

Discussion Briefing – Students' Union UCL Sustainability Training

Welfare and Community Zone, February 2023

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

UCL currently offers all students the opportunity to complete an online 'Sustainability Induction' module. This module aims to teach students: 1) what sustainability and climate action means for our student population; 2) what UCL is doing to tackle the climate emergency through teaching, research, and campus; 3) how students can be sustainable during their time at UCL.¹ The course takes approximately 15 minutes. Students' Union UCL do not currently have any data on the efficacy of the programme, nor on students' satisfaction with it.

More broadly, UCL has one of the most ambitious sustainability commitments of any UK university; by 2024 they will be a single-use plastic-free campus, have zero carbon buildings, 1.5 football pitches of additional biodiverse space and every student will have the opportunity to study sustainability. However, the University are not operating alone in this commitment; Students' Union UCL has itself committed to an ambitious three-year Sustainability Strategy (2022-2025).

Students' Union UCL's Sustainability Strategy

This strategy sets out an action plan for the union achieving its vision of being an organisation that lives up to its students' values in relation to environmental sustainability. With sustainability now being one of the most important issues for students at UCL, the union's vision is "to be an organisation that lives up to our students' values, by being truly sustainable in all aspects of our work, educating our members about the threat of climate change and the need for urgent action to protect the environment, and effectively influencing UCL to operate to a truly sustainable university".² In addition to this, the mission of the strategy is also clearly laid out: "We aim to become the most sustainable students' union in the UK through embedding principles of sustainability into all aspects of the Students' Union's activities and services, minimising our impact on the environment, and helping to educate and empower our students to understand their impact on the planet".³

For the purposes of this policy proposal, the union's commitment to "launch a sector-leading sustainability education and leadership programme for students" is significant. Action 6.9 of the union's action plan states that the union will "define and scope out options for an education and leadership programme on sustainability in consultation with our student body and relevant UCL departments".⁴

Given that the proposal seeks to replicate the Students' Union's Active Bystander (ABT) programme, a brief outline of the programme and its history are detailed below.

¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/new-students/your-online-induction/sustainability-induction>

² <https://studentsunionucl.org/sites/default/files/inline-images/Sustainability%20Strategy%202022.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Students' Union UCL's ABT Programme

The Students' Union's ABT programme is currently managed by the Students' Union's Research and Policy Team. Since launching, the programme has trained over 35,000 students and student staff, empowering them to identify and challenge poor behaviour to help create a safer and more inclusive environment.⁵

The training has been a core part of the student induction since 2019. This means that whilst all students are encouraged to take the training, it is not considered mandatory by UCL. The current programme is offered as a general workshop to all students, with specific departments receiving bespoke workshops based on specific needs.

The programme currently employs 10-15 student staff per year to assist with its delivery and evaluation. Multiple members of the Research and Policy team also dedicate considerable time to its ongoing success, and the Union has identified that a programme of this size also needs a full-time dedicated member of staff to coordinate and run the programme.

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

Nationally, universities and students' unions are increasingly investing in sustainability projects, and organisational scrutiny of these efforts is also intensifying. For example, People & Planet – the UK's largest student campaigning organisation campaigning to end world poverty, defend human rights and protect the environment – now release an annual league table on UK universities ranked by environmental and ethical performance.⁶ In the 2022/2023 league table, UCL has been ranked 7th out of 153 universities.⁷

At this time, Students' Union UCL has not identified any other unions in the UK with a bespoke sustainability training programme. However, similarly to UCL, many universities do offer modules on sustainability (e.g., Queen Mary University of London, St Andrews, University of Edinburgh).^{8,9,10}

Are there any legal implications to this item for discussion?

N/A

Does this relate to any existing SU policy?

N/A

Are there any financial, resource or stakeholder/ public relations issues with this item for discussion?

⁵ <https://studentsunionucl.org/active-bystander-programme>

⁶ <https://peopleandplanet.org/university-league>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/about/sustainability/cpd-training/ecocampus-sustainable-development-course-for-students/>

⁹ <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/sustainability/learning/>

¹⁰ <https://www.ed.ac.uk/sustainability/programmes-and-projects/sustainability-innovation-leadership/sustainable-leadership/professional-development/introduction-to-sustainability>

Significant financial input will be required to replicate the structure of the Students' Union's ABT programme.

The programme is funded by UCL and costs approximately £40,000 per year to run. Costs incurred would include:

- » Professional development of an online training module
- » Development of a live workshop
- » Hiring, training (internal and external), and management of student workshop leaders to deliver workshops both in-person and online
- » Hiring and management of student staff to support the delivery of the programme
- » Inter-departmental collaboration on marketing, communications, and systems
- » Advertisement of the programme
- » Feedback analysis
- » Impact reports
- » Future improvements to the programme
- » Initiating and ongoing stakeholder engagement/ management

As additional information, in order to fund a pilot programme, the Students' Union applied and received funding from the UN in 2015 to run a small-scale programme of consent workshops. In 2016, UCL and the Students' Union match-funded the programme, with the SU leading on the delivery.

Are there any sustainability implications to this item for discussion?

Yes. This policy seeks to introduce sustainability training for all UCL students. This would provide all students with the opportunity to engage with the subject of sustainability. The hope is that this would lead to positive behavioural changes among the student body thanks to an increased awareness of the environmental decisions that they are making.

Are there any equity and inclusion implications to this item for discussion?

N/A

What would be the next steps?

If this policy proposal were to pass, the Students' Union would need to:

- » Scope out the financial viability of the proposal
- » Scope and deliver a well-researched programme proposal