▥UCL

2022 – 2027
Strategic Plan

Student Life
Strategy

Executive summary

This paper sets out our vision for a unique student life at UCL and outlines the transformative impact we aspire to achieve by 2028. It starts by considering what makes student life at UCL unique and explores why extra and co-curricular activities are a core aspect of a rich student experience. It goes on to take stock of our current position, detailing key underlying principles before setting out our future ambitions. The strategy is underpinned by a commitment to work in partnership across UCL to:

- Build on the Students' Union's unique model of student engagement and leadership
- Recognise the diversity of our students and work towards achieving equity
- Provide opportunities for all levels of commitment and skill
- Support the creation of a student life 'hub' at a departmvental level
- Develop a coherent approach to supporting experiential learning
- Create more opportunities for Alumni to engage meaningfully with student life at UCL

The paper proposes six priority projects we believe will make the most substantial and ongoing impact to student life at UCL. These are:

1. Sport and physical activity
2. Performing and creative arts
3. Community volunteering
4. Intercultural engagement
5. Departmental societies
6. Vibrant student life in the heart of London

For each of the projects we have developed ambitious key performance indicators to govern our work phased over a 5-year period. This is summarised in the table below:

Project	Key performance indicators
Sport and Physical Activity	1. By 2028 50% (currently 25%) of students will engage with our sport and physical activity offering. 2. By 2028 over 5000 students across 10+ sports each will be involved in our TeamUCL intramural leagues. 3. By 2027 we will have a home for TeamUCL; a UCL sports facility acting as the epicentre of our sport and physical activity programme. 4. By 2028 we will have developed 5 TeamUCL sporting hubs.
Performing and creative arts	1. By 2025 we will have established a creative education programme of 10 inclusive courses from entry level to expert across various arts-based skills. 2. By 2026 over 1000 students will be involved in one-off performance opportunities. 3. By 2027 5000 students will be involved in our mass participation programme of accessible, low-commitment workshops across major arts disciplines. 4. By 2028 the number of students involved with artsUCL will be over 12,500.

Community volunteering	1. By 2028 the number of students taking part in community volunteering will exceed 5,000. 2. By 2028 students completing their dissertation through CRIS will increase from 200 to 800. 3. By 2028 the hours students give to volunteering will increase from 60,000 to 100,000.
Intercultural engagement	1. In 2024 we will deliver at least 15 major cultural celebration events annually with over 3,000 students attending a weeklong International Festival. 2. By 2026 at least 500 students will take part in informal language learning. 3. By 2027 at least 750 students will be engaged in international volunteering. 4. By 2028 there will be 10,000 active members of cultural societies.
Departmental societies	1. By 2026 50% courses will have an active departmental society. 2. By 2027 75% student leaders will complete a departmental societies leadership programme. 3. By 2028 we will have over 10,000 active members of departmental societies.
Vibrant student life in the heart of London	1. By 2028, 75% of all new intake students take part in an on campus event or activity during the Welcome period. 2. By 2028, half of all students attend at least one major on campus celebration each year, i.e., International Festival. 3. By 2028, 25% of students take part in a 'Discover London' activity each year.
Overall programme	By 2028 60% of UCL students will be a member of at least one affiliated club or society and at least 10,000 students will be involved in peer to peer or community volunteering.

The paper explains the rationale behind each of the identified ambitions above, examining our current offering, identifying growth areas, and setting a clear path to achieve our vision of an exceptional student life at UCL.

Our vision for student life at UCL

What is student life?

Students' development often takes place outside formal educational settings, through the networks they build, relationships they form, and experiences they have. Student life, any alumnus will tell you, is about the friends they met, where they lived, the extra-curricular activities they were involved in, the sports they played, societies they led, music and drama groups they performed in, the volunteering projects in which they participated, and the leadership roles they held. These experiences are a core part of a university education. They support career ambitions, grow confidence, and help to create mature and well-rounded graduates, ready to be leaders and decision-makers.

While this paper focuses on extra- and co-curricular activities and broader campus experience – termed 'student life' in this paper – we recognise the important synergies between 'academic' and 'non-academic' spheres. Equally we acknowledge that the strategy cannot cover every component that might contribute to a student's experience at UCL. We know that Student experiences must be seen in the round if we are to deliver a truly integrated, unique, and exceptional student life at UCL and that is why collaboration with both academic and professional services partners must be at the core of our delivery model. It is hoped that the strategy presents an opportunity to act as a springboard for other initiatives outside its direct scope and will ultimately benefit a wide range of areas across the whole institution.

Why is student life important?

The areas this paper covers are not just enjoyable for students but are essential in helping them to feel part of a learning community, enabling them to meet new friends and prevent loneliness and isolation. They support positive mental and physical wellbeing, build social and cultural capital, help students to achieve better academically, develop their confidence, and learn new skills that will support their future employability.

