impact the wider student body.

As one student remarked, "*There's very little feedback – I'm never really sure if the Union did anything with what we told them."*

Second, there is a lack of clarity on where or how decisions are made to the wider student body, which can create distrust or disinterest in the work which ICU does on behalf of students. For example, key decisions on Union financial matters – although held rightly by the Union's trustee board, or the Finance Audit, and Risk Committee (FAR)[4] – is not presented anywhere clear or digestible to the membership. This can cause concern that the Union is not prioritising spend or resource on issues affecting students.

Perhaps more pressingly, ICU does not clearly communicate its impact on the student experience well to the wider student body. An effective democratic structure should enable ICU to communicate how it has advocated on behalf of students at a range of levels – from course or community – to the wider student body.

Although survey data suggests the majority of Imperial staff consider the Union to be student-led and professional, one staff member summarised this disconnect by stating: "*They should be setting the exam papers, not telling us how to answer them*" – suggesting that the Union's representatives are too focused on responding to existing agendas (set by the University or operational work), rather than adopting substantive representation.

Recommendations

The review has identified five recommendations to resolve these concerns:

Recommendation	Operational delivery	Impact	Relationship to theory	Relationship to principles	Relationship to process
Hold Annual General Meetings (AGMs).	Meetings are held once per year and facilitated by the Governance Manager , Representation Team, and the Union's senior management team (SMT). They will be chaired by ICU President. Any Imperial student can	Students can understand, respond to, and influence ICU priorities, an d financial activity.	Formalistic representation	Integrity Impact and accountability	Opportunity led Data driven

[4] The purpose of the FAR is to monitor and challenge where necessary the financial statements of the Union, (including annual and other reports), interim management accounts, review significant financial reporting issues and judgments. The committee passes on their findings and recommendations to the ICU Trustee Board for ratification. The committee may have 3-5 trustee members, of which one must be external and one student.

	join, hear about ICU work and finances, and ask questions or feed in ideas to hold the ICU accountable.				
Release finance reports and minutes of FAR in a digestible, front-facing format.	SMT will produce annual financial report, which is published on ICU website, presenting digestible financial information for any student to read and understand. FAR minutes will also be published on ICU website in a student-friendly way and effectively publicised.	Increases ICUs ability to be financially transparent.	Formalistic representation	Integrity Impact and accountability	Opportunity led
Publish annual student experience and impact reports.	ICU will publish annually a student experience report, summarising student data, feedback and insight received, and the impact this has had on the student experience. Similarly, ICU will publish an annual impact report, articulating how its services have supported the student body.	Strengthens the legitimacy of ICU policy function, and shows the impact of Union services.	Formalistic representation	Integrity Impact and accountability	Opportunity led
Create mechanisms for student feedback and input.	Every student-facing team at ICU will have a mechanism for direct student input and feedback (e.g., events, surveys, etc.) and communicate any changes made.	Strengthens student input and engagement.	Formalistic representation	Integrity Simplicity and efficiency Impact and accountability	Data led
Hold effectiveness reviews of its democratic structures.	Following the changes made by this, ICU will evaluate and review the impact of democracy review changes. After it has done this after the first year of implementation, it will deliver this every three year.	Ensures flexible structures fit for changing needs of students.	Formalistic representation	Integrity Inclusivity Impact and accountability	Opportunity led

Theme two: Officer structure reform

Findings

ICU currently elects five full-time, paid, Officer Trustees (OTs) to lead the political direction of the Union through executing and developing policy to further the aims and objectives of ICU, deliver its strategic plan, as well as ensuring that all members of the Union are equally represented.[5] These five officers also act as trustees of the Union, as well as chief representatives. The current Officer Trustee roles are:

- President: the ultimate representative of the Union
- Deputy President (Clubs and Societies): responsible for clubs and society recognition, support and representation
- Deputy President (Education): responsible for reporting on student views of academic affairs
- Deputy President (Finance and Services): responsible for reporting on student views on health and safety, financial procedures impacting students, union events and sustainability
- Deputy President (Welfare): reporting student opinion on liberation and welfare issues and representing the welfare needs of all students.

A full breakdown of their roles can be found in Bye-law F of the Union's governing articles. There is also a full-time Medical School president funded by the faculty.

Survey data revealed limited trust in the Officer Trustees (OTs). Only 41% of students felt OTs were "somewhat representative," while 49% believed they represented students "very little" or "not at all". Interviews noted that OTs have, historically, prioritised operational over strategic tasks, limiting their visibility and effectiveness as advocates.

This concern has been compounded by officer role titles and descriptions not matching their current portfolios of work, and the evolution of staff roles within the wider Union (e.g., a larger membership services and commercial directorate). Stakeholders highlighted the need for this clearer role delineation to ensure OTs can maintain a strategic and representative focus.

