STUDENTS' UNION UCL

Education Zone
Minutes

Date: Thursday 30 November 2023
Time: 18:00 – 20:00
Venue: IOE – 20 Bedford Way: Room 642

Chair: Shaban Chaudhary, Education Officer

Members:	P	AP	AB
Ahmad Ismail, Equity & Inclusion Officer	X		
Anji Suri, Trans Officer	X		
Bella Qureshi, Faculty of Laws UG Rep	X		
Connar Mawer, Faculty of Medical Sciences PGR Rep (Non-Clinical)	X		
Diksha Shahakar, Faculty of Arts and Humanities PGT Rep	X		
Elisa de Aragao Bibay, Women's Officer	X		
Ellen Durban, Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences PGR Rep	X		
Emma Pearlstone, Faculty of Mathematical and Physical Sciences PGT Rep	X		
George Ponodath and Fahm Deen, Faculty of Medical Sciences UG Rep (Clinical)	X		
Georgina Wilson-Cousins, Faculty of the Built Environment PGT Rep	X		
Guner Mertcan, Faculty of Population Health Sciences UG Rep	X		
Hilary Tang, Faculty of Arts and Humanities UG Rep	X		
Huihuang Jia, Faculty of Arts and Humanities PGR Rep			X
Issy Smith, Postgraduate Officer		X	
Jacqui Lee, Institute of Education PGT Rep	X		
Jianing Zhou, Institute of Education PGR Rep	X		
Kerem Isik & Yuvraj Jadeja, Faculty of Life Sciences UG Rep			X
Lilia Dimitrov, Faculty of Population Health Sciences PGR Rep			X
Luna De La Llama Kempeneers, Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences PGT Rep	X		
Manya Gupta, Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences UG Rep	X		
Menglong Bao, Institute of Education UG Rep	X		
Micah Gerstner, LGBQ+ Officer	X		
Michael Chan, Faculty of Life Sciences PGT Rep	X		
Mihika Kulkarni, Faculty of Brain Sciences PGT Rep	X		
Naif Alrehaili, Faculty of Mathematical and Physical Sciences PGR Rep	X		
Omar Abbas, Faculty of the Built Environment PGR Rep	X		
Padhmaja Varadaraj Ravichandar, Faculty of Population Health Sciences PGT Rep	X		
Philip Greger and Suzanna Chen, Disabled Students' Officer			X
Pranshu Goyal, Faculty of Engineering PGT Rep	X		
Preetika Bharti, Faculty of Laws PGT Rep			X
Rawleka Wilson and Rachel Lim, People of Colour Students' Officer	X		
Rong Zhou, Faculty of Engineering UG Rep	X		
Shaban Chaudhary, Education Officer, Chair	X		
Shirui Fan, Faculty of Medical Sciences PGT Rep	X		
Solon Tono Fountzopoulos, Faculty of Medical Sciences UG Rep (Non-Clinical)	X		
Sophie-Jayne Bush, Faculty of Mathematical and Physical Sciences UG Rep	X		
Tianxin Pu, Faculty of Brain Sciences UG Rep	X		
Tuamoru Odii, Faculty of Brain Sciences PGR Rep	X		

Vi Wang, Faculty of the Built Environment UG Rep	X		
Yasmin Garcia-Sterling, Research Students' Officer	X		
Yolanne Lee, Faculty of Engineering PGR Rep	X		

Quorum: 21

In Attendance:
Jeff Saddington-Wiltshire, Representation & Democracy Manager
Rhiannon Ellis, Representation & Democracy Coordinator
Matthew Phuklaewkla, Democracy Assistant, Minutes
Kathryn Woods, Pro-Vice-Provost Education (Student Academic Engagement)
Juan Grano De Oro Fernandez, Postgraduate Hall Community Officer for 109 Camden Road (Ann Stephenson, Ifor Evans, Max Rayne and Neil Sharp House)
Aadya Bhagat, People of Colour Network Rep