Involvement in extra and co-curricular activity is transformative in developing well-rounded individuals, equipped with the soft skills to empower them to excel in their formal education, throughout their time at UCL and beyond. To ensure students realise the full benefits of an active student life, a strong partnership between the Students' Union and UCL Careers is essential. By making targeted interventions we can enable students to effectively reflect on and articulate their experiences, helping students to realise their potential, aiding their resilience, and enabling them to be "change ready" to transition to life after their studies.

Extra- and co-curricular experience directly supports students to build skills in each area of UCL's Pillars of Employability: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/ucl-staff/embedding-employability-ucl.

It also helps to achieve the main transferable skills identified by the CBI that are of vital importance to graduate recruitment. These skills are equally important for postgraduate students at UCL, supporting individuals pursuing academic and other career paths.

"When it comes to university graduate recruitment, businesses are looking above all at the qualities of the individual… This underlines the importance of continuing to develop the broader, 'work readiness' skillsets that employers value – such as time management, team working, and problem-solving – in order to be best placed to seize future opportunities. The reality for graduates is that simply gaining a degree is not enough to win entry to a successful career meaning developing the right skills and attitudes is critical."

CBI, Education and Learning for the Modern World (2019)

Our vision for student life?

Student life at UCL is and must always be unique; grounded in our egalitarian values and history of radical thinking; built on the strength of our incredible, diverse, student community; and the ambitions we share in breaking down barriers to ensure all students receive an exceptional experience tailored to their needs. Our community is an intellectual powerhouse where talented students, supported by our incredible staff community must play the leading role in defining, delivering and constantly evolving student life at UCL. We will have succeeded when all students feel a sense of belonging at UCL, with a genuine ability to shape and develop their own experiences. Whether by leading student groups, volunteering projects, or taking part in life changing experiences, our ambition is that every student will be given the opportunity to learn, challenge themselves and thrive.

Our goal is to foster an environment where students can discover themselves, broaden their minds, develop their understanding of who they are, and the role they have to play as changemakers at UCL and beyond. To achieve this, we will create opportunities for students to push boundaries, challenge themselves, try new activities, question the world around them, and discover and hone their talents. We will develop a culture of volunteerism which sees students develop skills and give back to their peers and the wider community across London. We will invest in the development of resilient, reflective, and aspirational individuals, whose great memories of their time at UCL inspire them to be active within our alumni community, committed to lifelong learning, and ready to tackle the challenges facing an uncertain world. The legacy of UCL student life will be judged by the affinity students feel for the community that supported them, helped them to find themselves and build their futures.

We aim to develop:

- An environment which allows our students to enjoy a rich university life.
- Opportunities for all to try new activities, develop their skills, and build confidence.
- An integrated experience which sees strong synergies and complementarity between formal education and extra- and co-curricular activities.
- A major focus on inclusion; providing activities where students from diverse backgrounds feel welcome and able to thrive, with opportunities to get involved at every skill level.
- A student community equipped with the tools to enable excellent physical and mental wellbeing.
- A student community that feels a strong sense of belonging at UCL.
- Opportunities for all our students to make connections across our diverse student community, gaining intercultural skills and experience.
- Focused opportunities and help to prepare students for the world to come, as well as the world of today.
- Opportunities for students to engage with and contribute to communities across London.
- Opportunities for those students with special abilities and talents to excel and compete at national and international level.
- Appropriate facilities that support an excellent extra- and co-curricular experience.
- A strong external profile for UCL that showcases its excellent student experience, aiding its global reputation and future student recruitment.
- Opportunities for students to reflect and articulate the skills and experiences learned through their UCL student life.

Core principles

Principle 1: Quality

Student experience including our co- and extra-curricular provision will be of a standard commensurate with the academic global standing of UCL.

Principle 2: Diversity, inclusion, and belonging

Extra- and co-curricular provision will reflect and embed the value we place on diversity, inclusion and belonging to support our equalities and wellbeing agendas. Each student's unique circumstances will be recognised, and the right support and opportunities put in place to ensure the best outcome for them.

Principle 3: Partnerships

UCL and the Students' Union will work in partnership to create an environment where students can thrive in all aspects of their student life. UCL recognises and supports the role of the Students' Union as the main delivery partner for co- and extra-curricular activity at UCL, recognising that genuinely student-led activity in this area is a key unique selling point for the university and something to cherish. Ensuring a strong partnership between the Higher Education Development and Support Institute (HEDS) and the Students' Union will be central in maximizing the impact of these activities.

Principle 4: Beneficiaries

UCL and the Students' Union will work in partnership to provide a wide range of opportunities for all, to equip our students to achieve their personal ambitions and make positive contributions to society. In collaboration with UCL Careers, we will create moments for students to reflect on the skills developed through the activities they have been involved with at UCL, using this knowledge to help them achieve their career goals.

Principle 5: Environment

The physical and digital estate to support a rich student life will be at a standard expected from a world leading university and underpinned by our sustainability ambitions.

