STUDENTS' UNION UCL | Volunteering Service

Volunteering Service

Review 2020-21

About the Volunteering Service

Students' Union UCL's Volunteering Service exists to connect UCL with other communities across London, primarily by engaging students in enriching volunteering opportunities. We have three main services:

Community Partners – we place UCL students with volunteering opportunities at our network of around 400 community organisations.

Student-Led Volunteering Programme – we support students to set up and run their own community projects.

Community Research Initiative for Students – we help create research collaborations between Postgraduate Taught students and community organisations.

In addition, we provide advice and support to UCL colleagues on issues relating to volunteering and help them build links with London's voluntary and community sector.

2020-21 in summary

COVID impacted every aspect of life in the 2020-21 academic year, and volunteering was no exception. Our programme has traditionally been face-to-face – indeed, part of the appeal of volunteering has been the connection with other people.

Many of our community partners shuttered their volunteering programmes for at least part of the year, either because of organisational pressures or because of difficulties in moving their activities online. There was therefore a drop-off in number of in-person volunteering opportunities. Even where programmes did continue, the varying nature of COVID restrictions meant that planning volunteering was a difficult affair.

To mitigate for this, we supported existing partners to move their volunteering online, as well as seeking out new digital volunteering opportunities. For example, we successfully moved our Social Hackathons to an online model of delivery. We also provided small grants to partners to help plan new volunteering roles. **Overall, we placed 623 volunteers with our community partners.**
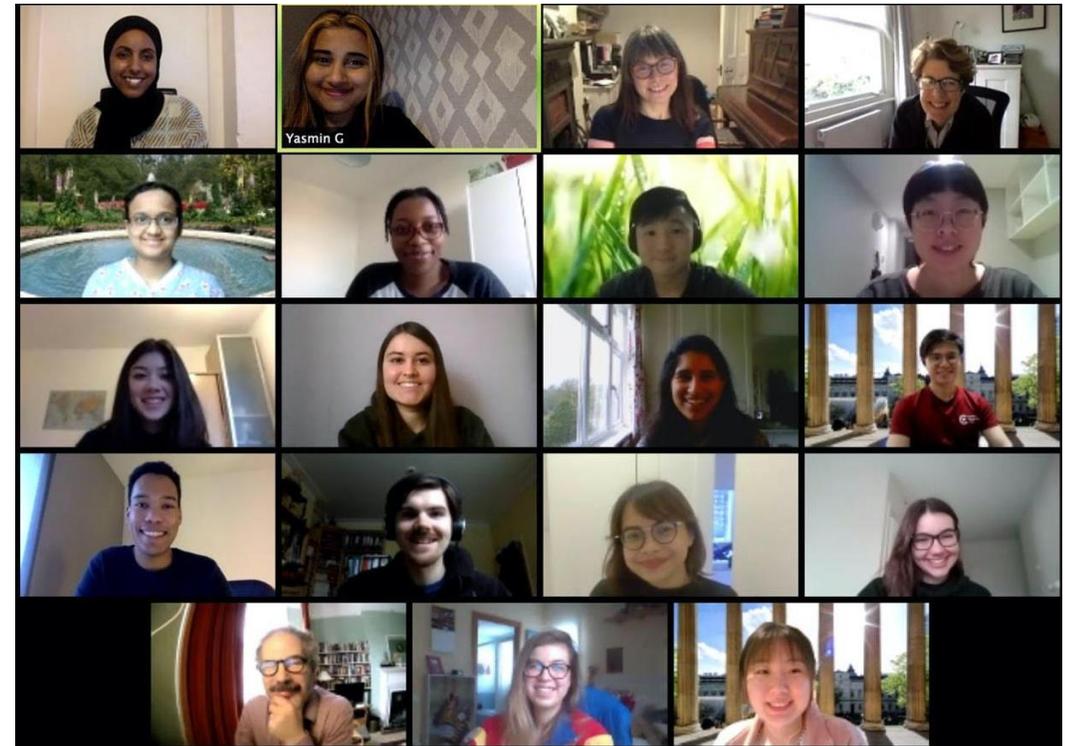
Similarly, our Student-led Projects have always been run as in-person activities. Our student groups work mostly with schools, who had their own pressures to contend with – and who were in lockdown for much of term 2, when our groups are usually most active. Nonetheless, good forward planning from our SLP team meant that we were able to get 32 groups delivering projects, **involving 557 volunteers and 164 leaders.**

