Students' Union UCL

Student Community Volunteering Strategy

Analysis and Action Plan

Acronyms used:

- CELS – UCL Community Engaged Learning Service
- I&E – UCL Innovation & Enterprise
- KEF – Knowledge Exchange Framework
- OVPESE – UCL Office for the Vice Provost for Education & Student Engagement
- OVPRIGE – UCL Office for the Vice Provost for Research, Innovation and Global Engagement
- PGI – Students' Union UCL Policy, Governance and Insight team
- PVP London – Pro-Vice Provost London
- SMT – Students' Union's Senior Management Team
- SSW – UCL Student Support & Wellbeing
- VM – Volunteering Manager
- WP – UCL Widening Participation

Note that all dates refer to 2021/22 academic year unless otherwise stated.

1 Our role within Students' Union UCL

1.1 Sabbatical Officers and democratic structures

Our connection with **elected officers** is weaker than that of other teams within the SU. We fall under the remit of the Activities & Engagement Officer, but historically the focus of this role has been on student clubs and societies. Similarly, the part-time Community Engagement officer role has a brief that includes volunteering, but post-holders have never concentrated on this or felt they had any representative function for volunteers.

Some of the other sabbatical officers are relatively unaware of our service. However, others have been more engaged – for example, circulating our communications, sitting on recruitment panels or creating content for our webpages.

Student volunteers are not represented at Activities Zone, and they do not have an elected officer. As a result, issues affecting volunteers are not raised within the Students' Union, and student volunteers very rarely progress into elected roles. We have a well-attended student advisory group, but this does not connect with any other part of the democratic structure, and it is staff-led.

Despite this, it seems that student volunteers have a more positive view of the SU than other groups of students, according to the Marketing Team's 2019 survey.

Action	When?
Invite Activities Officer and Community Relations part-time Officer to team meetings	Before Sept
Offer support to prospective sabb candidates if they want to mention student community volunteering in their manifestos.	February
Look at each incoming sabbs' manifesto in June, and then at their priorities in August / September – how does it align with our work? Send briefing notes.	Before Sept
Identify practical ways to engage Activities Officer and Welfare & Communities Officer in our processes, and PGT and Education Officers for CRIS.	Discuss over Summer 2021
Ask each sabbatical officer to produce a mini-video for social media at least once in the year (also supports 4.1).	Throughout year
Review the follow up email to all volunteers and project leaders to include links to UCL Careers and to other SU activities and voluntary roles, including elected positions (also supports 5.2).	Before Sept
Make sure we're sending opportunities to the relevant student liberation networks.	Throughout year

Action	When?
Share feedback from students and community organisations on internal Slack – CRIS already does this and it's a quick way to keep sabbs and everyone else updated on what we do.	Throughout year
VS staff to attend briefing meeting before each Activities Zone – this is where the agenda is set. VS staff also to attend the Activities Zone itself. This should help increase our visibility and availability with student officers, and improve our understanding of how zones work. CRIS to join Education Zone.	Throughout year
Alternatively, explore the viability of moving volunteering issues to the 'Welfare & Communities Zone'	Term 2
Include information about submitting motions to Activities Zone in newsletters to project leaders and to VS Think Tank. Likewise to the Education Zone for CRIS comms to students.	Throughout year
Volunteering Manager to hold termly meetings with each of the sabbs.	Throughout year
Ask Education Officer to pass content to department reps.	Throughout year
Do bite sized monthly briefing for Sabbs and SMT with discussion points – an infographic like marketing's weekly updates. (Also supports 1.2)	Throughout year
Invite sabbatical officers and part-time officers to Hackathons and to other events like volunteering fairs, project leader training, etc.	Throughout year
Arrange meetings with relevant part-time officers at the start of year to brief them about VS and identify ways we might work together (including Community Relations Officer, Arts, Societies, Sports, Sustainability, Women's BME, Disabled Students, LGBQ+)	July/Aug
Invite Activities Officer to host Volunteering Awards.	March
Get 1 day in sabbs' induction around volunteering – organised one-off or visits to partners. Bookend the experience on a briefing about our work and how it overlaps with their own portfolios. Also invite SU SMT.	For 21/22 this will be delivered as part of social hackathons in November
Involve the Activities Officer and Welfare & Community Officer in setting the VS Budget.	March
Invite Welfare & Community Officer to sit on VS Steering Group.	Aug
Activities Sabb to lead VS Think Tank.	Invite in Aug
Present VS Annual Report to Leadership Team.	Dec
Ask Policy, Governance & Insight team if we can add content to Department rep training, and include information on reps moodle site about volunteering and community building.	Aug
Ask Sabbatical officers to write a blog about volunteering – interview volunteers or visit one of our partners.	Throughout year
Look at replacing VS Think Tank with a Volunteering Zone, modelled on volunteering executive committees used at other universities.	Review summer 2022

Action	When?
Reinstate the part-time Volunteering officer role.	Review summer 2022

1.2 Integration with the rest of the Students' Union

We have always involved other SU teams in our work – for example, by inviting colleagues to our planning days, or offering space at volunteering fairs. However, we were based in a separate office within the Lewis' Building for a decade, which created a barrier to collaboration. The move into 25 Gordon Street helped integrate us with the rest of the Students' Union – our interviews with colleagues has highlighted ways we could build on this progress.

We have a good working relationship with Clubs & Societies – this is key, given the overlap on our Student-led Volunteering Programme. However, relatively few clubs and societies run community volunteering projects through the VS – we need to be more effective at connecting with club and society officers.

Our work has affinities with that of the Policy, Governance & Insight team – we support students to make positive change, and have a remit to connect students with wider society – but we haven't explored the potential for joint working as fully as we might.

There are specific values and benefits attached to community volunteering; students are connecting with people and organisations outside of the university bubble. Students tell us that the distinction between internal, peer-to-peer volunteering and community volunteering is a natural one, and that there are often different motivations for getting involved. However, The VS could be used better to promote some of these internal volunteering roles, highlighting the fact that the SU itself is a charity, and plotting progression routes between different types of engagement. There perhaps needs to be more recognition that we're a community of volunteer managers, and acknowledgment of the expertise of our colleagues in this area.

More broadly, we can help deliver a wider range of the Students' Union's priorities – including on sustainability, student wellbeing, sports and global engagement – though we clearly need to highlight these links better and ensure our work is integrated into the relevant strategies and workplans.

