



**Date:** Monday 13 November 2023  
**Time:** 18:00 – 20:00  
**Venue:** Chadwick Building – Bo5 Lecture Theatre, Hybrid

## Union Executive

### Minutes

**Chair:** Mary McHarg, Union Affairs Officer

Members:	P	AP	AB
Ahmad Ismail, Equity & Inclusion Officer	X		
Anji Suri, Trans Officer	X		
Aria Xingni Shi, Activities and Engagement Officer	X		
Elisa de Aragao Bibay, Women's Officer	X		
Grace Yang, Sustainability Officer		X	
Issy Smith, Postgraduate Officer	X		
Mary McHarg, Union Affairs Officer	X		
Micah Gerstner, LGBTQ+ Officer	X		
Philip Greger and Suzanna Chen, Disabled Students' Officer			X
Rawleka Wilson and Rachel Lim, People of Colour Students' Officer	X		
Shaban Chaudhary, Education Officer	X		
Sophie-Jayne Bush, Elected Officer from Education Zone	X		
Ella O'Brien, Elected Officer from Activities Zone	X		
Donna Amewu, Elected Officer from Welfare and Community Zone	X		

In Attendance:
Guy Stepney, Head of Marketing and Communications
Simon To, Director of Policy, Governance & Insight
Jeff Saddington-Wiltshire, Representation & Democracy Manager
Matthew Phuklaewkla, Democracy Assistant, minutes

Actions Log 2023/24	Responsibility	Update due:

### 1. Preliminary Matters - Welcome and Introductions

The Chair, Mary McHarg (MM) welcomed members to the zone.

### 2. Sabbatical Officer Updates – Any relevant updates on priorities or assigned policies

- MM gave updates on the [policy](#) to move Union finances from Barclays to another bank due to ethical concerns. Progress is being made on this – the Union has met with Barclays to air their grievances.
- Postgraduate Officer Issy Smith (IS) said that good progress is being made on PGTA contract issues and treatment, alongside supporting research students with learning difficulties.

### 3. Matters for Approval – Approval of minutes from the last meeting

Minutes were approved.

### 4. Matters for Approval – Follow up on action points from previous meeting

Updates on action points from the previous meeting were discussed:

- In order to make demographics categories more comprehensive, MM held a meeting with UCL (who are responsible for demographics metrics) – further talks will follow.
- Increasing visibility of policies that have been passed through
- Policies assigned to this year’s non-existent Welfare & Community Officer will be reassigned to other sabbatical officers (see later in document)
- The Officer Updates portion of Zones will now take place earlier in order to increase prominence and visibility which will provide better accountability
- Discussion on linking Officers’ progress on their policies onto their pages
- Addressing including the letter T in the LGBTQ+ Officer role in order to increase inclusivity
- Administrative assistance for student officers (for room booking and [Canva](#), etc.) will be picked up internally
- Increasing awareness of disabilities will celebrated in Disability Month, which takes place from 16 November to 16 December.
- Students are encouraged to send a policy proposal to address campus lighting improvements
- Representation & Democracy Coordinator Rhiannon Ellis (RE) created a weekly digest to increase awareness of current Union activities
- Additional funding can be disseminated down by staff as they become available, and passed on to Officers
- The Policy Zone Summit was a success.

### 5. Matters for Discussion – Student Officer Review

Representation & Democracy Manager Jeff Saddington-Wiltshire (JSW) gave a presentation on the Union’s review of the current Student Officer system (which comprises of [17 Officers](#)), and if it is representing all groups of students adequately.

- A question was posed to the audience - what is the purpose of Student Officers? Some responses were:
  - To represent different communities within the student body. Everyone agreed.
  - To advocate for different student groups.
  - To represent student interests to the union for minority students etc.
- Student Officers have the role of:
  - Representing marginalised identities and common interest amongst students
  - Forming vibrant and inclusive communities to promote a greater sense of belonging
  - Advocating and influencing for positive changes within the union

Some statistics:

- Student Officers make up 20% of policy proposals
- 30% go on to run for a Sabbatical Officer position
- 10% go on to run for another position.

Introducing new Student Officer roles is easy at UCL SU as anyone can make a suggestion at Zones which can be ratified to form a new position. However, there are some downsides to this:

- Compared to other Student Unions, there is a relatively large amount of Officers – this can be a burden to the staff, support and groups they are supposed to represent.
- Moreover, at UCL SU, support provided to student officers is sporadic, inconsistent, and informal.
- Officers either overworked, disengaged or left vacant
- Often, not all Officer positions are filled during the Leadership Race

Because of this, an exploratory review of the Student Officer portfolio is currently being undertaken. JSW has spoken to the Leadership Team, consulted staff, and will interview Student Officers about their experience. This research will be brought to Policy Zone and options will be given to the members for what they think the best move is going forward.

Research has also been undertaken for other Student Unions:

- Positions similar to UCL SU's 'Student Officer' are common in Unions, with 76% offering part-time non-academic leadership positions
  - This number rises to 96% in Russell Group institutions.
- Most roles are voluntary (94%)
- There is no clear 'one-size-fits-all' model for non-academic representatives.
- It is common for representatives to have a 'Community/Representation' focus
- Staff support and budgets for Officers vary greatly between institutions

Results from the National Student Survey (NSS) were also explored:

- When students were asked if their Union adequately represented their academic interests, 73% of those at UCL agreed.
- Other institutions have achieved greater numbers than this. For example, Buckingham New University topped the score at 86.3%. All competitors have different models which work well - no one-size-fits-all.