Our Community Research Initiative continued to expand, with **127 master's students** engaging in knowledge exchange with one of our community partners. New developments included additional training for students around community engagement, as well as research consultancy clinics for our community partners.
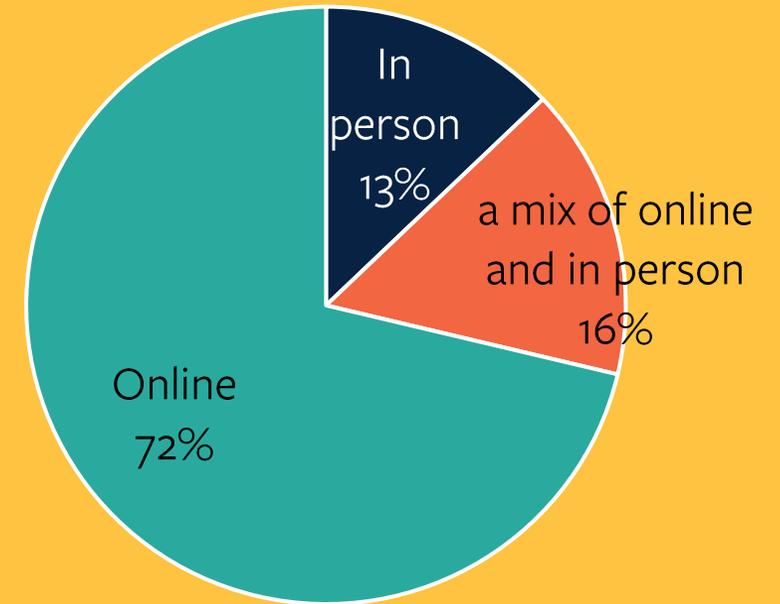
Meet our students

Zainab Dar (BA Comparative Literature) supported south London social enterprise Bud as a marketing researcher. "Becoming a volunteer was one of my goals for my first year of university because I wanted to be productive and get something good out of the opportunities that the UCL student union provides. I definitely recommend volunteering to anyone. Especially with lockdown I believe it can be so fulfilling to make a change in society and improve your own skills even within the confines of your homes amidst a pandemic."

Kirsty Goodman (PhD Security and Crime Science) was a Dementia Wellbeing Volunteer with Age UK Camden. "Even though I started the volunteering amid the global crisis, I am incredibly grateful that the technology we have today has allowed me to carry out this service from my family home down in Cornwall and I have found the experience positive for my own mental wellbeing. The perpetual lockdowns over the last year has brought a real sense of isolation and pessimism to many, including myself, but by connecting to Age UK Camden, even just for one-two hours every week, I feel a sense of connection to the community still."

Natasha Wilcock (Medicine) has been volunteering with Girlguiding St Pancras throughout her medical degree. "Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we faced a huge challenge: our face to face activities were no longer permitted but our work was even more needed as young people faced isolation at home. So we moved to weekly meetings on zoom and increased our frequency even meeting through the holidays and holding virtual sleepovers and camps. It has been a fantastic way for both the girls and adults to stay connected and we have had so many adventures online- from origami, to virtual protests to google earth trips around the world and so much more!"

Volodymyr Kyselov (BEng Mechanical Engineering with Business Finance) was one of the leaders of Project Impactive, a group of student engineers who work with disabled people to co-design improvements to assistive technologies. "One of the best things for me has been the opportunity to connect to so many smart and talented people and just by being around them I have learned so much."

Kaito Mizukoshi (BSc Management Science) set up UCLef, a group of UCL student musicians performing concerts for members of community organisations around London. "I have had the chance to discuss how to deliver a project with other students and staff during our training session and we have also had many other networking opportunities. I have managed to connect to other project leaders who deliver projects not just related to music, which has overall been a very interdisciplinary experience."