Action	When?
Review the information we provide to clubs and socs about how we can support them, including both the SLP Team and Partnerships Team.	Summer 2021
Continue to present at all-staff meetings at least once per term.	Throughout year
Ensure that volunteering is represented within the 'Keep Wednesdays Free' campaign.	Check when campaign is?
Ensure VS content is included in the Union' stakeholder newsletter.	Throughout year
Send student activities monthly updates about which clubs and societies are engaged in the SLP programme.	Throughout year
Send regular content for the Team UCL newsletter and the Societies newsletter, including relevant volunteering opps and profile pieces about club/soc projects. (also supports 4.1)	Throughout year

Action	When?
Run marketing campaigns – and have pages on website – displaying volunteering with big causes especially where these align with SU strategic priorities (e.g. BLM, climate change, social inequalities). Promote these as 'take action' rather than 'volunteering'. Make sure a volunteering 'call to action' is attached to all SU campaigns, and that Marketing is briefed to alert us when campaigns are in the offing. Create a new volunteering type that enables us to promote campaigning activities rather than formal volunteering. Engage relevant student societies (also supports 4.1)	Set up pages Summer 2021. Have as standing agenda item on marketing meetings.
Send out reminders to colleagues once a term about advertising internal volunteering opps through our channels.	Throughout year
Review how we contribute to club and society training.	Summer 2022
Continue to engage outreach officers within clubs and societies.	Throughout year
Discuss with the Policy, Governance & Insight team how we can better align our work	June 2021
Review how well aligned the systems and processes of Student-led Projects and Club & Societies are.	Summer 2021
Diarise regular catch ups between SLP Coordinator and relevant staff leads within Clubs and Societies.	September - put in diaries for the year
Investigate establishing a volunteering programme linked to Somers Town Sports Centre.	To discuss Summer 2021
Do some intensive work on establishing links between sports clubs and east London community organisations – as SLPs or volunteering partnership. (also supports 2.4)	To discuss Summer 2022
Link clubs/socs to their related SLPs on the website. Also supports 4.4 and 5.2	Term 1
Develop a clearer offer for clubs / societies to collectively volunteer together at one of our partners if they don't want to set up their own project.	Summer 2021
Create materials about volunteering and community building for Halls Reps	Summer 2021
Investigate how we can connect RAG and other student fundraising groups to key partners. (also supports 3.1)	Summer 2021
Develop a project aimed at connecting cultural societies with relevant London communities.	summer 2022
Draw up document showing what this strategy requires from other SU teams, and share.	June 2021

2. Our role at UCL

2.1 Alignment with UCL priorities

The Provost's strategy will determine UCL's priorities over the next five years. It seems likely that certain themes relevant to our work will remain important: excellent student outcomes, inclusion, intercultural competence, the student experience, community engagement and UCL's role within London. We have a contribution to make in all of these areas but need to communicate these links more effectively.

Volunteering is often seen through the lens of student employability, or as a vaguely defined 'good thing to do'. However, we have a good evidence base about our impact on many aspects of the student experience – not just employability, but wellbeing and academic studies as well.

Our success in engaging students from widening participation backgrounds was a surprise to some people we interviewed – there is a perception that volunteering is the preserve of more privileged students, though our data consistently shows the opposite. We should explore how we could collaborate more closely with other UCL services working with students from widening participation backgrounds.

Action	When?
Reinstate internal stakeholders newsletter - one edition a year, send during Volunteers Week in June. The Annual Impact report will cover the first part of the year. Make sure we're communicating the range of impacts we have and how they align with UCL priorities e.g. student wellbeing / belonging, employability, engagement with London, engagement with WP students. Talk to Marketing about how this can complement the SU's own UCL-facing comms. (also supports 6.2)	Start planning April, to go out first week of June.
Use Memorandum of Understanding to rekindle our relationship with Camden Council and learn how we might contribute to their COVID renewal work.	Throughout year
Explore with Innovation & Enterprise, UCL East and PVP (London) how we might build relationships with other local authorities.	Throughout year
Ensure that we measure and communicate our alignment with UN SDGs in annual report and on website (also supports 6.1).	Plan evaluation strategy Summer 2021
Draw up internal UCL stakeholder management plan	Summer 2021
Provide input about student volunteering into the new UCL strategy process.	Summer 2022
Ensure volunteering and CRIS is represented in discussions around student well-being and belonging.	Throughout year
Aim to get one article per fortnight into The Week at UCL	Throughout year
Engage with the UCL Belonging Working Group	Throughout year
Engage with KEF process (I&E)	

Action	When?
Aim to get CRIS on the map with OVP Research	

2.2 Relationship with academic departments

In order to engage more students in volunteering, we need to renew our efforts in reaching out to academic departments. Students consistently tell us in that this is one of the best ways in which to promote volunteering to them.

UCL Career's new framework – the draft title is 'UCL Pillars of Employability' – should be a useful tool here. The new faculty-based Student Success Advisor roles within Student Support & Wellbeing and the work-related learning teams within UCL Careers could also provide us with new routes into departments.

We are getting increasing numbers of requests from colleagues to support student placements within the voluntary sector – peers in other Russell Group universities are also experiencing this, and PVP (London) is looking at this issue. The challenge for us will be to help support this type of activity without taking resources from other areas. We can help ensure that such placements are good quality, and that voluntary & community sector partners are not overwhelmed or taken for granted.

More generally, we can help link academic departments with London's voluntary & community sector. The success of our Community Research Initiative has shown our value as a gateway to the sector, and it has generated more requests for help making connections for outreach, public engagement or research activities.

Action	When?
Produce data on which volunteering opps volunteers from different departments / faculties are interested in – use this to code up those opps and create start of year info packs.	Summer 2021
Review all current opps to code as many of them as possible by department ahead of start of year.	Summer 2021
Start to publicise departmental opps directories to departments.	September 2021
Develop partnership with UCL Community Engaged Learning Service, presenting a connected offer to both UCL departments and community partners, and developing a training offer around 'How to embed volunteering in your teaching'.	From June 2021
Organise more 'Building Bridges' events, connecting students with partners to co-design volunteering opps. (also supports 4.2)	June 2022
Provide termly content for Teaching & Learning portal.	Throughout year
Run a week long campaign – volunteering and my course – highlighting academic impacts. Have student profile in UCL student news, feature on SU newsletter and social media, case studies etc. (also supports 4.1)	TBC
Collaborate with PVP London on student placements work.	Throughout year
Present at UCL TA conference and UCL Education conference.	Look at who'd like to put forward papers in January