Keeping this information in mind, the question was posed on how to best deliver on the purpose of Student Officers – hence this is the focus of the Student Officer Review. JSW said that updates will be shared as work gets done.

MM added that different Officers take on varying amounts of perceived workloads. For example, the Sports Officer has a significant workload, compared to Officer for Students with Caring Responsibilities, for example.

Moreover, MM explained that the focus and level of staff support varies across roles. It is hoped for the playing field to be levelled out so that all officers can be supported.

## 6. Matters for Discussion – Cost of Living

The Sabbatical Team have been compiling shared objectives and combining some together into a ‘Cost of Living’ campaign. This was shown to the members so feedback and suggestions could be given.

A quick summary of the ‘Cost of Living’ objectives:

- There are four categories:
  - Financial Support
  - Housing
  - Access to Food
  - Employment
  
- Sabbatical Officer leads are assigned to each objective.
  
- Examples of objectives include:
  - Improvements to the Financial Assistance Fund
  - Campaign for UCL to commit to a rent freeze
  - Working with private providers to provide affordable accommodation
  - Raising awareness about the guarantor scheme
  - Pushing to open a food bank at UCL
  - Free cooking classes
  - Reintroducing low-cost food options
  - Lobby for Student Staff at the Union to be given more secure contracts with guaranteed hours
  - Working with UCL to ensure compliance with PGTA codes of practice across all departments
  - Information campaign on rights in the workplace
  - Student Officer Reward and Recognition Scheme

Feedback and thoughts from members:

- An update from Postgraduate Officer Issy Smith (IS) on the cooking classes objective, which she is responsible for: the project has been under planning and thought to take the form of online classes to increase accessibility and allow videos to be rewatched. She is open to feedback on this idea.
  
- LGBTQ+ Officer Micah Gerstner (MG) wanted more emphasis on tackling rent – members concurred and agreed that rent is becoming very expensive as prices are increasing.
  - To tackle this, Equity & Inclusion Officer Ahmad Ismail (AI) met with the UCL Accommodation Team last week and expressed concerns of increasing rent. UCL

seemed keen on working with the Union to avoid problems with room allocations, and making the pricing of Halls relative to their conditions.

- Education Zone Elected Officer, Sophie Jayne-Bush (SJB) enquired about the timeframe in which the Food Bank could be set up.
  - MM responded that this could be done very quickly theoretically, but in practice there would be issues with location, storage, security, commerciality, and logistics. Ideally, a solution to this would be arrived at within this year, and ideally next term – but this is dependent on finding a suitable space that does not impede other activities and has a social space.
  
- There were some concerns amongst the members about the Food Bank:
  - IS expressed concerns about food waste resulting from perishable foods, as well as ensuring that those using the Food Bank are actually those who need it. She offered a possible solution, which is to require a needs assessment from the Union Advice Service for repeat visits.
  - MM also highlighted that UCL has an existing relationship with Euston Food Bank, who give out food bank vouchers to students who require it – however, this doesn't cover the majority of the student population. The question was asked – is a new food bank needed if there is already one available?
  
- MG suggested a 'Too Good to Go' scheme with Union cafes are good, as it would make cheap food available to students at the end of the day.
  - MM highlighted the existence of the student volunteering group 'Zero Food Waste', who work with cafes to give spare food at the end of the day to Euston Food Bank.
  - IS mentioned that the Union has previously tried reducing the prices at end of the day for items that are due to expire, but this resulted in people just waiting until 6pm in order to buy cheaper food, which affects business.
  
- SJB gave a suggestion for the Food Bank following her previous experience in running one.
  - Bags were packed, containing enough food to make a meal (with vegetarian options etc. available)
  - Perishable items were placed on a table, free-for-all.
  - Visitors would bring carrier bags to reduce waste.
  - An attendance register was taken, with visitors' names and addresses taken which helped to gain insight into demographics, as well as keeping track of what each person took.
  - Multiple visits to the foodbank would refer visitors to the council for additional support. This system stopped people from being greedy but was still there for those who need it.

**7. Matters for Information – Minutes from AZ2301**

Minutes approved.

**8. Matters for Information – Minutes from EZ2301**

Minutes approved.

**9. Matters for Information - Minutes from WCZ2301**

Minutes approved.

**10. Any Other Business**The Union on the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Head of Marketing & Communications, Guy Stepney (GS) gave a short update on the Union's work supporting students affected by the ongoing conflict in Israel/Palestine.

Call to Fundraise for '16 Days Against Gender-Based Violence'

Women's Officer Elisa de Aragao Bibay (EAB) reached out to raise awareness for the [16 Days Against Gender-Based Violence](#), organised by the Women's Network. This is held from 25<sup>th</sup> November to 10<sup>th</sup> December.

She would like UCL to reaffirm their stance on survivor support, promote greater awareness, as well as emphasising and fundraising for the cause.

As Christmas is nearing, she would like to provide a good time to give back and celebrate healthy love and relationships by collaborating with societies to fundraise as much as possible for the 16 days of activism. This can be done in the form of tickets, for example.

EAB asked for those interested in supporting the initiative to tell their friends, so that if they work in societies, they could organise fundraising events. She would be thrilled if any Sabbatical Officers would also be interested in taking part. Lastly, EAB said that if this is of interest to anyone you know, to pass the message along.

<b>Minutes approved as a true and accurate record</b>	
Chair:	Mary McHarg, Union Affairs Officer
Signature:	Mary McHarg
Date:	12/12/23