Zoe Schott (MSc International Public Policy) collaborated with sexual health charity Brook on a research project as part of our CRIS initiative. "That part is really exciting: the fact that I'm not just creating research for knowledge's own sake. I'm creating it so that an active, dynamic, live organisation can actually use this knowledge to help people. I think that's cool."
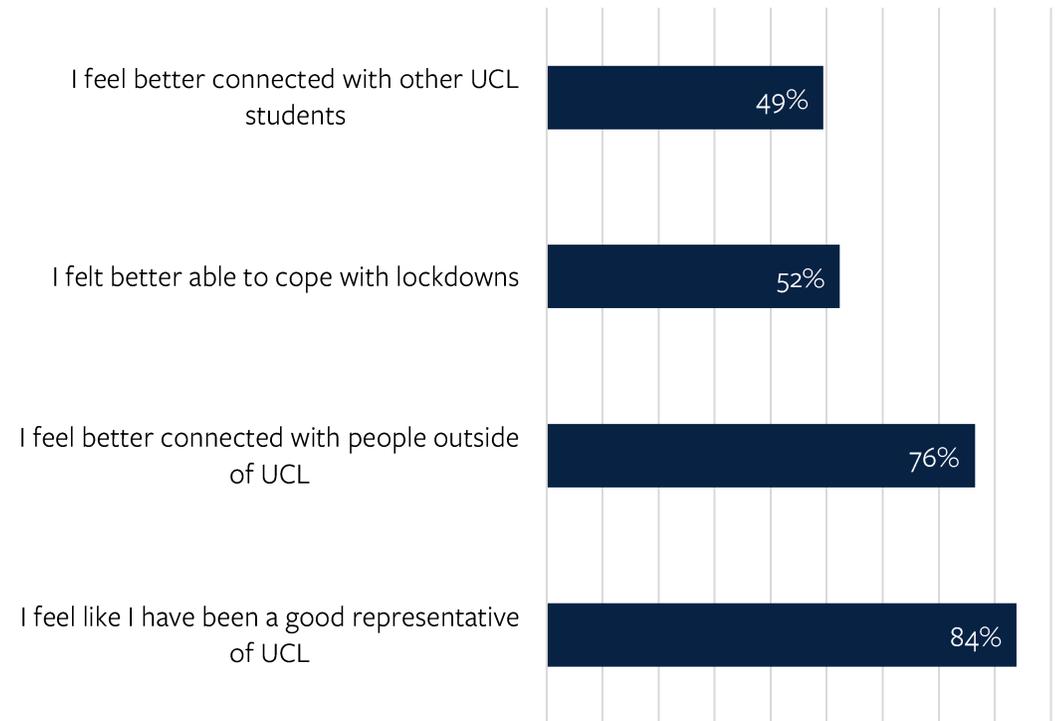
Impact on students

We have a strong evidence base on the positive impact of volunteering on students' skills development, academic life and their general well-being. In our 2021 student survey, we instead focussed on students' sense of connectedness.

76% felt that through volunteering they were better connected with people outside of volunteering, and almost half felt better connected with other UCL students. Just over half felt better able to cope with lockdowns, and 84% agreed that they'd been a good representative of UCL.

95% of students felt they'd made a difference through their volunteering. When we asked how, the most common responses were through making connections within a community, improving other people's mental health and wellbeing, with improving under 18's access to good quality education and access to digital services also being mentioned frequently.

Because of my volunteering ...% agreeing or agreeing strongly, n=174, VS volunteers.

I feel better connected with other UCL students	49%
I felt better able to cope with lockdowns	52%
I feel better connected with people outside of UCL	76%
I feel like I have been a good representative of UCL	84%

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Impacts with our community partners

In our <u>survey of community partners</u> who had recruited UCL student volunteers during 2020-21, 98% felt that our students had made an impact. When we asked how, the most commonly cited impacts were improving people's mental health and wellbeing, creating connections within a community, and improving access to arts, culture & heritage.

As usual, Camden was the borough where our students had the biggest impact – 45% of volunteering was with organisations based there. The next largest boroughs were Westminster and Islington with 8% and 6% of volunteers. The bulk of the online volunteering we offered was with our existing partners and so matched geographical patterns from previous years, even where it had moved online. However, we did see a big growth in organisations outside of London – online volunteering offered new opportunities with new partners.

UCL student volunteers have helped to improve ...% agreeing or agreeing strongly, n=52, VS community partners.