Action	When?
If funding will allow, have some 2 week paid internships for recent graduates to do face-to-face talks with academic departments during Welcome. (also supports 4.1)	Look at this during March 22 budgeting
Provide materials for Student Success Advisors about volunteering and wellbeing and academic success (also supports 2.3)	Summer 2021
Develop Social Hackathons in partnership with academic departments and work place learning teams in Careers. Produce a 'How To' guide to enable them to take more ownership (also supports 4.2)	Draw up plan over summer 2021
Provide regular content for the TA Talk Teams channel	Throughout year
Talk to UCL about how volunteering might be represented within the InkPath app, and how we might feed volunteering opportunities into the Departmental Pathways, and how we might use the reflective learning functionality. (also supports 2.3 and 5.2)	Throughout year
Produce content on website about progression routes into volunteering after course placements / Community Engaged Learning. Offer one-to-one appointments to students to help.	Term 1
CRIS to pilot connecting a cohort of Master's students to a single organisation	TBC
CRIS to identify a Master's programme where every student will be supported to develop their dissertation with an organisation.	TBC
Work closely with departmental societies coordinator – develop a formal offer to departmental societies around volunteering that can be shared widely. Organise special event for them in term 1.	Summer 2021
Produce material on 'personal tutoring and volunteering' for circulation to personal tutors and inclusion on personal tutoring website and training. Do Arena talk on volunteering for personal tutors.	Summer 2021
Feature CRIS and volunteering on the UCL Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) web pages	tbc
Ensure volunteering is referenced in the next education strategy.	tbc
Get CRIS on the radar with VP Research given that CRIS is supporting co-created research as part of curricular research element.	Summer 2022
Contribute to the next KEF round (4-5 years if it follows similar waves that REF does)	Assess timescales Summer 2022
Expansion of CRIS principles to Early Career Researchers through REF incentives – case studies for real impact.	Next five years
Develop partnership agreement with Faculty of Engineering, and showcase this as model for working with other faculties and departments.	June 2021
Create slide deck and script about volunteering for use by tutors and departments at the start of term.	Summer 2021

2.3 UCL Professional Service departments

We generally have good links with a number of UCL Professional Service departments with shared interests – UCL Culture Engagement Team, UCL Innovation & Enterprise, UCL Careers, UCL Widening Participation, UCL Alumni and Student Support & Wellbeing. We need to build on these and be alert to new internal partnerships.

Action	Need support from
Get info on UCL Careers themed weeks and plan our own marketing and events around them.	Careers
Continue to participate in Co-Curricular working group.	OVPESE
Promote skills search function on website to careers consultants.	Careers
Provide briefing document for careers staff on how to refer students.	Careers
Create landing page on our website for UCL Careers extra students, detailing support we can give them.	Careers
Run marketing campaigns on volunteering and skill development (also supports 4.1)	Input from Careers would be useful
Run marketing campaigns on volunteering and wellbeing (also supports 4.1)	Input from SSW and Community & Welfare Sabb would be useful
Launch webpages for UCL halls. Promote to student residence advisors, and through hall rep policy zone (also supports 4.4)	UCL halls, PGI
Review work with alumni volunteering team and identify new areas of collaboration. (also supports 5.1)	Alumni Volunteering
Send regular content to careers consultants for their newsletters.	Careers
Work with UCL Careers work-related learning teams to deliver more mini-hackathons.	Careers
Talk to doctoral school about how we might work together	Doctoral School
Work on collaborative project with UCL Grand Challenges connecting student volunteers with the Grand Challenges.	Grand Challenges
Work with WP's Transition mentor programme to include more material on volunteering.	WP
Identify areas for collaboration with Sustainable UCL	Sustainable UCL
Talk to UCL Careers about use of Careers registration data – can we use this to better understand volunteering behaviours or to direct students towards volunteering?	Careers
Ask Careers to include question about volunteering in their alumni case studies.	Careers
With UCL Careers, create content on 'Careers in the Voluntary Sector' – or broader, natural environment, local government, cultural heritage etc. This might include resources, case studies, enhancements to careers events (e.g. charities themed weeks)? (also supports 5.2)	Careers

Action	Need support from
Careers and alumni office, produce videos of employers talking about skills graduates need and tie this in with volunteering – especially leadership and commercial awareness, as students are often lacking these. Could be used for both promotional purposes, and also to encourage students to reflect on what they've learnt. (also supports 5.1)	Careers
Get at least one item per year into Public Engagement Newsletter about how we can connect UCL Colleagues to VCS	UCL Public Engagement
Meet with Public Engagement to discuss how we track and report interactions at department / faculty level	UCL Public Engagement
Contribute to training for Student Residence Advisors in Halls	UCL Halls of Residence

2.4 UCL East

We will continue to work with the UCL East office on planning volunteering programmes on the new campus. We will also coordinate with Students' Union UCL's offer; one area of synergy is with our sports clubs.

Action	When?
Do a big push on getting more east London organisations registered, including termly meetings with UCL East Engagement Team.	Throughout year
Meet SU Union Affairs officer and Welfare and Community Officer termly to brief them on our work in East.	Throughout year
Pass new content for departments (see 2.2) to new course leads at UCL East.	Throughout year
Ask volunteers placed with East London partners to share their volunteering experiences and write profiles. Share this content with UCL East colleagues.	Throughout year
Launch our east London volunteering page, including our opps directory page and information about what we're doing for students.	October 2021
Work with MSc Citizen Science and Public History to embed CRIS in their courses for 2022-23 and beyond.	Throughout year
Organise one-off events just for UCL students badged up as 'UCL East volunteering'.	TBC
Work with WP to coordinate schools work in east London. Align with their partners schools approach, and with monitoring and evaluation framework, and with the East passport scheme.	Throughout year
Identify whether there are volunteering opportunities with UCL East flagship partners.	Throughout year
Engage with emerging work at UCL East about 'belonging'	Throughout year
Ask about joining the UCL East Access and Outreach Advisory Board	June 2021

2.5 Staff Volunteering

A number of UCL colleagues raised the topic of staff volunteering during our research – and it is included as a priority within the UCL London Framework. It will be important to work with people from across UCL to make sure that any developments cohere with and complement our student volunteering offer. A well-run programme would help enhance UCL's offer to the voluntary & community sector, and should raise the profile of volunteering more generally within UCL – helping normalise it as a behaviour for students too.

