



## Environmental, Social, and Governance Policy

### 1. Scope and Purpose

- 1.1. Goldsmiths Students' Union recognises its positionality in a turbulent and changing society. To lead a community of students, the Students' Union ought to set an example of ethical social practice, providing an institutional environment whereby our members have a space to engage with education in a supportive, participatory, and transformative way.
- 1.2. Goldsmiths Students' Union is a charity and institution, engaging and conducting business in a social system, whereby our actions have direct and indirect impacts on the lives of our members and on wider society.
- 1.3. The Students' Union further acknowledges our members and stakeholders positions in regards to ensuring that the Students' Union engages in responsible corporate activities, noting the numerous political motions passed through democratic processes that compel the union to take action to prevent Union involvement in immoral acts, such as fossil fuel extraction or the military.
- 1.4. This policy therefore aims to align Goldsmiths Students' Unions' practices as a charitable organisation with institutional values through an environmental, social, and governance policy.
- 1.5. This policy applies to all activities conducted by, or on behalf of, the Students' Union.

### 2. Ethical Framework

- 2.1. The issue of ethics is philosophically broad, with a range of opinions and arguments as to ethical practice. The articulation of normative ethics is ripe for contestation, arising from a lack of a referential basis and shifting cultural norms. Thus, it is pertinent to outline an institutional ethical framework.
- 2.2. Normative ethics in the current era are fundamentally premised upon Western neoliberal ideals, themselves evolutions of a conservative capitalism, inherently connected with European ideological and philosophical development following the enlightenment. These values have been variously critiqued by scholars, and their ongoing relevance in the modern era is contested.
- 2.3. Within the context of the British Charitable Sector, there are already moral values codified in legislation and guidance. These include the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#), which are expected to be upheld by all elected officers and the Executive, and [Charity Governance code](#). Broader factors influencing decisions include efforts to enshrine the rights of individuals and groups, namely that stipulated in the European Convention on Human Rights. These should be adhered



to at all times, however form the minimum baseline for ethical practice in the charitable context.

- 2.4. The ethical aims of the organisation therefore ought to be oriented towards a Humanist morality, in which agents are encouraged and incentivised to take duty-based decisions, and in which the fundamental agency of all persons, regardless of characteristic factors or location is respected. The reduction of harm should be sought in all circumstances, bounded by the absolute rights of groups and, consequently, individuals. Cooperation towards collective interest should be encouraged, with no one individual or subgroup allowed to dominate the whole. Ethical development should be encouraged, with restorative justice prioritised over the retributational.
- 2.5. A foundational principle of both Goldsmiths Students' Union, as well as the broader society in which it is situated, is that of Democracy. Democracy, broadly defined, is the aim of situating power for decisions amongst the populace; in this context the membership of Goldsmiths Students' Union. Democracy can take many forms, however the imperative ought to be to ensure a distribution of power to all members. The actions of the union must therefore be oriented towards the collective interests of members with sufficient mechanisms to collate and resolve diverging opinions and positions.
- 2.6. This ethical framework applies to all decisions undertaken by Goldsmiths Students' Union. Whilst all employees and members have an obligation to abide by the policies, processes of the Union, alongside any legislative or regulatory requirements, the ethical framework provides a mechanism to deal with areas of ambiguity, as well as principles for tackling as yet unknown issues and the drafting of new institutional policies.

### **3. Environmental Policy**

- 3.1. Goldsmiths Students' Union recognises the tremendous threat posed by the climate crisis caused by human activity, and therefore, the adverse consequences this will cause for all life on our planet. The Union recognises that current resource consumption rates are unsustainable, and identifies the economic premise of growth driven-societies as a fundamental driver of this unsustainable development.
- 3.2. Against this context, Goldsmiths Students' Union recognises the responsibilities placed upon it as a membership-led charity to ensure all reasonable steps are taken to mitigate against, and prevent contributing to, the climate crisis.
- 3.3. Goldsmiths Students' Union therefore commits to taking steps to reduce its environmental impact. The Union should undertake regular reviews of its activities to identify areas of environmental risk, and put in place achievable and relevant Climate Action Plans



to mitigate against these. The Executive shall be responsible for regularly reporting progress on these aims to the Trustee Board.

