

Briefing – Lighting Infrastructure at UCL Policy Proposal

Date: 19 January 2024

Audience: Welfare and Community Zone

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

Over the last decade, UCL has been working to improve its complex heritage estate to make it as accessible as it can be by systematically identifying and removing barriers in the buildings and main thoroughfares. All new and refurbished buildings follow the Inclusive Design Strategy to implement design solutions to make UCL's buildings more accessible and inclusive to everyone.¹ This Strategy refers to the Society of Light and Lighting (SLL), an authority on lighting. Also, it specifically recognises the need for maintenance to improve the accessibility of UCL's existing estate, for instance, improving lighting.

UCL has also worked with AccessAble to provide access guides to staff, students and visitors.² UCL Estates provides a wide range of facilities management and business support services to UCL across the Bloomsbury campus.

Light engineers have also been involved as a part of 'Transforming UCL', which saw the refurbishment of areas such as the Wilkins Terrace³ and the development of the Student Centre.⁴

Whilst the policy proposal only mentions the lighting infrastructure that UCL controls/can improve, most of the street lighting in Bloomsbury is controlled and maintained by the Street Lighting and Drainage Team in Camden Council.⁵

What would change if the policy was successful?

The Union would urge UCL to evaluate the expenses involved in enhancing the lighting infrastructure across the campus vicinity, with a view to improve the safety of students navigating campus.

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

Dark or poorly lit areas often become hotspots for incidents, making students, particularly people from marginalised groups, more susceptible to harassment and assault. Reports from organizations like UN Women UK and the Office for National Statistics indicate a concerning rise in sexual harassment and assaults in public spaces across the UK.⁶

¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/estates/policies/2023/nov/inclusive-design-strategy>

² <https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/ucl>

³ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/estates/case-studies/2021/aug/wilkins-terrace>

⁴ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/estates/about-ucl-estates/transforming-ucl>

⁵ <https://cindex.camden.gov.uk/kb5/camden/cd/service.page?id=48OjwBbVL2o>

⁶ https://www.unwomenuk.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/APPG-UN-Women-Sexual-Harassment-Report_Updated.pdf;

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/sexualoffencesinenglandandwalesoverview/march2022>

Research from the British Journal of Criminology has also highlighted the correlation between inadequate lighting and increased crime rates, including sexual offences.⁷ Improved lighting has been proven to reduce the likelihood of these crimes by increasing visibility and the perception of safety in public areas.

Are there any legal implications to this policy proposal?

The UK has safety standards and regulations governing public spaces. Enhancing lighting aligns with these standards, ensuring that campuses provide a safe environment for students, staff, and visitors.⁸

Lighting upgrades should align with national initiatives promoting energy-efficient technologies and sustainable practices to contribute to broader environmental goals.

The UK Equality Act emphasizes the importance of accessibility and inclusivity. Enhancing lighting infrastructure supports these principles by creating environments that are accessible to individuals with diverse needs, including those with visual impairments.

Does this relate to any existing SU policy?

No.

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

There will be financial implications and constraints associated with implementing such a proposal. UCL would need to assess its budget, allocate funds appropriately, and adhere to financial regulations.

Are there any sustainability implications to this item for discussion?

The type of lighting technology chosen for the campus can significantly impact energy consumption. If the proposal involves upgrading to energy-efficient LED lighting or incorporating smart lighting systems, it could contribute to reduced energy usage compared to traditional lighting options.

Opting for durable lighting solutions can also contribute to sustainability by reducing the frequency of replacements and associated waste. Ensuring that lighting installations do not negatively impact local flora and fauna, and integrating them into the landscape responsibly, would further support sustainability goals.

Assessing the carbon footprint associated with the manufacturing, installation, and maintenance of the new lighting infrastructure is also crucial. Moreover, properly designed lighting that minimizes light spill and glare not only conserves energy but also helps protect the natural night environment and ecosystems.

⁷ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.4073/csr.2008.13>

⁸ <https://atp-instrumentation.co.uk/blog/lighting-levels-in-the-workplace-uk-health-and-safety/> ; https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/centre_for_london_public_london_digital.pdf

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

By prioritizing well-lit pathways, UCL can ensure that all members of the campus community, regardless of physical abilities, can navigate the space safely.

Many students leave campus late to travel during off-peak hours. With London experiencing reduced day light in winter, and the prevalence of late-night activities or part-time jobs, ensuring adequate lighting is crucial for ensuring that students have safe commutes.

A well-lit campus creates an inviting atmosphere that encourages social interaction and engagement while also addressing concerns related to personal security. This is particularly important for students from marginalised backgrounds who are less likely to feel safe due to a perceived lack of personal safety.⁹ This perception is often informed by personal experience of harassment.

Equity concerns may arise if lighting enhancements primarily focus on certain areas of the campus, leaving others insufficiently lit. It is important to conduct a thorough assessment of high-traffic areas, considering spaces that are frequently used by students, faculty, and staff from all departments and backgrounds.

What would the next steps be if the proposal passed?

The SU would have to meet with teams within UCL Estates such as Campus Experience and Infrastructure team and with Pip Jackson (Head of Access & Inclusion) to lobby for a comprehensive evaluation of the expenses involved in improving the lighting infrastructure around campus.