Actions Log 2023/24	Responsibility	Update due:
Meet up with Georgina Wilson-Cousins regarding unresponsive reps	JSW	30/01/24
Continue discussion regarding Prescence of Faculty Reps at a later date	SC	30/01/24

1.   Preliminary matters – Welcome and Introductions
Education Officer warmly welcomed all members to the Education Zone

2.   Officer Updates and Questions – Equity & Inclusion Officer
As this was their first time at Education Zone, Equity & Inclusion Officer Ahmad Ismail (AI) introduced themself. They then gave their updates on:
-   Creating a low-commitment, beginner friendly Art Programme across all Arts at UCL
-   Streamlining Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) work done at UCL
-   LGBTQ+ inclusion and plans for the LGBT+ History Month in February
-   Accommodation-related issues
-   The launch of the Hall Community Officers Programme
-   The Impartial Chairs trip to Northern Ireland last week, to learn more about divided communities and groups as part of preparation for the Disagreeing Well Programme

Micah Gerstner (MG) introduced themselves as the LGBQ+ Officer, and gave more information about the LGBT+ History Month. They said they would love it if they could get collaboration and support from degree programmes and societies with this. This could be done by reaching out to faculties for help with the History Month, and passing on word to departmental societies. Materials for promoting this will be sent out later over the Winter Break. AI also said for interested members to look at departmental EDI teams. Finally, MG reminded that if members had any questions, to please send them to him.

A member asked AI about what activities they did in Northern Ireland – a quick summary was given:

- The purpose of the trip was to learn about the conflict between the Unionists and Loyalists in order to learn more about Disagreeing Well: to be able to achieve a balanced perspective by recognising that each person has inherent biases and needs to be able to challenge them
- Different communities were spoken to in order to listen to different perspectives: people from the IRA, RUC, Unionists, etc.
- The experience from the trip will help for conversations in external speaker events, in being able to be able to keep impartial without giving in to one side or another.

3. Officer Updates and Questions – Education Officer

Next, the Education Officer Shaban Chaudhary gave his updates:

- The first draft of the [Russell Group Student Union](#) (RGSU) Group Manifesto is ready, and will be discussed at the RGSU residential in Manchester mid-December
- Information about [Academic Board](#) membership
- Negotiations with the [Library Committee](#) to increase the number of study spaces in libraries
- Good progress being made on the new Union building
- Faculty and Lead Department Reps training going well
- The [Programme Excellence Project](#) has now been launched
- [Extended Learning Opportunities Project](#) launched
- Working on academic flexibility for elite athletes
- Hired new Head of Intercultural Engagement
- Working on implementing an Academic Rep Network to link up committees and groups together to facilitate productive discussion and work
- Working with [Union Finance Committee](#) to manage money given by UCL to the Union for hardship funds

A general concern was brought up by Georgina Wilson-Cousins (GWC), Faculty of the Built Environment PGT Rep: if Academic reps are not responsive and there are issues, are there any alternatives for students to get their voices heard? Jeff Saddington-Wiltshire (JSW), Representation & Democracy Manager suggested that they have a chat together to discuss this. Also, it is possible to directly message the Chair of the [Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCC).](#)

4. Special Guests – Personal Tutoring Review and SORAs
Kathryn Woods (KW), Pro-Vice-Provost introduced Zone members to the [Personal Tutor Review](#).

Some key points:

- National Student Survey (NSS) data, general discussions and findings from a Steering Group revealed that the personal tutoring system is not working as well as hoped at UCL.
- 48.5% of students and 40.9% of staff felt that the personal tutoring system was working well.
- The core issue identified was that the system is "inadequate".

KW asked Zone members for their experiences and feedback regarding the personal tutoring system at UCL. Responses included:

- Students are somewhat unaware which topics should be discussed with personal tutors (academic questions, pastoral care, signposting, etc.), and this is something that is not well-conveyed to new students at UCL.

- There was a general consensus that personal tutors are generally more suited towards academic issues and career advice; emotional issues should not be under their responsibility as they generally have not received specialist training for pastoral care.

