

Bye-Law Sabbatical Officer Elections Cover Paper

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Summary

- Preventing re-election for sabbatical positions makes it easier for UCL to ignore student complaints and demands, since it encourages long-term inconsistency in political projects which currently depend upon successive officers following the same policies to be successful.
- There are two rules preventing re-election of sabbatical posts, one in the byelaws and one in the Articles of Association. The proposal here is to amend the relevant section of the byelaws, allowing a proportion of current officer portfolios to stand for re-election and setting the precedent for UCL approving an amendment to the Articles of Association thus that all officers can stand for two-terms.

Background

At UCLU, the four sabbatical trustee posts (Education and Campaigns Officer, Welfare and International Officer, Sustainability, Engagement and Operations Officer and Activities and Events Officer) are forbidden by the Memorandum and Articles of Association from seeking re-election, and so Council does not have the power to change this without UCL's consent.

UCL has in the past refused to make this change to the governing documents, arguably because UCLU has historically had a confrontational relationship with the university and it has proven easier to fend off student complaints for one year than for two years.

However, the BME Officer, Women's Officer and Postgraduate Students' Officer are not trustee positions; only the byelaws currently prevent re-election to these posts, and so this rule can be changed by Council.

A clear majority of students' unions in the UK allow full-time sabbatical officers to stand once for re-election, with the maximum numbers of terms in office (as set out by law) being two.

The Situation

UCL has over years, unsurprisingly, refused to amend several elements of the Articles of Association that affect UCLU's ability to challenge the university's senior management and hold it to account, including the ridiculously high quoracy level it has set for general assemblies (2 percent, a number bigger than the capacity of any room at UCL) and mandating that Sabbatical Trustees cannot stand for re-election. By custom, this has been extended to all officer positions.

As a result of not permitting re-election, many projects fail to survive a sabbatical officer's term. The Women's Network has been fortunate in having had several officers in succession prioritising opposition to sexual harassment, for example, helping the campaign extract a significant sum of money from the university to fund the sector-leading Zero Tolerance campaign. Others may and have not been so lucky; the battle to improve the conditions of postgraduates who teach has been revitalised this year, but a full-time officer at the centre of the project is needed to ensure its longevity.

Similarly, this year huge progress has been made on building the Parents and Carers Network, giving ground for a social space to the 3000 or so students at UCL who have caring responsibilities; however, much of the work around necessary campaigning (such as increased bursary provision to

aid childcare costs, or expanding the nursery) has been that of scoping, with tangible changes a long-term project requiring input over a more protracted period.

Allowing non-trustee sabbaticals to stand for re-election would set such a precedent that it would encourage UCL to amend the Articles of Association to allow all officers to run for two terms. This should be put in the wider context of efforts to democratise UCLU by lowering the quoracy level for general assemblies.

The proposal is to accept the attached amendment to the byelaws with immediate effect.