

## **Policy Proposal: In support of an improvement to the Muslim student experience**

### **What would you like the Union to do?**

This Union should mandate the following:

- 1) Continued inclusion of Islamophobia training provided by FOSIS (The Federation of Student Islamic Societies) as part of its current yearly diversity and inclusion training for all union staff, especially sabbatical officers.
- 2) Increased awareness of UCL incident reporting procedures and link to it through the SU website. As well as this, increase publicity through SU social media channels and through other means such as displaying media on the screens found in SU buildings and encouraging UCL to do the same across their estates.
- 3) Lobby UCL on the following:
  - a) A permanent space for Friday prayers, as currently Muslim students rely on Union space in the Bloomsbury Theatre. As well as this, the current space is not adequate for the needs of Muslim students as there is huge overcrowding and unsafe usage of corridors and fire exits due to increased number of Muslim students.
  - b) Increased prayer space across UCL's campuses, as the current spaces provided do not meet the needs of Muslim students (as according to research carried out by the Islamic Society in the 2019/20 academic year which found that in the NSC B2 prayer space, attendee numbers was regularly above the quoted capacity)
  - c) To pledge that new increased prayer space is at the forefront of building plans for any new UCL buildings and spaces
  - d) Islamophobia training delivered by FOSIS to be included as part of its current diversity and inclusion training for the SMT and all student facing staff such as student support and wellbeing, chaplaincy and other relevant committees.
  - e) A review of mental health provision to ensure that it is faith sensitive and competent mental – this would help professionals to understand the context of Muslim students and this should in turn help towards addressing their mental health needs.
  - f) Allocation of Ramadhan funding from the university and prearrangement of increased space for evening Ramadhan prayer.
  - g) Flexible timetabling to allow for Muslim students to carry out their obligated prayers that fall during university hours, in particular, resolving that no teaching takes place during the times for Friday prayer. Ensure no student faces a detriment for leaving the room to observe their faith.
  - h) Lobby UCL to have dedicated prayer space in all existing buildings.

### **Why would you like to do this?**

This Union believes that there are areas where the conditions of the Muslim students can be improved, and we hope that with the help of the SU we can create an environment that fosters growth, development and collaboration. In order to protect and create a safe environment that improves the experiences of Muslim students, it is crucial that we are proactive in identifying and intervening in the matters that hinder the community from fully immersing themselves in life as a student at UCL.

This proposal outlines a list of recommendations that we believe will tackle the

aforementioned issues and improve the experiences of the Muslim community on campus. We ask that the SU consider and adopt these recommendations.

### **How will this affect students?**

This Union notes that Muslim students make up a large part of UCL's and by extension, the SU demographic. As well as this, admission statistics released by UCL in 2020 highlight a trend of a growing number of Muslim students which show an increased need for the SU to adapt to meet the needs of Muslim students. In the 2019/20 academic year, UCL Islamic Society conducted a survey with the consultation of the Interfaith Champions office to gain a further insight into the experiences of Muslim students at UCL. The survey results found that many Muslims at UCL found that there was inadequate support for them to be able to practise the core aspects of their religion to a desirable extent.

In a paper published by the National Union for Students, it stated "one in three respondents were fairly or very worried about experiencing verbal abuse, physical attacks, vandalism, property damage or theft relating to their religion or belief at their place of study. Additionally, one in three respondents said they had experienced some type of abuse or crime at their place of study, with one in five experiencing verbal abuse in person."

These alarming figures from a national student body highlight that there is a need for the SU to improve the student experience of Muslim students and lobby the university to establish a clear and robust policy to protect and enhance the university experience of Muslims students. This Union believes that students at UCL should not face such difficulty when trying to practice their faith on campus, as this is not conducive to the pastoral support structure required for academic success and student satisfaction. We believe that measures set forward will be the first steps to such a change.