How will we achieve the vision?

Focus on the Students' Union's unique model of student engagement and leadership.

At the core of our strategy is the need to increase support for our unique model of student-led activity underpinned by high quality professional staff support, that sees student leaders as the chief actors in delivering exceptional experiences for their peers. Through this model we build stronger student communities and enable thousands of student leaders to gain life-changing skills. We must ensure we invest in the framework of support, structures, systems, and resources to empower student community and peer to peer volunteers to create activities, events and experiences which are not simply transactional, but can be transformational for their own development and that of the wider UCL community. Moreover, we recognise that there is further potential for aspects of this model to be adapted and applied to the formal curriculum.

Recognise the diversity of our students and work towards achieving equity.

We recognise that each individual student has different circumstances, backgrounds, and experiences. We have one of the most diverse student communities in the world, representing nationalities from across the globe, with over 50% of students studying at postgraduate level. As the make-up of the student body changes, with 25% of the incoming undergraduate cohort on widening participation schemes, we must recognise that creating a wide range of opportunities is not enough on its own. We must build into all our programmes, the agility to adjust, move resources, and solicit meaningful feedback that enables us to tailor opportunities so that every student at UCL has access to activities that suit their needs and aspirations.

Provide opportunities for all levels of commitment and skill.

We must ensure all students can get involved with activities with different levels of required commitment; as participants at events, taking part in one-off opportunities, becoming involved in student groups as peer-to-peer or community volunteers, or being actively involved as student leaders delivering their own projects or running their own groups. To deliver an exceptional student life we must cater for all levels of desired engagement. Previous experiences, background, or past opportunities should never be a barrier to students enjoying a rich and fulfilling student life at UCL.

Create a student life 'hub' at a departmental level.

While this strategy focuses on activities outside of formal education, student life is a multi-faceted experience requiring a joined-up approach. Agreeing a standardised model for the support of departmental and course based societies across UCL would provide us with an opportunity to create a central hub for student life locally, to help define and deliver a personalised and tailored experience at a departmental level.

Well supported and resourced departmental societies should become the conduit for a wide range of extra- and co-curricular activities with the Students' Union and UCL working together to make positive interventions and drive new initiatives. By ensuring close collaboration at departmental or course level between our network of Academic Reps, society officers, and staff, we will create a uniquely agile and responsive student experience 'unit'.

Through these departmental or course-based groups, our programmes to deliver intramural sports leagues, volunteering in the community, career support, alumni engagement, and community building social activity becomes more than the sum of their parts. It is through this lens that the priority projects below will come to life.

Develop a coherent approach to supporting experiential learning.

Our approach will be underpinned by a strong partnership across UCL aimed at maximizing the impact of experiential learning in all its forms. Working closely with the new Higher Education Development and Support Institute (HEDS) we will ensure a coherent, integrated approach to empowering students to recognise, reflect and articulate the skills they have developed through engagement with our programmes.

Enable Alumni to engage meaningfully with student life at UCL.

Through a strong partnership with Alumni Relations, we will seek out meaningful opportunities to harness the talent and enthusiasm of the alumni community. Whether it be through mentoring student leaders, offering high-impact volunteering opportunities or sharing their expertise in sport and the arts, our aim is to enhance the student experience and foster a lifelong relationship between the university, our current students, and our global alumni community.

Priority projects

1: Sport and physical activity

Sport and other forms of physical activity build student communities, accelerate friendships, support physical and mental wellbeing, and help to provide a sense of belonging. We want to build an active campus for UCL, where every student has the opportunity to take part in sport and physical activity, in a way that works for them.

Where we are now

At present, our student engagement levels are strong, but not yet exceptional. TeamUCL sports clubs engaged over 7000 students in 2021-22 with a further 3000 students engaging in our other physical activity programmes. Our sporting performance as a university ranks us between 15th and 25th nationally – this could and should be better for a university of our size and standing. We are sector leaders in delivering inclusive and participation-level sport and physical activity but need increased resource to maximise our reach across the student body.

The single biggest challenge we face is a lack of university-owned sporting facilities, required to develop our programme further.

Where we want to be

UCL is a global leader in education; we want to develop our sport and physical activity offer to drive our student experience to this same high standard. Students should want to study at UCL because of our sporting provision, not in spite of the lack of it.

