Policy Proposal: Accessible Education Now!

To be discussed at: Union Executive
Proposer: Sandra Ogundele
Lead Officers: Education Officer, BME Students' Officer
Part-time Officers involved: Disabled Students' Officer

What would you like the Union to do?

- Students' Union UCL should be fighting for accessibility, inclusivity, safety and a 'no-detriment' principle to be at the heart of all UCL decision-making. No plan must be created without a proper equality impact assessment.
- Lobby UCL to conduct impact assessments on the basis of their class, geographic location, housing situation, disability, etc.
- Lobby UCL to ensure that students are not required to perform significant administrative work in order to get the support they need. A lack of medical notes, formal diagnosis or assessment should not prevent students from receiving support, mitigation or any specific home equipment adjustments. Disabled students must be given clear information about how to get support.
- The SU should lobby UCL Departments and Faculties to work collaboratively with students, Student Support and Wellbeing (SSW) and other relevant teams for full accessibility.
- Students' Union UCL should lobby for automatic funded extensions for PhD students and suspend sanctions for students who can't afford their fees.
- The Students' Union should lobby UCL to ensure students should be told as soon as possible about any changes to teaching, financial welfare and disability support.
- Students' Union UCL will collaborate with UCL to send termly surveys to the student population evaluating the response to the pandemic and identifying areas for further improvement in UCL's approach.
- Student's Union UCL will investigate the associate membership for interrupting students and will lobby UCL to change their approach to interrupting students.
- Students Union UCL should lobby the government for more robust protections for students who are blocked from universal credit, experiencing the hostile environment policies, and those who are experiencing other forms of insecurity.
- The SU should champion the Disability Discrimination Report and lobby UCL that it is not put on hold, as they may be key to the university's COVID-19 response.
- The Students' Union should lobby UCL to change its complaints procedure and will also work with UCL to increase accessibility and visibility for avenues by which students can have their access issues during the pandemic resolved in a timely manner.
- We must continue to push for the helpful COVID-19 related adjustments to stand for all both during and after this pandemic, especially online access to lectures, tutorials, seminars and meetings of both academic and administrative nature. Students' Union UCL should lobby to ensure that self-certification is brought into the standing procedure for extenuating circumstances.

Why would you like to do this?

- COVID-19 has meant many students have been experiencing hardship that is preventing them from participating fully in their education. From lack of access to appropriate technologies, increased racism against Asian communities and online abuse, mental health struggles, unsafe home environments to financial and housing insecurity.
- During the pandemic the university has had to adapt and become more flexible. The changes to the academic regulations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has proved to

many students with disabilities and chronic illnesses that reasonable adjustments (e.g. online attendance, online examinations and self-certification for extensions and deferrals) are possible and functional within universities.

- The pandemic has shown the value of incorporating accessibility into teaching during a crisis but also during non-crisis times. UCL were able to prepare for online access because of the recently released report on disability discrimination. Having put thought into such alternative ways of accessing teaching helped when the university was forced to move its teaching online in March.

How will this affect students?

Accessibility and inclusivity are often pitted against the workers' rights of staff, the learning of other students, but this is a false dichotomy. Striving for flexibility and accessibility enhances pedagogy and learning, improves working conditions and accessibility for other groups such as international students, mature students, postgraduates, those with caring responsibilities and those from an underprivileged socioeconomic background.

However, this progress is still only halfway there – many students are still finding education inaccessible. For instance, disabled students are receiving less support than usual, are expected to do impossible levels of administrative work in proving their need for support and are experiencing accessibility issues with online teaching.

Postgraduates, research and practical based students are often left out of these conversations. We believe the effects of COVID-19 will persist into and after the next 3 academic years.