



Impact Report

2022-23

where **more** happens



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Introduction

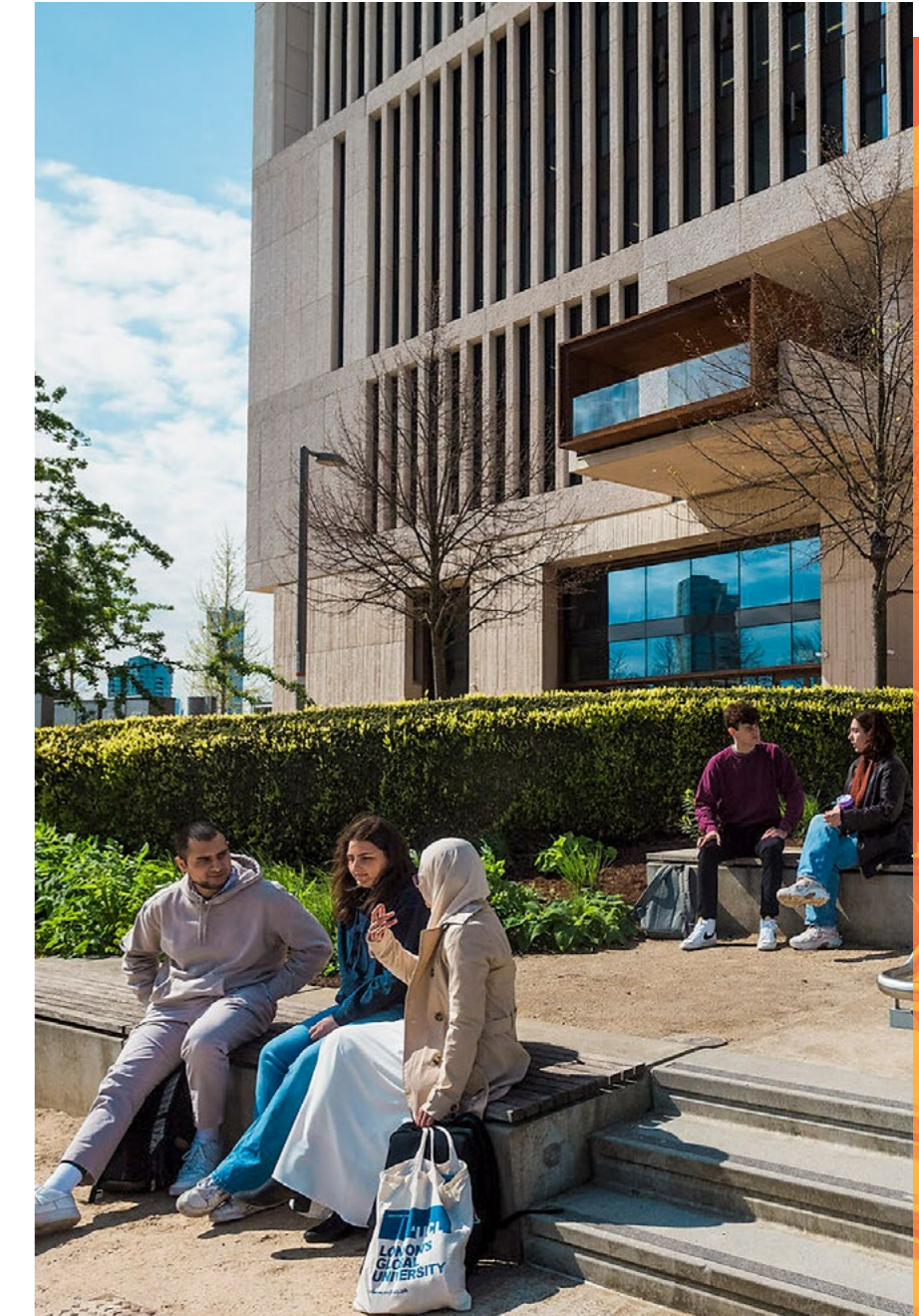
Over the past year we've helped tens of thousands of students to feel welcome at UCL, to make new friends, build skills and confidence, and foster a stronger sense of community and belonging. In line with our vision to ensure an excellent student experience and to become one of the best student organisations in the world, we have continued to expand our work for students. Over the past year we achieved our highest ever level of engagement in our sports, student societies, elections and many other programmes.

We have also launched flagship new services, including opening two new convenience stores which are providing great value meals on our two campuses, as well as additional student employment opportunities. Our student satisfaction has risen from 18th in the Russell Group in 2018 to 7th today, and we are continuing to modernise and improve the work of the organisation to meet rising levels of demand. We were also rated in the top 5 Students' Unions in the Student Crowd best SU's survey 2023. The only Union in the top 20 without a proper SU building. Earlier this year, we were delighted to work with UCL to develop and launch UCL's new Student Life Strategy. This sets a compelling vision for students' extra and co-curricular experience for the next five years. This will see thousands more opportunities for students to get involved in activities that will enable them to make the most of their time at university, build skills to support their future careers and create memories that will last a lifetime. We are looking forward to working with colleagues from across UCL to bring this exciting plan to fruition, starting in September.



As well as experiencing successes, this year has been a tough one for many of our members, with challenging cost-of-living pressures and ongoing industrial action affecting their university experience. This has come on top of significant disruption to their studies during Covid. We've had an important role to play in supporting our members, during this challenging time. We've been proud to launch the largest hardship support programme of any students' union in the UK, made possible by additional grant funding from UCL, and have continued to develop our programme of low cost and high impact activities, to help students make the most of their time at university.

Whilst our programmes continue to grow and develop, facilities for the students' union and for sport remain a major challenge, with our facilities being the worst of any major UK university. We are pleased that UCL has recognised this, and we are working with UCL colleagues on developing a business case for a new building for the Union and new sport facilities. These will be essential to delivering the quality of social and extracurricular experience that our students increasingly expect and need.



130 Years of the Union

2023 marks 130 years since the first version of a Students' Union at UCL came into being. On the third of June 1893, UCL's Council approved the formation of the Men's Union Society for 'the promotion of social intercourse and of the means of recreation, physical and mental, of the students of the University College, and the financial success of students' clubs', and in September 1893 the first students joined the society, starting a 130-year journey to the students' union we all know today. Putting students first since 1893. This is the journey that has taken us from our founding to today...