"There's no clarity about what's within their remit anymore, and I think that's why students don't know what they're doing." – ICU staff member

A clear example of this is the Deputy President (Finance and Services) (DPFS), where the role no longer has a clear, relevant remit within ICU and requires particular consideration within a new structure. Although there are necessary aspects to the role, such as driving work around Union and University sustainability, it is imperative that this is embedded into every officer portfolio rather than one officer – as this issue permeates every aspect of Imperial life. However, given the President is the lead officer for the Union, it is pertinent that the primary remit for this sits within this role.

Another key strategic objective which the Union is aiming to deliver upon is the objective around the delivery of fun and inclusive communities.[6] Although clubs and societies and their representation is a critical component of this, student led events, reward and recognition, and volunteering also foster community and a sense of belonging. The Deputy President (Clubs and Societies) (DPCS) role could be broadened to include representation on these issues and therefore renamed to Deputy President (Activities) (DPA).

[5] Imperial College Union, *Bye-law F - Officers of the Union* (2023)
[6] ICU strategic plan, 2023-28

In contrast, a clear gap in ICUs current advocacy approach is how it represents postgraduate students. PG students make up roughly 48% of the student population, but there is no full-time support or holistic understanding of their diverse needs and issues. A proposed solution to this problem is a full-time postgraduate officer, replacing the DPFS role and acting as a student representative to advocate for academic and non-academic needs of this cohort. However, upon consultation with the Early Career Research Institute (ECRI), as well as reps and ICU staff, there were a number of concerns about this approach:

- This role would struggle to recruit PGRs (particularly given the time, lifestyle, and funding constraints), and the role would only attract, and therefore represent, PGT students
- ICU is not currently equipped to support a new role, as it does not have the infrastructure nor understanding to PGs a role of this nature
- This would reduce the possible funding envelope for part-time student community organisers

Therefore, a more pertinent alternative to this would be to establish a full-time representation coordinator to build community and equip ICU with a holistic understanding of the challenges PGs face before holding elections for any full-time or part-time role.

Another key concern is the challenge around OT accountability for their work. In the current system, broad accountability for Officer work is administered at council and at board, where OTs write a short report based on their objectives. Additionally, the President 'line manages' the deputy presidents, which officer teams have reported either leads to a lack of effective support or clear divides which can impact their ability to function successfully as a team. Only 39% of students felt they could hold elected representatives to account (14% strongly agree, 25% somewhat agree).

"We don't know what they're doing week to week. It all just disappears after elections." – Student Council member.

Contributing to the issue of accountability is that the Officer team's work is regularly diverted away from their manifesto objectives because of opportunities or issues presented by the University or the student body. A key example of this is rent negotiation settings, where officers had to set aside their projects to focus their attentions on influencing these discussions.

Recommendations

The review has identified eight recommendations:

Recommendation	**Operational delivery**	**Impact**	**Relationship to theory**	**Relationship to principles**	**Relationship to process**
Change Officer line management to Managing Director.	Sabbatical officers as staff to be line managed by the Managing Director (NB; the MD would have no jurisdiction over how Officers represent student views or act as trustees).	Clear accountability for Officer development, support and HR processes.	Formalistic representation	Integrity Simplicity and efficiency Impact and accountability	N/A
Rename DPCS to Deputy President (Activities).	The role would maintain responsibility for club and society oversight and	Enables positive and inclusive co-curricular culture,	Substantive representation	Inclusivity Innovation	N/A

	development, but in addition to this would include more holistic community development for students (including student-led events, volunteering, reward and recognition, and skills development) with support from the ICU staff team. They would also promote inclusivity through activity.	aligning with student and organisational needs.		Simplicity and efficiency Impact and accountability	
Remove the role of DPFS.	Commercial services are staff led and will implement strategies for student consultation (see theme one). Budgeting and resource decisions continue to be responsibility of Trustee Board, but financial reports are presented annually to students (see theme one). Sustainability and events will be in the jurisdiction of the President, and student development and student-led events will become the responsibility of DP Activities.	Provides capacity to better support remaining officers, and space to introduce an officer role more reflective of needs of student population.	Substantive representation	Simplicity and efficiency	N/A
Do not elect a fifth Officer Trustee for AY 25-26.	ICU will be led by four Officer Trustees for the upcoming academic year. The revised byelaw for next council meeting will not include fifth officer. Council and Board may choose to add a fifth officer through the effectiveness reviews or at separate meetings.	Charity resource can be reallocated to more up to date functions (see below). This also improves effectiveness of the remaining Officer team through enhanced staff support.	Substantive representation	Integrity Simplicity and efficiency	Data driven