Action	When?
Work with PVP London to progress discussions on staff volunteering.	Throughout year
Continue to engage with UCL homelessness project led by I&E.	Throughout year
Look at feasibility and resourcing for funded staff volunteering programme. This area would be fully funded via an increase in UCL funding rather than diverting any resources currently used to support student volunteering.	TBC

3. Our relationship with the Voluntary & Community Sector

3.1 How we support the Voluntary & Community Sector

Without our partners within the Voluntary & Community Sector, very little of the volunteering we offer would take place. The sector has been squeezed during COVID-19; demands for its services have increased whilst income has gone down. The sector will be vulnerable to austerity measures that are likely to come in the wake of the pandemic, and so confidence in the sectors' financial stability is low.

The Provost has spoken of the importance of serving our communities. The question for us is how can the VS – as a source of volunteers, and a link to a large university – help support the sector?

It's also important that we measure and monitor the quality of our partnerships. Students want rewarding experiences, and our partners want well motivated and well prepared volunteers. What tools can we use to measure quality and ensure excellent outcomes for both students and our partners?

We have a particularly strong relationship with Camden's Voluntary and Community sector – 43% of our students' volunteering takes place there. This gives us an opportunity to look at what else we can do very locally, and also apply our learning from our work in Camden to UCL East.

Action	When?
Expand our partners breakfast series to include talks from partners themselves about how they run their volunteering programmes. This should include content on listening to volunteers ideas, recruitment processes, communicating with volunteers.	Plan term 1 series in September
Develop fundraising-based social hackathons (also supports 4.2)- utilising https://www.dsc.org.uk/event/funds-online-free-trial/	Term 2
Investigate the feasibility of creating pool of volunteers who can be mobilised quickly via phone for emergency needs.	Summer 2021
Introduce a series of research networking meet-ups for partners to meet with UCL staff and develop ideas	July, Aug, Sep
Introduce a research consultancy service for partners to get free consultation from trained PhD students to move idea from the ideas stage to outlined research topic	November 2021
Explore developing a fund to award partners small grants to carry out research, develop theory of change or logic models, or write up findings or literature	Next five years

Action	When?
Create short animated online video showing expectations on organisations registering with us – this might be easier to digest than our partnership agreement. Highlight the importance of listening to volunteers ideas, recruitment processes, communicating with volunteers, making students feel appreciated.	Summer 2022
Investigate whether we'd be able to access HEIF funding in future for community engagement or knowledge exchange projects.	Summer 2021
Run campaign to generate more organisation-initiated SLPs	Autumn 2021

3.2 Coordination with other parts of UCL

The VS is not the only part of UCL that works with the voluntary & community sector – UCL Culture, Innovation & Enterprise, Widening Participation, UCL Sustainability, UCL East, The Pro-Vice Provost for London and many departments and individual academics have links to the sector too. As mentioned above, the way that UCL engages with communities around us is likely to feature in the new UCL strategy.

Coordination with these other parts of UCL will become even more important during difficult times for the sector, in order to maximise impact and to prevent duplication. The Pro-Vice Provost for London will be looking at how to coordinate UCL's relationship with organisations across the Capital, including the voluntary & community sector. We can offer our knowledge to this piece of work, as well as our experience of collaborative working with other UCL colleagues. In particular, we can make sure that the needs of the small organisations that make up the majority of our partners are addressed.

Action	When?
Write up examples of how we've supported connections between UCL and voluntary & community sector. Communicate our function as a gateway to the Voluntary & Community Sector in future annual reports, and in communications with academic departments.	Term 1
Continue our participation in the UCL London Advisory Group and work with PVP London on joining up UCL's approach to the voluntary sector. Understand who are the 'key' partners and how we can fulfil maximum potential from the relationship	Throughout year
Review the VS Steering group membership to ensure that PS teams – and relevant academics - that interact with the voluntary sector are represented.	August 2021
Collaborate with UCL Grand Challenges on ways to connect the voluntary sector with their work.	Develop proposals during Summer 2021
Continue to meet regularly with UCL Community Engaged Learning Service (CELS).	Throughout year
CRIS Manager will attend UCL Citizen Science Working Group	Throughout year
Get in touch with new Vice-President (External Engagement) and the new Public Affairs team.	Autumn 2021
Work with colleagues across UCL (Public Engagement, CELS, I&E, PVP London etc) to develop a better internal network of staff working with Voluntary & Community Sector.	Develop proposals during Summer 2021
Align with and feed into PVP London's 'key partners' approach	Throughout year
Reinstate a UCL – VCS networking event like Creating Connections	Develop proposals during Summer 2021
Revisit need for 'Listen & Respond' matching website.	Summer 2021
Investigate how we measure the quality of our partnerships with the sector, in collaboration with other parts of UCL.	Autumn 2021

Action	When?
Produce an agreed set of principles and definitions for UCL departments working with the voluntary & community sector. Produce materials to go with this e.g. pro-forma agreements	Autumn 2021
Work with UCL Public Engagement on developing a single entry point for VCS partners to UCL support	Autumn 2021

4. Increasing participation

4.1 Promoting volunteering

How can we increase the numbers of UCL students volunteering? During the research for this strategy, we received a wide range of suggestions about marketing, including updating our use of social media, tapping into different motivations for volunteering and communicating the variety of benefits. Staff and students stressed the importance of work with academic departments and of making much better use of the welcome period.

More generally, many people told us that our message does not stand out amongst all the other things going on at UCL.

Beyond piecemeal improvements to marketing, there's a larger issue of volunteering's place within the culture at UCL – how it's perceived by students and staff, and how to make it more normalised. Our aim should be to make volunteering regarded as a core activity for students at UCL, and something readily associated with the Students' Union.

Students respond to messages from other students. Our volunteers have great stories to tell – but we clearly need to do better in getting those stories heard. One avenue for this is better use of video.

We are much more than a signposting service for volunteering, but perhaps need to be better at communicating the distinctive aspects of what we do – our curated, vetted list of partners; the degree of support volunteers receive; the fact students can set up and run their own community projects; the Community Research Initiative.

The appeal of the word 'volunteering' came up in several conversations – for some students, is a turn off – though for many others, it's the best word to describe what we do.

We also need to get better at showing how volunteering connects with some of the high-profile societal issues that many students are passionate about such as climate change, racial justice and inequality. We could set some goals around some of these big issues – for example, mentoring 500 young people or clearing 100 tonnes of rubbish from London's green spaces.

We have a relatively poor understanding of some points of the student volunteering journey – in particular, what prompts them to engage with us, do they progress from low-commitment volunteering to high-commitment activities, and what could be done to sustain their involvement?

A number of non-volunteers were aware of us through seeing our Volunteering Fairs. It's clear that these events are good for raising our general profile, as well as an efficient way of matching students with projects.