1893

The Men's Union Society was established under the leadership of Professor Edward Shafer. Its goal was "the promotion of social intercourse and of the means of recreation, physical and mental, of the students of University College, and the financial successes of students' clubs". It was one of the first Unions of its kind. A year's membership cost £1 and 1 shilling.

1897

The Union is given its first spaces on campus with three rooms in the North Cloisters including what's now known as the Haldane Room.



1897

The Women's Union is formed, with Rosa Morison, the Superintendent of Women Students at its head.

The Men's Union acquires a sportsground at Acton, securing a ground had been a key founding aim of the Men's Union.



1900

The wooden Phineas statue is stolen from a local tobacconists as students celebrate the lifting of siege of Ladysmith in the Boar War, later to be adopted as the UCL student mascot.

1903

The Union elects its first student president; John Farcombe.

1905

The Union persuades UCL Council to suspend lectures on Wednesday afternoons to enable students to participate in sport and other activities.

1906

The Union's first drama production takes place – The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde, raising £25 for the New Union Athletic Ground Fund.

1907

The Union buys new sportsgrounds for both men and women in Perivale.



1938

The Union moves its sportsground to a much larger site at Shenley.

1940

Destruction of UCL's Great Hall and associated rooms in the Blitz means the Union loses its main space for student performances, activities and social events.

1945

The Union starts the Student Healthcare Association, which, until the birth of the NHS, ensured all students received free health care. The first university initiative of its kind.

1946

The Union Society and the Women's Union combine. The Union, as it is today, is formed.

The first edition of Pi, at the time, a student newspaper rather than the magazine it is today. It was named Pi in reference to Dr David Pye, UCL's Provost 1943-51 who supported its development. Famous editors include Bel Mooney and Jonathan Dimbleby.

1947

The first Union bar is opened.

1948

The Union's Film Society is founded.

1951

UCL student opera is formed, the start of the most successful student opera group in the country.

1958

Shenley Pavilion is opened with The Foundation Games. They're played in a blizzard, but UCL beat Kings 15-9.



1959

The Union moves into 25 Gordon Street on a temporary basis whilst plans for a new Students' Union were to be developed.



1965

The Union elects Nelson Mandela as its Honorary President and founded the South African Scholarship Appeal, whereby UCL would waive tuition fees for one Black South African student per year. The Union, in turn, raised funds to cover the student's living costs.

Clement Attlee, Prime Minister 1945-51 speaks at the Union's Foundation Week debate.

1968

Union President John Shipley secures places for two student representatives on UCL Council.

1969

In protest of the Conservative Association inviting Enoch Powell as guest of honour to their annual dinner, the Union and the College devote the day's events and lectures to the study of racism.

The 'Central Collegiate Building' home of the Bloomsbury Theatre opens with space for Union activities in the floors above the theatre. Students are disappointed when the plans that had originally been for a Students' Union building were amended to build a theatre and rowing tank. Two further buildings on Gordon Street were planned with new Union sports and social facilities, but these were not completed due to lack of funds.



1971

UCL students are among the 20,000 protesters to bring West End traffic to a standstill demonstrating against the Government's proposals on students' unions. Thatcher's proposal would have significantly restricted students' union's autonomy and finances. After huge student support for the campaign, the proposal was dropped.



1972

Formation of The Lesbian and Gay Society, our first form of representation for LGBT students. They successfully lobbied the National Union of Students to run a Gay Rights Campaign.

1974

Students persuade UCL to give them representation on the Academic Board of the university.

The position of Union President is abolished to make way for a new elected officer structure.

1979

The Union leads the way on calling for UCL to take more responsibility for students' safety. After a spate of assaults on campus, the Union demands that male and female security guards be put on key parts of campus; a first for UK universities.

1989

Plans are drawn up for a new Students' Union building between 25 Gordon Street and the Bloomsbury Theatre. But the project is not prioritised for UCL capital funding due to the proximity of the University of London Union and the idea is shelved again.

1990

The Union secures additional space in 25 Gordon Street, opening Gordon's Café on the ground floor of the building.

1991

The Union secures an entertainments venue and bar in UCL's Windeyer Building, this was demolished in 2011 with the Union losing its only large events space.

1998

The Union funds a large proportion of the costs of building a new sports hall shared between UCL students, pupils at South Camden Community School (now Regent High School) and the local community.

2003

Students and staff campaign strongly in opposition to the proposed merger between UCL and Imperial College. The merger was later abandoned.



2007

Students campaign for UCL to divest in the arms trade placed fake tombstones in the main quad with the words '1,000 people every day are killed by arms'. UCL would later form an ethical investment committee and divest from arms.

2011

The Union moves into the lower floors of the Lewis's Building with the opening of the George Farha Café, Richard Mully's Basement Bar and Huntley Pub as new student facilities.

2012

UCL reveals plans to knock down social housing in East London to make way for a new campus. Students work with the Union to mount a campaign against the proposal and successfully save the Carpenter's Estate.

2013

The Union elects its first BME Students' Officer.

2019

Refurbishment of Phineas Bar and Union offices in 25 Gordon St.

The Union plays a key role in UCL's decision to divest from fossil fuels and in UCL's Eugenics Inquiry leading to the de-naming of UCL buildings linked to Eugenicians.

2020

The Union successfully moves to digital service provision during the Coronavirus pandemic, with thousands of students still able to access services online.

The Union persuades UCL to provide space for it to open a new student convenience store near the centre of the campus.



2021

The Union runs its largest ever Welcome programme and the UK's largest student election, and reaches 19,000 members of its clubs and societies.

The UCL Volunteering Service is officially integrated into the Students' Union.

2022

UCL's consultation for its new strategy include the option for major investment in a Students' Union building and sports facilities.

2023

UCL backs the Students' Union to transform the student experience and funds a new strategy for student life...