People's mental health and well-being	87%
Connections within a community	83%
Access to arts, culture and heritage	62%
People's physical health	40%
People's access to digital services	35%
Under 18's access to good quality education	35%
Adults' access to lifelong learning	33%
People's political power, voice and influence	23%
The physical environment	19%
Access to sport	15%
People's financial security	13%

By volunteering to tutor this year, UCL students have supported our pupils in what has been a tumultuous year in education. With their support for one hour per week, our pupils are more likely to transition into their next academic year with the tools and skills they need in English and maths to progress.

UCL students have enabled us to deliver big projects related to sustainability. Without them some of the projects would not have been possible. They were active on all sides (operations, fund raising, communication, workshops deliveries, etc.)

We had a day session with the team and were very impressed by the engagement and level of insights they were able to provide in a short space of time. Following the Hackathon we have welcomed one of the students as an intern and he is making some great improvements to our website and online presence, which is in line with targets set on the day of the Hackathon.
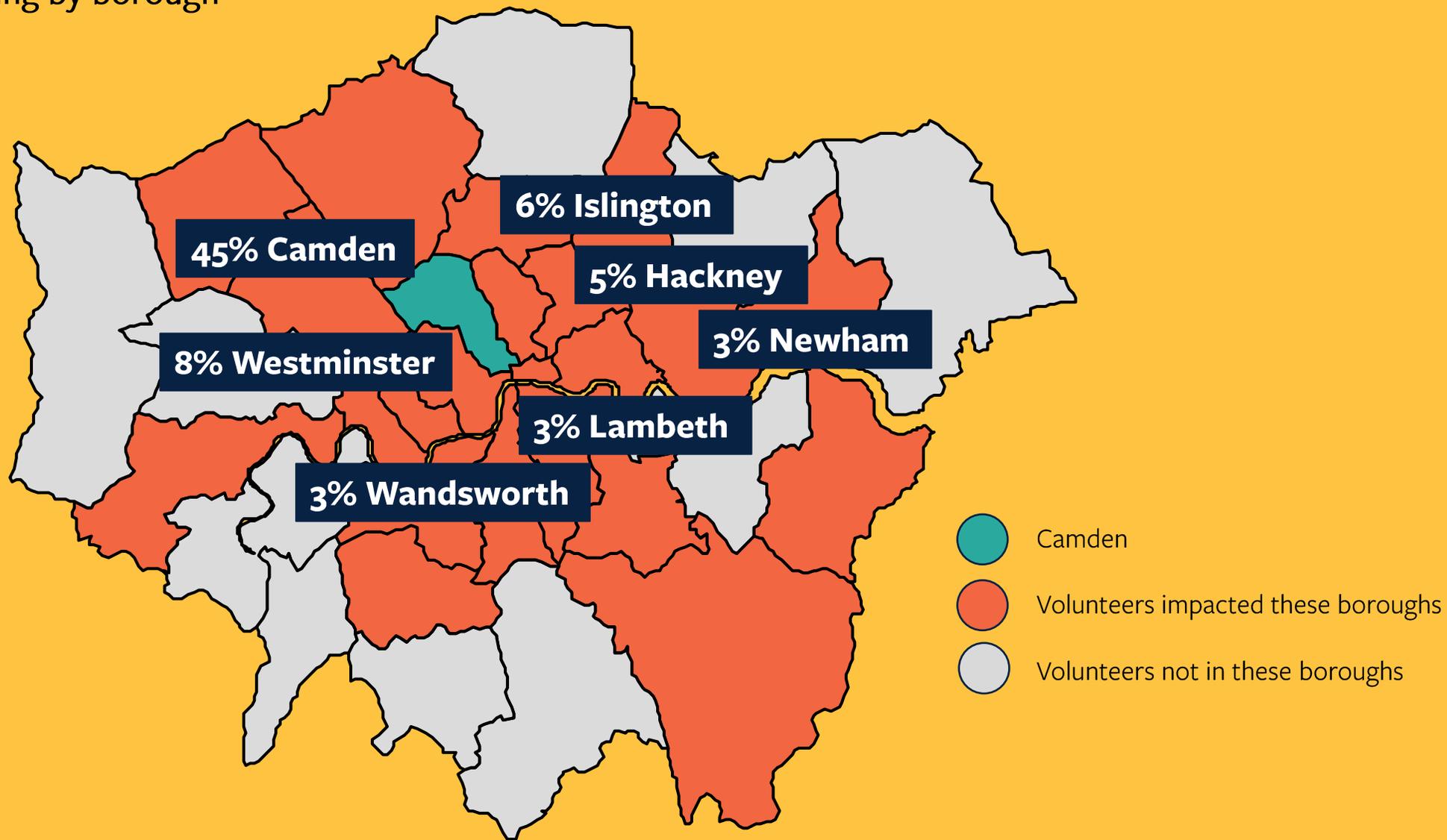
UCL volunteers supported our organisation to provide COVID19 responses in different ways (delivery food, befriending, teaching skills, etc). We were able to increase number of virtual activities and grow this service.

