

Title of the Proposal

For PGRs to be considered employees at UCL

To be considered at

Education Zone

What would you like the Union to do?

I propose that UCL follows the lead of Sheffield Hallam University and give UCL PGRs employee status (<https://www.shu.ac.uk/news/all-articles/latest-news/phd-stipend>). This ensures they will have employment rights and will not be paid less than the real living wage (in line with UCL Staff pay policy). To avoid PGRs struggling in the future, I feel UCL should take this opportunity to make this progressive decision. The Student Union should campaign, alongside UCL PGRs and support where possible through appropriate leadership channels.

Why would you like to do this?

This is a huge issue for many PGRs as without employee status there is no employment rights and benefits that come with that including for example guaranteed maternity pay, paid sick leave (please see article: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-03069-w>). The recent movement to persuade UKRI to increase PhD stipends in line with inflation and/or to living wage was a direct result of many PhD students struggling to afford rent, bills and food due to being paid less than living wage (<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-01934-2>). I have contributed to the campaign to increase stipends over the past year with success and I now feel UCL should take the lead and make this change to ensure no future PGR students suffer whilst studying at UCL.

How will this affect students?

The above suffering outlined experienced by PGR students at UCL would not have occurred if they considered PhD students, who contribute hugely to the UCL's global impact and success, as employees (due to UCL's policy to pay all living wage). It is difficult to convey how students have struggled this past year. As I worked directly on the campaign I received many emails from UCL students experiencing debt as a result of taking out loans to pay for rent, having to drop out and students who feel mentally unwell from the stress and anxiety. I am glad that UCL have match-funded UKRI for students funded by UCL, and other funding bodies that have yet to increase stipends to living wage. However we should not stop here as more needs to be done.