Imperial College Union
Board of Trustees / 25 February 2026

Budget and Business Planning Timetable 2026/27

Author(s): Tom Newman (Managing Director)
Purpose: To detail the Union's proposed budget and strategic planning timetable for 2026/27
Decision: To note

1. Current context

The Union has submitted its block grant request for 2026/27 and 2027/28 (*Appendix 1*). We are still awaiting final confirmation on the exact amount but are confident that we will receive both request A and B. It is likely our request C will require a separate funding bid outside of the core funding.

The Union proposes a renewed timetable for 2026/27 with some minor refinements based on feedback over the past year. Imperial Union Trading will also be included in this process.

The Union maintains a similar unified approach to the business management cycle to provide a consistent annual process that translates strategy into delivery by bringing together objective setting and measuring, operational planning, annual reviews, and budgeting into an operable timeframe.

This approach aims to provide a framework that allows the Union to create effective plans for its teams and staff, budget for those plans and measure the success of those plans using relevant metrics. The results of those metrics must then be used to influence future planning cycles and priorities.

The Board are asked to note the planning cycle.

2. Business management components

The Union's business management process comprises of three components:

- **Operational Planning –** The process by which teams and individuals set and review their objectives and KPIs via their operating plans and the Union's balanced scorecard.
- **Annual Review –** The process by which the Union measures the performance of its teams and staff. It defines and measures individual staff objectives and sets training and development plans.
- **Budgeting –** This sets out the timeline and process by which the Union creates its annual budgets. It is informed by operational planning.

3. Process

The business management cycle will be driven by the Senior Management Team and follow the sequence detailed below:

Process	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Strategic Prioritisation					Strategic Priority Workshops for Management Committee and Operational Managers				
Balanced Scorecard						Develop 26/27 KPIs	Review 25/26 Balanced Scorecard Results Set 26/27 KPIs		
Operational Planning	Review 25/26 Operational Plan			Review 25/26 Operational Plan		Directorate/Team/Officer Priority Workshops & Develop 26/27 Operating Plan	Confirm 26/27 Team Objectives and Operating Plan		
Budgeting		Reforecast	Reforecast		Budget Holder Training All staff Q and A on budgets	26/27 Budget Development	26/27 Budget First Draft Review	Final 26/27 Draft to FAR	Final 26/27 Budget Approved by Board
Staff Annual Reviews			Mid-year Reviews Completed						Annual Reviews Begin

4. Rationale

The above process details a framework that will ensure the sequencing sets the organisational priorities first, then the delivery plans and budget in in which to achieve them.

There is a more detailed planning cycle which will break down specific tasks and deadlines particularly related to budgeting.

This includes:

- Scheduling time to discuss and agree detailed budget assumptions (including inflation) planned for March FAR.
- A window for budget holders to prepare (3 weeks) and for Finance/SMT review (3 weeks in total).

5. Adjustments

Since last year's cycle, some minor practical adjustments have been made based on team feedback, and new tools introduced to better align operating plans with strategic goals:

- Development and establishing priorities first at team levels, and then budget setting based on team priorities.

Appendix 1

Imperial College Union

High Performing Imperial College Union: ICU
Financial Model Financial Case 2026/27 & 2027/28

Author(s): Tom Newman (Managing Director)
Nico Henry (Union President)

Purpose: Providing a summary of the request for Imperial College Union's (ICU) grant level.

1. Executive Summary

This paper provides a summary case for the delivery of the ICU strategy 2023-28. It should be read alongside our strategic plan – themed 'High Performing Students' Union' – which reflects the need for the Union to build on the success of its previous 'Back to Basics' strategy, and for Imperial College London to deliver on its strategy, 'Science for Humanity'. Our funding case aligns with ICU's primary purpose as a charity to further the welfare, educational and social development for Imperial students.

The Union is proposing a two-year funding agreement covering financial years 2026/2027 and 2027/2028. The additional funding request will allow ICU to deliver the following:

- Enable Imperial to deliver its strategic objectives, specifically the theme of *'Class of 2030'*
- To ensure that Union services are able to scale with planned University expansion.

