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UCL in bold bid to control landmark student venue



Photo: JOE TAYLOR

By ELINOR ZUKE • Editor

UCL has launched a bid to take over ULU's flagship headquarters for its own student union in a move that could provide a massive boost for UCL students - but risks slamming the door on those from other colleges.

For years UCL students have been forced to put up with a cramped and dishevelled student union building, with the college itself failing to provide improved premises in the hope it could one day get its hands on ULU's HQ and turn it into a social hub for UCL students.

And with the University of London (UL) - which has had enough of bankrolling ULU's spiralling costs - now asking colleges to submit expressions of interest in taking over ULU's Malet Street building as part of a cost-cutting drive, UCL has seized its chance.

UCL wants to take a long-term

lease of the whole building and hand over management of it to UCL Union, with ULU renting back space for its sports and societies, *London Student*, and limited representation services. The only rival bid to UCL's is from ULU itself, which is proposing to carry on running the building and re-develop its shops.

UCL's proposal claims it intends to make the building available for use by all UL students, with UCL's existing student advice centres and job service moved into the building for use by students at other colleges "on a contribution basis".

But asked by *London Student* how this contribution would be calculated, UCL finance chief Jack Foster said he didn't know - and couldn't give assurances that they would be affordable to small and specialist colleges.

Foster also admitted that UCL might not even offer these services to students from other colleges at all if it

meant reducing the levels of service for its own students.

UCL's proposal also includes providing medical and dental surgeries, a range of retail offerings, and the current level of extensive social space - but not the swimming pool, an expensive facility which is one of few in Central London. UCL is not prepared to foot the bill, insisting it must be covered by the colleges.

"A much stronger argument, on financial and usage grounds, might be made for the incorporation of this space into the fitness centre," the bid states with regard to the pool.

Foster admitted he had "no idea at all" how much it would cost to implement UCL's proposals. He told *London Student* it would "run into millions".

"We're at a very early stage, if we get some positive feedback, then we can get some professional advice on costings. We know we can afford it, because we're delivering most of those services at the moment. It's an extension of that."

UL officials also defended the absence of cost analysis in the bid. Director of Estates Martin Burchett said: "All we were after at this stage was an expression of interest, and clearly there's a lot of work that still needs to be done."

"We were genuinely after just an expression of interest, in general terms, what you want to do. We'll obviously have to talk about the financial deal in due course."

Although no guarantees have been

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Photo: MICHAEL BRUNSDEN, NOUSE



Who's that?

By ELINOR ZUKE • Editor

Nearly 50 per cent of UK undergraduate students didn't attend this year's Freshers Fair, and less than three per cent can name the President of the National Union of Students - some of the findings in a survey revealing just how low student involvement in their unions is.

The survey, conducted by Opinionpanel on behalf of *London Student*, interviewed 1019 students at 130 Higher Education Institutions, representative of the UK HE population in terms of gender, year group and university type, online between 21st and 23rd of May.

15 per cent of students said they had used none of the student union offerings the survey asked about.

The student services used most were Freshers Fairs - attended by 55 per cent of undergraduates, and commercial outlets such as bars, shops and cafés, used by nearly seventy per cent of students.

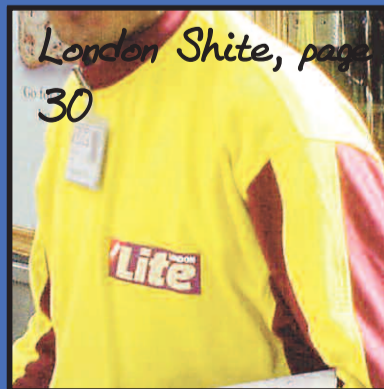
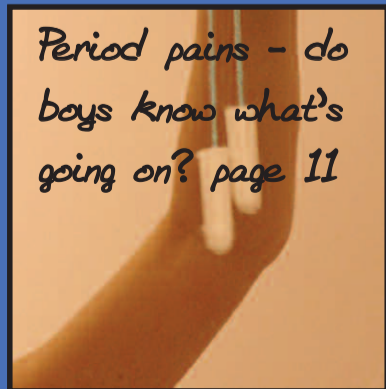
The survey also asked students if they thought they could name the President of the NUS. 93 per cent admitted they couldn't name her.

Of the 68 students out of 1019 who thought they could name her, only 25 (2.5 per cent of the sample) went on to select Gemma Tumelty (pictured) from a selection of four other names invented by *London Student*.

Gemma Tumelty said: "Sadly, it is impossible for the NUS President to engage on a one-to-one basis with every student in the country. That is

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King's loses out

By PETER BEECH

The tug-of-war over Somerset House's New Wing will end in victory for London's luxury hotel business.

According to the *Sunday Times* (May 11), hospitality heavyweight GuestInvest is due to pip rivals including KCL with a lease offer believed to be in the region of £50m.

