

Policy Proposal: SU UCL to be a pro-trans Union

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To be discussed at: Union Executive

Lead officer(s): WIO, AO, DOCO, WO

Part-time officers involved: Trans Officer.

What would you like the Union to do?

The Union shall endeavour to be pro-trans in its ethos to ensure it meets its objectives of welfare of its trans (including non-binary and gender diverse) students, and their allies.

This means:

- 1) Supporting and lobbying UCL for policies and activities that are trans-inclusive (eg. Gender neutral/inclusive bathrooms), right to self-identify one's gender (or none or fluid) and get University services (like SSW/other support) as such without questioning their identity;
- 2) Promote respect and awareness of trans and non-binary issues in student life and support appropriate engagement within the University/ union activities. This would include an active conversation by clubs/societies/events having gender segregated space(s) with their trans members on their appropriate inclusion or provision of having gender-diverse spaces.

[Note: All trans people do not have the same experiences and self-identification should be understood as identification with their experiences instead of identification as one or the other gender (which also promotes cisnormativity). Thus, a transmasculine person may benefit from spaces stereotypically thought of as 'for women', example, around abortion rights, sexism and misogyny, etc. while at the same time feeling conflicted about using those spaces as it goes against their gender identity. Union should endeavour to communicate the basic ethos of encouraging clubs/societies/other events to communicate with their trans members before putting them on one or the other 'category'. Thus, a diversity based approach needs to be adopted by the Union in terms of access to gendered spaces while acknowledging the right of trans students to determine which of these spaces they can benefit from.]

- 3) Resisting any academic or non-academic trans-exclusive and transphobic propaganda or activities on campus;
- 4) Actively monitoring and taking action against any trans-exclusive/ hateful/ transphobic activity within the Union including those in Union spaces and through clubs and societies' activities.
- 5) Liaising on a regional and national level with organisations (like NUS) to promote trans rights.

Why would you like to do this?

Trans students are an important and core part of the Union, be it in terms of activities in clubs and societies or day-to-day participation in furthering the Union's aims of equal participation and welfare for all students. They are also a core part of the Union liberation groups, with Trans officer spearheading a number of awareness campaigns and propelling UCL to make inclusive policies and provisions.

Yet they face constant challenges around University spaces being cis-normative. Often, their experiences are clubbed in 'either-or' categories marginalising them in the process. For example, a

lack of understanding of gender as a diversity of experience which might significantly differ according to the individual, and therefore may seem to be mutually exclusive in terms of the types of spaces people want -- ie: some people might not want gender neutral bathrooms due to past trauma, but gender neutral bathrooms are also integral to trans inclusion. Or disagreements on 'safe spaces' - some might want women's spaces to be inclusive to women and non binary people, but some trans men might feel like they relate a lot to experience as a 'woman' in society (that doesn't mean they are a woman), for reasons such as experiencing misogyny/sexism on all scales (whether for being perceived a woman or for experiencing medical challenges such as with abortion); or the question of including transmasculine experiences in conversations on feminism.

A UCL event held earlier this year in February drew a huge gathering of trans-exclusive 'radical' feminists (more appropriately trans-women exclusive) in the name of an 'academic conference' organized by UCL IoE academicians. This gathering brought to the campus people who are openly transmisogynistic and trans-women phobic and have supported ousting them from women only safe spaces. The event created an atmosphere of distrust within our trans community who feared UCL becoming a space that openly supports anti-trans propaganda. These events/people use association with academia/ reputed Universities as a justification to assert (wrongly) that 'women rights' are in conflict with 'trans rights'. (See their opinion in Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/20/womans-place-uk-is-not-a-trans-exclusionist-hate-group>).

An atmosphere of some UCL academics being actively anti-trans(women) is damaging to the morale and safety of all trans members, particularly those who happen to study in their Departments and classes. The Union should take a stance in pressurizing/lobbying UCL to not allow such things to happen again in its premises. While the Union can only lobby UCL, it can actively monitor any such activities within its own spaces and through clubs and society. Making a proper channel to address any such instances would go a long way in establishing trans students (and allies) trust and confidence within the Union. The appropriate steps taken by the Union in resisting the aforementioned event were appreciated widely by the trans, non-binary and ally community both with UCL and NUS. Making it a Union policy will contribute towards trans student welfare time and again.

The proposal further calls for not just resisting transphobia on campus, but also actively promoting awareness of trans students' life challenges and experiences through regular events/activities or training depending on financial situation at the Union. This policy envisions the Union as a champion of tackling 'cisnormativity' within University life.

This proposal draws from and would be supported by two other policies already in place: Gender-neutral toilets,

<https://studentsunionucl.org/policy/up1915/toilet-transformation-in-ioe>

and trans inclusion in sports,

<https://studentsunionucl.org/policy/up1808/adoption-ucl-specific-transgender-inclusion-in-sport-policy>

The Union has a duty to promote welfare of students at UCL and its mission statement outlines its role in supporting students and enabling them to get more out of University through connections, activities and networks as well as influencing UCL and wider community on issues of importance for

students. By adopting this policy, the Union will further the objectives laid out in its mission statement.

How will this affect students?

In times when trans students are disproportionately vulnerable to hate crimes, gender-based and sexual violence, knowing that students Union is a space that has pledged trans student welfare and safeguarding as its core policies will build trust and confidence. This will in turn lead trans students to explore the University fully and take part in all activities without the fear of being discriminated against or harassed. This policy would go a long way in making UCL safer for Trans students where they can get more out of University experience in any and every sphere, they participate in.

The idea of Union promoting gender diverse spaces and encouraging , both internally in its activities and externally with UCL, active communication and collaboration with Trans students to make available diverse spaces (for example, mix of gendered and gender neutral bathrooms, or 'feminist spaces') would ensure an equitable inclusion of trans students which is based on their lived experiences.