We want to provide all UCL students with the sporting offer to meet their needs, whether trying a sport for the first time, making friends in a TeamUCL league sports team, experiencing world-class coaching to excel as an athlete, or sports volunteering in the local community.
With a home for sport, we would work to develop TeamUCL Focus Sport Hubs. Sector-leading student sports clubs delivering performance pathways,

high quality coaching for all sporting abilities, links with grass-roots sports clubs and community volunteering projects will all be in one place.

a. Active campus
i.   By 2028 engage 50% (currently 25%) of students across our sport and physical activity offering each year.
ii. Continue to develop and grow our nationally acclaimed Project Active programme with a focus on diverse participation in yoga, dance, and other accessible and fun activities, alongside developing new mass-participation events: a new annual 'UCL Campus to Campus Charity Run' from UCL East to Bloomsbury; inter-departmental digital fitness challenges; and a wide variety of cross UCL sporting tournaments with a focus on inclusion and diversity of participation.
iii. Use sport and physical activity as a tool to unite Bloomsbury and UCL East campuses through active travel, and the two-way draw of sporting activity and facilities.

b. Building our TeamUCL community
i.   Develop and enhance the coaching infrastructure of our 75 TeamUCL sports clubs to cement our standing as one of the largest, most diverse, and inclusive university sport programmes in the UK.
ii. Continue to expand TeamUCL Leagues – our intramural competition offering – with an aim of engaging 5000+ students across 10+ sports each year by 2028.
iii. Continued development of The London Varsity Series, using our friendly rivalry with King's College London to maximise support for this high-profile event and build our sense of TeamUCL pride and belonging. We aim to significantly grow spectator involvement in the competition as a focal point for all students to support our sporting community and feel engaged as part of the community of students.

c. Supporting students to reach their sporting potential.

i. Expand our disability sport programme providing opportunities for students with disabilities, alongside targeted initiatives for students struggling with their mental health.

ii. Upskill our students as coaches and officials, enabling them to gain qualifications, whilst increasing our volunteer workforce to deliver sport internally and within the local community.

iii. Gain Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) accreditation, evidencing that UCL provides a supportive university experience where dual career athletes can thrive.

d. Sports facilities to enable increased participation and an improved student experience.

i. Create a home for TeamUCL at UCL East. Provision of new indoor sports hall and artificial floodlit facilities at the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre.

ii. Relocation of our current university grass pitches to a more accessible site on the public transport network, with core all-weather facilities.

iii. New larger and fit for purpose gym at the Bloomsbury campus as part of a new Students' Union building, alongside the development of further satellite gyms at sites, including at UCL East, as part of a wider TeamUCL gym network to make students feel part of our community.

Key performance indicators

1. By 2028 50% (currently 25%) of students will engage with our sport and physical activity offering.

2. By 2028 over 5000 students across 10+ sports each will be involved in our TeamUCL intramural leagues.

3. By 2028 we will have a home for TeamUCL; a UCL sports facility acting as the epicentre of our sport and physical activity programme.

4. By 2028 we will have developed 5 TeamUCL sporting hubs.

2: Performing and creative arts

From entry level to expert, the arts should be accessible to everyone, allowing all students to benefit from creative education and expression, building a greater sense of belonging and community within UCL, whilst increasing opportunities to engage with the wider arts community in London and beyond.

Where we are now

A relatively new brand identity – artsUCL, is the creative community at Students' Union UCL. As of 2021-22, we have 6211 UCL students involved in 33 arts focused groups. Ranging from Live Music to Film and TV, there is a diverse range of creative interests represented within the community. A major part of artsUCL currently is the student-led programme of productions which sees 26 shows being put on each year, with over 700 students involved onstage and behind the scenes.

Currently, the programme mostly attracts those with a previous interest and knowledge in the arts. Whilst the quality and scale of the work done by the community is impressive and has led to multiple alumni leading successful careers across the field, it can unfortunately limit the accessibility of the community for those who are yet to experience the numerous benefits of creative expression and education.

Where we want to be

By breaking down barriers to participation, we will make UCL a place where creativity is championed and all students, regardless of background, are able to develop the creativity, innovation, and confidence that arts involvement provides. With enhanced professional support, we want to increase the number of opportunities available to engage with artsUCL, for those at all levels of experience.

We will empower our arts groups to expand and enhance their offering to members and non-members alike, with the aim of vastly increasing the engagement with the community across the student body so that by 2027 over 12,500 students are involved with the arts at UCL.

a. Arts for all
Open the arts to a far wider section of the UCL student body by launching a major new programme of large-scale, low commitment participation workshops and classes to develop creative confidence and incubate new talent.

i. Establish a mass participation programme of made up of low cost and low commitment art, craft, drama, dance, and music activities and entry level skills development workshops.
ii. Run a series of major 'no experience required' performance opportunities each year, with at least 1000 of students engaging with the creative process.
iii. Create opportunities for students to perform at major UCL events and celebrations such as open days and graduation ceremonies that are open to the whole UCL community.
iv. Work in partnership with community organisations and utilise arts alumni to create opportunities to creatively engage outside of UCL.
v. Expand support for smaller scale 'black box theatre' productions which allow students to develop new creative skills and build confidence without the constraints and risk associated with larger scale theatrical productions.
vi. By the end of the 2028, we will double artsUCL participation levels from approx. 6200 individuals (in year 2021-22) to approx. 12,500 (around 26% of the student population).