The students have been a great support to our clients. They have provided emotional support through telephone befriending. This support has been vital particularly during the time when many vulnerable older people became even more isolated when they were advised by the government to shield in order to avoid contracting Covid-19.

Quotes from our survey of community partners, summer 2021.

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The impacts of volunteering by borough

6% Islington

45% Camden

5% Hackney

8% Westminster

3% Newham

3% Lambeth

3% Wandsworth

8%
Out of
London

Camden

Volunteers impacted these boroughs

Volunteers not in these boroughs

Who volunteers?

Some long-standing trends remained despite the radical change in the nature of volunteering in 2020-21. Women and undergraduates continued to be more likely to volunteer, as were disabled students and UK students from Asian ethnic backgrounds.

However, there were some differences too. International students from outside the EU/EEA were less likely to engage – this was largely due to a big fall in the number of Chinese students volunteering. We don't fully understand the reason for this fall, but it seems likely that it's related to COVID.

There were some changes when looking at participation at faculty level – usually Laws, Life Sciences and Medical Sciences have highest participation rates. Whilst these were still all above average, Arts & Humanities showed the highest levels of volunteering.

As in previous years, male students, and students from particular faculties – Engineering, MAPS, and the Built Environment – were less likely to volunteer. During Summer 2021, we drew up a plan with UCL Engineering to work more closely together on volunteering, which we hope will increase participation levels. We're keen to do something similar with other faculties and departments.

When we asked non-volunteers in a survey why they hadn't chosen to take part, by far the biggest reason given was that they were too busy with their studies to volunteer. Around a quarter also said they were too busy with paid work. However, this is a complicated area. We know that volunteers are just as likely to have a part-time job during term time as those who don't volunteer, and students with committee positions with clubs / societies are actually much more likely to volunteer. We also know that students on courses such as Medicine and Laws – with high time demands – are keen volunteers. It's perhaps more accurate to say that non-volunteers don't see the value in giving up their limited spare time, rather than simply being too busy.

It's also worth noting that 25% of non-volunteers said that they didn't know how to get involved – the survey was drawn from students who'd actually signed up to our newsletter, so the figure amongst the wider student population is likely to be much higher.

Faculty	Total VS Volunteers	% of students who volunteer with VS	% of undergrads who volunteer
Arts & Humanities	172	5%	6%
Laws	54	5%	7%
Medical Sciences	169	4%	7%
Population & Health Sciences	68	4%	13%
Social & Historical Sciences	218	4%	5%
Life Sciences	125	3%	5%
UCL Total	1246	3%	4%
Brain Sciences	74	2%	5%
Engineering	117	2%	2%
Maths & Physical Sciences	86	2%	2%
Built Environment	48	1%	1%
Inst of Education	100	1%	4%

As undergraduates are much more likely to volunteer, it's also useful to look at the undergrad participation rates. For example, as Brain Sciences has a lot of postgrads, their participation rates are below average. If you just look at their undergrads, their participation rates are above average.

Read the full participation report

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Top 10 departments by volunteer engagement

| Faculty	Department	Total VS Volunteers	% of students who volunteer with VS	% of undergrads who volunteer with VS
PHS	UCL Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Institute for Women's Health	15	12%	38%
ART	European and International Social and Political Studies	42	11%	11%
ART	Arts and Sciences BASc	49	10%	9%
MDS	Division of Infection and Immunity	10	8%	16%
PHS	Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care	20	6%	8%
ART	English Language and Literature	26	6%	6%
MAP	Natural Sciences	24	6%	6%
PHS	Institute for Global Health	16	6%	9%
SHS	Institute of the Americas	11	6%	6%
MDS	UCL Medical School	109	6%	6%
SHS	Institute of Archaeology	24	5%	9%
IOE	Centre for Languages and International Education	9	5%	5%

