

Policy Proposal: Add option for multi-year membership of Departmental Societies

What would you like the Union to do?

The Departmental Societies here suggest allowing departmental societies to choose to sell memberships that last over the whole duration of the student's affiliation to their department. This could either be in the form of a life-long membership, as long as the student is in the department or a sufficiently long time to not have to buy memberships several times during their studies.

This proposal is proposed by the Greenough Society, Crook Society, Pharmacology Society, Bartlett School of Architecture Society, Philosophy Society, SSEES Society, Engineering Society, and the Psychology and Education Society

Why would you like to do this?

Departmental societies are at the centre of many students' social and academic development throughout their degrees. They feel included due to their affiliation to their department, and many buy their membership in their freshers' year. However, when years two, three, four, and so on come, fewer and fewer buy memberships. Whether it is going to jazz nights at Phineas with your friends, playing board games with your coursemates after a lecture, or drinking the communal coffee in the common room, our members don't always realise what is simply an unofficial gathering, a departmental event or a departmental society event. That is because, unlike other societies and clubs, the students will always belong and be welcome in their department and departmental society.

Therefore, many of our members do not understand why they have to buy new membership every year. In practice, they won't purchase membership unless they have a particular reason. We don't want to exclude students who are not very active in the departmental society because they don't pay a membership fee for the one event they participate in every year, why in reality, we instead let them join anyways. Departmental societies that are not affiliated with the Students' Union do this, and it is one of the significant reasons for being non-affiliated.

Further, it could be an economic advantage to the departmental societies to offer a higher one-time membership fee than smaller yearly fees, as most students only buy membership once and are willing to pay more. Especially when they are new to UCL, many students see the point in paying, e.g. £20 for three or four years of community.

Lastly, every year several of our members who wish to run for the committee, typically at the end of their second or third year, realise only too late that they're actually not members according to the Students' Union's records and therefore cannot run for committee due to the 28-days rule. Many of these have been active in the society their first and/or second year and believed that they were still members, causing frustration and extra administrative work for the Union in terms of requests for exemption for the 28-days rule.

How will this affect students?

Multi-year memberships would simplify the departmental membership process for the students, as they would not need to consider buying new memberships every year. It would also free up time for the departmental society committees, as we

would no longer have to spend time and effort convincing older members to re-buy memberships every year, and the students will not have to feel bad for attending events without buying a membership. The up-front membership price would probably rise for the departmental societies that do take a membership fee. However, it is unlikely that the departmental societies would raise the price more than the current price for 3 or 4 years. The proposal would work towards a stronger sense of community in the departments and be a strong argument for affiliation of the currently unaffiliated departmental societies.