b. Increase the accessibility of this creative education

Develop and expand our existing music, drama, dance and student media programme to enable increased levels of participation at all levels across our diverse student community, with a particular focus on areas that drive high levels of participation.

i. Provide increased support to our music, arts, drama, and dance groups to allow them to scale up their activities to reach more students at all levels, including supporting emerging talent with more professional creative support.
ii. Develop a 'Creative Development Plan' with each arts society to highlight areas for progression and expansion and provide clear actionable steps towards this.
iii. Establish the creative education programme – a series of inclusive courses, with minimal cost for students, that allow students to try activities and develop skills and confidence within the disciplines of music, drama, art, and dance. This will include peer-to-peer tuition to reduce costs as well as advanced professional classes, supported by a bursaries programme to ensure access for all.
iv. Develop a musical instrument and equipment library for student use, removing a key barrier to participation.
v. Provide additional support for student media outlets, creating more opportunities for students to contribute towards publications and develop journalistic, technical and editorial skills.

c. Make Bloomsbury Theatre the home of artsUCL

Maximise the potential benefits of the Theatre and Studio Theatre for our student community, nurturing a collaborative arts community at UCL that benefits students and academic colleagues.

i. Continue to build the profile of our student shows in the Bloomsbury Theatre to maximise its potential as a key asset for the student community.
ii. Hold a collaborative artsUCL showcase at the beginning of each academic year to immediately create the association with the community and venue.
iii. Explore the potential to increase time available to student groups in the Theatre and Studio annually to allow for the involvement of more of the community and ensure more student performances are held on campus in appropriate theatre spaces
iv. Explore whether we can create a stronger connection between students and the Theatre's Commercial Hire and Bookings, supporting students to gain experience of theatre programming and management
v. Seek out opportunities to create additional performance spaces to meet the growing need of our student community including considering potential for provision at the UCL East Campus.

Key performance indicators
1. By 2025 we will have established a creative education programme of 10 inclusive courses from entry level to expert across variety of arts-based skills.
2. By 2026 over 1000 students will be involved in one-off performance opportunities.
3. By 2027 5000 students will be involved in our mass participation programme of accessible, low-commitment workshops across major arts disciplines.
4. By 2028 the number of students involved with artsUCL will be over 12,500.

3: Community volunteering

At its core, student volunteering is about building bonds – between students and people in other communities, between students and voluntary and community sector organisations, and between students themselves. Volunteering provides them a chance to get out of the university bubble and put their own values into action. It can also boost their wellbeing, help them develop new skills, and gain insights into their academic studies. We want every UCL student to be inspired and empowered to take part in rewarding, well-organised community volunteering that makes a difference in the wider world.

Where we are now

We have three areas of focus:

- Community Partners – we place UCL students with volunteering opportunities at our network of community organisations.
- Student-Led Volunteering Programme – we support students to set up and run their own community projects.
- The Community Research Initiative – we help create research collaborations between postgraduate taught students and community organisations.

Each year, around 2000 UCL students are supported into community volunteering by our Volunteering Service, giving over 60,000 hours of their time. Those students volunteer within 200 voluntary and community sector organisations across London, and with 70 student-led community projects. In addition, 200 PGT students engage with our Community Research Initiative. The Volunteering Service is particularly successful at engaging international students, UK students from BAME and widening participation backgrounds, female students, and disabled students.

Where we want to be

Inspiring more students will require us to increase the visibility of volunteering within UCL and have everyone aware and excited about its possibilities. Our aim is to make volunteering regarded as a core activity for students at UCL and create more opportunities for volunteers to connect with one another.

a. Make it easier to volunteer
Volunteering has a successful track record in engaging a wide range of UCL students. Nonetheless, we are keen to continue to remove barriers to participation. We need to make it easier to find volunteering that matches students' interests and ambitions and broaden the range of opportunities on offer. Time-light and flexible roles can form a good entry point into volunteering and allow all students – whatever their other commitments – to take part. We also need to use improved IT to make the process of signing up easier for both students and volunteer recruiters.

i. Expand the student-led volunteering programme, particularly focusing on projects developed by clubs and societies, and those based within academic departments (see below).
ii. Support community partners to develop new volunteering opportunities for UCL students.
iii. Use new technology to make it even easier for students to find suitable volunteering opportunities.
iv. Develop more one-off volunteering opportunities, especially those within walking distance of our campuses and student residences.
v. Improve awareness of volunteering amongst UCL students and the staff who support them.

b. Expand high impact volunteering opportunities
Over the last few years, we have developed several innovative new models of volunteering that engage new cohorts of students, and which are highly regarded by our community partners.

i. Social Hackathons – expand our programme of day-long problem solving events bringing together students and our community partners.
ii. UCL Charity Consultancy Challenge – significantly expand our successful week-long consultancy experience for teams of students within the voluntary and community sector.