- 3.4. Goldsmiths Students' Union commits to undertaking initiatives to reduce, as far as reasonably practicable, the disposal of non-recyclable waste. This includes reviewing and reducing the usage of single-use plastics, and reducing the amount of consumables procured.
- 3.5. The environmental impact of our supply chain should form a fundamental part of procurement decisions, with all reasonably practicable steps being taken to reduce this; including ensuring an adequate provision of low-carbon food products, such as vegan options, in all our Commercial outlets.
- 3.6. Goldsmiths Students' Union commits to take steps to reduce the environmental impact of employee and member travel. Regularly commuting employees should, where possible, be encouraged to use public transportation, and home working should be permitted where practicable. Where an employee or member is engaged on Union business off-site, all efforts should be made to prioritise the use of public transport, and further to ensure the use of the most environmental transport, for example electrified rail travel should be prioritised over diesel bus travel. Air travel on Union business is not permitted.
- 3.7. As it occupies space on the wider Goldsmiths, University of London estate, Goldsmiths Students' Union has reduced autonomy over its physical space and buildings. Nonetheless, Goldsmiths Students' Union commits to working with the University to ensure that the Students' Union is in broad alignment for environmental action related to the estate. Where the Union is responsible for maintenance, the estate, and facilities, it commits to assessing the environmental impact of these. The Union commits to reducing its energy consumption, and promoting efficient use of resources.
- 3.8. This policy should not serve to bound the Union in its advocacy for environmental justice and action, both in the local context and wider context amongst Students' Unions and the Higher Education sector, in alignment of the Unions' charitable aims.
- 3.9. The Trustee Board ought to embed environmental considerations into all institutional decision making, whereby it forms an equal part of consideration and deliberation as other ends. These duties should be considered as equal to other imperatives as far as reasonably practicable, to ensure balancing against other business interests.

#### **4. Ethical Investments and Financial Practices**

- 4.1. Goldsmiths Students' Union aims to ensure transparent communication of its financial processes and practices. It should ensure that annual accounts are published publicly via the Charity Commission, and that all relevant policies are available on the



Students' Union website. The Union shall make all financial partners aware of its policies.

- 4.2. In its decisions and actions related to financial matters, which includes but is not limited to areas of banking, investment, and insurance, the Students Union' endeavours to uphold its obligations to adhere to ethical practice and alignment with its organisational values. The Students' Union shall refrain from advertising or collaborating with companies deemed unethical or incompatible with our organisational values.
- 4.3. The Students' Union therefore ought to insure that it does not knowingly invest in or facilitate through financial means - either directly or indirectly - entities or activities deemed unethical.
- 4.4. Specifically prohibited activity includes any company, organisation, or institution involved with:
  - 4.4.1. A material interest in Fossil fuel industries and activities
  - 4.4.2. A material interest in arms, weaponry, defence, and surveillance industries and activities
  - 4.4.3. Direct violations of International law, or complicity with such violations
  - 4.4.4. Border industry activities
  - 4.4.5. Private property development activities
  - 4.4.6. Disruption to community and international stability
  - 4.4.7. Contributions to poverty, child exploitation, or other forms of abuse
- 4.5. The Students' Union will prioritise community investment and local sourcing, where possible, and will seek business opportunities with entities demonstrating a proven track record of ethical conduct.
- 4.6. When engaging insurance brokers or investment partners including pension funds, the Students' Union will ensure that they operate, to the extent practicable, in accordance with socially responsible objectives that align with those of the Students' Union.
- 4.7. The Students' Union will, at a minimum, ensure adherence to human rights practices in its financial decisions. It is imperative that all decisions consider the ethical implications of these, alongside commercial prospects and the value for money this represents for the organisation.

## **5. Social Issues**

- 5.1. The Students' Union commits itself to the values of Equity, Welfare, and Liberation. The Union recognises its responsibilities to advocate for all members, including those that are disadvantaged by differential power structures. In this context, the Students' Union identifies this inequality as a social harm that ought to be changed in favour of more equitable conditions. Further, the Union identifies increasing atomisation and individualism amongst populations as a further cause of social harm, and thus seeks to advocate for collaborations and the rights and interests of collectives.



- 5.2. The Students' Union commits to ensuring policies and procedures on matters related to Equality are sufficiently robust. These include the Equal Opportunities Policy and Dignity at Work policy contained within the Employee Handbook, which provide a minimum standard expected of employees, in alignment with relevant legislation.
- 5.3. In all decisions, the Students' Union should ensure that the principles of equity and inclusion are upheld, such that no one societal group or individual is unduly prioritised over another; measures to prioritise a societal group or individual where there is clear rationale for doing so in the pursuit of the aims of the organisation as outlined in our ethical framework may be permissible. The Union should ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable, mitigations are taken where a decision affects certain groups of members or employees.
- 5.4. Goldsmiths Students' Union recognises that conflicts and incongruencies can occur when dealing with different groups, such that there is a perception that the interests of the groups are in opposition. In such circumstances, the fundamental principles and maxims of each of the groups should be understood and considered. Alignment with the fundamental principles of ethical framework should be considered when decisions are taken. At no point should a decision be made that is incompatible with the legitimate furtherance of the cause of Human affairs.
- 5.5. Goldsmiths Students' Union ought to commit to the highest standards of Labour practices. These include the recognition of relevant Trade Unions, and the regular review of staff remuneration and working conditions. Goldsmiths Students' Union commits to paying all employees and contractors at least the London Living Wage.
- 5.6. Goldsmiths Students' Union should undertake regular reviews of its employer practices to identify areas of weakness in regards to its social obligations, and commit to steps to mitigate and rectify any areas of weakness. A further review should identify similar areas of concern in regards to provision of services and support for members.