2022-23 in Numbers

- We supported 393 clubs and societies, with 31 newly affiliated this year. These student-led groups attracted 21,347 members, a new record, with 42% of all UCL students having joined a club or society this year.
- Our student satisfaction was at 7th place in the Russell Group, which shows student satisfaction with how we represent their academic interests, up from 18th place in 2018. We were rated in the top 5 Students' Unions in the Student Crowd 'Best SU's Survey 2023.
- 7,497 students engaged with TeamUCL, the home of sport at UCL, with almost 300 students participating in our new intramural leagues. We also won the British Universities and College's Sport National Award for Diversity and Inclusion.
- We trained 8,195 students to be Active Bystanders, helping to prevent harassment and sexual misconduct. This year we offered both online and in-person workshops. We also worked with academic departments to deliver bespoke training.
- We celebrated the hard work and progress of all the clubs, societies and individuals who make a huge impact on students' lives at our annual awards ceremonies in June. This year, we received 1,098 nominations, our highest number ever.
- Our Sabbatical Officers delivered in-person induction talks to new students. 'UCL 101' Welcome induction talks in the Bloomsbury Theatre introduced thousands of students to the Students' Union..
- Our café staff have served more than 200,000 hot drinks, toasted more than 30,000 paninis and served more than 31,000 croissants across the year. Our bars have sold 650,000+ drinks, including 127,000 alcohol-free and 24,000 cocktails.



- We supported a wide range of student fundraising activities including a UNICEF - #UniteWithUkraine Fundraising Concert. Following the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria in February, our Turkish Society raised more than £13,000 and collected vital supplies for those affected. They made such an impact that UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (pictured opposite) heard of their work and came to show his support to the appeal.
- We expanded our commercial operation, opening two new shops – the Bloomsbury Shop in the Wilkin's Building and the Pool Street Shop at the UCL East campus. Since opening we've sold 15,000+ meal deals. We've also introduced a wide range of international foods to meet our students' needs.
- Together with our student-led groups, we hosted more than 620 events during Welcome Week, up from 523 in 2021.
- We supported 2,282 student volunteers throughout the year, working on projects such as supporting homeless people, working with refugees, supporting young people to learn to read, plus a wide range of other community and environmental efforts.
- Seven of our student groups were recognised nationally at the National Societies and Volunteering Awards, with Education for Choice society coming runner up for the Community Award.
- 2,391 students have taken part in Project Active classes, with 57% of attendees from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background and 44% previously classing themselves as 'inactive.'
- 6,539 students have engaged in our arts programme, joining an ArtsUCL society and exploring, performing and developing everything from musical theatre to opera to journalism.
- Our Social Hackathon's and the Community Challenge proved as popular as ever with 156 students working in partnership with 16 community partners to develop solutions to real-life challenges that the organisations were facing. Volunteers addressed challenges around volunteer recruitment, donor engagement, marketing, impact measurement, data analysis, sustainability, equality, diversity and inclusion and more.



- We launched the Russell Group Students' Union Cost of Living Report working with all of the Russell Group Students' Unions, representing 700,000+ students to produce the largest study on financial pressures facing students to date.
- **Over 300 students competed in our Varsity sports competition this year, across 27 sporting events, with over 2,000 students coming along to support the events as spectators. London is Purple once again after we reclaimed the trophy beating arch-rivals, Kings, 17-12. the largest study on financial pressures facing students to date.**
- We've taken 'TeamUCL Against Hate' to new heights; training over 60 sports clubs on how they can provide an inclusive environment for all club members.
- **We ran the largest and most successful election ever at UCL, with 10,400 voters in the Leadership Race and a 20.9% turnout – the highest number of voters of any Students' Union in the UK for the third year running.**
- Our Volunteering team worked with 350 community partners to provide a range of one-off, flexible and long-term volunteering opportunities that enabled 1,502 students from across 71 UCL departments to volunteer.
- **194 students participated in the Community Research Initiative for Students, writing their dissertations in partnership with local community organisations. This is a 33% increase compared to last year. We've also achieved a 25% increase in student-community partnerships.**
- Our Advice Service supported 1,602 students, up from 1,152 last year. There was a 60% increase in overseas students seeking support and a 105% increase in support for PGT and PGR students.
- **We recruited and supported a network of more than 1,839 Academic Reps across every department at UCL who dedicated themselves to improving education at UCL.**
- Our cafés have been paving the way in sustainability. We introduced crockery and increased the single-use cup charge to 50p to encourage the uptake of reusables, with around 18% of customers using reusable cups. We've saved almost 200KG of single-use plastic through the scheme this year.



Strategic Priorities

In 2022, we launched our ambitious three-year strategic plan ‘Where More Happens’. This was based on extensive consultation with our students, staff and UCL colleagues. The strategy maps the next stage of our journey towards our long term ambition to:

“create an outstanding experience for UCL students and to be one of the best Students’ Unions in the UK and the world.”

In achieving this, we see our role as building a vibrant and empowered student community with real influence at UCL and beyond – one that enables students to enjoy their time at UCL, pursue their passions, see the world in new ways and develop the skills and experience to change the world for the better.

Our new strategy has really raised the bar, setting out our ambitions for the next three years as we move through the Union’s 130th birthday and look towards UCL’s bicentenary in 2026. Our vision and mission will be achieved by delivering impact in the following four strategic themes – Effective Influence, Amazing Experience, Vibrant and Inclusive Community and Excellent Union.

Our Impact Reports during the life cycle of ‘Making More Happen’ will give our members, and other stakeholders, top-level updates on the progress and outcomes of our annual priorities in these four key areas of focus. Below, we share a selection of impacts made in each priority area so far.



Priority One: Effective Influence

As the representative body for all UCL students, the Union has one of the largest collective student voices in the UK. We’re focused on making our influence effective and impactful; achieving positive change for our members. We want students to be true partners in the development of UCL as well as being influential voices in the wider community and at a national level.

Student voice is at the heart of everything we do, and we are making excellent progress in this area. Our Leadership Race, held in March 2023, is our annual election for students to elect next year’s team of officers. This year was our biggest yet, with 10,400 students participating, for the third year running the highest number at any UK university. The increase in voters, up from 10,219 last year, plus a 20.9% turnout, is a huge testament to the hard work of student representatives and leaders of clubs and societies who worked tirelessly to help make the academic year a success.