c. Integrate community volunteering with academic departments and UCL Careers

We know that co-curricular volunteering can enhance students' academic experience and expose them to more informal and diverse learning environments. However, take up is highly variable across departments and faculties. We aim to unleash the learning potential of community volunteering.

i. Grow the Community Research Initiative for Students (CRIS). Our CRIS programme connects master's students and community organisations so they can collaborate on research projects and solve real world challenges. Our aim is to expand this programme, doubling uptake from 200 to 400 as a first step. This could include opening the programme to final year UG students and to PGR students.

ii. Expand the number of student-led community projects based in academic departments.

iii. Expand our 'Building Bridges' programme where students, academic staff, and community partners co-design subject-specific volunteer roles.

iv. Improve our support for department and faculty-led volunteering programmes, building upon the model of our partnership with UCL Engineering Outreach.

v. Build on existing links with UCL Careers. UCL Careers and the Volunteering Service already work closely on projects like 'Volunteering & Your CV' and the recent UCL Charity Consultancy Challenge. There is great potential for further work, for example increasing support for work-based learning and around UCL Careers themed weeks.

vi. Embed community volunteering within the UCL East campus, working closely with the academic departments there, the Engagement East team, and Access & Widening Participation.

vii.Work with Innovation and Enterprise and our community partners to develop a 'initiative taking' programme designed to ensure that all students can be active participants in the betterment of UCL and their own student experience. By providing a structured programme of skills sessions and coaching, we will incubate the next generation of social entrepreneurs; while supporting individuals to take initiative and work on projects which tackle the challenges at UCL that matter the most to them.

Key performance indicators

1. By 2028 the number of students taking part in community volunteering will exceed 5000.
2. By 2028 students completing their dissertation through CRIS will increase from 200 to 800.
3. By 2028 the hours students give to volunteering will increase from 60,000 to 100,000.
4. By 2028 there will be at least 10,000 volunteers (peer to peer and in the community) supported by Student's Union UCL.

4: Intercultural engagement

UCL's student community is one of the most diverse in the world, however, students do not always realise the benefits. We want to create a truly global experience for all students at UCL, harnessing the diversity of our student body, building links across the world, and creating opportunities for international volunteering which ensure every UCL student is internationally aware, culturally inquisitive, and a true global citizen ready to change the world for the better.

Where we are now

In 2020 the Students' Union launched a Global Engagement Strategy with an aim to foster an inclusive and tolerant community with high levels of intercultural competence whilst increasing the reputation of UCL nationally and internationally. The Union now supports 64 affiliated cultural societies, with 5000 active members, who run a range of fantastic events and activities throughout the year. We have further increased our work delivering culturally significant events across campus with notable examples including Chinese New Year, Asian Spring Festival and Nowruz opened up to the whole student community. Our International Festival has grown each year to an annual series of events with over 1000 student attendees in 2022, and we have begun to build fruitful relationships with international partners.

Where we want to be

We want to enable all UCL students to enjoy an intercultural experience at UCL, substantially increasing the membership of our affiliated groups, as well as supporting more one-off events open to all. We will greatly increase our capacity to provide opportunities for students to engage with different cultures at UCL and ensure more students are given the chance to participate in co-curricular activities in London and overseas that develop genuine connections with student groups around the world.

a. Expand UCL-wide cultural celebrations

i. We will work with our cultural societies to put on authentic and traditional celebration events that will not only allow our students to see their own cultural milestones highlighted and respected, but also enable the wider UCL student community to experience and understand key aspects of global cultures.

ii. Engage students in the planning of major celebrations at UCL for key cultural moments throughout the year, such as Chinese New Year, Diwali, and Nowruz, expanding our programme every year based on student demands with at least 15 major campus cultural event celebrations embedded in the annual cycle by 2024.

iii. Expand our annual International Festival into a week-long, student-led celebration and showcase of international culture at UCL, employing live streaming technology to co-create aspects of our festival with global partner institutions.

b. Intercultural engagement for all
Enable students to develop cross-cultural friendships and connections, help develop language and communication skills, and learn more about global cultures from their peers.

i. Starting from induction, establish a year-round programme of events and visits specifically designed to create cross-cultural connections and friendships across our diverse student community.

ii. Establish a large-scale peer-to-peer recreational language learning offer for UCL students with at least 500 students directly benefiting by 2026. This would complement the formal language learning offer provided by the Centre for Languages & International Education, inspiring more students to enrol for their courses.

iii. Invest in training students to become peer tutors, including exploring opportunities for virtual 'exchanges' with students from international institutions.

iv. Seek out opportunities to support UCL's Grand Challenge on Intercultural Communication, aligning our work with academic and professional services colleagues to deliver a positive impact at UCL and beyond.

c. Enable international mobility

We will develop opportunities for international mobility and partnerships across the globe which broaden student horizons and develop global citizenship skills through co-curricular activity.

