

## Briefing – Policy Proposal

Date: 19 February 2024

Audience: Welfare and Community Zone

### What is the current situation at UCL related to this proposal?

UCL provides access to general support services, mental health and wellbeing resources, and avenues for seeking advice or assistance. This includes mental health phone lines and a University run counselling service. The University also offers a dedicated advice team offering support and guidance on various issues, including mental health concerns, and providing access to advisors for additional assistance.<sup>1</sup>

For more than a decade, UCL has recognised and observed Men's Health Week and raised awareness about issues and inequalities affecting the health and well-being of men.<sup>2</sup>

This year, the "All Jokes Aside" campaign was established by TeamUCL to provide meaningful support for male-identifying students at UCL, encouraging them to engage in activities that promote mental health and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup> This included free weekly sports, fitness, and activity sessions as well as activities like Walk and Talk groups. A talking and listening group for male-identifying students has also been created. This group provides a confidential space for open discussion around mental well-being with other students and a qualified counsellor.

There is a UCL Mental Health Society, affiliated with the Students' Union in 2020, which aims to signpost students to the resources they need and works to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.<sup>4</sup> This society is open to all students, is run by students and also aims to be a support system for students without one.

The UCL Students' Union has several Sabbatical and Student Officers that address the health, welfare and wellbeing of all students at UCL. In addition, certain student officer roles (such as the Women's Officer and POC Officer) are in place to lead networks (community inclusion groups) for otherwise marginalised and under-represented students.<sup>5</sup> Due to the nature of the part-time voluntary positions, the Students' Union encourages Student Officers to dedicate ~25 hours a term (~2 hours a week) to their elected position. In the current academic year, a Student Officer review was undertaken by the Representation and Democracy Team. One of the core aims of this review was to reduce the number of Student Officer positions.

The SU has a variety of roles that address men's welfare issues. All students are eligible to apply for these positions, regardless of gender.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/support-and-wellbeing/wellbeing>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2013/may/10-june-start-mens-health-week>

<sup>3</sup> <https://studentsunionucl.org/all-jokes-aside>

<sup>4</sup> <https://studentsunionucl.org/clubs-societies/mental-health-society>

<sup>5</sup> <https://studentsunionucl.org/leadership-race>

1. **Welfare and Community Officer:** By focusing on student welfare, well-being, and mental health support within a broader framework of student support services and community engagement, this Sabbatical Officer role addresses men's health issues. This role is vacant this year and therefore does not have any assigned policies, but the coming Leadership Race will elect the next person for this position. The “All Jokes Aside” campaign fits most naturally within the remit of this position.
2. **Activities and Engagement Officer:** This Sabbatical Officer role addresses health-related issues of all students through various avenues such as sports, arts, volunteering, skill development, and global engagement.
3. **Equity and Inclusion Officer:** By focusing on equity, inclusion and student support, this Sabbatical Officer role also addresses men's health issues within a broader framework of promoting overall well-being and creating an inclusive environment for all students.
4. **Sports Officer:** This Student Officer role focuses on promoting physical activity, fostering inclusivity, and creating a supportive community environment within sports clubs, which contributes to addressing men's health concerns as well.

## What would change if the policy was successful?

The role would act as a way to specifically engage male-identifying students in mental health and well-being resources. It would serve as an access point to services that TeamUCL provides (e.g. the “All Jokes Aside” Campaign) , by signposting students to key resources.

The role aims to position men as “agents of positive change”, by supporting key campaigns and initiatives across the Union, such as efforts to reduce instances of sexual harassment and violence. Lastly, the role would hold voting rights in all three Policy Zones, the Union Executive, and the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee. This is a status that only the Liberation Officers currently hold.

## What is the relevant national / international context to this situation?

In the UK, certain mental health conditions disproportionately impact men. Men are nearly three times as likely as women to become dependent on alcohol and three times as likely to report frequent drug use.<sup>6</sup> Men are also more likely to die by suicide when compared with women.<sup>7</sup> In comparison, women are more likely to report having attempted suicide and are more likely to self-harm.<sup>8</sup>

There are some specific health interventions targeted at men at a national, regional and community level. The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Issues Affecting Men and Boys published a report on “The Case for a Men’s Health Strategy” in February 2022. In July 2023, the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee launched an inquiry on men’s physical and mental health outcomes. In November 2023, the UK Government announced

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/statistics/men-women-statistics>

<sup>7</sup> <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pb-0056/> ; <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/men-and-mental-health>

<sup>8</sup> [https://media.samaritans.org/documents/ResearchBriefingGenderSuicide\\_2021\\_v7.pdf](https://media.samaritans.org/documents/ResearchBriefingGenderSuicide_2021_v7.pdf)

that a Men's Health Ambassador would be appointed along with the establishment of a men's health task and finish group.<sup>9</sup> The Men's Health Ambassador will be responsible for increasing awareness of certain conditions and health needs faced by men by dispelling taboos and stigmas and encouraging more open conversations among men about their general health.<sup>10</sup>

In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe ratified, with the support of 53 member states, a men's health report and strategy.<sup>11</sup>

Men's officers have been introduced at the University of Plymouth and the University of West England (UWE), with a specific focus on men's mental health issues.<sup>12</sup> As of February 2024, there is no longer a Men's officer at Plymouth (it has been replaced by a Men's Network).<sup>13</sup>

### Are there any legal implications to this policy proposal?

No.

### Does this relate to any existing SU policy?

No.

### Are there any financial, resource or stakeholder / public relations issues with this policy proposal?

If the responsibilities of the proposed Men's Welfare Officer overlap significantly with existing support services or roles within the SU, there is a risk of duplication of efforts. Duplication of responsibilities can lead to confusion among stakeholders, including students, staff, and other support services, about who to turn to for assistance. It can strain limited resources, including financial resources, staffing, and infrastructure.

Introducing a Men's Welfare Officer position may raise concerns or objections from certain stakeholders, such as advocacy groups, students, or staff members who may perceive it as detracting from existing efforts to address gender equality.

Public backlash of the new position, particularly in relation to gender equality and inclusivity, may impact stakeholder support and organisational reputation. Clear communication and messaging about the rationale and objectives of the position are essential to address any potential misconceptions or criticisms. Attempts to introduce this position at other students' unions has led to backlash from the student community.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pb-0056/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/biggest-prostate-cancer-screening-trial-in-decades-to-start-in-uk>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289053532>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.thestudentsunion.co.uk/support/parttimeofficers/menswelfareofficer/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.upsu.com/representation/men/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/bristol-university-su-rejects-mens-2194136;>  
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jan/16/do-students-really-need-a-mens-representative>

## Are there any sustainability implications to this policy proposal?

No.

## Are there any equity and inclusion implications to this policy proposal?

It is important to ensure that the creation of this position does not inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes or hierarchies, but rather serves to address genuine areas of need, and promote equity for all genders.

Discussions around equity and inclusion should consider how the Men's Welfare Officer role intersects with other dimensions of diversity, such as race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic status.

## What would the next steps be if the proposal passed?

The proposer would meet with the Representation and Democracy team to draft an Amendment to Governing Documents to be voted on at the Union Executive.

As the nominations for the Leadership Race are open, the next time for this position to be elected would be during the Rep Election in October 2024.