We have amazing student leaders at all levels – from our Sabbatical Officers who lead the Union to the 1,839 Academic Reps who work in partnership with staff across their department and faculty to improve the experience of students. If this year has shown us one thing it’s that we make the most impact when we support our students as leaders. For example, we have empowered and supported Reps to take on ‘Language Rep’ roles and they have now facilitated conversations in up to six different languages. Other Reps have conducted primary research to better understand student perceptions of industrial action, while some have attended workshops and formed their own departmental societies.

Our Rep Elections in October were hugely successful, too. These part-time and voluntary roles can often be a student’s first step into a leadership role. 5,880 students voted, more than double the previous year. Students are more satisfied with their reps than ever, and submitted a record number of nominations for the Academic Rep of the Year awards.

Marianna, an Academic Rep, is an excellent example of how our reps are able to influence key decisions in their departments whilst gaining skills and experience.

Marianna says: **“Being a Rep has not only given me a chance to gain friendships, but also helped me to develop leadership and public speaking skills. Discussing concerns on the same level with the academics, I have felt a sense of community and belonging.**

Our Policy Zones, introduced in 2019, are meetings in which elected student representatives discuss issues, projects, campaigns and propose policies. They continue to provide us with direction and feedback to influence decisions in the Union, across UCL and further afield. This year, our Zones were active discussing issues of concern to students and passing a number of new Union policies.



Priority One: **Effective Influence** CONT.

We held two all-student votes in response to student policies. In November 2022 more than 6,000 students voted on whether to support staff taking industrial action. 68% of students voted in support. In May 2023 we held an all-student vote on our affiliation to NUS UK, with a majority of students voted to remain affiliated.

Officers and elected students have also helped to shape our environmental policies throughout the year. The Union’s Sustainability Ambassadors have used their voice to encourage other students to think about more sustainable options, whilst highlighting change that we have made in our outlets. For example, in April we increased the single-use cup charge to 50p and added crockery as a dine-in option in our cafes.

Harper Taylor-Hanson, our Trans Officer, has been another student who has achieved great things this year, and has encouraged others to create fun and safe spaces for the community to come together.

Harper tells us: **“As the Trans Officer I am responsible for representing the needs of the trans community at UCL through zones in the Students’ Union. I have voted in favour of policies that I believe would benefit our community and raised issues that would be overlooked without trans insight.”**

We have played a vital role in amplifying the student voice at UCL East, UCL’s new campus on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. In September, we experienced a moment in history with the opening of UCL East where we welcomed 700 new students, who were joined by those living in One Pool Street accommodation, to the brand new campus at the Queen Elizabeth Park in Stratford. Our East campus offers a number of exciting new degrees and there have been many faculties running programmes this year, ranging from Population Health Sciences such as Global Business School for Health, to the Bartlett School, MAsc Global Urbanism.

Our UCL East Officers have been pivotal in ensuring the student voice is at the heart of decision making. They have used the UCL East Forum as a means to amplify the important issues, working alongside UCL who have provided updates, listened to students and made changes where possible. Over the course of the year, we have been able to help bring forward student feedback resulting in library opening hours increasing, a new computer cluster set-up, a laptop loan scheme starting, and dedicated classrooms provided for students to eat lunch on campus. All examples of positive student-led change. We have also produced our first UCL East Academic Experience Survey, which will become one of our annual reports. This report provides a snapshot of the academic experience for UCL East students with some useful recommendations about campus accessibility and reviewing course structures.



Priority Two: **Amazing Experience**

We want all our students to have an amazing experience at UCL outside of the classroom, with the best extra-curricular offer in the UK. We want our students to have fantastic opportunities to pursue their interests and passions, with opportunities to learn new skills, try new things, grow their experience and confidence, and develop new friendships.

For many students their first introduction to the Students’ Union is during Welcome fortnight, which is our big opportunity to show off all the amazing experiences and extra-curricular activities available to all students. For the first time since 2019, we delivered a fully in-person Welcome events programme, hosting more than 600 events. More than 14,000 students attended our two-day Welcome Fair and over 6,800 students joined our big nights out across London. The majority of our events have been free, and 86% of our Welcome events were alcohol-free. For the first time during Welcome, we hosted a series of one-off volunteering opportunities with our community partners such as One Housing.

Societies and clubs are the best way for students to have an amazing experience outside of the classroom. This year 21,347 students joined a sports club or student society, the highest ever number at UCL. In total, we supported 393 clubs and societies, with 31 newly affiliated this year. From Hiking Club (our largest club with 1,828 members) to the Anime Society, we have something for everyone.

Being a part of a society, doesn’t just help students make new friends and increase a sense of wellbeing, it can also teach them something new and help them grow in confidence.

Nell Wedgwood, a third-year student speaks of the skills she’s gained through extra-curricular activities: **“I really think that my work with Pi has been invaluable. It’s given me more confidence: in my writing, in my leadership abilities and in networking.”**



Priority Two: **Amazing Experience** CONT.

We've also seen record numbers of students getting involved in sport this year. 7,497 students engaged with our sports programmes.

And this year's Varsity sports competition was bigger than ever. Over 300 students competed across 27 matches, for which over 2,150 students supported as spectators. UCL took back the trophy from Kings, winning 17-12. We had a lot of firsts, RUMS Rugby played their first Varsity ever, and we held our first Wheelchair Basketball Varsity match.

We've continued our work improving the inclusivity of our sports programme, running an outstanding disability sports programme, with TeamUCL winning the British Universities and Colleges Sports National Award for Diversity and Inclusion. This means we have been recognised for our sector-leading approach to embed diversity and inclusion in everything we do. Our sports leaders are also making real impact in terms of broadening awareness of more niche sports. For example, the Calisthenics club, have this year seen great success, winning Club of the Year and the Shield for Most Improved Cup or Team at our annual Union Awards. Alongside running the club, Demetri, Calisthenics President, co-founded the University Calisthenics Association, and organised the first University Calisthenics Competition in March. Held in collaboration with Steel Warriors, an anti-knife crime charity, the competition saw competitors from 35 universities.