## **6. Governance**

- 6.1. As an incorporated Charity, the Goldsmiths Students' Union Trustee Board is responsible for managing the affairs of the Union. The powers of the Trustee Board and Charitable objections are outlined in the Constitution, which serves as the Union's governing document. Further powers are stipulated in the Bye-Laws.
- 6.2. In line with the governing documents The Trustee Board may delegate its powers to committees and the Executive, which are then entrusted with decision making powers. This does not preclude review and assurance of these decisions by the Trustee Board, in line with the Constitution. It is the responsibility of all



parties to ensure good governance practices, which includes adherence to the governing documents and relevant charitable guidance.

- 6.3. Trustees are expected to abide by the Trustee Code of Conduct, all relevant charitable guidance, and all applicable internal policies. These include but are not limited to the Ethical Conduct Policy, which contains guidance for managing conflicts of interest.
- 6.4. The Trustee Board is responsible for the performance management of the Executive, through the Chair of Trustees. These duties extend to the application of this policy and the alignment with Ethical Practice. It is expected that the Trustee Board, and Chair of Trustees, support the executive in achieving these ends, and periodically review performance and alignment with the policy.
- 6.5. All decisions should as far as possible be taken with as much relevant information as practicable. The Trustee Board should be responsible for gathering additional information where there is a lack of clarity. The Trustee Board ultimately should be accountable for its decisions, thus it is imperative that all decisions are clearly minuted and placed on the website.
- 6.6. As differences of opinions are expected as to the ethics and suitability of certain decisions, where these do occur, discussion should occur at the Trustee Board. Where a financial or business decision is to be made that is permitted under delegation policies, but the suitability of that decision is contested or uncertain, the decision ought to be brought to the Trustee Board.
- 6.7. The Trustee Board ought to regularly review the efficacy of its operation and take meaningful actions to resolve governance issues. These include regular skills audits of the Trustees, undertaking a review of risks, and reviewing internal policies, including those related to Trustee decision making. It may be appropriate for the periodic review of the Trustee Board to be undertaken by a disinterested third party. The Trustee Board commits to regularly adapting to maximise its effectiveness.

## **7. Conduct of Societies and Clubs**

- 7.1. Societies and Clubs, while granted autonomy over aspects of their functionality, should ensure that they are abiding by ethical practices.
- 7.2. Societies and Clubs have an obligation to ensure that they are complying with the policies of the Union, which includes the financial provisions outlined in this policy.
- 7.3. In some circumstances, Societies and Clubs may be affiliated with or supported by external parties. In such instances, it is the duty of Societies and Clubs to ensure that such affiliations are in alignment with the Union's Institutional Values.

## **8. Staff Duties**



- 8.1. A breach of any part of this policy by employees of Goldsmiths Students' Union will be considered a misconduct offence.
- 8.2. Any uncertainty as to the policy should be clarified by the Chief Executive in the first instance, with the Trustee Board providing ultimate authority.

## **9. Partnership with Goldsmiths, University of London**

- 9.1. As our partner institution under the Education Act 1994, Goldsmiths Students' Union maintains strong institutional connections to Goldsmiths, University of London.
- 9.2. Due to the nature of this relationship, which includes the use of areas of the University estate by the Students' Union, there is a need to ensure alignment across Environmental, Social, and Governance practices.
- 9.3. As such, this Policy has been written to ensure, as far as practicable, a baseline alignment with related University Policies.
- 9.4. This alignment ought not to impede the Students' Union in pursuing its aims in regards to this Policy, and as such, it is recognised and encouraged that the Students' Union may go beyond the University in pursuing ethical policies and actions.
- 9.5. The Students' Union, as the representative body of Students' at Goldsmiths, is engaged with conveying the opinion of the Student body to the University. It is expected and encouraged that the Students' Union will advocate for changes to the benefit of its members. Therefore, this policy should not serve to unduly bind the Students' Union in matters related to this policy in its dealings and advocacy work with the University.

## **10. Interactions with other policies**

- 10.1. This policy has a number of interdependencies. These include but are not limited to:
  - Constitution
  - Bye-Laws
  - Scheme of Delegation
  - Procurement Policies and Procedures
  - Financial Procedures
  - Employee Handbook
  - Safe Space Policy

## **11. Policy Ownership and Review**

- 11.1. This policy is the responsibility of the Trustee Board. Changes to this document must seek the approval of the Trustee Board.
- 11.2. This policy must be reviewed at least every 5 years from the date of passing.





- 11.3. The Students' Union acknowledges the need for stakeholder engagement with this policy. It shall therefore be uploaded to the Students' Union website, and be communicated to all relevant parties.

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