If we can successfully address these marketing issues – as well as improving processes and increasing the breadth and supply of volunteering opportunities – we should be able to increase the number of students involved in volunteering beyond our previous record of 2200 volunteers.

Action	When?
Get VS onto Ask UCL. Also, make sure enquiry desk staff are briefed about us.	Summer 2021
If restrictions allow, create a 'summer of volunteering' campaign	Planning from May
Work with Marketing to develop a map of the 'student volunteering journey'. To what degree does volunteering engagement match 'ladder of engagement' models? And what does that mean for our marketing and systems?	Term 2
Programme in a yearly cycle of marketing campaigns, including: • Volunteering & wellbeing • Volunteering and my course – highlighting academic impacts • Volunteering and skills • Short term and one-off volunteering	Summer 2021
Create annual content planner, incorporating our campaigns as well as other relevant internal and external dates (e.g. International Women's Day, Varsity, etc) and relate to overarching SU marketing planner	Summer 2021
Increase amount of Instagram usage, set metrics.	Put plan in place Summer 2021
Create Instagram posts from student profile pieces, linking to organisation pages on our website.	Throughout year
Test student appetite for volunteering-related podcasts	Term 2
Collect stories from alumni who volunteered with us whilst they were at UCL	Summer 2021
Continue with postgrad specific newsletter	Monthly throughout year
Reinstate mid-week specialist newsletters	From September
Incentivise partner organisations to help us get profiles of student volunteers.	Term 2
Get video content about volunteering from other professional services e.g. careers, SSW etc.	Term 2
Get video content from partners taking about their roles, include content from UCL students – embed this in their directory entries, use it on social media to link to directory	Term 3
Welcome – week 0 and 1 – aim to have a welcome event every day, intro talks, training, one-off volunteering, build a programme.	Put plan in place Summer 2021
Review training needs of VS staff around marketing and social media	Summer 2021
Ensure we continually communicate the quality of support students receive from us	Throughout year
Review front page of our webpages to make sure it reflects the above aims.	August 2021

Action	When?
Integrate CRIS and volunteering programmes better, so that CRIS students are encouraged to get involved in volunteering while they develop their research ideas.	Put plan in place Summer 2021
Include statement on all opportunities that travel expenses are paid, and frequently mention this in newsletters.	Put in request to systems June 2021
Do a weekly round-up of a few of the new opportunities in our directory each week on Instagram stories. Something similar to what the Union Instagram account does with its weekly round-up of 'what's on at UCL this week'.	Throughout year
Re-use profile pieces and turn them into posts on our Instagram to share student volunteering experience.	Throughout year
Create a partners impact tracker to gather stories and feedback from community partners. Put these stories online (see also 5.1 and 6.1)	Put in place Sept 2021
Review targeted communications list – is it up to date? Do we have all relevant UCL channels listed?	Summer 2021
Draw up 'key messages' list to hit in our comms, drawing on points above.	Summer 2021
Use the Volunteering Service's 20th anniversary in 2022 to promote the service – book in exhibition in cloisters, plan campaign for June 2022.	Start planning Jan 2022
Ensure volunteering is included in UCL prospectuses – offer up case studies. Understand timescales for these.	Get timescales June 2021
Conduct research into student perceptions of the term 'volunteering' and alternatives, including whether there are differences in terms of UK / international students, gender, or academic subject.	Term 2
Allocate a week at UCL to be 'volunteering week' when we can really highlight volunteering – make it the number 1 message for SU and have an intensive campaign.	Plan summer 2021, deliver term 1
Discuss with SU Marketing team how we can make our messages stand out better.	Summer 2021
Discuss with SU Marketing how we get video content from volunteers for sharing on Instagram	Summer 2021
Ensure we have weekly content for SU student newsletter	Throughout year
Ensure that there is relevant content about volunteering on 25 Gordon Street video screens at all times, and a VS story on the front of the SU website.	Throughout year
Get advice from SU Marketing on paid for Instagram or Facebook advertising for events.	Summer 2021
Review where we are placed within SU website – students expect to find us in 'Make a Change'	Summer 2021
With marketing, draw up a plan to get volunteering content into pre-enrolment comms	Summer 2021
Try to ensure we're prominent at the Welcome fair.	Summer 2021
Ask graphic designers to design a set of 1x1 templates/ info-graphics to share with our student stories etc, as often we don't have any quality images to use.	Summer 2021

Action	When?
Make it easier to gather student stories by including button that links to webform in the post placement email. (also supports 4.4)	Summer 2021
Get volunteering messages into the to the 'Getting sorted' pre-enrolment programme	Summer 2021
Produce a leaflet for inclusion in halls of residence packs	Summer 2021
Make better use of CAM social media to feature key events and campaigns	Throughout year
Introduce a volunteering ambassadors scheme – students commit to passing on relevant volunteering opps via course whatsapp groups	Autumn 2021
Run a campaign on student fundraising groups	Term 1 and Term 2
Ask UCL and SU Marketing if we can do takeovers of their social media channels e.g. during Volunteering Week.	Autumn 2021

4.2 Breadth of volunteering

Interest in volunteering has actually increased during COVID-19, and some commentators are hopeful this may be sustained into the future. However, our programme will be affected by a more limited supply of vacancies in the short to medium term, and we may have to support existing partners to develop new volunteering opportunities, as well as building new partnerships.

Much of the volunteering we offer is similar to our programme 10 years ago. As expectations amongst students change – and as Gen Z predominates – we'll need to consider what new types of volunteering we need to offer, and how we should we present it. We also need to look at under-represented groups - for example, Built Environment students or postgraduates – and think about how we can engage them.

The top reason – by far – for not volunteering is being too busy with academic study; being too busy generally is also cited as a barrier by a lot of students in both surveys and focus groups. We need to rebuild our one-off volunteering programme, and better highlight time-light opportunities. Equally, we need to do more to showcase how volunteering can enhance your studies so the time investment is seen as worthwhile.

Demand for digital volunteering opportunities has increased during Covid-19; this demand may remain in the longer term. Online volunteering can be more accessible, particularly for commuter students, distance learners, and part-time students. However, a lot of online volunteering can often be quite solitary and can thus lack a lot of the skill development and wellbeing benefits of in-person activity.

The time spent travelling to volunteering is one of the biggest complaints amongst student volunteers in our surveys. When searching for new opportunities, we should put particular emphasis on places close to UCL, and to UCL East as we get closer to its opening.

