Imperial College Union
Board of Trustees / 27 May 2026

Operational Planning Priorities

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Purpose: To gain Board input into priorities for operational plan 2026/27.

Decision(s): To note / consider

1. Purpose

This paper presents the strategic themes that are emerging from ICU's 2026/27 business planning process and invites the Board's input before plans are finalised (final plans normally presented at the September meeting). The Board is asked to:

- Sense check whether the priorities from team plans are the right ones for 2026/27.
- Offer input on specific areas where management is weighing up competing considerations
- Endorse the overall direction of travel allowing plans to be finalised and communicated to staff

Union Council will be engaged for input and feedback at the June meeting.

2. Emerging Strategic Themes

The following six themes cut across multiple teams' plans and represent the current organisational priorities for 2026/27. They are presented in a deliberate sequence: the people and operational foundations that make everything else possible, through to the student-facing standards those foundations should ultimately deliver, with sustainability as the cross-cutting commitment running through all of them.

2.1 People, culture and organisational capability

Staff retention and team capacity are the most consistently cited risks across all team plans, and the condition on which progress against every other theme depends. A revised people plan will significantly refresh ICU's approach to training and development, HR service fundamentals (e.g. induction, recruitment), the relationship with the University as employer, career progression, and succession planning. Until this foundation is stronger, the organisation's ability to deliver sustained improvement in service quality, marketing effectiveness, and digital capability will remain constrained.

2.2 Process improvement and service quality

Several student facing services are operating with underdeveloped processes: inconsistent information across systems, unclear escalation routes, and limited standard operating procedures. This creates an uneven experience for students depending on which service they access, and places disproportionate reliance on individual staff knowledge rather than effective, documented systems. Significant process improvement work is planned in student activities and across the digital systems on which those services depend. Progress in this area is closely linked to the digital capability theme set out in 2.3.

2.3 Digital capability and systems integration

ICU relies heavily on a small number of specialist digital staff, creating significant single point of failure risk. Several workstreams across teams are contingent on digital capacity being prioritised effectively, including new platforms for the temporary staffing service and improved student group management. Plans include the development of a staff digital champions network and a digital steering group with student and trustee representation. The Managing Director's objectives will include a review of ICU's digital provision with a view to developing a best in sector roadmap for users.

2.4 Marketing and communications capability

Marketing and communications underpin almost every strategic priority including member engagement, democratic participation, student transparency and commercial growth. Planning has shown multiple teams reliant on the function. Reviewing resource and ensuring marketing and communications support is integrated into priorities will be critical.

2.5 Customer service standards

Better HR, processes, systems, and communications should translate into a consistently better experience for every student who interacts with ICU. The planning process has identified that a consistent customer service standard does not currently exist across ICU's services. An organisation-wide standard, common training offer, and shared measure of service quality are required. A cross organisational customer service training programme is proposed for rollout in the first half of 2026/27, applicable to all student and member-facing teams. Integrating building operations with first line student support will also be a crucial underpinning workstream, ensuring that a student's physical experience of ICU's spaces and where to go with any query (including student group support) is consistent and well managed.

2.6 Sustainability

Sustainability efforts have been uneven reflecting genuine commitment in some teams and limited engagement in others. The 2026/27 ambition is to move from good intentions to coordinated action with an organisation wide sustainability action plan. This will establish a consistent baseline of commitment across all teams breaking down the sustainability strategy ambitions into SMART objectives and key results.

3. Timelines

The following are key dates to finalise the organisational objectives and budget:

i. June 2026 Union Council feedback on ICU 2026/27 priorities (including capital priorities)
ii. July 2026 Board approve budget and capital plan
iii. September 2026 Board provided with ICU 2026/27 operational plan including all team objectives and key results

4. Recommendations

The Board is invited to:

i. Note the strategic themes emerging from the 2026/27 planning process and offer any observations on whether these reflect the Board’s own assessment of priorities.
ii. Endorse the overall direction of operational planning subject to any guidance from this discussion.