Imperial College Union
Board of Trustees / 27 May 2026

Digital Systems & Membership Engagement Update

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Purpose: To update the Board on progress against the ICU Digital Systems & Membership Engagement Plan, including student feedback received to date, and to note the decision to move from consultation to action on priority digital issues.

Decision(s): **To note**

1. Background

In February 2026, SMT developed a Digital Systems & Membership Engagement plan following receipt of an open letter from student leaders raising concerns about digital systems - in particular the SUMS rollout - and the broader culture of digital decision-making at ICU. This paper provides a progress update against that plan.
The plan's key objectives were to:

i. Formally acknowledge and respond to concerns raised in the student open letter
ii. Provide clear rationale for previous digital changes
iii. Publish a transparent roadmap of planned future digital changes with timelines
iv. Provide a clear plan for communications and consultation so students are informed and able to meaningfully contribute to future plans

2. Progress to Date

2.1 Immediate Actions
The following immediate actions have been completed:

i. A formal response was provided to the Board of Trustees (by 5 March 2026)
ii. A blog post was drafted and published in response to the open letter
iii. Communications were sent to clubs and society committee members before Easter, inviting feedback and assuring them a digital roadmap was forthcoming
iv. Initial consultation activities were planned, scheduled and started
v. A Union Council paper (authored by Annie Willmot) was submitted and discussed on 17 March 2026
vi. Quick fixes were actioned within Membership Services including training the full Activities Team and reducing approval times to under 2 days
vii. Possible fixes for SUMS shop issues outlined by systems team

2.2 Student Feedback Summary
Feedback has been gathered via Union Council, a number of targeted surveys, a small focus group (led by the Advice Service) and 1:1 conversations with student leaders.

The Trustee Board will already be aware of a summary of responses received during consultation with Union Council on 17 March. When asked in one word to describe their digital experience with ICU at Union Council (34 responses), the most common responses were:

"frustrating" (13), "slow" (7), "hard to navigate" (3), "inconsistent" (2).

Only a small minority responded positively: *good (3), fine (2), okay (2), decent (1).*

This data, drawn from the broadest audience consulted, sets the tone for all other feedback received.

Key themes from the broader consultation:

i. SUMS shop functionality needs to be resolved as priority
ii. There is significant residual frustration about how the SUMS transition was handled. The broader sentiment is that changes are made without full transparency on the rationale.
iii. Consistent across all consultation methods are themes that the website is difficult to navigate, particularly on mobile, and students cannot easily find what they need.
iv. Overall sentiment is cautiously optimistic but rooted in scepticism from past experience (Democracy Review, SUMS shop). Students are willing to engage but need to see visible outcomes.

Note on sample size: The 1:1s and survey represent a small, student-leader-heavy sample. The Union Council response provides the broadest data point and should be weighted accordingly in any public summary however this is still a small sample of our whole student population. A wider student survey remains outstanding and would strengthen the evidence base however, given the prominence of this last theme (iv), and the risks detailed below, it felt critical to pause consultation and focus on visible action.

2.3 Summary of risks following student consultation

Risk	Detail
Reputational	Continued consultation without visible action will further erode trust; students have flagged this explicitly
Operational	SUMS shop functionality issues are causing real administrative burden for clubs and societies now
Equity	Some students (e.g., arts societies, LCO-adjacent groups) are more disadvantaged by digital changes than others and are not being heard
Communications	Students want honest communications and a clear roadmap going forward, the longer we are unable to provide this, the bigger the risk to student trust

2.4 Decision to Move to Action

Further consultation activities have been paused. It is recognised that there is a reputational risk in continuing to gather feedback without providing consequent action. The decision has therefore been taken to focus on what can be actioned now, rather than continuing to consult without visible progress. Students will be kept informed as actions are delivered.

3. Timeline and Next Steps

3.1 Short term (w/c 18 May 2026)

i. SUMS to provide a full timeline of required development and release changes to shop functionality by the week commencing 18 May 2026
ii. This timetable will be released to students by the end of that week
iii. Priority issues being addressed include:
    a. product attributes functionality
    b. approvals currently held by staff team to be assigned to student management committees

iv. Annie continuing to meet with relevant stakeholders to ensure student needs are fully understood

3. 2 Medium Term

Work on website user experience has not commenced on the original timeline. However, student consultation has provided clear insight into required improvements such as improving functionality and accessibility to resources on the ICU website. So, in the interests of demonstrating visible action, the Digital & Marketing team are going to explore improvements to the website based on feedback already gathered.

A longer-term digital strategy is being developed.

3.2 Long Term

A Digital Steering Group will be established, bringing together trustees, students and staff to work through required improvements to the digital strategy in an open and transparent way. The steering group will focus on understanding what best looks like and how ICU gets there. This will provide ongoing governance and student involvement in digital decision-making.

4. Summary

The Union is committed to improving its digital offer for students. In the short term, the focus is on delivering tangible improvements to the SUMS shop, with updates expected by the end of the week commencing 18 May. In parallel, longer-term planning is underway to ensure digital improvements are made in a structured, transparent, and student-informed way.