Demetri says: ***“The Calisthenics club has been one of the highlights of my final year at university. Not only has it given me an amazing community of supportive athletes, it's also helped to improve my physical and mental health.”***

It's not just competitive sport that we've seen growth. Project Active, our no commitment, no experience necessary, no judgement programme of professionally run exercise classes has seen great success, engaging with 2,391 students – 51% of those studying at postgraduate level. The programme has been taken up by 44% of those who previously classed themselves as 'inactive,' with 57% of female participants from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background. We held Bloomsbury Fitness 'Girls Night In' events. These were an opportunity for students to try out the gym and be guided by female instructors during our women's only hours, of which 246 students attended.



We've been busy building a fantastic events programme at UCL East too, hosting two UCL 5K runs at the Lee Valley VeloPark on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. 522 students and staff took part, and found it a positive, welcoming, and inclusive experience. It was a great opportunity to showcase UCL East and to support with community building. We were grateful to the Running, Athletics and Cross-Country Club who provided pacers and marshals for both events.

Many of our sports teams have taken their passion for sport into a volunteering project of their own – and the Union has been there to support them. This year we provided support and training which enabled 162 project leaders to deliver 36 student-led volunteering projects, with a further 19 in development. In total, 1,059 students volunteered their time to make a difference as part of a student-led project. Volunteers from 15 sports clubs and societies channelled their passion into delivering activities in the local community, including UCL Lightning Cheerleading Club. The Club have been teaching cheerleading to secondary school children, giving them the opportunity to get active, have fun and enjoy a pursuit that is typically expensive and difficult to access.



Priority Two: **Amazing Experience** CONT.

We've supported 884 students through Student-Led Volunteering projects, too. Green Walkers have run litter picking walks in the area surrounding UCL, Zero Food Waste have been collecting unsold food from Union and UCL food outlets and donating it to homeless shelters and Project Impactive have built accessibility equipment for people with disabilities.

It's clear that our student volunteers have made real impact this year. Despite the cost-of-living, and all the pressures students face, there is still an appetite to do more, to step up and support those in need.

One of those students, Chloe Chan, a volunteer for Ronald McDonald House Charities, won Volunteer of the Year at our annual Volunteering Awards in June.

A representative from the charity said: "Chloe volunteers for us every week without fail. This time commitment is invaluable and impossible to put a price on. She may not realise the impact she has made, but I don't know what I'd do without her. Her volunteering has led to more income for the charity and therefore has a direct impact on the families we support."

ArtsUCL has also grown significantly. We had a record-breaking year with 6,339 students participating in our arts programme. There have been 12 student-led Bloomsbury Theatre productions, from King Charles III from the Drama Society to Breathe by the Dance Society, with 9,391 people attending shows.

Mars, Drama Society member and director of a play in the Bloomsbury Theatre, speaks of the value of being a part of ArtsUCL: "You get to experience something that would happen in a professional setting. We have students who direct, write, produce and executive-produce – and that allows you to experience the arts before going into it as a career."

As we move into 2023-24, the Union is delighted to be partnering with UCL to deliver the new Student Life Strategy that will help us to deliver a step change in the quantity and quality of extra and co-curricular experiences that we can offer.



Priority Three: **Vibrant & Inclusive Community**

We aim to build, support and energise our diverse student community, making it stronger and foster a greater sense of belonging for every student. Our spaces are at the centre of the student community at UCL and somewhere where our members can access support and advice when they are in need. We want to be a global students' union, where all our students have opportunities to see and experience the world in new ways by engaging across our diverse student community, and we want our students to get the most out of living and studying in London.

UCL is a global university, home to 50,000 students from more than 150 countries, so it's vitally important that we help as many as possible feel a sense of community in their new home. We do that in a number of ways, firstly through our excellent programmes and initiatives to support all members of our community, such as our vibrant Women's, LGBTQ+, Trans, BAME, Disabled Students, Parents and Carers, and Mature Students' networks.

This year, over Welcome Week, the Union's Print Room Café was host to Welcome Breakfasts for five of these networks – positioning the Union at the heart of the campus community. These breakfasts helped to encourage those students who identified as part of those groups to meet up with others and feel at home at UCL. We hosted picnics, games nights, socials and more, helping to create an inclusive and welcoming community at UCL.

Our Equity and Inclusion Unit has continued to be active throughout the year – holding an event to mark International Women's Day, activities to mark International Transgender Day of Visibility, and a collaboration with the Volunteering team to run an event to help students learn more about volunteering for charities that support women. This year has also seen a renewed commitment to help Student Officers to host events, observe history months and suggest policies. Each history month and community-related observation has seen regular opportunities to socialise with coffee mornings and book clubs, get hands-on with crafternoons and raise any community concerns directly to the Union with the Equity and Inclusion Officer's history month drop-ins.



Priority Three: **Vibrant and Inclusive Community** CONT.

We now have 32 Departmental Societies, which bridge the gap between students' academic and 'extra-curricular' lives. At UCL East we have been building a strong student community, along with developing our events programme on site. This year we hosted a successful Student Support Services Fair, Volunteering Drop-Ins, a GBSH International Picnic and a UCL East Christmas Party.

We have also run regular Project Active swimming, yoga and pilates sessions. As a Union we also made our mark on campus in a physical sense, opening the Pool Street Shop, a new convenience store, for students and the public. We know just how important it is that everyone living and studying nearby has a local convenience store they can pop into for their essentials, and we're now the closest and most convenient shop around. Over the course of the year we have continued to focus on making our shop as attractive as possible to students and staff, introducing a zero-food waste section, an amazing lunchtime meal deal offer and varied opening hours to suit busy student schedules. Sustainability and affordability have been top priorities for us, along with an excellent international product range to suit the huge range of student nationalities living and studying at UCL East.

It has also been important for us to develop our services and activities at the site, and for the students there to see us as the organisation that helps them build their student community. Our team have been working hard to support students with accommodation issues, organising a programme of UCL East social and extracurricular events, and working with UCL colleagues to gain access to improved facilities.