i. Develop a national pilot project to promote international opportunities by supporting clubs, societies, and volunteering groups to take part in volunteering projects abroad with at least 750 students involved in international volunteering projects by 2027.
ii. Develop several international partnerships enabling elected student officers to build peer relationships and connections with universities and students' unions across the world that will help provide UCL students with the opportunities to travel and have first-hand experience of the differences and similarities in student life.

d. Disagreeing well at a global university

We have a rich tradition of actively promoting freedom of speech, hosting events which broaden the horizon of students across UCL, exposing our community to a wide variety of often antithetical viewpoints, challenging them to see the world from other perspectives and to better understand the role they play as global citizens. Expanding our work in this space to facilitate a wide range of opportunities to tackle controversial issues whilst supporting our students to disagree well should be a central aspect of a UCL education.

i. Pilot a modern, inclusive series of open student debates focused on tackling the grand challenges facing the world. We will create a forward thinking and vibrant programme that will embed the culture of civil discourse within the student community at UCL enabling our radical thinkers at every level to develop their skills and confidence in debate and respectful disagreement.
ii. Create a 'tackling contentious issues' skills development programme, starting with a pilot partnered with experts at Queens University Belfast, creating opportunities for students to build an understanding of conflict and reconciliation in the Northern Irish context. Working with Arena and VPEE, develop a reflective learning programme to upskill student leaders to tackle the contentious issues of an uncertain world, building resilient and reflective students able to disagree well at UCL and beyond.

Key performance indicators

1. In 2024 we will deliver at least 15 major cultural celebration events annually with over 3000 students attending a weeklong International Festival.
2. By 2026 at least 500 students will take part in informal language learning.
3. By 2027 at least 750 students will be engaged in international volunteering.
4. By 2028 there will be 10,000 active members of cultural societies.

5: Departmental societies

Departmental societies deepen students' sense of belonging in their department, are a conduit for insight into the student experience and add incalculable value to the UCL learning community. Our vision is to reimagine departmental societies as pioneering student-led hubs for extra- and co-curricular activities within every department at UCL, inspiring students and staff to come together, forming an intellectual partnership which transforms the student experience at a departmental level.

Where we are

In 2021 we created a new model of support for departmental societies, working with existing non-affiliated groups and colleagues across the institution to understand how best to support the development of thriving departmental learning communities. We now have 28 affiliated groups and 3000 active members, the beginnings of a new development and awards scheme, and a clear structure for affiliation and bespoke support from both Union and departmental staff.

Where we want to be

We aspire to affiliate all existing departmental societies, creating new departmental or course based groups where a need is identified. This will enable thousands more students to benefit from tailored support, training, and resources, providing opportunities to develop new partnerships and create innovative activities designed to build inclusive, vibrant communities at a departmental level. Our student leaders know what their peers want, and, with the right resources and partnerships in place, they can build a real sense of belonging and pride in their cohort, bridging the gap between the academic and 'extra-curricular' sphere.

a. Standardise support and resources for departmental societies across UCL

i. Provide tailored support, funding, and training for departmental societies across UCL. By 2027 we aim to have a departmental society in all UCL departments.
ii. Introduce risk, event, and project management expertise which will empower student groups to thrive.
iii. Improve sense of belonging through the establishment of TeamUCL League teams in every departmental society, creating more opportunity for leadership roles and community building via sport.

b. Roll out departmental society development programme

We will invest in the training and development of our student leaders, ensuring they are empowered to excel in their vital roles.

i. Create a collaborative development planning process which will upskill student leaders helping students to initiate new activities, manage finances and deliver sustainable growth in their activities whilst building a deeper sense of community.
ii. Invest in departmental society leadership programme and development awards which recognise and showcase our groups' many developments and achievements with 75% of departmental society leaders actively engaged by 2027.

c. Build strong academic representative and staff partnerships

We will enhance relationships between departmental societies and Academic Reps to strengthen the student voice, invigorate discussions on how departments can improve student experience in the round, to provide the best opportunities to their learning community.

i. Create an agreed model which enables all new departmental societies to integrate the related Academic Reps onto their committee.
ii. Bridge the gap between UCL departments and the Students' Union, share resources and administrative responsibilities that alleviate pressure on UCL staff so they can focus on providing the best education and tailored experiences.
iii. Ensure all departmental societies have a designated point of contact in their department they can rely on for support.
iv. Work with HEDS to build a coherent approach to delivering additional wholesale co/extra and formal curricular support.

Key performance indicators
1. By 2026 50% courses will have an active departmental society.
2. By 2027 75% student leaders complete the departmental societies leadership programme.
3. By 2028 we will have over 10,000 active members of departmental societies.

6: Vibrant student life in the heart of London

UCL's estate is unique, expansive, and provides exceptional spaces for events that bring the students, staff, and our local community together. Our Bloomsbury campus is positioned in the heart of London – a stone's throw from world-class attractions and our new UCL East Campus based in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic park is at the centre of London's new creative quarter for culture, education and innovation. The development of the Campus Experience and Infrastructure Team, along with the Students' Union's extensive events management experience, provides an opportunity to create a unified vision for campus events, based on partnership and collaboration.