John Pennethorne's grade 1 listed annexe, which faces onto Waterloo Bridge, has housed the Inland Revenue since 1849.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has been working with the Somerset House Trust to decide the future of the public building since the civil servants gave notice last year.

Other sections of the historic building occupied by government administration will be freed up by the reshuffle, with King's set to move into



Photo: GAETON LEE

buildings on the east side of the courtyard.

The Courtauld Institute of Art will continue to occupy the north wing, with the Institute of Contemporary Arts rumoured to be switching to the south or west wings from its current home in the Mall.

The main prize, however, seems to have been awarded to the developers.

GuestInvest stepped into the breach after negotiations with the Israeli Alrov group, reported in *London Student* last year, ground to a halt.

King's bosses have refused to comment on the reports. Last October, they published their own plans for the New Wing, which envisaged a 'crucible for the arts, with space for digital arts, film, music and performance.'

'Resigned' president paid

By ELINOR ZUKE • Editor

Student officers have reacted angrily to news that ULU President Jennifer Huseman, who stepped down from her post at the beginning of the month, is to be paid for what would have been the remainder of her time in office.

Although details of the deal made between Huseman and the University of London – who pay ULU sabbatical officers their £21k annual salary – are confidential, remaining VPs Diego Carmona and Joe Martin have been privately briefing fellow sabbaticals at other colleges about the arrangement.

In a statement circulated on 6th May, Huseman wrote "Effective immediately, and as a result of a worsening in my medical condition related to my disability, I am compelled to step down from the ULU Presidency in order that I may go on extended sick leave. It is with great sadness that I have had to make this decision, but under the circumstances it is what is best for my health and for Union business.

But stepping down does not equate to resignation, and officers have ridiculed Huseman's assertion that the

situation is best for ULU.

King's future president Chris Mullan commented on Imperial College news website Live!, which broke the news: "To sit there for 6 months, barely turning up once a month, all the while enjoying her £21,000 pa salary, knowing she could not work for it, is insulting, wasteful, greedy, and disgusting."

Mullan and others have questioned the veracity of her disability, despite meetings between Huseman and the University's occupational health therapist.

Eight officers had previously submitted a motion of no confidence to remove Huseman from her position, including her salary, in March. The motion listed examples where Huseman had failed to perform numerous aspects of her job.

Diego Carmona said the Senate meeting was cancelled because: "You can't no confidence someone while they're on sick leave and they can't defend themselves. It's not in the constitution, but it's necessary from a legal human resources point of view." But this decision disappointed some of the motion's proposers, all sabbatical officers who represent their colleges at

ULU's Senate.

Andy Fernando from UCLU said: "If you're sick, fair enough, but I don't just think that's an accurate record. When she was there she was failing to do anything. She failed to organise award ceremonies and lead on campaigns and meet with officers. Even her conduct within the office, from what I understand, was poor."

Another of the motion's proposers, Stephen Brown, who is President of Imperial College Union added that he was concerned that Huseman had not delegated responsibilities while unwell: "I imagine if I got run over on the way home I'd be on the phone to my colleagues saying 'you have to pick this up'" he said. "In a position of responsibility, that's the way the world works."

Jennifer Huseman declined to comment further on her situation. UL Director of Human Resources Kim Frost said: "All staffing matters are treated in confidence and this case is no different. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment."

He declined to comment on whether the University would cover the salary or deduct it from ULU's budget.

Students don't use union

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why members of each individual students' union are put forward to represent the views and interests of their fellow students on a national level.

"Students' unions are constantly looking for new ways to engage their members in the democratic process. But political apathy does not just affect students – most people do not know who their local MP is, for instance."

Imperial College Union President Stephen Brown said the results raise questions about the impact the NUS has on students.

"I'm not at all surprised," he told *London Student*. "While the president of the NUS is the public face of students,

it's very difficult to get their identity down to students on the ground. The name recognition isn't a massive issue for me, but at the same time it does raise questions about the work of the NUS.

"If I felt that NUS officers were doing something incredibly useful and directly relevant to the students I represent, I'd take on some responsibility for communicating that on, but unfortunately those occasions are very few and far between."

Further results show only a small minority of students joined a society or sports club at their union, while an even smaller fraction had used academic advice services or attended a union campaign.

One in sixteen have attended their union's general meeting – and half of those never went back.

Less than one in five said they'd joined a sports club, and 27 per cent joined a society.

Six per cent used their union to find a volunteering placement, and 15 per cent used an academic advice service.

Andy Fernando, VP Education and Welfare at UCL Union said union meeting attendance was a "case of where and when. If it's on a rainy day in the middle of nowhere they might not want to come. It's not that they're selfish, students sometimes aren't willing to involve themselves in things that don't affect them."

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