Recruit a Postgraduate Coordinator (full-time staff role).	This role would support PG specific policy and campaigns and empower PG reps to enact policy and campaigns. They would liaise with ECRI and Trade Unions (e.g., UCU). The role would focus in on understanding PG specific issues, and support PG representatives across institution.	This would deliver a more equitable capacity to support c.48% student population. Postgraduate students are supported, understood, and advocated for.	Descriptive representation Substantive representation	Inclusivity Impact and accountability	Data driven
Consider further a part-time or full-time PG Officer in the future.	Union Council and Board can choose to revisit this option through regular reviews. ICU will evaluate the effectiveness of other recommendations related to postgraduate representation to inform this decision.	The opportunity remains for a senior 'political' voice for PGs, but ensures ICU support for postgraduate representation is consolidated prior to this.	Descriptive representation Substantive representation	Integrity Inclusivity Impact and accountability	Data driven
Reform Officer accountability mechanisms	Officers will still be held to account at Council, and each officer will align to the proposed committees (theme three) - receiving feedback, and co-developing policy. Manifestos or reports would be used as a live document – reviewed regularly with ICU staff, with input from students.	Students and reps will feel Officers are more accessible and visible. Accountability at council is formalised and focused on student priorities and manifesto promises.	Formalistic representation Substantive representation	Impact and accountability	N/A
Introduce Officer secondary portfolios	Secondary portfolio responsibilities would be agreed annually, based on key student issues and feedback. They would be assigned to officers each year based on interest and skill.	Clear student leadership on key issues that impact students.	Substantive representation	Innovation Impact and accountability	Opportunity led Data driven

Theme three: Community organising

Findings

Citizens UK define community organising as 'bringing people together so that they can build the power to win change. This means building community-led solutions to big and small problems, that work for everyone'.[7] Based on the applied principles, the ambition to model substantive representation, and deliver data-driven policy development, the application of a community organising model is fundamental to the effectiveness of ICU democracy.

Student communities are not currently supported consistently. Volunteer officers – particularly LCOs and identity-based representatives – reported difficulty maintaining regular engagement with their communities owing to workload and a lack of consistent operational support or infrastructure.

Because ICU has lacked a structure for organising around emerging issues or interest-based themes, students who share experiences or concerns often have no clear way to come together and drive change unless there is already a formal officer role. This can lead to a focus on a small number of students at the top of the democratic hierarchy, and an over-reliance on 'opportunity led' change rather than 'data driven', grassroots led influencing. This is corroborated by the data; 82% of students who responded to the survey reported their desire to be consulted by reps before reps can speak on their behalf, with only 18% of students indicating that reps can use their discretion when representing students.

Equally, a key concern from the University is the limitations of the feedback ICU offer to Imperial at every level. Senior Imperial staff have asked for ICU to be able to feed in aspects of the student experience which they do not already know. Representatives do not draw from a broad evidence base – instead demonstrating adeptness at articulating their individual experiences rather than research, data, or insight.

Recommendations

The review has identified two recommendations:

Recommendation	Operational delivery	Impact	Relationship to theory	Relationship to principles	Relationship to process
Hire part-time student staff to support the delivery of community building and events. *	Working with relevant representatives, these individuals will support different communities to deliver community building, and community organising, initiatives and events. Communities might include groups such as PGs, international students, students on	Under-represented student communities are supported by lifting logistical and operational barriers.	Symbolic representation Descriptive representation Substantive representation	Integrity Inclusivity Innovation Impact and accountability	Data driven

[7] Citizens UK. *What is community organising*

	campuses away from South Kensington.				
Deliver community organising training for all student volunteers.	All reps are trained in community organising to help build effective substantive representation.	Reps are more effective at advancing student objectives and interests.	Symbolic representation Descriptive representation Substantive representation	Integrity Inclusivity Innovation	Data driven

*NB; This recommendation is contingent upon agreement on the following recommendations in theme two:

- The removal of the DPFS
- The introduction of a Postgraduate Coordinator

Theme four: Council reform

Findings

Council is made up of 55 members, consisting of the Chair, the OTs, the Liberation and Community Officers, the President, Education and Welfare representatives from each Constituent Union, the Postgraduate Taught and Research Chairs, the Academic and Welfare Officers from each faculty, the Management Group Chairs, and 16 elected members. The meeting occurs monthly, and any student is invited (although Council is reminded) to bring motions which are voted on to bring about a policy change in the Union. The benefits of this model mean a large range of voices from different communities are, in theory, contributing to policy development, and provides further democratic legitimacy to ICU's political direction. It also has a role in scrutinising the OTs.

However, there are many issues with the current structure. There is a clear disconnect from the current student body – only 18% of surveyed students strongly agreed that Council decisions reflect their priorities.

There is also a clear tension between how students would like decisions to be made:

- 67% of students wanted to vote directly on decisions or engage through forums or polls, suggesting dissatisfaction with representative-only structures.
- At the same time, 68% of students preferred consensus-based decision-making, supporting formats that encourage discussion over binary outcomes.

Furthermore, although there have been more policy-focused discussions in recent meetings, Council often spends time examining procedural or operational matters (e.g., small changes to byelaws or officer reports). One participant described Council as "*very inward-looking – it doesn't really speak about the student experience, only the Union*." Others felt "*the discussion always comes back to procedure*," even when the topic was meant to be policy focused. Evidence suggests few voices are heard at Council meetings – with a small number of regular members contributing to the discussion. There is a risk that Council is perceived as being too slow to respond to the needs of the student body, which further undermines confidence in ICU to be truly representative of their interests.