To achieve this, the Union is requesting baseline block grant funding of **£3,264k** in FY26/27. This is summarised below (with commentary following on the category labels relating to requested uplifts on top of the baseline figure):

Component *(Category)*	**Block Grant £k**	**Funded Salary Uplifts £k**	**Total £k**
FY25/26 (baseline)	3,176	*50	**3,226**
Baseline adjustment (FY25/26 uplifts)	-	**38	**38**
Cost increases *(A)*	111	94	**205**
Additional activity *(B)*	99	-	**99**
Additional activity *(C)*	103	-	**103**
FY26/27 Request	**3,489**	**182**	**3,671**

*Initial estimate by University Finance

**Additional amount following final calculation (£88k impact in FY25/26) – University Finance confirmed will be paid separately

Costs of salary uplifts agreed through the University salary negotiation process in Y2 (FY27/28) would be invoiced for separately, as previously.

2. Additional Funding of Core Activity

The College and ICU both have organisational strategies, which set an ambitious and transformational vision for the University and the Union that befits a global top 10 University. The request for additional funding is purposefully aligned to the University priorities that ICU is expected to deliver itself or in partnership. These include supporting an increasingly diverse and growing student body, to deliver on the Imperial Experience project objectives, and the University's strategic theme *the Class of 2030*, where an engaging extracurricular experience is highlighted as a priority. For this to be realised, the Union must be empowered to invest in core services.

The uplift request can be categorised by priority into three options:

A: +£205k to maintain current service levels

Additional £205k support for cost increases which have emerged since our last agreement (2024), comprised:

- **£94k** estimated salary increases in FY26/27 (assuming a 3% salary increase together with other increments) is also expected. We would normally invoice for the actual amount separately following completion of pay negotiations, but have included an estimated figure here for completeness.
- **£111k** (3.4%) relating to other increases including:
    - License fees relating to general insurance of **£40k** (transferred from University policy to Union 2024/25)
    - **£21k** (5%) increase to student group budget allocations (which has remained at £425k since FY21/22 and now needs to cover unavoidable cost increases including insurances), and
      An additional **£25k** to fund the Student Experience Fund.***
    - **£25k** covering inflationary increases, primarily focused on membership activity including core union events e.g. awards, 2 day welcome fair .

***This has been potentially identified as being awarded via the President's Fund.

B: +£99k to fund key priorities in addition to maintaining current service levels

An additional £99k to finance key priorities – further detailed below - around providing:

i. High quality advice.
ii. Provide representation, community building and engagement activity at Non-South Kensington Campuses.

Objective and Cost	Rationale
To provide high quality advice for communities at Non-SK Campuses and as student numbers increase.	To ensure the continued provision of high-quality, independent advice for students at non–South Kensington campuses and in response to planned increases in student numbers. Planned growth in student numbers will directly increase demand for casework-based advice. The ICU Advice Service provides free, independent, and confidential support to students, complementing University services by offering non-institutional advice on academic appeals, complaints, and misconduct processes. This independence is essential to maintaining student trust and enabling early, informed engagement with University procedures. The service supports the University's regulatory obligations, including alignment with expectations set by the Office for Students on student protection, consumer rights, and effective student engagement.

	The ICU Advice Service operates on a per-student demand model, rather than a fixed-capacity model. Without a proportional increase in adviser capacity, there is a material risk of increased waiting times, reduced early intervention, and greater escalation to formal complaints or external routes. This proposal ensures that independent student support scales in line with institutional expansion, safeguarding service quality, regulatory compliance, and student trust. The proposal is to add **1.0 FTE split as follows 0.5 FTE casework and 0.5 FTE outreach**, access and preventative activity. This balance allows both frontline demand and preventative engagement to scale together. The current service baseline was established in 2022 based on student numbers from 2020/21 (20,300 Full Time Students). Since then, both student numbers (21,450 Full Time Students in 2024/25 or an increase of 5.7%) and case complexity have increased materially. Casework is no longer short term and transactional but increasingly long running and high intensity. Since January 2025: ▪ Mean case length: 76 Days ▪ Some cases exceed two years, with over 20 appointments and 400+ case notes. This means case numbers significantly understate the true workload being carried by advisers. Demand also remains high and is concentrated in peak risk periods (linked to progression). In 2024/25 the service handled: ▪ 167 Cases ▪ 273 enquiries ▪ 544 formal requests Requests peak in Summer and early Term 1. Imperial's planned expansion is likely to be international, postgraduate and multi campus. Each of these groups has systematically higher demand for independent advice services. At present 53% of service users have international fee status, a cohort who often face more complex and higher risk cases frequently linked to visa compliance and academic progression. As student numbers grow, case volumes will increase, but case complexity will grow faster driven by more formal complaints and misconduct cases, more visa linked and regulatory risk, and more students navigating multiple university systems simultaneously. Without increased adviser capacity this creates escalating institutional risk, reduced early intervention and greater pressure on University services.
To provide representation, community building and engagement activity at Non-SK Campuses	To strengthen student representation, community building, and engagement at non–South Kensington campuses, in line with shared University and Imperial College Union (ICU) priorities to improve the experience of students based away from South Kensington. Both the University and ICU recognise the need to enhance the experience and sense of belonging for students at non–South