Harnessing our collective skills, we will deliver a wide range of events in line with our shared ambition to create a vibrant campus and a truly exceptional student experience, with high quality events running every week during term time. Whether it be our extensive welcome programme, our winter festival, or end of year celebration events that take over campus, students should be able to actively shape and enjoy the most vibrant campus in London.

a. Enhancing quality and providing professional support
Thousands of events take place across UCL every year led by departments, professional services teams, students, and external organisations, from full-scale festivals to intimate workshops, we will work to collectively enhance the overall quality of UCL events by:

i. Creating a framework for running an event at UCL, setting an agreed standard for events run on UCL campus to ensure all events are safe, accessible, sustainable, and where appropriate, student-led.
ii. Providing training, support, and ongoing development for students and staff to continually enhance our collective capacity to deliver outstanding events.
iii. Where possible, engaging our exceptional students to deliver our events programme, either as a paid or voluntary opportunity.
iv. Enhancing and utilising the UCL Go app to ensure events are clearly advertised and booking onto events is a seamless experience, contained within a UCL digital environment.

b. Our campus
There is a substantial opportunity to deliver a comprehensive programme of major events across the year, centred on our Bloomsbury and East campuses. We will achieve this by:

i. Harnessing a partnership between UCL Estates and the Students' Union and focus on achieving the best outcomes for students as our core aim whilst recognising the need to seek commercial opportunities to reduce financial burden.
ii. Creating a central programme of high-profile festival style celebration events on the Bloomsbury campus, led and delivered by students wherever possible.
iii. Forming partnerships with community organisations to deliver events which help bring new visitors to our campus, connect our students with community organisations, and encourage our students to be active members of their city.

c. Discover London
Off-campus, we must capitalise on the incredible opportunities that our location in London offers our students. We should not leave this to chance but ensure that every student at UCL realises the benefit of our location. We will achieve this by:

i. Curating a regular programme of activity that engages students with the very best that London has to offer in arts, culture, sport, food, and entertainment.
ii. Centrally delivering a year-round 'Discover London' campaign to acts as a gateway for students to access the best London has to offer.
iii. Leverage the 'Discover London' initiative to form strategic partnerships with City Hall and Visit London, promoting the huge impact UCL's student community has on the local economy.
iv. Seek out opportunities to work in partnership with the UCL London Office, showcasing the contribution UCL makes to our home city.

Key performance indicators
1. By 2028, 75% of all new intake students will take part in an on-campus event or activity during the Welcome period.
2. By 2028, half of all students will attend at least one major on campus celebration each year, i.e., International Festival.
3. By 2028, 25% of students will take part in a Discover London activity each year.

Other enablers

a. Consider Investment in a new home for Students' Union UCL

Consider investment in a new fit for purpose home for the Students' Union which will create a central hub for student life, a genuinely student-led vibrant centre at the heart of campus, and a one stop shop for a vast range of social extra-curricular activities which will be transformative for UCL student experience.

b. Consider investment in new facilities for sport

Investigate potential of expanding the Union's gym at the Bloomsbury campus, moving the Union's sportsground to a more accessible location on the public transport network and the development of multi-sport facilities at the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre at the Olympic Park.

c. Remove financial barriers to participation

Support the Students' Union to grow and develop its Participation Fund, providing financial support for students to participate in extra-curricular activity. Personal circumstances should not bar any student from taking part in an active and vibrant student life. Support the Students' Union to develop a major programme of fundraising in support of this.

d. Utilise high quality student led social spaces

Review the Students' Union's social spaces, with a view to significantly increase capacity and enable the Union to play a more prominent role in social spaces across the campus to increase the sense of community and belonging for students. Creatively use venue spaces and utilise other venues across campus to deliver an increasingly diverse range of social events.

e. Invest in volunteers

Increase support for peer to peer and community volunteers to establish, lead and develop a wide variety of groups to support the interests and passions of our diverse community. Increase investment in providing dedicated leadership training and support the personal development of student leaders, and empower more students to develop events, activities, and opportunities that benefit the UCL community.

f. Recognise extra-curricular and co-curricular achievement

Work with HEDS and UCL Careers to develop new ways for students to receive recognition or credit for involvement in extra- and co-curricular activities, including helping them to reflect on the skills they have developed and how to communicate these to employers.

g. Partners in delivery

Continue to foster a strong and successful partnership between UCL and the Students' Union, helping the Union to move towards its vision of being one of the best in the world; respecting its role as UCL's main delivery partner for the extra-curricular and social experience for students and the benefits of the Union's student-led, but professionally supported, approach to activities and events.

UCL

2022 – 2027
Strategic Plan

Student Life
Strategy