"I sat through three hours and didn't say a word. Then never came back." – Student Councillor
"It's all about form, not function." – Council Chair

A recent Council meeting to discuss the initial findings from the Democracy Review evidenced that there is benefit to Council members having the opportunity to consider, shape, and develop policy in small groups – which ensures every perspective shapes the outcome.

Policy development

The formation and passing of policy currently sits with the Union Council. However, this is not the only mechanism for setting the political direction at ICU. The representatives – particularly the OTs – run on political manifestos, and these shape the way the union influences Imperial and the wider community. ICU has created some governance around officer objectives to ensure they are plugged into the wider overall annual operating plans of the Union, as well as communicated to stakeholders upon arrival. However, more could be done to communicate the political objectives of the OTs to the membership.

This lack of communication can weaken transparency and accountability, making it harder for students to connect officer work with their original mandates. Currently, most political direction from manifestos is only tracked through brief officer reports to Council or internal goal-setting mechanisms, with limited visibility for the wider membership.

Some students expressed interest in engaging with policy if the processes were easier to access or understand, such as through themed policy calls, deliberative forums, or open agenda-setting.

Several Padlet comments suggested that even simple publication of officer workplans and manifesto progress could increase trust.

Taught/Research Academic Rep Forums and Community and Welfare Forum

The academic (TARF/RARF) and welfare representative (CWF) forums occur termly and have varied attendance. The success of the format of these meetings was found to be mixed. For example, there was more impact in a small group or 1:1 basis with academic reps, versus better forum participation from Wellbeing reps.

To ensure these forums are contributing to policy setting, ICU should look to frame these around rep concerns or ideas to improve student engagement and wider representation. This is particularly important as survey data highlighted strong trust in academic representatives, with 44% of students reporting that these roles represent them to a great extent.

"They're the only people I've ever seen actually bring my feedback to someone who listened." – Undergraduate Engineering student

Furthermore, there are opportunities to link these forums more closely to the Union council agenda. While forums provide a structured space for reflection, reps reported that the value of these sessions often depended on how well they were facilitated and whether actions were followed up. Where academic reps were offered focused, faculty-specific time in smaller formats, engagement increased. In contrast, wellbeing reps appeared more motivated by peer connection and shared learning.

In Council responses and interviews, several reps noted that forums felt disconnected from Union influence unless there was a clear pathway into decision-making. Integrating outcomes from these forums into Council papers, or enabling reps to submit collective motions, could enhance their status and create a tangible link between representative roles and Union policy. Reps also expressed a desire for more clarity about the forum purpose – whether advisory, deliberative, or decision-making – and greater continuity of discussion across terms. Attendance could be supported by stronger integration into rep training, standing meeting schedules, and role expectations.

Club and Societies Project Board (CSPB)

CSPB holds policy-setting powers and oversees the development of student-led activities. Even in the current structure, it is considered a successful representational and developmental space for clubs and societies—rather than a gatekeeper for processes. 55% of student respondents said that clubs/socs were the most useful cluster for representing students, and Management Group Chairs and CU leaders are engaged in decisions about club operations, funding, and development. However, if the remit of the DPCS changes, this could be expanded to wider input into other student activities.

Recommendation

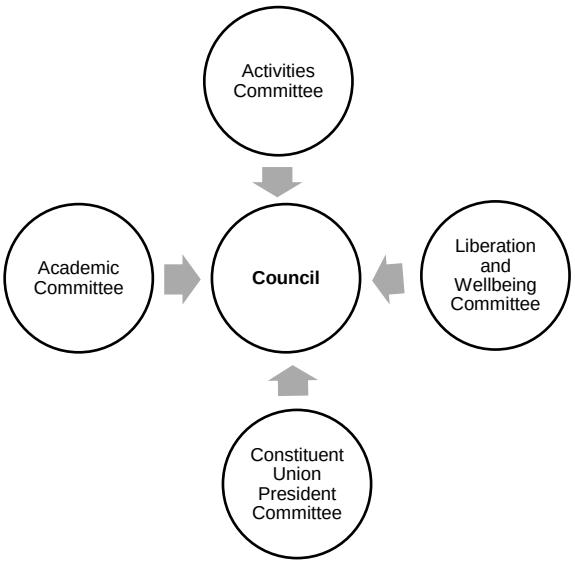
The review presents one recommendation:

Recommendation	**Operational delivery**	**Impact**	**Relationship to theory**	**Relationship to principles**	**Relationship to process**
Introduce four committees: ▪ Activities committee (replaces CSPB)	The committees will be chaired by relevant Officer. The whole Council will meet a minimum of once per term, and chairing this	This provides clearer purpose and visibility. It embeds student input	Formalistic representation Symbolic representation Descriptive representation	Integrity Inclusivity Innovation Simplicity and efficiency	Opportunity led Data driven

▪ Academic committee ▪ Constituent Union Presidents committee ▪ Liberation and Wellbeing committee.	overarching committee remains the responsibility of Council Chair as 'Speaker of the house'. The Council meetings are preceded by the committees, where any student can contribute. A report on the business of the committee (including officer work) will be scrutinised at Council meetings. Committees will be less formal than current Council structure (e.g., students can come with an idea rather than a paper).	through forum approach. It promotes productive, collaborative discussion, while maintaining timely influence and trusted existing structures.	Substantive representation	Impact and accountability	

