

Student Sustainability Council – Careers (13 December 2022)

Minutes: Joanna Socha

1. Welcome & introductions (DA)

- DA opened the meeting by greeting everyone, outlining the agenda, and introducing the staff team.

2. UCL Careers presentation (WB)

- Weronika Benning, Business Development Manager at UCL Careers, joined the session as the careers staff lead. WB looks after engagement and partnerships in the team (marketing and comms, alumni engagement, job board screening, events team).
- WB introduced the UCL Careers department and the work it does. Careers' responsibilities include:
 - Developing principles of engaging employers
 - Brokering connections between UCL students and graduates and employers, facilitating recruitment (pre-Covid there were 900 instances of engagement)
- There are three categories of employers Careers work with:
 - Major graduate recruiters – with well-resourced early talent teams, present usually at Careers Fairs
 - Businesses employing UCL graduates before and impressed with the quality
 - Small to medium enterprises, anticipating growth – most of students go work for them. Careers offer extra support and discounts for this category.
- Careers operate with limited resources (staff, funding) and subsidise education activities (talks, workshops, consultancy, insight events) through promotional events (e.g. Fairs). Themes of educational activities are spaced out throughout the year for accessibility.
- Work on ethical careers policy:
 - Regular benchmarking with other universities
 - Working with Change Agents UK to get consultancy on how to improve transparency of company values on the jobs board
- Addressing the question of controversial companies:
 - Is it right for some companies to be excluded? Steer from UCL leadership is to not exclude any employers with lawful opportunities. It is not the role of Careers to arbitrate on which companies should be advertised to students.
 - How do you draw the line between 'good' and 'bad' companies? Most big and potentially controversial companies have sustainability policies and even accreditations.
 - Any screening questions asked to employers should focus on sustainability and ethics more broadly – how to define meaningful and comprehensive criteria?
 - Actions of oil and gas companies are key in responding to climate emergency – should we be making it less accessible for UCL students to be part of the solution?
 - Careers' key role is guiding, not prescribing, students' professional life.
- Discussion questions for groupwork:
 - Careers education: what information should students be able to access before meeting employers at Fairs and other big events?

- MyUCLCareers, the online portal for UCL careers: what value-based questions should be included and how holistic should they be (note: this need to be scalable and in searchable format)?
- How to have more local versions of the ethical careers policy, beyond the general level of the jobs board, applicable to Careers events, internships programmes etc.? What kind of principles or basic agreements should underpin the policy for employers to participate engage with students in different ways?

3. Student general Q&A

No questions were asked in the general Q&A and the Council proceeded to groupwork immediately.

4. Group feedback discussion: one group per theme

Discussion groups were formed online and in the room to discuss the questions introduced above by WB.

5. Groups report back

Groups presented the following suggestions and observations:

- UCL's role and resources to be used towards educating students about important values and teaching critical thinking, not de-emphasising the big companies which attract most students.
- Instead of singling sustainability out as a theme, exploring the theme of applying sustainability to any role or company. Educating about sustainability in the whole organisation not just particular jobs – how to search for jobs like that? Could every role have sustainability embedded as standard?
- Incorporating more voices in the debate about potentially controversial companies: distinction between promotional and educational events – what kind of speakers attend either?
- Jobs board:
 - labelling employers who are examples of excellent practice in sustainable operations
 - avoiding negative or punishing labelling
 - ESG statement requirement
- Using videos to engage with students as opposed to written info:
 - how to find carbon targets,
 - how to spot greenwashing,
 - which accreditations to look out for,
 - introducing Global Reporting Initiative Standards, and giving examples of good reporting – externally verified, sector-specific
- Skewed perception: what gets filtered down to students is linked to high-profile Fairs, while there are many other events, particularly of educational nature
- Big companies are advantaged in having outreach and early talent teams, which also improves their PR
- Proactively spotlighting companies that are doing well and highlighting examples of good practice

- Students' knowledge and direction in careers comes from multiple sources, not just the university careers service

6. UCL Careers – reflection and closing remarks (JS)

All the points discussed by the students will be incorporated into the Careers team meeting, the outcomes of which will be shared with the Council. There is scope for the Council responding and providing further feedback during the next session in January – to be confirmed via email.