

Imperial College Union  
Board of Trustees / 29 May 2024

**Student Experience Fund Update**

- Author(s): Christian Cooper – Deputy President (Clubs & Societies)
- Purpose(s): To update the Board on the progress of the Student Experience Fund, and to seek approval to pursue the next steps outlined.
- Decision(s): To **note** the report and to **approve** delegated authority to Management Committee to make all decisions on the next steps of the fund expansion.

### 1. Introduction

The Student Experience Fund (SEF) was brought in for the current academic year (2023-24) to provide financial support for under-engaged students to participate in Union clubs, societies, and events. This paper provides an overview of a full report that has been produced on the fund's efficacy, along with proposed next steps.

### 2. Executive Summary

The Student Experience Fund was designed to enhance student engagement by providing financial support for under-engaged students to participate in Union clubs, societies, and events.

The fund was **allocated to all bursary recipients** at Imperial College, with funds **credited directly to students' Union accounts**. This approach meant that recipients did not have to take extra steps to secure funding, however it has meant that **only UK undergraduates in receipt of a bursary have been eligible** this year.

As of 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024, **935 out of 2419 eligible students utilised the fund**, with a **total expenditure of over £30k**, reflecting a moderate **engagement rate of 38.7%**. Utilisation was particularly high among first-year students. Feedback from students has been largely positive, highlighting the fund's role in enhancing the student experience, although it has also pointed to the **need for improvements in payment flexibility and communicating the fund to students**.

Looking forward, ICU aims to expand the fund's reach and efficacy. Plans include enhancing the fund's accessibility through **targeted communications, training for club and society leaders, and improving technical infrastructure to allow split payments**. Additionally, consideration is being given to extending eligibility to **postgraduate and international students** to ensure that the fund is truly targeting under-engaged groups. ICU intends to achieve this through a **trust-based model** where any student who does not currently receive the fund can **self-declare their need and apply for funding**.

### 3. Full Report

Trustees are asked to read the full report on the fund, which can be found in Appendix 1 to this paper.

## 4. Key Points

The following goals and next steps in Table 1 have been identified, some with relatively simple solutions, and others which require further research.

Table 1 - Goals and Next Steps

Problem	Goal
1. Only 38.7% of eligible students have utilised the fund.	50% of eligible students utilise the fund. (See Strategic Initiatives)
2. The system does not currently allow split payments.	Split payments to be possible for all purchases.
3. Only Bursary recipients can access the fund, all of whom are UK undergraduates.	Expand the fund demographics to postgraduate and international students.

### 4.1. Engagement Initiatives (Problem 1)

The following engagement initiatives have been identified:

**Integrate the fund into all student welcome events** – Develop partnerships with the relevant Imperial College stakeholders and departments to ensure that the fund is publicised during welcome events, including to postgraduate and international students.

**Targeted communications campaigns** – Launch targeted email campaigns, social media promotions, and informational webinars specifically designed for under-engaged groups. This was intended for the current academic year, delivered through the Registry (due to data sharing restrictions), however this has not yet been done.

**Inclusion of fund details in training modules for student leaders** – Include modules on how to promote and facilitate the use of the fund in all training materials for student leaders (both society leaders and student reps), ensuring that they are well-equipped to inform students about the fund and encourage its use.

### 4.2. Systems Improvements (Problem 2)

Systems improvements are required to allow for split payments to be made. Through discussions with the ICU Systems team, the move to SUMS will allow the current SEF platform to be migrated in its entirety, however split payments may not be initially possible. It is intended that we will reach out to SUMS to discuss implementing “gift card” functionality to SUMS.

### 4.3. Expansion of the Fund (Problem 3)

The primary initiative for the 2024-25 academic year is to expand the fund to postgraduate and international students. The current fund is only able to be utilised by UK undergraduate bursary recipients and for the fund to achieve its aims of increasing student engagement, it must be open to all. We propose to expand the fund to postgraduate and international students through a trust-based approach. Full details on this decision can be found in the full report (Appendix 1).

## 5. Funding for the 2024/25 Academic Year

As the fund is evolving and developing over the next year, we believe that the Union's Strategic Investment Fund is the most appropriate sources of funding for "year 2" (2024/25 academic year) of the fund.

Initially, we are suggesting that, following the return of any unused designated funds for this academic year, ICU designates £20k from the Strategic Investment Fund to the Student Experience Fund for the 2024/25 academic year.

It is proposed that, after 2 full years of the fund, enough data will be available to determine a long-term plan for the fund and include the funding within the core Union budget.

A full request for funding will be taken to the June meeting of FAR, followed by the July meeting of the Board of Trustees.

## 6. Next Steps

Moving forward we are asking Board members to **note** and discuss, if necessary, the full report attached in Appendix 1 and to **note** that a full funding request, alongside the Union budget for 2024/25, will come to Board in July.

We are also asking Board to **approve** that:

- i. Management Committee be delegated authority to make all decisions on the next steps of the fund expansion, including the method and operations of expansion (i.e. a trust basis), with the exception of the funding request that will come to the June meeting of the Board of Trustees.