<u>Committee structure and remit</u>

The committees will act as policy development forums – acting as the intersection between the 'opportunity led' and 'data driven' methods of influence – and seeking to satisfy student desire for direct input into democracy and make decision by consensus. Remits of these committees will be specialised and clear to ensure that those who hold relevant positions or have particular interest in a policy area will be able to influence discussions. They will be chaired by the relevant Deputy President and/or president. The structure is demonstrated below:



Any student can and will be actively encouraged to attend these committees, but a formal membership is necessary to ensure the voices of a multiplicity of students is incorporated. Membership of these committees would need to be established, but a draft membership is articulated below:

Academic committee	**Activities committee**	**CU presidents committee**	**Liberation and Wellbeing committee**
Chaired by: DPE	Chaired by: DPA	Chaired by: President	Chaired by: DPW
Members: - Department reps - Academic CU reps - PG CU reps*	Members: - Management group committee members - CU Presidents and activities representatives	Members: - CU committee presidents	Members: - Liberation and community network members - Wellbeing department reps - Wellbeing CU reps

* This is contingent upon the creation of PG CU reps.

<u>Council remit</u>
Council will continue to construct agenda and pass items of business. However, instead of focussing on procedural items or operational concerns, they will adopt the following approach:

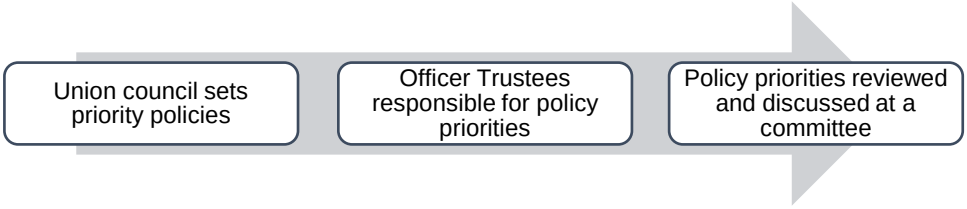
- Set priorities for the committee to discuss during the year
- Scrutinise and pass policy formed at committee level
- Scrutinise committee reports and officer output

The Council will be chaired by an elected Council Chair. Functionally, this role will continue to be an impartial 'speaker of the house' and be independent in all proceedings.[8]
The intention behind this new model of council representation is to engender both a data driven and opportunity led approach to advocacy and influence.

Data driven:



Opportunity led:



[8] Imperial College Union, *Bye-law F - Officers of the Union* (2023)

Theme five: Constituent Unions

Findings

The five CUs (City and Guilds College Union, Imperial College School of Medicine Students' Union, Royal College of Science Union Royal School of Mines Union, and Silwood Park Union) are an integral part of ICU's governance, providing focused representation for specific faculties and communities. They were developed as a response to Imperial merging several existing STEM colleges together to create the over-arching College. In 2025, they still play a vital role in tailoring advocacy and engagement to local needs, but their relationship with ICU is marked by both strengths and challenges.

Survey results show that 49% of students view CUs as "somewhat representative" and 18% say they represent them "to a great extent" – a better rating than Officer Trustees.

First, the Business School – the most recent faculty to be established by Imperial in 2003 and introduced undergraduate courses in 2023 – does not operate under the same structure as the other three faculties. This is largely as the Imperial Business School (ICBS) has developed its own representative function (Dean's Student Advisory Council) which does not correlate with ICU structures owing to its lack of elected roles. This creates challenges for ICU in representing the needs and interests of Business School students because parallel representative roles are frequently unfilled. A democratic structure should include thinking around how to capture the Business School faculty into a CU model, so they may benefit from that representation.

Conversely, the Faculty of Engineering builds community and representation under two CUs – the City and Guilds Constituent Union, and the Royal School of Mines. While this is not inherently negative (the faculty is the largest in the College), it creates diverging cultures and voices to faculty leaders.

Unlike the other CU presidents, the Medical School funds a full-time, sabbatical officer role as president which operates with significant autonomy – both physically (the role is based outside the students' union offices) and operationally (their work is centred around the medical students and their experience).

"They get stuff done – that's the difference. We actually see the outcomes." – Medical student
And: *"It's odd that they're outside everything but also more effective."* – University staff stakeholder

This role is completely funded outside of the block grant but enjoy aspects of the support ICU give to deliver their work and focus their development. They are not a member of the trustee board. Notably, undergraduate medical students frequently rank their experience with their students' union highest above all other departments in the National Student Survey (NSS). Although other faculties may not be able to fund a full-time president, there is clear benefit in ICU ensuring other CU presidents are given high-quality support to deliver on their objectives and build community within their faculty.

