

The Students' Union has had many successes and continue making a meaningful impact on student life. This year, the Union has significantly improved student representation with a new academic rep system, increasing representatives by 41% and ensuring more student voices are heard. The Food Pantry has provided essential support, helping over 500 students facing financial difficulties stay fed. The Student Parliament has successfully passed four motions on key issues, ranging from Ethical Investment to Student Employability, demonstrating its commitment to positive change.

Additionally, the Students' Union Officers have led campaigns like Wobble Week, offering vital mental health and well-being support to students during challenging times. With additional funding, the Students' Union can expand these initiatives and introduce new programs that further enhance student support, representation, and opportunities. Investing in the Union is an investment in students' success and well-being.

In the next year the Students' Union really wants to build on current communities and improve its reach out to students. We strongly believe in being aligned with the universities goals and supporting each other to improve student experience at Birkbeck.

Financial History

Over the past year, Birkbeck Students' Union (SU) has faced increasing financial pressures due to rising costs, including pay awards and the high expenses associated with securing sports venues in central London. As a result, the SU has been forced to make significant cuts to staffing and budgets, which has negatively impacted our ability to effectively support students.

To manage costs, two Student Union Assistant positions were not filled, leading to a natural reduction in our capacity to communicate with students and provide representative support through Student Voice. This shortfall has placed additional administrative burdens on existing managers, reducing the time available for strategic development and growth of the Union.

These staffing cuts are part of a broader trend over the past few years, where the SU has repeatedly reduced staffing and resources in response to rising costs. This cycle of cuts has significantly hindered the SU's ability to grow and improve its services for students. Unlike other Students' Unions, Birkbeck SU operates with highly restricted funds, limiting our ability to respond proactively to student needs as they arise.

Not all student needs or issues can be predicted and budgeted for in advance. Therefore, it is essential that the SU has access to unallocated funds to respond promptly to emerging student issues and support officer-led campaigns without having to seek additional funding from the university throughout the year. Relying on university approval for funds often causes delays, limiting the SU's ability to address student concerns quickly and effectively.

Block Grant Proposal

The SU is requesting that the university increase the block grant to £660,000. While this may seem like a significant increase, it represents the necessary funding to break the SU out of its current cycle of financial strain and enable improvements in services for students.

This increase would mean raising the current funding per student from £54.04 to £80 per student. As outlined in the benchmarking paper previously submitted, Birkbeck SU would remain on the lower end of overall benchmarking compared to other students' unions in London and similar institutions. This additional funding would also provide access to unrestricted funds, reducing the SU's dependency on additional funding requests from the university throughout the year and allowing for greater flexibility to respond to student needs and initiatives more effectively.

The information below will outline the SUs priorities when it comes to this funding while also allow more unrestrictive funds.

Receptionist

We recognise that our visibility on campus needs improvement, and students have shared similar feedback through various channels. As a small Students' Union, our office is often unmanned due to staff being in and out of meetings, making it difficult for students to access support when they need it. To address this, we aim to ensure our office is consistently staffed from 2pm to 8pm, Monday to Friday. Providing better accessibility for both our growing daytime student community and evening students.

Introducing a dedicated receptionist will create a welcoming and reliable presence, ensuring students always have someone to speak to at a time that suits them. In addition, the receptionist would support key administrative tasks such as booking advice appointments, coordinating room reservations for student events, minuting meetings, and managing queries. This additional support would free up staff time of other staff, allowing them to be more visible on campus. Whether through weekly SU stalls promoting events and communities or by focusing on key projects such as revamping societies and reviewing advice team policies. Investing in this role is an essential step towards strengthening our engagement, visibility, and overall support for students.

38,721 (Grade 4)

Asking:

£45,000 (Including set up costs such as Laptop, Receptionist Desk, Equipment).

