# UCL and Lancaster suspend Ukrainian societies over charity law drone purchases



Two UK university student unions have suspended their Ukrainian societies following the discovery of transactions that may have contravened charity regulations by purchasing drones intended for use in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The unions at University College London (UCL) and Lancaster University initiated these suspensions as part of investigations into alleged violations of UK charity laws.

Both student unions are recognised charities regulated by the Charity Commission, which oversees the appropriate use of funds and fundraising activities. According to the Charity Commission, engaging in activities to provide military supplies or aid to foreign armed forces does not align with charitable purposes, and is thus prohibited under UK charity law.

The investigations arose after it was revealed that significant sums had been used by the societies to purchase drones. UCL’s student union suspended its Ukrainian Society in March after it emerged that the group had utilised £1,500 in profits from a club night held in Mayfair the previous October to acquire a DJI Mavic drone, an asset frequently employed by Ukrainian forces in their combat against Russian forces.

Artur Podsokha, president of the UCL Ukrainian Society, expressed his views on the situation, stating that he felt compelled to take action. “I couldn’t remain silent while Russia’s war has been terrorising our country since 2014,” he stated. Podsokha further clarified that the society’s funds had not been raised explicitly for military purposes but derived from event profits, emphasising a sense of responsibility to assist fellow Ukrainians in their struggle.

Lancaster University’s Ukrainian Society similarly faced scrutiny after it was reported on social media that it had amassed over £20,000 to support Ukraine, with more than half of that figure allocated to drone purchases. In a social media post, the society detailed the acquisition of three DJI Mavic 3 Drones, alongside various drone parts for the territorial defence forces.

Responding to inquiries from the Financial Times regarding the allegations, Lancaster University’s student union acknowledged its recent awareness of the issues. A statement indicated that while no formal investigation had been launched, the society's affiliation was suspended out of caution, pending further inquiry. The student union also clarified that the Ukrainian Society did not receive any funding from the university itself.

The Ukrainian Society at Lancaster University defended its activities, maintaining that its fundraising efforts were strictly humanitarian in nature. “We have never made any announcements or posts regarding fundraising directed at military targets,” they asserted, emphasising that any communications suggesting dual-use items were connected to the personal initiatives of individual members rather than official society activities.

Podskha affirmed that the society felt a profound sense of privilege to be safe in London while conflict rages in Ukraine, sharing that the soldier who received the drone sent them a thank you video post-delivery. UCL expressed support for the union’s decision to suspend the Ukrainian society during the ongoing investigations, stating that the disciplinary processes are independent of the university itself.

As these investigations continue, it highlights the complex interplay between charitable activities and regulations amid a broader geopolitical conflict. The Charity Commission has previously issued warnings regarding similar issues, demonstrating the ongoing challenge of ensuring compliance with legal standards as fundraising for conflict-related purposes intensifies.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/40719104-6404-448e-8232-9f8e5e3493a5> - This article reports on the suspension of Ukrainian societies at University College London and Lancaster University due to investigations into potential violations of UK charity laws related to drone purchases intended for use in the conflict in Ukraine.
2. <https://www.ukrainianworldcongress.org/uwc-launches-birds-of-freedom-2-0-a-christmas-special-fundraising-campaign-to-supply-drones-to-ukraines-military/> - This announcement details the Ukrainian World Congress's 'Birds of Freedom 2.0 – A Christmas Special' fundraising campaign aimed at supplying drones to Ukraine's military, highlighting the use of drones in the conflict.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/08/11/charity-commission-shunning-small-charities-ukraine-aid/> - This article discusses the Charity Commission's approach to small charities attempting to provide aid to Ukraine, including the challenges faced by organizations like Alfs in delivering humanitarian assistance.
4. <https://www.workersliberty.org/index.php/story/2023-09-05/student-organising-ukraine> - This piece covers student organizing efforts in Ukraine, including the activities of Direct Action students in Lviv and the challenges they face, such as potential expulsion for running a stall at a freshers' fair.
5. <https://www.cage.ngo/articles/cage-briefing-understanding-ukraine-and-palestine-solidarity-in-uk-schools> - This briefing examines the dynamics of Ukraine and Palestine solidarity movements in UK schools, highlighting instances where schools have been involved in fundraising or donation drives for Ukraine, including those organized by the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain.
6. <https://goldsmithsucu.org/2023/09/04/motion-in-solidarity-with-ukraine/> - This motion passed by the Goldsmiths University and College Union expresses solidarity with Ukraine, condemns Russia's invasion, and supports the right to self-determination, reflecting the union's stance on the conflict.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/40719104-6404-448e-8232-9f8e5e3493a5> - Please view link - unable to able to access data