PG students make up around c.48% of Imperial's student population. As aforementioned in this report, postgraduate students are not holistically represented by ICU democratic structures. Currently, the Union elects a Postgraduate Research and Taught Chair, as well as four faculty-based Academic and Welfare Officers. These roles are often uncontested or left unfilled, and the structure sits outside of the CUs. This is because the CUs are technically undergraduate (UG)-facing and do not formally represent PGs within their faculty. However, in practice, some engage with PGs informally or through events and shared initiatives. This creates inconsistency, with some CUs building productive postgraduate links and others having minimal interaction. Several CU officers noted they "*weren't sure what postgrads wanted from us*," and *"PGs don't really see*

themselves in our CU model. That's a problem." while PG students said they "*didn't even know the CU was meant for them."* RCSU have recently introduced a postgraduate officer onto their committee, but the impact of this change has not yet been fully understood.

These issues speak to overarching problems around disparity, inconsistent integration with the wider ICU model, and a lack of clear direction or support. Although their distinct and historical cultures do create a sense of community pride and belonging, their collective advocacy power is weakened, alongside their relationship and trust in ICU as an umbrella body.

"We don't know where we stand with ICU. Sometimes it's collaboration, sometimes it's conflict." – CU Leader

ICU should take a greater role in uplifting student leaders, facilitating their development based on their needs and data, and enhancing their community-building activity. This may be achieved through formalised collaboration, shared terms and relationships built between likeminded roles, resource sharing and/or joint campaigns. Council feedback called for clearer expectations between ICU and CUs, especially around where collaboration should happen versus where autonomy is valued.

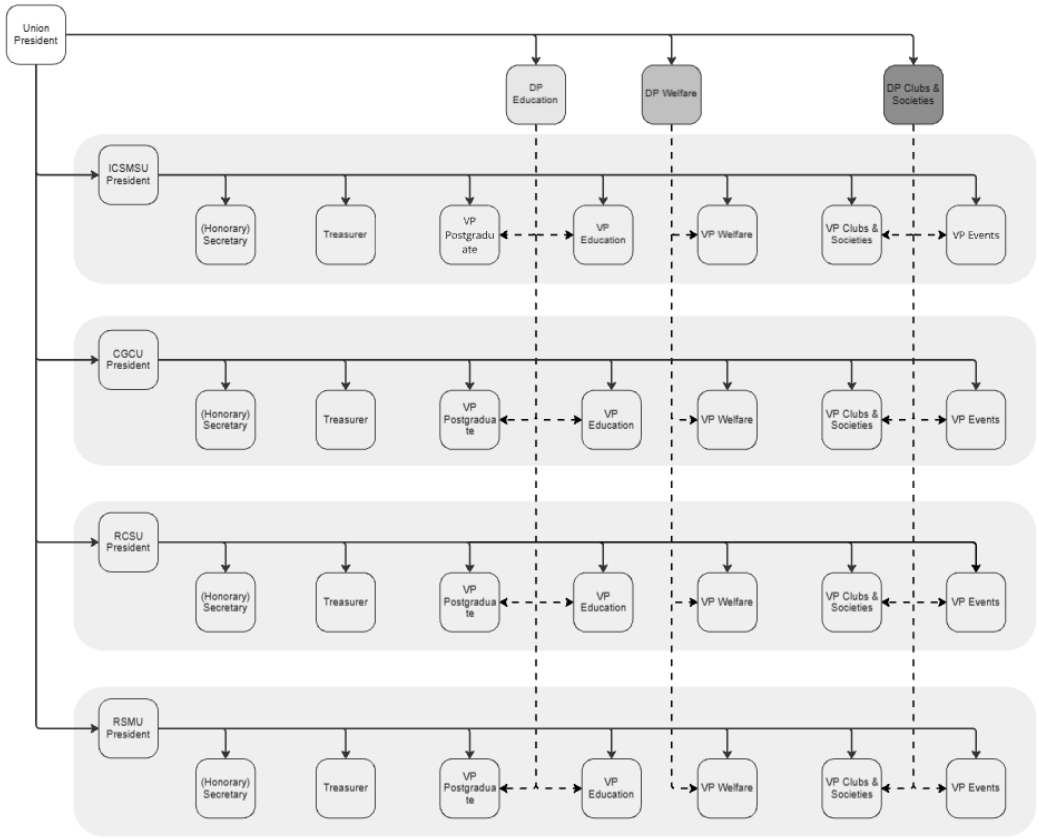
Recommendations

The review proposes four recommendations:

Recommendation	**Operational delivery**	**Impact**	**Relationship to theory**	**Relationship to principles**	**Relationship to process**
Co-develop partnership agreements between ICU and CUs.	Partnership agreements will set out joint and individual priorities and objectives to create a shared understanding. They will outline expected activities and support available from ICU, tailored to the needs of the CU. They will also include commitments to inclusive representation and community development.	This will lead to enhanced activity on both sides, as well as assuring efforts to gain wider scale representation. Fundamentally, it also ensures ICU can better support CU activity.	Formalistic representation Symbolic representation Descriptive representation Substantive representation	Integrity Simplicity and efficiency Impact and accountability	Opportunity led Data driven
Create and implement a CU officer development programme.	ICU will provide tailored development and support for CU officers on governance, leadership, planning, peer-support, and coaching They will also receive specific support on how to respond to, or represent, PG issues in their faculties.	CUs will be trained by ICU, leading to impactful activity and development opportunities for student leaders as well as a consistent approach for students at faculty level.	Substantive representation	Integrity Inclusivity Impact and accountability	Data driven