The pandemic has seen an upsurge in informally organised, mutual-aid style volunteering. Equally, the RVS Good Sam NHS Volunteer Responders programme saw massive interest. The question for us is to what degree we can support students into these sorts of roles, as well as encouraging a more broad range of pro-social activities such as giving blood, voting, involvement in campaigning activities, or general neighbourliness.

Action	When?
Create guide for setting up digital volunteering opportunities, based on what we've observed during COVID-19.	Summer 2021
Re-establish the one-off volunteering programme, and make sure it is prominent. Get events promoted in SU and UCL newsletters, on social media, etc.	Summer 2021
Use Summer 2022 to experiment with new activities	Summer 2022
Follow up on our March 2021 analysis of enquiries to find more opps in the in-demand categories.	Summer 2021

Action	When?
Create online animated guide for partners about the design of volunteer roles	Term 2
Promote one-off volunteering heavily towards post-grad students	Throughout year
Seek out more opps with BAME, disability, LGBT and women's organisations to promote to the networks	Throughout year
Encourage organisations to use the 'task-based' volunteering opp type and create a landing page for these.	Throughout year
Set up at least one of the flagship project ideas – these will help expand the breadth of volunteering (also supports 4.3)	TBC

4.3 Improving the recruitment process

Our data shows that the majority of students who enquire about opportunities do not go on to actually volunteer. Surveys show that this is sometimes due to slow recruitment processes – students don't hear back from recruiters, or recruitment timelines are too long. For other students, different priorities take hold and they find they don't have time to commit. Some of the students in our focus groups and surveys said they'd like more support from us in the application process.

On the other hand, some of our community partners report that they sometimes struggle to respond quickly enough because of capacity issues. They're often placing opportunities on a variety of different online platforms, and so might not have time to engage with some of the non-generic aspects of our website. We therefore need to look more closely at how we make our systems easier for our partners to engage with.

Action	When?
Create new mini-Hackathons where students road-test organisations volunteer adverts and recruitment processes.	Term 3
Review messages to students in emails and website to make it clearer we can help them if they experience problems with their volunteering applications.	Term 1
Make it clearer to organisations we can help them input their opportunity data into our website.	Summer 2021
Conduct in-depth research with partners on usability of the website and how it could be improved.	Term 3

4.3 Flagship Projects

One way to publicise our work, engage new groups of students and generate new opportunities is to develop more high-profile flagship projects. These would be distinctive, focussed and be able to involve high numbers of students. We would play more of an organising role than our ordinary brokered roles. The Social Hackathons have shown this approach can work well – though there are resource constraints to consider too.

See Appendix 1 for potential flagship project ideas.

Action	When?
Draw up a set of criteria, decide on which Flagship project approaches to develop, and draw up fundraising plan	Summer 2021
Revisit fundraising plan every 6 months to see if other opportunities might be available.	Throughout year

4.4 Systems

We'll need to make further improvements to our systems to make volunteering as easy as possible for students, as well as freeing up staff time from routine administrative tasks. The last year has given us opportunities to try new things, many of which have proved more efficient – we will consider what to retain into 21/22.

The following areas would particularly benefit from improvements: DBS and reference checking, sending and logging communications with students, finding easy ways for students to tell us they are volunteering, making it easier for students to find relevant volunteering opportunities on our webpage.

Students in our focus groups and surveys asked for better information about volunteering opportunities, especially in terms of location, time commitment and application process. This will help them make better choices.

Action	When?
Explore use of calendar software (e.g. Calendly) across team to book in student appointments.	Summer 2021
Make the directory more prominent on the front page – rename it to Opportunity Finder or something similar?	Summer 2021
Offer an online version of the volunteering fair even if we run an in-person event	Autumn 2021
Create an easy to find FAQs page for students, to save lots of unnecessary emails to our admin team. Have a link at the bottom of every opportunity.	Term 1
Sort out the back button on the specialist directories so they link to our home page.	Term 1
Create 'what sort of volunteer are you?' questionnaire that displays relevant volunteering opps. Start with students needs and interests. Promote on social media.	Term 2
Can pre- and post placements emails include students' name in the subject line, to get their attention?	Summer 2021
Can the pre-placement email pull in details of similar opportunities?	Summer 2022
Build a button into pre-placement emails – have you volunteered? Make it easy for them to tell us. Link it to a form for students where students can just click to update their records. Incentivise updating of record with a prize draw?	Summer 2021
Create CRM system to manage interactions with students in one place – follow up emails, DBS checks and references.	TBC
Send out opportunities via Instagram, twitter and facebook – can we automate this?	Throughout year
Have an option on opportunities – recommend this to a friend. Share on email / social media etc	TBC
Create a prompt to sign up for newsletter whenever anyone registers for an opp (want to hear about more opps like this)?	TBC
Change 'categories' field label at the bottom of each opp to 'Find similar opportunities'	Summer 2021
Can we set up vacancy alert system, so students sign up to receive emails / texts whenever relevant opp comes in?	TBC
Can we have a live chat function on the website whenever admin team are online. Link to MS Teams?	TBC

Action	When?
Talk to SU Systems team about how we can more effectively gather monitoring data (also supports 6.1)	TBC
Draw up timescales for these actions with Systems.	TBC

5. Enhancing the experience

5.1 Skills and knowledge development

How do we help students make the most of their volunteering?

Student employability is set to become increasingly important, with a likely contraction in the graduate job market and difficulties finding work experience. In partnership with UCL Careers, we currently offer 'Volunteering and your CV' sessions, with about 40 participants a year. These help students reflect on and identify what they've learnt from volunteering. How can this programme be scaled up?

In addition, volunteers would benefit from material to help put their volunteering in context – such as content on the specific issues students encounter in their volunteering (such as homelessness, sustainability, inequality).

Two different approaches were suggested by our interviewees . One route is to use online learning materials, though these would need to be short and easy to engage with.

Another is to hold a talks programme, featuring speakers from charities and from UCL's alumni network, as well as academics. Similar programmes have been successful at other universities and could help build a community of volunteers (see 5.3).

