STUDENTS' UNION UCL

Welfare & Community Officer – November Report 1

Name: Rachel Lim

Section 1: Sabbatical Officer Priorities

How have you communicated with students in the past fortnight?

Yes, mainly through society events, and the welfare zone which occurred October 31st. I have set up 1-2-1s with HCOs, am visiting halls and eating dinners at our catered halls next week, as well as setting up a dinner for Welfare Zone participants incoming.

Pre-emptive note:
Apologies for the late start on these reports. I have a big problem with writing (disability) but have here a detailed report highlighting what should be main projects and initiatives I have picked up so far into my term. A lot of this was written before the new structure of the sabb reports and so are backwards in its structure but honestly I hate chatGPT and if I were to manually restructure it it would take another month so sorry!

1) Students can access quality and reassuring mental wellbeing services when they need support.

Students can access quality and reassuring mental wellbeing services when they need support.
- Raised the issue of a seeming lack of intermediary intervention before students come to mental wellbeing/SSWS services in crisis mode
- Raised in UMHC for institution level awareness
- Working with SSWS to look at student participation in SSWS events and how to look at "gaps" in students accessing services
- SSWS expressed their belief in the Support to Study Framework in reaching and supporting students, I'm still questioning the support students have before this point
- ACC interested in increasing comms promoting their spaces as an informal community for language development and support
- Definitely feel that more work needs to be done in the area and will continue to engage more stakeholders
- Raised the issue on the lack of large-scale amalgamation of communication and student support across departments. This feeds into student burnout and

unnecessary trauma when having to recount their story, especially when displeased at the process (e.g. sexual misconducts lost to societies team, complaints team loses cases to SSWS once referred without any overarching and defining "approach" to how cases should be processed)

- Also echoed at the Advice Service where students usually come having found insufficient support in other areas
- This concern and one above have been raised to the University Mental Health Charter
- Similar concern raised in the Personal Academic Tutor Working Group, which aims to revamp the PT-student experience through a restructuring of their responsibilities. As the more "holistic", pedagogical approach is less of an emphasis following the new Personal "Academic" Tutor focus, SSWS and I are concerned about the new gap in student contact
- Sit on the PAT Working Group to ensure that PATs are still aware of their duty of care in student needs. Also investigating and involved in developing their "escalation process" to ensure that needs are fed back to the department on a more structured and less ad-hoc basis to standardise students' experiences with their PATs)
- Raised this in the OfS E6 Harassment/Sexual Misconduct Policy Working group. Now part of the sub-working group looking at the sub-clause of "a single source of information" for student resources and reporting to voice student opinion.
- Raised to Sarah Cowles who is of a similar opinion and pointed to a need for departments to have greater proactivity and communication with their students. Will follow this up with her soon.
- Secondary point to above: lack of cross departmental communication also results in the absence of datapoints/data collection/timescales available to anyone in terms of how long student cases are passed between departments, their resolution, whether they appeal etc.
- Raised this in UMHC, with SSWS, and Grand Challenges. Working closely with UCL Grand Challenges (particularly after their Mental Health Services Mapping) to look at this issue.

Student facing mental health service comms:
- This has always been one of my major concerns. It feels like we although we may provide "enough" services, students are unaware of the exact breadth of UCL's support. Due to the ad-hoc nature of case referrals based on independent staff evaluation, along with lack of student info, students are not empowered to understand
- Raised the issue of students in crisis with key management
- Meeting with Sarah Cowles: Departments will be receiving comms soon (meeting on week of 28 Oct) clarifying that students with crises and wars impacting their studies are subject to ECs without utilising their DAPS, alleviating unnecessary student burden.

2) Students are financially supported to meet their basic needs to succeed in their

studies.

- Have opened the conversation about lobbying for the UCL Financial Assistance Fund to provide more clarity about the reason for a student's application rejection, even if split into vague categories. Will follow up in due time
- Reviving Project Period, which is thankfully increasingly backed by the passed policy this first WCZ. Including more student reps and students to ensure a student-focused narrative (UCL East Officer and student who started a period poverty charity in Brazil) and aim to present a new business case in due time.
- Enquiring about the UCL's stance about their duty of care to students in order to better work with them. Answers vary but baseline answers indicate that by their measures we are lacking in our intermediary measures in student support. I'll be following this up with the SU but hopefully with the creation of more mentor/peer shcemes and more information flagging to students through my other initiatives this should really help students.

3) UCL offers students an accessible, supportive, and affordable living environment designed for their needs and to develop communities.