Ensure CUs actively represent and cater for PG students.	The approach to representing PGs is outlined in partnership agreements. Each CU will have an elected postgraduate officer/VP PGs on their committee (name dependent on CU) These roles will deliver PG specific activity, with support of ICU, and in collaboration with ECRI. This replaces the current PG Rep Committee structure (AWOs/Rep Chairs).	PGs have equitable representation and communities to UGs, and their representation structures are assimilated into existing ICU ones.	Descriptive representation Substantive representation	Inclusivity Simplicity and efficiency Impact and accountability	Data driven
Introduce a CU for Business School.	This new structure would need to be co-developed with the ICBS but would seek to ensure there is a parallel structure to the DSAC for both UG and PG students.	This provides an equitable experience for ICBS students and ensures UG ICBS representation is truly assimilated into ICU structures.	Descriptive representation Substantive representation	Inclusivity Simplicity and Efficiency Impact and Accountability	Data driven

Postgraduate representation embedded into CUs



The above diagram represents an example of how this may be operationalised. Feedback from CUs during a recent CSPB suggested that the CUs were broadly happy with embedding PG representation into the CU structure but advocated for flexibility around the naming of these roles in line with their distinct culture and tradition. The review recommends that this is articulated as part of the partnership agreement, so that there is parity but distinction.

Particular consultation on this issue has been extended to the Faculty of Medicine (including staff), given the current remit of the ICSMSU as well as its funding requirements.

Theme six: Liberation and Community approach

Findings

Currently, ICU elects nine LCOs in the Leadership Election Cycle, including:

- Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Officer
- Disabilities Officer
- Ethics and Environment Officer
- Interfaith Officer
- International Officer
- Gender Equality Officer
- Mental Health Officer
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer + (LGBTQ+) Officer
- Working Class Officer

Underneath each role is a network of other volunteers, who support the work of the LCO to deliver campaigns, events, and advocacy for their wider communities. These roles are elected in the Autumn series of elections.

Engagement from under-represented groups in ICU's democratic and representative structures is low and inconsistent. LCOs are expected to carry out significant representational and advocacy work, often with little structural or peer support. The extent to which these officers can engage in policy development, consultation, or influencing varies widely across roles and academic years. Many volunteers have taken on their work in isolation, with limited access to continuity, institutional memory, or cross-role collaboration. Officers operate comfortably in the space of event delivery, because other aspects to their role require an active community to engage with.

"Sometimes it feels like they're doing everything alone – they don't have a team." – ICU staff member

"I felt like a figurehead, not someone who was expected to do anything." – Former LCO

There are also broader concerns about the sustainability of relying on voluntary officers from marginalised groups to lead change without capacity or a supportive infrastructure. These challenges intersect with issues of emotional labour, burnout, and gaps in role clarity and accountability.

The role is also challenging to articulate to the wider electorate. This is in part because of the varying expectations and barriers to communicating their effectiveness when in post. Another key reason is the elections for the network and the officer role are separated, so it is unclear that there is a mandate, or a support system, embedded into the ICU structures. Equally, the network roles are also challenging to fill owing to a lack of clarity with how they intersect with the officer. A consequence of this (reported by the officers themselves) is the difficulty in recruiting successors or building lasting community engagement – which means work is at risk of restarting every year.

Recommendations

The review proposes three recommendations:

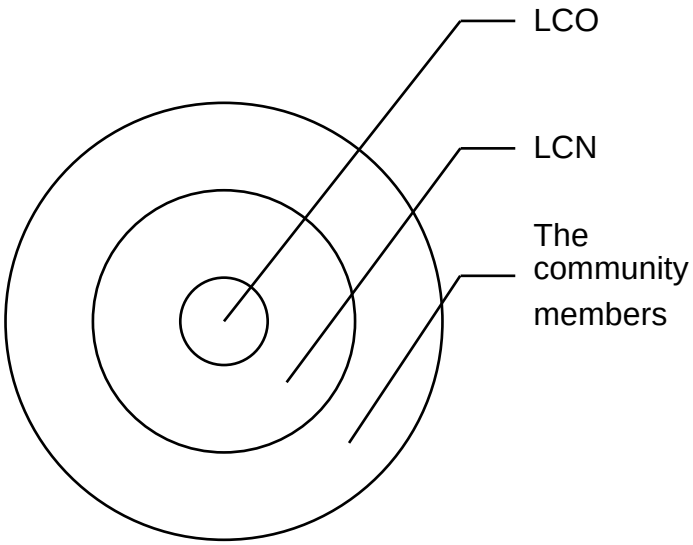
Recommendation	Operational delivery	Impact	Relationship to theory	Relationship to principles	Relationship to process
Elect the LCNs before the officer.	The whole LCN will be elected by campus-wide ballot as part of the Leadership Elections. Instead of proscribed positions, these will be open and reflect the needs of the network. Elected network then chooses an LCO delegate via an AGM, who politically leads the network, and is the representative to meetings. Networks can host open meetings, shape their own structures, and develop shared priorities.	This places less emphasis and responsibility on one individual, and creates a sustainable group of student volunteers, and encourages continuity.	Formalistic representation Symbolic representation Descriptive representation Substantive representation	Inclusivity Innovation Impact and accountability	Data driven
Enable substitution of representation.	When the LCO delegate is unavailable to attend Union and University meetings, other network members can attend in place.	This increases flexibility and accessibility and ensures that the entire network is active and visible.	Descriptive representation Symbolic representation	Inclusivity Impact and accountability	Data driven
Clarify the eligibility and accountability of the networks.	The delegated LCO spokesperson sits as a formal member of the Liberation and Wellbeing Committee Networks (with the LCO as spokesperson) provide a report termly to the Liberation and Wellbeing committee.	This provides a formalised layer of accountability for the networks.	Formalistic representation Symbolic representation Descriptive representation	Integrity Impact and accountability	Data driven