Our fantastic commercial spaces, which provide the space and opportunity for students to make friends and relax, have also been host to a number of postgraduate friendly events throughout the year. With around 55% of postgraduate students at UCL, we launched a new programme

2023 students described us as:

Inclusive	Active
Helpful	Fun
Diverse	



of activity this year, specifically for this demographic. We held a programme of social events in our Institute Bar, coffee meet-ups in the George Farha Café at Bloomsbury, as well as trips out bowling and to the theatre. Additionally, our merchandise shop, the Hanger, has been incredibly successful.

Our commercial operations have grown too, with the opening of our two new shops. With more space, we have been able to provide an even more amazing experience for our students. The Bloomsbury Shop in the Wilkins Building has provided an affordable place on campus for students to pick up a good value lunch or snack. Our £3.50 meal deal, of which we've sold more than 15,000 since opening, is cheaper than our biggest competitor, Tesco, on nearby Tottenham Court Road. We've invested in our spaces too, replacing the seating inside George Farha Café, and adding more seats and planters outside the Print Room Café. Our cafes are flourishing, and are at the heart of the student community - we served more than 376,000+ customers this year, a jump from 250,000 last year.

Alongside this, we have fostered a sense of belonging for students through the international and intercultural events and projects that we host. This year we developed a new programme of major cultural celebrations. In December, we held our fantastic Winter Arts Festival, featuring stage performances, DJs and dances. The UCL Chinese Students and Scholars Association also held a Temple Fair in January in the Main Quad to celebrate the Year of the Rabbit with food, games and cultural showcases. Crucially, our recent Brand Effectiveness and Perceptions Research shows that our work in this area is making impact. Unprompted, the majority of the 4,500+ students surveyed described the Union in a positive light, with 88% describing us as 'Inclusive,' 87% describing us as 'democratic' and 80% 'community building.'

With our diverse community and the cost of living so high, it's vital that these opportunities have been available to all. Thanks to generous financial support from UCL, our Participation Fund, which current UCL students can apply for to help enable them to take part in clubs, societies and extra-curricular activities and events has been crucially important this year. We've awarded £21,779.93 – a 30% increase in uptake on last year – funding club and society membership fees, travel expenses, and specialist kit and equipment.



Priority Three: **Vibrant and Inclusive Community** CONT.

Indeed, there is no doubt this has been a challenging year to be a student. The Cost-of-Living Crisis has shaped much of our work and is an issue which has affected everyone, especially students who are already financially stretched. With inflation at a 40-year high, the average rent 16.1% higher than a year ago and the cost of buying food and basic necessities increasing every week, we knew from the start of the year how vitally important it was that students felt supported. Over the summer our Sabbatical Officers worked with UCL to establish new and expanded support for those facing financial hardship. In September we launched a Cost-of-Living Hub, bringing together all the advice and practical support from across UCL into one place. Students could find information such as how to loan laptops and how to access guidance about emergency accommodation, alongside financial advice and links to university services. As anticipated, and in line with national trends, enquiries to our Advice Service increased considerably as the year progressed. In January, we led national research into the experience of students during the cost-of-living crisis. Working alongside all the Russell Group students' unions, we represented 700,000+ students and produced the largest study on financial pressures facing students to date.

The subsequent Russell Group Students' Union Cost-of-Living Report received national coverage and revealed a deeply disturbing picture of the struggles that students across the country face daily. We learnt that 1 in 4 students across the UK regularly go without food and essentials and that many students are below the UK poverty line. With these figures in mind, as a Union we knew we had to reaffirm our priorities and endeavour to help students at risk of financial hardship. We launched new and expanded support. Thanks to new grant funding from UCL, we were able to significantly expand our hardship support. We awarded £110,714.00 through the Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund, which helps students overcome temporary hardship problems during their studies. This was almost 20 times the amount awarded the previous year.

“The Sarah Douglas Hardship fund helped me (and my family) get through an incredibly difficult time. The grant helped me to maintain my financial contributions to my household for a couple of months, including groceries (...) and my rent contribution. This helped to take off a lot of financial pressure, allowing me to continue studying, and giving me some time to get back on my feet.”



One in five students at top universities consider dropping out over cost of living



RussellGroupSUs @RussellGroupSUs · Mar 13
Read our report into the devastating impact the Cost of Living Crisis is having on students at Russell Group universities
russellgroupstudentsunions.org/news/students-...



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We also awarded £21,000+ through the Participation Fund, a pot of money that can enable students to take part in Students' Union clubs and societies as well as any other extra-curricular and co-curricular activities and £22,000+ through emergency grants which provide up to £150 straight into the bank account of those with immediate and urgent living expenses. Iris, a third-year biology student was one of those students in need. She says: ***“I needed an emergency grant because of my financial situation. It was related to the increase in the cost-of-living prices, and especially in my case I had a bill problem, a pretty big one, which is why I was struggling. I met an advisor who was very comprehensive and helpful and a few days later I had the grant.”***

Additionally, we were able to award almost £5,000 through our new Gender Expression Fund which is open to people experiencing feelings of stress and anxiety at the disconnect they feel between their gender and identity. Grants can be used to purchase gender affirming products, such as clothing, binders, packers and beauty products, as well as being put towards travel to medical or therapy appointments.

As the year continued, housing continued to be one of the biggest priorities for our student community – with the Advice Service seeing a 65% increase in students needing support with this. The majority of students needed support with looking for accommodation, contract advice – checking tenancy agreements and explaining what they mean – along with disrepair issues and problems with landlords and letting agents. In total, we helped almost 500 students with housing queries. Alongside the financial support, we continued to live by our promise of being better value than the high street when it came to our commercial offering. In November we introduced a brand-new menu in the George Farha Café featuring exceptionally low-cost breakfast and lunchtime meals to support students during the winter when inflation on food prices was escalating. This included 50p beans on toast, and a £2.50 pasta lunch. We provided 2,035 of the low-cost breakfasts and 2,268 lunches over the course of the year. We also made it a focus of our communications to highlight ways in which students could get the most from being on campus – for example improving signage in our outlets which highlighted where there were microwaves to heat up food brought in from home.