Action	When?
Experiment with talks, panel discussions and debates series focussed on issues that might interest student volunteers. Involve students in picking topics. Involve academics. Open to all student volunteers – including those who volunteer elsewhere. Include a panel discussion on progression to community leadership. Involve academics, community partners, alumni and other students (also supports 2.2)	Draw up plan Summer 2021
Supplement these with online content – short two minute videos exploring issues around volunteering. This could be student generated – including interviews with academics, community partners, alumni and other students. Add a call to action to each.	Draw up plan Summer 2021
Create self-directed online version of 'Volunteering and your CV' - show how volunteering can be used through various stages of the recruitment and selection process e.g. CV samples describing volunteering, exerts from cover letters and personal statements, answers to interview questions using examples from volunteering (e.g. via short video clips). Include footage of alumni saying how volunteering helped them in their career.	Draw up plan Summer 2021
Also, ask partners if they have relevant materials to place on website – to help students find out more about the issues.	Draw up plan Summer 2021

Action	When?
For SLPs, move training about processes (e.g risk assessments) to online narrated slide shows / quizzes and concentrate in person training on leadership and community engagements.	Draw up plan Summer 2021
Experiment with offering regular group debriefs to share experiences of volunteering – giving students space to reflect.	Draw up plan Summer 2021
Explore how we can use the website to help students reflect on and record their learning from volunteering.	Draw up plan Summer 2021
With Careers and alumni office, produce videos of employers talking about skills graduates need and tie this in with volunteering – especially leadership and commercial awareness, as students are often lacking these. Could be used for both promotional purposes, and also to encourage students to reflect on what they've learnt. (also supports 2.3)	Draw up plan Summer 2021
Develop bite-sized self-directed sessions on civic role of university and asset-based approaches to community development	TBC
Talk to Public Engagement about their training programe.	June 2021

5.2 Progression routes

Another way to help students get the most out of their volunteering experience is to help them progress onto other activities. Developments with the Students' Union UCL website may make it easier for students to plot progression routes across the Union's services. UCL Career's Pillars of Employability framework and the potential introduction of the Inkpath app present other opportunities for students to tie in volunteering with their personal development.

Progression is not just a matter of skill development, but also how students connect up what they are passionate about. A big driver for students volunteering is their support for particular causes – and we could have a role in helping them link their volunteering with campaigning activities.

Action	When?
Review the follow up email to one-off volunteers detailing progression routes into other sorts of volunteering (including opps with the organisation they helped).	Summer 2021
Create materials for online volunteers – getting the most out of virtual volunteering.	June 2021
Work with Sabbs and Policy, Governance & Insight team to offer a session for project leaders on running for elected position, early in term 2.	Plan from Nov 2021
Keep up conversations with SU Systems team on building progression routes into new website.	Throughout year
Revise Volunteering and your CV – focus the material on students who've already volunteered.	June 2021
Talk to Public Engagement on their experience of using InkPath.	Summer 2021

5.3 Connecting volunteers

Beyond the employability and academic impacts, we should explore how we can also maximise the well-being benefits of volunteering. This should include building a more inter-connected culture of student volunteering at UCL, where volunteers are better able to share experiences and learn from each other, as well as feeling part of a larger undertaking. Doing this may also help improve word of mouth promotion of volunteering, and help raise its visibility within UCL. Students in our volunteers focus group said they'd like to be connected with other volunteers – it'd be particularly valuable where they aren't volunteering in a large group already.

Action	When?
Talk to Student Activities about how welfare officers in clubs and society officers operate, how they're supported etc. Aim to implement welfare officers for all student-led projects	Have in place for 22/23
Trial SLP group catch ups – chance to meet other SLP leaders working in similar types of projects. Set up slack channels (or similar) to supplement these and keep up communications.	Term 1
Trial setting up a slack or teams channel for all volunteers, perhaps themed around types of volunteering.	Term 1
Explore creating a snappier brand identity for SLPs – like Team UCL. Give a sense of belonging to a larger endeavour, and that there's a whole programme of support.	Term 3, any changes in place for 22/23 academic year
Reinstate the project leaders conference	TBC
All leaders to be invited to Volunteering Zone	If we set this up
Ask students if they want to be introduced to other students volunteering on similar projects, set up teams group or whatsapp group for them.	For 22/22 academic year

6. Our remit

6.1 Measuring Impact

In recent years, we have made progress with measuring and reporting our impact. The cornerstones of our approach are our annual student survey, our partners survey, and the student case studies we publish on our webpages. However, there is room to improve how we measure the impact our volunteers make upon the communities they work with – given the diversity of our programme, this is harder to capture. Similarly, we need to better report the impact we have upon UCL – for example, the help we provide to other departments in connecting with the voluntary sector. We also need to better capture data on how we're impacting on SU and UCL priorities – such as sustainability, Widening Participation, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Action	When?
Review SLP reporting framework to find consistent way of measuring impact.	Term 2
Develop a framework for recording impact upon VCS, including more regular gathering of partners' case studies throughout year.	Term 2
Develop a framework for recording impact upon UCL	Term 2
Review of KPIs with OVPESE and SU.	Over Summer 2021
Review training needs of VS staff around impact measurement	Over Summer 2022
Review how we measure the impact of volunteering on wellbeing and belonging.	Term 2
Establish summer evaluation internship for UCL student	Look at during budgeting March 2022

6.2 Communicating our remit internally

Our research has revealed a wide range of perceptions amongst UCL staff about what the Volunteering Service's remit is and/or what it should be. Our activities are often seen through the lens of student employability, or through vaguely defined notions of 'being a good thing to do'. We need to better articulate what we do and why we do it – and the range of impacts our work has.

We could also better explain our place within the spectrum of community engagement activities undertaken by students. Whilst we can never be responsible for the whole picture, we can highlight our role in building good quality partnerships with London's voluntary & community sector. We should also consider what we can offer to students who have organised their own volunteering or who found it through their academic department. We also need to define how we can support UCL departments that run their own volunteering programmes, such as UCL Engineering's Outreach team.

Action	When?
Produce an infographic depicting the spectrum of volunteering, showing what aspects of volunteering we focus upon and how we can support students in other types.	Term 2
Continue to publish yearly impact reports, conveying the breadth of impacts.	Published by December
Push content through Student Health and Wellbeing Community of Practice newsletter	Throughout year
Consider a renaming of the service to reflect that we're community volunteering, but also to maximise our engagement with students. Use student feedback to shape this decision.	Look at this during Term 3

6.3 International volunteering

We don't currently offer international volunteering beyond providing a webpage of advice and links. A number of people we spoke to suggested this as an area of development, though to do this properly would require additional staffing with relevant expertise. Even then, there are significant ethical issues to consider.

UCL Global Engagement is already running a number of international volunteering placements, and so anything we develop would need to be complementary to their programme.

