

Paper For Discussion: Affiliation with Citizens UK
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Aim

To discuss the idea of membership with the community charity, Citizens UK; and the benefits and costs to Imperial College Union and its members, of being affiliated with this organisation.

Background

Citizens UK (CUK) is a charity with the aim to bring communities together to campaign on issues for the common good.

Citizens UK's objectives (as per their website):

- *“To develop the capacity and skills of the members of the socially and economically disadvantaged communities of Britain and Ireland in such a way that such members are better able to identify and meet their needs and participate more fully in society;*
- *To assist by directly promoting the more effective working of local and national capacity building institutions designed to pursue that aim.”*

Jennie (DPW) and I have been in regular contact with West London Citizens, attending workshops and meetings for their London Wide Housing Campaign for the London Mayoral election debate. For the debate CUK will propose three major asks as decided upon by the West London community; London living rent, London-wide rogue landlords taskforce, and lack of control over developments. Two of the three asks could have direct positive impacts on our members.

Campaigns

CUK is not a campaigning organisation, but rather a community organising organisation, by working with institutions to train them on how to win campaigns.

Therefore, CUK campaign on anything its members want to campaign on. As an example of a campaign relevant to students, in the past few years Nottingham University Student Union have won the following campaigns, due to being part of the organisation:

- Mandatory licensing for private landlords so that they have to meet certain housing standards.
- £90,000 of funding from the Police and Crime commissioner to install 1000 CCTV in cameras in taxis to ensure that students are not getting ripped off or sexually harassed.
- Free tampons in all female toilets in University.

- Leadership development of their Sabbatical officers - including how to chair assemblies of 2,500 people and negotiating with the council.
- As well as that, students were interested in some of CUK's national campaigns and became involved in the Living Wage and Social Care.

Testimonials from other Unions

"We have been affiliated to citizens now for about 18 months, initially we got involved because the SU became a living wage employer and got accredited through citizens. The two major benefits that we get are 1) the training is invaluable for our Sabbs..., to go on a 6 day course with community leaders focussed on community organising is incredibly useful. 2) the community links, MDXSU has always had a very difficult relationship with our local community... Since affiliating we now work really well with them on all sorts of issues from HMO's to social care.

The main campaigns we have been part of are the general election campaign and the mayoral election, but we are just starting to work with our campus trade union on a living wage campaign, which they will be incredibly useful for.

Basically I can only speak positively, and I think our sabbs would say the same."

Ed Marsh – Director, Middlesex Students' Union

Tor Njamo – President, Ravensbourne Students' Union states that CUK membership is better value for money than NUS affiliation.

Membership

If the Union were to join, CUK would look at what issues are affecting our members. They would work with the Officer Trustees and students to learn how to build power, do research, take action and negotiate. The Union would also be able to get involved in other current campaigns put into action by members of the wider London community, for example, the London Mayoral elections debate.

A list of the current London Universities/Student Unions affiliated with CUK:

- Imperial College School of Medicine
- Queen Mary SU
- City University London SU
- London South Bank SU
- University of East London SU
- University of West London SU
- UCL – Bartlett Development Planning Unit
- Birkbeck University London
- University of East London
- Middlesex Students' Union
- Ravensbourne Students' Union

Membership would provide training opportunities for sabbaticals and student officers and volunteers. The training would teach techniques to influence others, negotiate, build power and how to organise within communities, whilst also giving skills that could be applied elsewhere, for example, networking techniques.

Membership with CUK has the potential to help future sabbaticals and volunteers run effective campaigns important to the membership, and help us link up with other organisations providing diverse volunteering opportunities for our members. This is already starting to occur; through attendance at CUK events, the DPW has formed links between the Student Development department and the Migrant & Refugee Community Forum. These connections have proved very useful for Imperial's branch of STAR, provided more opportunities for personal development and volunteering to our members, and improved the Union's position as part of the local community.

The membership cost for our institution would be £5,000 per annum.

Options for discussion

- The benefits and opportunities of membership with CUK
- The potential negatives and concerns of membership with CUK
- The appetite of our members to be affiliated with such an organisation