With the cost of being a student at an all-time high, finding part time work has of course been a priority for many UCL students. We employed 275 students across the Union to run our bars, cafes, gym and shops. We're a London Living Wage and this year, we brought in the recommended London Living Wage pay increase in February, earlier than required to put more money into our students' pockets.

As we look towards another academic year, the cost-of-living will remain a very real issue for our community. For UK students, the student maintenance loan is set to rise by only 2.8% for the 2023/2024 academic year, making them £1,523 worse off than the previous year once accounting for inflation. As a Union we will continue campaigning nationally for more support whilst continuously seeking new ways to make university life as accessible and fun as possible. We'll also continue to focus on empowering students to make decisions about money, so they know their rights and feel confident and prepared for the year ahead, with the launch of our new money and budgeting advice programme. This has also been a year where we have witnessed the strength of our student communities in times of difficulty. In February, when news broke of the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria, our Turkish Society mobilised their community, collaborated with other student groups, and started supporting fundraising efforts. Outside the Print Room Café the committee sold cakes and treats and collected more than £8,000 in two days. Thousands donated and helped to raise awareness – an incredible example of the UCL community stepping up to support one another in a time of crisis.

When the society began collecting vital supplies to send directly to those affected, their work was noticed by the UK Prime Minister who came to help pack boxes at the end of the day. The PM bought his own relief parcel, which he added to the collection before helping pack boxes. Eda Yildirimkaya, a committee member of Turkish Society, said: “It was a complete surprise: the Prime Minister just turned up and said ‘you are doing a great, great job – we really appreciate your efforts. He then asked about our friends and families back home and said his thoughts and feelings were with us at this time.”

We have also continued to support Ukrainian students this year, amid the ongoing war in Ukraine – with speeches and a quiet moment of reflection as we gathered in the Main Quad to mark the one-year anniversary of Russia's attack.

Priority Four: Excellent Union

The fourth aim in our strategy is to be an Excellent Students' Union. In essence, we want to be a fantastic, efficient, well-governed and effective charity, that is one of the best student organisations anywhere in the world, so that we can effectively represent and provide fantastic services for all our members.

As part of our mission to be an excellent union, it's important that we are able to communicate our work internally and externally – and our communications work has grown and developed in line with the growth of the Union. We have an excellent digital presence, with great in-house web development and systems capabilities. Our social media channels, website, and email newsletters, continue to be the most effective form of communicating with members, in fact our newsletters were read 3.7 million times this year. In the nine months of the academic year, from September to June, our content reached 243,526 students via Instagram. This is up from 194,704 in 2021-22. We have also launched a new fortnightly UCL East newsletter to all students at Here East and One Pool Street. Students tell us they feel well informed about our work, with positive feedback on our communications approach.

Our internal communication has also improved this year. At the start of the year we launched the intranet as a home for all staff information, including updates, policies, procedures, departmental reports and summaries, and staff contact lists. It brings

together a lot of information in one place that used to be spread across the shared drive, Slack and email into an online space, making one source for important information. The development was led by the Systems team but involved nearly every Union department contributing content across its 19 sections. Many Union staff visit it each week, and we're continuing to add more content to make it more indispensable for staff in future.

This year, Hamza, our Education Officer, was tasked with summarising the UCL student academic experience in just ten pages as part of the most recent Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) submission. The TEF is run by the Office for Students and assesses undergraduate student outcomes and student academic experience every four years. Universities can be awarded Bronze, Silver or Gold at the end of the process. To inform UCL's submission, we submitted a summary of student educational experience at UCL. We analysed 29 different reports and data sets, representing 30,000 data points and 26,000 students.



We also engaged with 400 current students through focus groups, workshops with Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps, surveys and engagement with our Policy Zone membership. Our research told us that students most enjoyed what they were being taught (module content) and how they were taught (teaching delivery). But they felt they needed to work with UCL on study workload and feedback they received (both the timing and quality of the feedback).

On a similar theme, our annual Student Priorities for Wellbeing Report, will provide invaluable feedback which will help us in our mission to be one of the best students' unions in the world. The report, which outlines the main issues that have affected student wellbeing during the academic year, considers various aspects of mental, social and physical wellbeing. This year we have drawn on data from over 20 different sources, including focus groups, interviews, internal UCL surveys, and external sector research and literature, with a focus on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on students' wellbeing. We will use the findings of this report to shape the direction of our work in this area next year. As well as being rated in the top 5 Students' Unions in the Student Crowd 'Best SU's Survey 2023,' we also reached 4th best UK university for clubs and societies compiled from 24,000+ of their student reviews.

Financially, we have continued to deliver a balanced budget and are in a strong financial position with a growing grant funding from UCL, and increases in income from our commercial services. In June we switched banking provider from Barclays to Metro Bank, a more ethical banking provider, due to student concerns about Barclays links with the financing of fossil fuels. As a Union it is important to us that our funds are held in banks which have strong environmental credentials. The decision has been taken in response to the Union's Ethical Banking Policy after a long selection process from several UK banking providers. Following a process of financial and governance due diligence performed by the bank and having negotiated the terms of business, the Union's bank accounts have been opened and are now operational. We also now have effective governance, data protection, facilities and health and safety management in place.

As part of our global engagement strategy, we are developing new global partnerships to promote staff and student exchange. In January we provided online training for student leaders from the Technical University of Kenya, where we are supporting the development of their Students Association. In March we hosted a week's visit from them to observe our elections and learn more about student democracy and leadership in the UK.

We also hosted a visit from the University of Sydney Students' Union this year. Staff and Officers have been on tours of Students' Unions in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Sweden and Denmark. We also sent a small delegation to the annual conference of the Association of College Unions International (ACUI), all with the aim of helping to foster innovation, share projects, build skills and develop staff.

Not only that, we know our staff are a big part of what makes the Union so great - and results from our Staff Engagement Survey tell us this is a great place to work. There were some real areas of strength in the survey, such as colleagues trusting and respecting each other and their managers, belief that the Students' Union delivers a high-quality service to its members and fairness, respect and dignity at work.

