Imperial College Union
Finance, Audit & Risk / 25 March 2026

Business Continuity Plan Test - Update

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Purpose: To update FAR on the outcome of our Business Continuity Plan Test carried out on 9 February 2026, including lessons learned and actions planned
Decision(s): To note

1. Context

Over recent years, the Union has developed its business continuity capability through the introduction of a Business Continuity Policy, the identification and analysis of priority services, and the creation of detailed response plans. This work has been reported to Finance, Audit & Risk Committee through a series of updates and has established a structured approach to managing major incidents and maintaining critical operations.

This programme included defining priority Union services, undertaking impact analyses, establishing the membership of the Imperial College Union Incident Management Group, and developing detailed business continuity response plans. These actions have now been completed, culminating in a comprehensive Business Continuity Plan.

Following the completion of this work, the Union committed to testing its preparedness through scenario-based exercises. On 9 February 2026, an off-site Business Continuity Plan tabletop exercise was delivered at the White City campus, facilitated by Imperial's Head of Risk and Resilience. The session brought together members of the Operational Management Group, Senior Management Team and elected Officers.

The exercise was designed to rehearse the Union's incident management structures, test the practical application of business continuity plans, and identify any gaps in capability. Participants worked through a series of realistic scenarios, including:

- An ICT shutdown
- Restricted building access
- A prolonged power failure

The purpose of the exercise, and this paper, is to assess the Union's current level of preparedness, highlight strengths and areas for improvement, and ensure that lessons learned are translated into clear and prioritised actions.

2. Outcome

The Business Continuity Plan tabletop exercise was successfully delivered, with a high level of engagement from all participants. The session generated open and constructive discussion, with participants contributing ideas and demonstrating a clear commitment to strengthening the Union's business continuity arrangements. The facilitator also noted the high level of engagement and positive approach taken during the session.

The exercise demonstrated a good level of awareness of operational pressures and priorities, particularly in relation to key activities such as elections, welcome period and major events, and provided assurance that the Union has a developing framework for incident response. However, key areas for improvement included:

- Deputising arrangements
- Communications resilience (particularly out-of-hours and for casual staff)
- Reliance on ICT systems with limited offline access to critical information

Across all scenarios, the importance of clear escalation structures, early communication, and effective coordination with university services was a consistent theme. These findings have informed the development of a detailed action tracker to strengthen the Union's overall resilience.

3. Action plan

See below for the core themes identified during the exercise and a summary of actions to be taken:

Theme	Summary of priority actions	Desired outcomes
People & Structural Resilience Ensuring steady leadership and clear decision-making during incidents, so operations remain stable and staff have confidence in the response.	Strengthening deputising across critical roles, embedding business continuity into induction and refresher activity, and formalising roles such as incident log-keeping and governance escalation.	Continuity of leadership and decision-making, reduced reliance on individuals, and improved accountability during incidents.
Escalation & Imperial Interfaces Establishing simple, reliable escalation and communication routes, including backup options, to support effective coordination.	Improving cascade lists and escalation processes, testing out-of-hours response, and clarifying interfaces with university services.	Reliable and timely escalation, reduced uncertainty, and stronger coordination with university partners.
Communications Resilience Strengthening emergency communication methods and developing standard templates to ensure the Union can communicate clearly when it matters most.	Defining clear communication routes and stakeholders, incorporating social media into response plans, and ensuring plans, key messaging templates and materials are available both digitally and offline.	Clear, consistent and timely communication, with improved ability to reach all core audiences during incidents.
Critical Functions Preparing robust alternatives and contingency arrangements to maintain delivery of critical services during disruption.	Documenting operational workarounds, defining continuity plans for elections, events and building operations, and mapping key dependencies.	Improved continuity of critical services, reduced operational and financial impact, and more structured incident response.
Information & Tools Resilience Ensuring essential data and materials are accessible, including offline, so decision-making is not dependent on ICT availability.	Providing offline access to key plans and templates, strengthening version control, and improving reliability of continuity materials.	Faster, more effective decision-making during outages and reduced dependency on ICT systems.

4. Next steps

The detailed Business Continuity Improvement Plan has been reviewed with the Operational Management Group (OMG) on 9 March, with ownership of actions assigned across relevant teams. The detailed action tracker is available on request.

Implementation will follow a phased approach, with initial actions (0–2 months) focused on strengthening foundations such as deputising, escalation routes and access to key materials. Medium-term actions (3–6 months) will build operational readiness, with longer-term activity (6–12 months) focused on testing, embedding and ongoing review.

The Union can report progress back to FAR at an appropriate future date.