Manager Salary Review

Currently, three of our managers are on lower salaries compared to their counterparts at other Students' Unions. Retaining experienced staff is crucial, as

their expertise plays a vital role in the success of the Students' Union, and a high staff turnover would negatively impact the services we provide to students.

We are committed to fairly rewarding our managers; however, the SU cannot afford to do so under the current block grant. We believe that staff deserve to be paid fairly and in line with inflation. To address this, we are requesting a reserve of £30,000 to cover the costs of the regrading process. Investing in fair pay will help maintain stability, retain talent, and ensure the continued success of our services for students.

Asking

30,000

Clubs and Societies

Clubs and Societies are the heart of creating student communities on campus which aligns with the university education strategy.

The Activities Team has had a highly successful and engaging period, with 150 students officially joining sports clubs or purchasing memberships. In February alone, there were 29 student-run events, including regular training sessions for Dance sport and Mountaineering, as well as some exciting one-off events. Highlights include the Ukrainian Society hosting a vibrant Salsa dancing workshop and the Investment Society launching an impressive Trading Competition.

A standout achievement came from the Dance sport Team, who competed at a competition in Birmingham, becoming champions in 4 categories and securing strong placements in several others, a fantastic testament to their hard work and talent.

Currently, the Students' Union is only able to provide administrative support for sports teams and societies, limiting the opportunities available to students. We aspire to offer financial support like that of other Students' Unions, ensuring our student groups can thrive. To achieve this, we are requesting £20,000 to support sports teams, which face significant costs, and £10,000 to assist societies. These funds would be distributed on a case-by-case basis, recognising that some societies have minimal expenses (e.g., Film Society), while others require greater financial support to operate effectively.

For comparison, SOAS Students' Union allocates £80,000 to support their sports teams and societies. With this additional funding, we can facilitate more student-led events, strengthen campus communities, and enhance the overall student experience. Which aligns with the University's goals for supporting student communities.

Asking:

30,000

New Office

The SU understands that the university may not have immediate plans to revamp the new SU space this year. However, we are requesting funding to refresh and improve our new office to create a more engaging and welcoming environment for students.

Currently, the office lacks character and feels less inviting as a result. We believe that simple, cost-effective improvements, such as introducing new furniture, adding more plants, and increasing seating would help showcase the SU's branding and identity. These changes would make the space more appealing and encourage students to feel comfortable and connected with the SU.

Additionally, it's currently difficult for new students to identify the SU office or even know that it exists. Incorporating SU branding into the office and extending it into the surrounding corridor would serve as effective signposting, making it easier for students to find and engage with the SU.

To achieve this, the SU is requesting £20,000 to purchase new furniture for the office and additional funding to improve the overall branding and aesthetic of the space. This investment would help strengthen the SU's presence on campus.

Asking

£20,000

Staff and Training Fund Enhancement

The Students' Union's current training budget is £4,000, which primarily covers the cost of basic training from the NVCO and attendance at Small Students' Union Conferences. While the university offers some valuable training courses, much of this training is not tailored to the unique needs of a Students' Union or the specific ways we support students. To enhance the effectiveness and professional development of both elected officers and staff, we are seeking an increase in the training budget to address key areas of priority.

Currently, elected officers receive training from SU staff; however, we aim to strengthen their development by providing access to specialized external training. We are requesting funding to enable officers to attend the Lead and Change Conference (NUS Conference for officers) at a cost of £2,500, external reputational training for £1,000, and campaigns training for £2,000. Access to these training sessions would allow officers to build valuable connections with other student leaders, increasing opportunities for involvement in national campaigns. It would also improve their ability to manage the SU's reputation and enhance the impact of officer-led initiatives, ensuring greater success in the year ahead.

Students' Union staff would also benefit from professional training to stay updated with policy and legal changes, ensuring they can effectively support students. We are seeking funding for GDPR training (£1,200) to ensure compliance when handling student data, health and safety IOSH training (£1,000) to support the safe delivery of events, and lead safeguarding training (£850) to uphold the highest standards of student welfare.