This was also the year that our HR team launched our People Strategy, driven from the achievement of the Silver award we received as part of the Investors in People accreditation in 2021 which only 15% of companies achieve. The award recognises that the right principles are in place but more than that, it means people and leaders are making active efforts to make sure that there's real consistency and everyone in the organisation is feeling the effects. The People Strategy is divided into six themes, with a target for each.

Over the next three years we will strengthen our workforce and core processes to be sustainable and flexible. We will then build on this foundation, monitor progress in implementing changes and improve to deliver on our ambition to achieve Gold in the next Investors in People assessment. Finally we will secure our achievements, continuing to strive for excellence.

We also completed a comprehensive review of the Students' Union's approach to safeguarding to respond to updated guidance from the Charity Commission. Additionally, we have been making good progress against our Governance Improvement plan to ensure we meet the best practice frameworks for students' unions and charities.

Looking Forward

We believe that extra and co-curricular experiences can have a transformative effect on students' lives. These experiences help students to develop skills, build networks, reduce loneliness and isolation, grow in confidence, and enjoy their time at UCL. We were very pleased to launch a new Strategy for Student Life at UCL. The Strategy was unveiled as part of UCL's new strategic plan.

The Student Life strategy will kickstart the largest ever expansion of co and extra-curricular experiences at UCL. Over the next five years, we will significantly expand our model of student engagement, empowering thousands more student leaders to deliver exceptional experiences for their peers. We're raising the bar for student experience in sport, arts, volunteering, departmental engagement, and events.

"The new Student Life strategy is a significant development for not only students, but our whole UCL community. Students are at the heart of UCL, and it is crucial that they are able to thrive and reach their fullest potential in their time here – not only academically, but outside this arena, too. The Student Life strategy launches us into a new era of possibility for students, and I look forward to seeing how they further transform life on campus, and their own lives, too."

Dr Michael Spence AC, UCL President & Provost



Priorities for year one include the expansion of our work in sport, further development of the Community Research Initiative, and growing our major events programme. The strategy focuses on six key areas:

Sport and physical activity

Giving every student access to a sporting offer that meets their needs, whether trying a sport for the first time, making friends in a TeamUCL league sports team, experiencing world-class coaching so they can excel as an athlete, or undertaking sports volunteering in the local community. By the end of the Student Life strategy, we will aim to enable half of all students to engage with sport and physical activity.

Performing and creative arts

Breaking down barriers to participation enabling all students, regardless of background, to develop the creativity, innovation, and confidence which engagement in the arts brings. This leads to a greater sense of belonging and community within UCL and increases opportunities to engage with the wider arts community in London and beyond. By the end of the Student Life strategy, we are aiming for 12,500 students to engage with our performing and creative arts programme.

Community volunteering

Inspiring students to take part in rewarding, well-organised community volunteering that makes a difference in the wider world. Helping our students to build bonds – between students and people in other communities, between students and voluntary and community sector organisations, and between students themselves. Boosting students' wellbeing, and helping them develop new skills and insights into their academic studies. By the end of the Student Life strategy, students will give more than 100,000 hours annually to volunteering across London.

Intercultural engagement

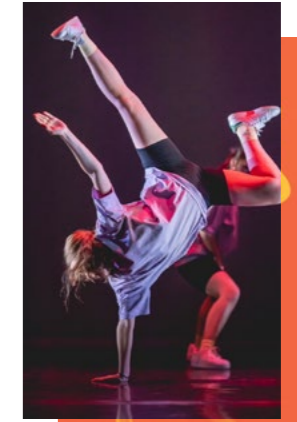
Creating a truly global experience for all students at UCL, harnessing the diversity of our student body, building links across the world, and creating opportunities for international volunteering which ensure every UCL student is internationally aware, culturally inquisitive, and a true global citizen ready to change the world for the better. By the end of the Student Life strategy, up to 10,000 students will be part of a vibrant cultural society.

Departmental societies

Building a real sense of belonging and pride amongst each cohort, bridging the gap between the academic and 'extra-curricular' sphere. Thousands more students will benefit from tailored support, training and resources, creating opportunities to develop new partnerships and innovative activities designed to build inclusive, vibrant communities at a departmental level. By the end of the Student Life strategy, we are aiming for 10,000+ students to be part of a departmental society.

Vibrant events in the heart of London

Harnessing our collective skills to deliver a wide range of events that create both a vibrant campus and a truly exceptional student experience, with high-quality events running every week during term time. From the extensive Welcome programme to the Winter Arts Festival, and the end-of-year celebration events that take over campus, students will be able to actively shape and enjoy the most vibrant campus in London. By the end of the Student Life strategy, half of all students will have taken part in a major on-campus event.



Looking Forward CONT.

UCL East

In September 2023 we are set to welcome another 2,000+ new students at UCL East. We will focus on creating pathways and mechanisms for clubs and societies to participate there more easily, as well as increasing engagement with sporting activity on campus.

We are also growing our volunteering offer, connecting with the local community in Stratford through events and mixers and working alongside UCL to improve our UCL East Welcome Week, to give our new members the very best introduction.

Improvements in our spaces

At Bloomsbury we are beginning a major, very exciting, new investment in the ground floor of the Students' Union building at 25 Gordon Street which will see an expansion of the Hanger, our merchandise shop. We will be introducing more ranges to our UCL branded clothing and accessories. We're investing in the space because we know students love our merchandise.

At the same time, we are redeveloping the reception area at 25 Gordon Street to create additional seating for Gordon's Café. Stone Willy's Pizza outlet will close, with the pizza offering added to the menu at the George Farha café in the Lewis Building. This will mean that we have a hot food offer to support our Union Bars, the Huntley and Mully's. The works will be completed, ready to open in September. We will also be redeveloping and upgrading the Bloomsbury Fitness changing rooms.

As we move into the new academic year we're continuing to actively seek other opportunities to expand our commercial activities to provide more services for students, create more student employment opportunities, and generate more income to expand our work for our members.

Our primary focus for the 2023-24 academic year will be to begin delivering the transformational work outlined in the new Student Life strategy. With that, we will continue to foster a strong and successful partnership with UCL as we move towards our vision of being one of the best Students' Unions in the world.



Impact Report

2022-23



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studentsunionucl.org