- Signposting could be better implemented, as some students were not aware of the existence of support structures such as [Extenuating Circumstances (ECs)](#) or [Statements of Reasonable Adjustments (SoRAs)](#), and procedures for these until late into their course.

- Students can be assigned personal tutors who have no relation to their course, even sometimes coming from outside UCL. This limits their effectiveness in academic support or career advice.

    o Members generally agreed that personal tutors should at least be based at UCL.

    o A member proposed a system where students are able to choose their personal tutor on the basis of their field, depending on which career students wish to enter.

- Different faculties reassign personal tutors at varying intervals. Some students have the same tutor for the entirety of their programme, whilst other students have a new tutor every term.

- Different faculties have varying levels of success with their systems. Students from the Medical Sciences Faculty generally are quite content.

- There should be more structure in meetings, and there should be more guidance for tutors to help structure conversations between tutors and students. A system similar to the Transition Mentor framework could be incorporated for this.

- Some students have minimal contact with their tutor, and a student thought that the system needs to be more strict and needs to enforce meetings in order to stop students from minimally engaging with their tutor.

- Students should be able to receive academic feedback and guidance on their work from their personal tutors. However, some students felt that tutors should instead signpost resources.

    o Relating to this, members of the Zone were generally unaware that the [Academic Communication Centre (ACC)](#) was available to all. This could be made more clear.

- It would be good if UCL could implement a personal mentor for those on PhD programmes.

KW summed up the general consensus of the room:

- Personal tutors should be used purely for academic-related queries

- Pastoral care can be moved towards either [Student Support and Wellbeing (SSW)](#) or more 'local', departmental resources such as [Student Advisers](#)

Finally, KW said she would follow up on the discussions held in the meeting. The Chair, SC thanked her for coming to the Zone to deliver her talk.

5. Matters for Discussion – Presence of Faculty Reps

Edward (Rong) Zhou (EZ), Faculty of Engineering UG Rep, discussed the presence of Faculty Reps:

- In the Engineering Faculty at least, students generally do not engage with their Reps.

- Most do not even know who their Course Reps are, and what their role is.

- This makes it difficult for any meaningful change to be made.

- Because of the lack of student-to-Rep connection, staff do not take Reps seriously as they are not substantially representing any students.

- The system is based on a 'chain model', which escalates (in increasing order) from Course Reps, to Departmental Reps, to Faculty Reps. However, this chain is easily broken at multiple places, due to a variety of reasons which can include passive Reps not doing their job.

- Therefore, there should be discussion about making Reps more 'representative' and present.

EZ asked for members' thoughts on this. Members discussed two topics, which were Rep-to-student communication and vice-versa:

Rep-to-Student Communication:

- The lack of access to the student mailbox makes the job more difficult, and it would be nice if there was a single email address that students could message for any concerns or queries.

- Moreover, it would be good if Faculty Reps had access to mailing lists so that information can be directly communicated to students rather than having to 'drip-feed' this down through the chain of command, which is easily broken.

  o This system already exists in the Bartlett Faculty and the Faculty of Medical Sciences, but the latter would appreciate a dedicated mailbox for this purpose.

- Some Reps may not engage because they do not feel supported by academics.

Student-to-Rep Communication

- In order to better publicise Reps and increase awareness, several suggestions were offered:

    o A 'pyramid'-type diagram showing the chain of command can be posted in prominent locations, such as on websites or in departmental common rooms.

    o However, some students thought that only the most relevant level of Representative should be should in order to avoid confusion amongst students and reduce bureaucracy – in most cases, this would be the immediate Course Rep.

    o Another member thought that publicising Reps should be partly the responsibility of their respective departments. For example, Reps could be advertised on Moodle.

    o Introducing this information in different formats, such as Reels, would be nice

    o Transition Mentors could distribute this knowledge to students.

- The lack of participation from students towards Reps, and especially regarding elections and voting, could be addressed by holding key events on Induction Days when student participation would be the highest.

    o However, there was some concern as many Course Reps end up staying in their role for the rest of their programme – there is no real election every year.