On Accommodation and living environment:

- Partaking and participated in the NUS Parliament Lobby day on the 23rd October about the Renters' Rights Reform Bill, to include students in the banning of no-fault evictions and guarantors
- Along with SU Democracy, working on a larger policy piece on how student accommodation affects student experience, and to what extent
- Starting the conversation with UCL about their guarantor policy in the interim
- Opened the conversation of a "Chill Zone"
  - Currently finding a room, have looped in UCL Inclusive Environments to ensure the space is fit for all students
- Hall Community Officers: dev. plan to work with them much closely this year and bringing them into key conversations throughout the next year. Planning "surgeries"/drop in dinners throughout catered halls in November to stay close to current student opinion and also feedback on Accommodation
- Have raised with Accommodation the low food quality at catered halls. This had already been noted and passed to Gather and Gather (caterer) who have recently changed management and are remedying the situation immediately. Will follow up with students in a months' time.
- Raise the issue of the lack of beds for the number of students at cheaper rates, considering UCL underperforms compared to other London universities
- On the Student Accommodation Strategy Working Group to act as student voice. Constantly feedbacking what students priorities e.g. price overall instead of more

ensuites, but work here is relatively new and I want to re-state my commitment to working with students here as I want my opinion to reflect our student body and not my sole opinion
- One of my main aims here is to lobby for UCL to ring fence accommodation fee surplus for future accommodation development instead of funding other areas of UCL

As of the week starting 4 November:
- For the first time, the Students' Union is involved in rent-setting for our accommodation in the writing of the first report (previous participation was limited to comments on the final report which limits the amount of influence we can have). So after a couple emails, thank you to Aimie Chapple and Joe Lay.
- First meeting only occurred 6 Nov about rental assumptions in the business case for our accommodation but I was able to input the fact that the maintenance loan uplift was confirmed at 3.1% in comparison to what increases in rent were discussed
- Nomination accommodation were discussed and I input the importance of UCL presence in order to maintain UCL experience throughout halls for studens

On campus environment and community:
- Raised the issue of training of sunflower lanyards fr student staff (done) and FT staff (WIP)
- UCL East Campus Wellbeing board:
1. raised the issue of student commute between the two campuses if UCL is so keen to integrate them + what UCL's long term strategy was
   a. Response: colloquially, tbf not much. They are waiting for TfL to integrate new tube stops in the next 15 years. This is an area of concern for me and I will follow this up with Eda (EIO) as she is most involved with East proceedings.
2. student engagement was discussed at length and how they planned to go about it. Raised the suggestion for more student staff in order to increase the amount of student voice within these spaces. Of note but to be followed up on.
- Transition Mentor Scheme
- Delivered a IOE induction with Manjula Patricks from ARENA about multicultural engagement in a classroom. Co-writing an article with Manjula Patricks and Indie Beedie about inclusive classroom practice during disability awareness month.

4) Students find their community and discover new things that support their wellbeing.

- Refreshers initiative: something I copied from Imperial SU. Idea was that students who miss the initial Welcome Period find it much harder to integrate into the student community as they don't feel as welcome, as well as the financial barrier once taster memberships end. Starting from Term 2, at least one society a week will open their event/training to all students, completely free, in order to continue encouraging new students to join a student community.

- Intercultural Summit: happening on the 12 Nov. Aims to bring together all the cultural societies for the first time, and pioneer a new level of communication between soc leaders and the SU.
- Second-hand market: creating spaces for students to sell their second hand goods on a large scale, creating a more student facing image towards sustainability. Raised with team going to Australia as it's common in Australian universities and to observe and learn. Have not started the conversation here as much.
- Opened the conversation at International Student Orientation (along with International Student Officer) about the efficacy of their current programme and will have an open dialogue moving forward about what can be done to ensure intl students are signposted to the right resources earlier on

Section 2: Attendance at important Union meetings and events

1) Union meetings attended and main outcomes

Welfare Zone: Policy about Period Products at UCL by Elisa (Womens' Officer passed)

Section 3: Attendance at important UCL meetings and events

1) UCL meetings attended and main outcomes

- Student Access and Success Committee: have raised the issue of student facing and engagement that doesn't loop in the SU
- Work Health and Safety: Communications during outbreaks have referrals to SSW and UCL but not the SU, mentioned the importance of having a united front when it came to student-facing comms. SU will be looped in. Raised the concern of an increase in student injuries (though lower than pre-pandemic levels) although there was a decline in staff injuries. Staff response was that a new, and much shorter reporting procedure was put in place with Incidents @ UCL and so it was likely that there is simply more reporting of a hidden majority that is coming to light, although the long term numbers will be monitored
- Connected the Alumni team to the sabb team: I believe that the way we engage with Alumni is a fraction of our potential. Alumni team to follow up with various points with specific sabbs.
- Apologies but other UCL Committees are mentioned throughout my report, most notably the PT Working group and UMHC. Please refer to above.

Section 4: What progress have you made on your assigned policy proposals?

What three points from your report do you need to be communicated to Students?

- Do you know where to go and what services exactly UCL offers to support you?
- Sabbs are in sore need of much more consistent discussion with the student body and I would appreciate suggestions in this area
- UCL has a massive issue with student communications instead of my original view of an issue in provision (the two are inexorably interlinked, and I still maintain belief that we are much below numbers of student provision if student awareness was higher) and I am working on improving student communications, especially when it comes to mental health services
- Living situations in our halls is a constant active discussion and I am keen to continue working in this area this year