	Kensington sites. In response, the Union has begun to develop a multi-site approach (aligning with the University approach), which sets out the need to work in partnership with University departments to ensure a minimum level of core provision for all students, regardless of campus location. We are requesting **1.0 FTE to be responsible for multi campus engagement activity**. This role will work in partnership with the University to support the delivery of: ▪ Community-building activity that improves connection and belonging ▪ Representation structures that ensure students at non-SK campuses are effectively supported and heard ▪ Engagement mechanisms that align student feedback with institutional decision-making The role will enable a step-change in provision from 2026/27, while also providing essential staff capacity to plan for future expansion at White City, ahead of the opening of the new Academic Building in 2029. This investment ensures that student representation and community infrastructure scales with institutional growth, supports equitable student experience across campuses, and underpins a coherent, sustainable multi-campus model.
The cost of two additional roles at 2b grade is **£99k** based on current gross costs.	

C: +£103,114k to fund targeted belonging and engagement

An additional £103,114k to fund other priority areas – further detailed below - around:

i. Belonging linked to agreed University and Union priorities

Objective and Cost	**Rationale**
Belonging Events and Engagement Fund. To deliver a year-round inclusive engagement programme aligned with the Imperial Experience Project.	To provide a year-round, inclusive student engagement and events programme aligned with the Imperial Experience Project that seeks to remove financial barriers to participation and strengthens student wellbeing, belonging and academic success. Social connection is a critical driver of student wellbeing, sense of belonging and academic outcomes. This is evidenced consistently by Imperial research and external UK research by Advance HE demonstrates a positive relationship between engagement and student motivation, and attainment. Students who feel socially connected show higher academic self-efficacy and stronger commitment to their studies. Currently the Union delivers a substantial programme of engagement activity (over 280 events annually and approximately 40,000 student attendees) but this provision is predominantly self-funded through ticket income and bar spend. This creates structural barriers to participation, linking engagement to spending power disproportionately excludes students facing financial and academic pressures. This proposal shifts student engagement from a transactional, income-dependent model to a strategic, funded model focused on accessibility, inclusion and experience rather than consumption.

	With dedicated investment the Union can significantly expand non-alcohol led and late-night activity and make a large proportion of events free at the point of access, and double overall engagement opportunities across the 2026/27 academic year. The programme will priorities inclusive, low-pressure formats (e.g. creative and wellbeing events, facilitated social mixers, activity-based events and subsidized trips) which are particularly effective for new, international, postgraduate, commuter and non-nightlife engaged students. Targeted investment in engagement infrastructure has already demonstrated impact at Imperial, most notably through the expansion of the Welcome Fair, which ICU doubled in budget and delivery days, significantly improving capacity, accessibility and student experience. This investment ensures that student engagement scales with institutional expectations around wellbeing and student success, removes financial barriers to participation and embeds sustainable evidence led model of social connection that supports retention, belonging and academic achievement across the student body.
Total investment requested **£103,114.** This includes one additional role at 2b based on gross cost of £43,114 . This role will design, deliver and evaluate the events and engagement programme ensuring sustainability, consistency and impact. The remaining £60,000 will allow all current events to be free and allow the removal of charges for student groups to use ICU spaces. This will allow approximately 10 events per term focused on making friends and building belonging.	