Action	When?
Investigate what other volunteering services in UK universities are doing.	Term 2
Promote Student Union UCL's student mobilty fund to SLP leaders to explore links with similar groups in overseas universities.	Investigate over summer 2021
Write feasibility proposal for funded international volunteering programme.	Summer 2022
Work with Global Engagement office to develop after-care package for returning international volunteers, finding them progression routes into local volunteering.	Term 2
Explore setting up volunteering partnerships with overseas universities for students to share experiences and possibly arrange exchanges.	Summer 2022
Explore links with association of Commonwealth Universities through UCL Grand Challenges.	Summer 2021

Appendix 1 – Flagship Project Ideas

Our interviews yielded a number of suggestions for new areas of development – flagship projects that could:

- Be easily promoted.
- Have an identifiable impact.
- Host a significant number of volunteers.
- Broaden the range of volunteering we offer.
- Connect with SU and/or UCL strategic priorities.

We've summarised the ideas below:

Ultra-local volunteering

Develop a brand for volunteering within walking distance of UCL's Bloomsbury Campus (and, ultimately, UCL East). Such opportunities would be found on a single webpage and would have a distinctive promotional campaign, and could encompass students and staff. Local organisations would receive additional support for developing relevant volunteering opportunities. This could also tie in with other UCL departments, such as UCL Culture, who are looking at our relationships with our immediate neighbours.

Why? Students prefer shorter travel times for their volunteering. The programme would tie in with other work at UCL looking at our relationship with Camden.

Resources required A simple version of this could be achieved within current resources. Alternatively, we could set up a specific project with a local partner (for example, an after school club or befriending scheme) and seek external funding for it.

Expand CRIS

Increase capacity of the Community Research Initiative to engage more students – potentially looking at undergrads or PGTs.

Why? CRIS is a relatively new service and is currently being part-funded by OfS as part of an evaluation into the impact of student Knowledge Exchange. This project should help us identify how we might scale up CRIS. However, capacity will still be limited by the number of staff working on CRIS – matching and supporting students on KE partnerships can be labour intensive.

A number of people we interviewed asked why CRIS is only available for PGT students – undergraduates would benefit from a similar service. This would broaden our offer to academic departments and to students.

Resources required Any significantly scaling up of numbers would require additional staffing resources. If we moved to support UGs and PGRs, we'd need to be careful of the overlap with Evaluation Exchange and UCL Community Engaged Learning Service.

Consultancy challenge

Students would receive training in consultancy skills, and then work as teams with a charity over a 10 week period on a consultancy project. At the end, they'd present their findings to a panel and there would be a prize for best project. The charity partners would provide feedback on how they were going to implement the findings.

Why? This would be an extension of our social hackathons, which have proved popular with students and have provided useful results for our partners. A similar scheme sponsored by Morgan Stanley was popular and attracted new students to volunteering. This would help meet the demand for work-related placements, and could be tailored for academic departments. We could work closely with UCL Careers on this, potentially connecting with other work-place skills beyond consulting, e.g. data science, web design / development / coding, Customer Relations Management, Social Media Marketing, Market research / Industry Analytics.

Resources required As we found with our Global Citizenship Programme, organisations would require support to develop suitable projects. Matching students to projects and organising training and support is also time consuming. A small trial with 3 or 4 partners could probably be done within existing resources, but anything larger would need at least part-time staffing.

Clubs & Societies into the community

Provide intensive support for clubs and societies to develop programmes within London schools, and/or with voluntary organisations.

Why? We already work with UCL's sports clubs through our Student-led Volunteering Programme, though the number of projects is relatively low compared with the number of groups. However, there is potential for growth in this area, particularly if more support could be given to clubs and societies in developing links, and more initial on-site support.

Resources required A trial project could be run with a small handful of clubs and societies, though a larger programme is likely to need some staff resource, possibly as a joint staff member between the VS and clubs and societies.

UCL Foodbank

Set up a student-run foodbank at UCL, with students sourcing donations, dropping off food packs, running pick up points and organising fundraising.

Why? Food poverty is likely to continue to be an issue within Camden and elsewhere. It would provide a popular volunteering opportunity for students.

Resources required We'd firstly need to establish whether there is a need for another foodbank locally. If so, finding a suitable space would be the main requirement. The foodbank could be run as a student-led project.

Personalised Matching

Rather than advertise volunteering opportunities to PGR students, we ask them to submit information about their skills, experience and interest, and approach community organisations who may have short projects they can work on. Organisations can also browse a directory of available students for their projects (for example if they need help with statistical analysis, graphic design, or business planning).

Why? Having a PGR only service might help attract these students to volunteering. There has been a move towards skills-based volunteering within the sector during COVID-19, and some commentators think this is likely to stay. There are good examples of this kind of service (e.g. https://www.digitalcandle.org.uk) we could emulate and make relevant to UCL PGRs. This approach would also work well with staff volunteering.

Resources required A small scale pilot to test demand amongst students and community organisations would be needed – this would require some new website functionality (though this could probably be based upon what's already been developed for CRIS). If the scheme was scaled up, some staffing resource would be required to assist students and help organisations create suitable briefs. We'd also need to carefully differentiate this from UCL Evaluation Exchange.

UCL Volunteer Responders

Build up a pool of UCL volunteers who can be called on at short notice, using Whatsapp or similar.

Why? We do get calls for volunteers at short notice, outside our cycle of newsletters and other comms. Also, a lot of students are interested in one-off and short term volunteering. During COVID-19, there has been increasing use of apps to manage pools of volunteers.

Resources required This service could be set up relatively easily using Whatsapp. We could funnel our existing one-off programme through it, and seek out new opportunities.

Supported Volunteering Programme

The Supported Volunteering Project is based on the idea of using the employability and wellbeing benefits of volunteering to improve outcomes for students with poor mental health and with disabilities.

Why? We've had referrals from UCL Careers to help students with disabilities find volunteering opportunities – a 2018 AGCAS report highlighted how they are more likely to be unemployed than non-disabled graduates. We know from our own surveys that volunteering helps students develop the sorts of skills in demand by employers, such as understanding others, collaboration, problem solving and influencing skills. Thus, volunteering can be particularly valuable for students with disabilities.

However, the Volunteering Service is not fully equipped to support students with additional needs and as such we do not proactively seek such referrals. We do not have the staff resource to provide one-to-one advice and guidance to such students or to make sure our partners have the right support mechanisms in place. Nor do we have the specific skills and experience to ensure the best outcomes, and there is no budget to help overcome barriers to participation.

Resources required A small pilot programme with a small cohort of students could be run with a pot of money to help overcome barriers to volunteering. A larger scheme advertised to all students with disabilities or poor mental health would require at least part-time staffing.