Approach to liberation – a ‘community first’ model

The approach to liberation and community representation will change to a ‘community first’ model. This places communities in the best position to define their leadership, discuss the issues most pertinent to them and suggest action, as well as to build an inclusive community with support from ICU.

In practice, this will mean each community will elect its network committee each year during the Leadership Election cycle. The network will elect their lead representative – the LCO.

This model of community building is represented below:



Responsibilities of the Networks and the Designated Officer

Although the review recommends that network roles remain non-descript to enable flexibility and autonomy of the networks, they should seek to act in the following ways:

- Organise students with similar identities, experiences or interests to articulate issues they face as a community
- Seek to influence the Union, the University and beyond on their community's behalf
- Organise campaigns, projects, and activity to bring together the community and to bring awareness of the issues that they face.

The role of the LCO is to:

- Represent the community at formal Union or University meetings
- Convene the report written by the network and act as the spokesperson on the Liberation and Wellbeing committee.

Theme seven: Governance

Findings

As established at the very beginning of this review, ICU governance and democratic structures have developed over a period of time – some aspects dating back to the early 1900s when the University was established. As the University has evolved, the governing articles have been built upon but not fundamentally changed.

Following a review of the governing documents, CounterCulture found that some governance processes – particularly around elections, complaints, and byelaws – are overly complex and not consistently understood or applied. Stakeholders noted that attempts to update the Major and Minor Elections Byelaws were challenged on the grounds of removing accountability, despite intentions to modernise and clarify.

Similarly, some election processes seen as outdated. While 25% of students voted in the leadership elections, this drops significantly for Autumn and Summer. Three election cycles create additional confusion for student leaders and returning officers, and cause election fatigue amongst the wider student body. Only 17% of students strongly agree that elections are accessible and inclusive.[9]

This complexity contributes to frustration among those engaging with ICU's democratic systems, creates barriers to participation, and risks undermining confidence in institutional processes. It also absorbs disproportionate staff and officer time to interpret, explain, or workaround procedural gaps.

There is also limited clarity over which students are full members of ICU and what rights are afforded to associate members. This includes students on placements, intercalating medical students, visiting researchers, and alumni participating in Clubs, Societies and Projects. There is uncertainty around whether associate members are eligible to vote or stand in elections, access certain services, or take part in democratic processes. This inconsistency creates confusion and may undermine the fairness and transparency of ICUs democratic and governance structures. When comparing to sector peers and other membership organisations, most UK institutions would not allow associate members to vote and would only be in officer positions for specific associate roles (e.g., alumni reps).

Recommendations

The review proposes three recommendations to these problems:

Recommendation	Operational delivery	Impact	Relationship to theory	Relationship to principles	Relationship to process
Clarify the rights of associate members	ICU should conduct a full review of its membership categories – leaning on sector practice. Following this, it should define the democratic rights and entitlements of associate members, and all categories	This ensures alignment with sector, and creates a shared understanding amongst staff, students, and associate members.	Formalistic representation	Integrity	N/A

[9] Student Experience Survey (2025)

	and rights to be clearly communicated				
Modernise the Union byelaws.	ICU should redraft byelaws in line with democracy review outcomes, ensuring they are plain language and updated in a manner which befits a 2025 and future cohort.	Ensures any changes made are enshrined in the governing documents and provides clarity for students and staff to follow.	Formalistic representation	Integrity Simplicity and efficiency	N/A
Simplify the election processes and cease the operation Summer Elections (for leadership positions only).	Remove the Summer Elections cycle for leadership positions, but this will remain in place for CSP positions. In tandem, ICU will review all election materials and messaging to ensure succinct, accessible and clear language.	This will improve election accessibility and engagement.	Formalistic representation	Simplicity and efficiency	N/A