In addition, we are requesting access to Wonkhe SUS, a specialist service providing expert insights on key issues in higher education and Students' Unions. This includes guidance on freedom of speech policy, duty of care, and sexual misconduct and harassment and critical areas for both officers and staff. The cost of Wonkhe SUS is £1,298, which would equip our team with the knowledge and tools to respond effectively to emerging challenges and support students more proactively.

To ensure we can deliver high-quality training and professional development, we are seeking to increase the training budget to £1,000 per staff member, bringing the total additional request to £10,000. Investing in training will empower both staff and officers to better represent students, strengthen advocacy efforts, and enhance the overall effectiveness of the SU.

Asking

£10,000

Increase in Team Budgets

The Students' Union staff consistently achieve a great deal with limited funds, but as we move into the next year, each team aims to enhance its services and impact for students.

SU Support

The SU Support Team has made a real difference this year. Managing over 500 cases this academic year alone, all aimed at helping students stay on track academically and ensuring their retention. This success showcases our dedication to improving the student experience through both internal and external partnerships. Our close collaboration with Student Wellbeing Services resulted in meaningful events such as Mental Health Week, while working with the University Academic Quality and Standards Team allowed us to address key challenges faced by students. We also partnered with Aila Money to enhance financial literacy and organised outreach stalls that engaged 135 students and helped raise awareness of the academic and pastoral support that was available.

Through presentations to over 300 students, we've made Student Union services more visible and accessible. Our team has been committed to supporting the diverse needs of students, working alongside the EDI and Disability Teams to ensure inclusivity. Additionally, we have organised and managed monthly food pantry sessions, providing essential support to 270 students

The additional funding would cover promotional materials, printed handbooks, and refreshments (tea/coffee) to create a welcoming and accessible environment for students attending wellbeing sessions, stalls and general promotional materials for the service. We are asking for an additional £1,000 to enhance this budget.

SU Communications

The SU Communications Team has had many successes so far this year, from the biggest Welcome Week attendance to date, to continued growth on our social media platforms. Firstly, the Welcome Week program in September had both the highest number of events and attendees to date, which shows the valued partnership between the Comms team and the Activities team. We focused on pushing out Welcome Week content further in advance and over a wider spread of channels, thus resulting in the biggest turnout. Also, our social channels such as Instagram are maintaining a steady growth, gaining 1,400 followers from the start of 2024. From January 2024, our reach has growth by 39% due to a focus on more dynamic video content and pushing the visibility of the Sabbatical Officers. Engaging with both our events and online content allows students to feel more involved with university life and builds a sense of community.

To expand its reach and strengthen student awareness, the team is seeking funding for branded merchandise, promotional materials, and increased SU branding across campus. This investment will improve visibility and help students feel a stronger connection to their Union. We are seeking an additional £6,000 to increase our communications team’s budget to allow for more SU branded items, and more physical advertising across campus.

Student Voice

This year, the Student Voice team successfully adapted its representation system to increase engagement and participation. To further enhance visibility and recognition of student representatives, we propose investing in Academic Rep lanyards (£400), Student Head of Faculty jumpers (£600), and Student Parliament pins (£500). While these may seem like small additions, these items foster a sense of pride among student representatives and ensure they are easily identifiable on campus, strengthening representation and engagement.

By increasing team budgets, the SU can provide visibility on campus for representation and building on the reward structure of representatives to ensure students who are volunteering their time are recognised for their efforts. SU Voice team are asking for an additional £2,500 to their budget.

Asking

£9,500

To be transparent about the importance of these items below is a table of priority.

Priority (1 being the top priority)	Item	Cost
1	Increase in National Pay Awards	Unknown
2	Clubs and Societies Funding	£30,000
3	Manager Salary Review	£30,000
4	Increase in Team Budgets	£9,500
5	Training Costs	£10,000

6	Receptionist	£45,000
7	New Office Revamp	£20,000