- KW said that it would be good if the role of a 'Student Experience Staff' could be created, who would contact the relevant people on behalf of students.

There was much debate amongst the Zone members, so this discussion will be continued at a later opportunity. **Action: Discuss this further**

EZ gave a summary of the discussion, then thanked members for their feedback. He finally added that there needs to be more awareness about Faculty Reps and their role is in dealing with Departmental and Course Representatives.

6. Matters for Discussion – PhDConnect

Yasmin Garcia-Sterling (YGS), Research Students' Officer, introduced PhDConnect to Zone members:
- A brief introduction was delivered, explaining that it is a networking scheme for PhD students to foster collaboration and conversations across disciplines. This originated in the Bartlett Faculty, but is now expanding to other areas. Some activities done by PhDConnect include:
    o Speed Research 'Dating'
    o PhDeets, an event for Masters students to network with PhD students and learn more about the application process. This is held in February every year.

7. **Matters for Discussion – Student Officer Review**

JSW gave a talk on the Union's currently ongoing Student Officer Review (SOR), which aims to optimise the delivery of the Student Officer system in order to best fulfil its purpose, which is to:

- Represent marginalised identities or common interest amongst students

- Form vibrant and inclusive communities to promote a greater sense of belonging

- Advocate and influence positive changes within the Union

As a summary of actions in the SOR:

- Largely keep the operation of [Liberation Networks](#) the same, but rename them to 'Community Networks'. Moreover, each of their corresponding Student Officers will be renamed to 'Presidents'.
- The Disabled, People of Colour, and Women's Students' Networks will have a committee below them, consisting of a Welfare Officer and a Treasurer. There will be an option for Presidents to add their own committee roles, such as Events Officer or Secretary.
- This is the same for the LGBTQ+ Network, but there will be two Co-Presidents, each responsible for either Sexuality or Trans related issues.
- The Research Students' Network will be kept the same, but Faculty Reps will be used more.

Questions asked:

Is it still possible to job-share?

> Yes, job-shares are still possible and it is possible for the Networks to be run by co-presidents.

Won't Presidents have too much workload, managing a committee on top of all their usual tasks?

> It is hoped that in future, Presidents will be able to delegate work to fully formed Policy Zones.

Will there be someone in charge of the Community Network Presidents?

> Yes, this will be the relevant [Sabbatical Officers](#).

Concerns raised by Zone members:

The title of 'President' makes the job seem like a society, so people might not take the role seriously.

> JSW said the name is not a firm idea and is still open to suggestions. Some ideas were given for an alternative name, which included keeping it as 'Officer'; 'Head Officer'; 'Chair'. The latter was generally well-received by Zone members.

Not many people might want to be on the committee because it is a large voluntary workload.

> JSW said that this is something that needs to be addressed. Some Zone members thought that an incentive would be beneficial to attract people towards these roles and keep them in the role once the workload gets tough.
>
> However, the Chair (SC) notified members that due to Union Charity rules, students may only be paid for two years as an officer – this would mean that if paid Presidents chose to go on to become Sabbatical Officers, they would not be paid for the full duration of their work. There was considerable discussion regarding this.

Introducing a committee might involve a large amount of unnecessary bureaucracy.

> Some members disagreed with this sentiment. For example, the People of Colour Students' Officers Rawleka Wilson (RW) and Rachel Lim (RL) said the workload would be unmanageable if there were no additional people to assist in the role. Moreover, it was opined that this space has not been established yet, so it potentially could be highly effective.

A general question was asked by Anji Suri (AS), Trans Officer, about how newly-elected Officers do not have a significant degree of contact with the previous Officer. This means that settling in the new role becomes quite difficult. JSW said to AS that he can put them into contact.

The Zone was adjourned at this point due to time constraints. JSW thanked members for attending.

Minutes approved as a true and accurate record	
Chair:	Shaban Chaudhary, Education Officer
Signature:	Shaban Chaudhary
Date:	12/12/2023