The following departments also had high levels of engagement amongst their undergraduates.
- Laws (7%)
- Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering (7%)
- UCL GOS Institute of Child Health (22%)

Low participation departments

Faculty	Department	Total VS Volunteers	% of students who volunteer with VS	% of undergrads who volunteer with VS
MAP	Mathematics	14	1%	1%
MAP	Physics and Astronomy	13	1%	1%
ENG	Electronic and Electrical Engineering	9	1%	2%
ENG	UCL School of Management	20	1%	2%
ENG	Computer Science	11	1%	1%
MAP	Earth Sciences	2	1%	1%
BEN	Bartlett School of Construction and Project Management	6	1%	1%
BEN	Bartlett School of Architecture	11	1%	1%
ART	Slade School of Fine Art	1	0%	0%
ART	Greek and Latin	0	0%	0%

Volunteering participation by gender
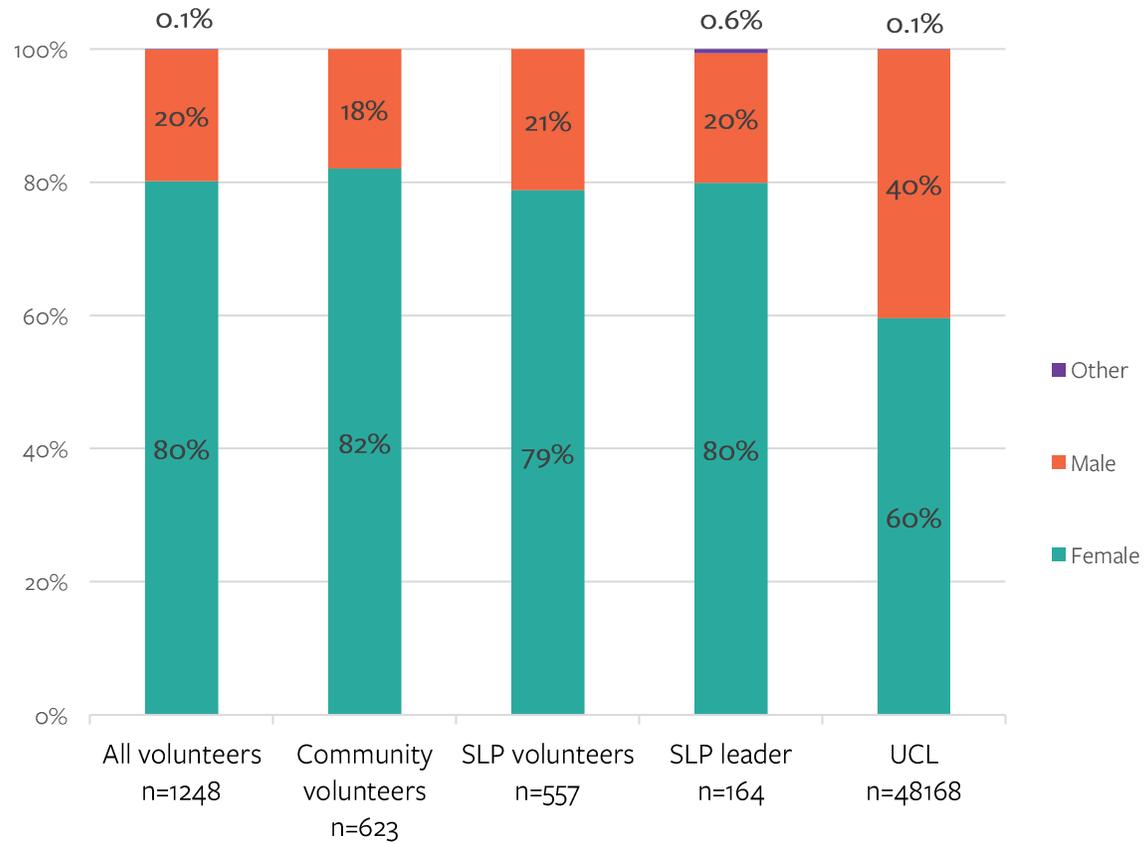
Volunteering participation by study level
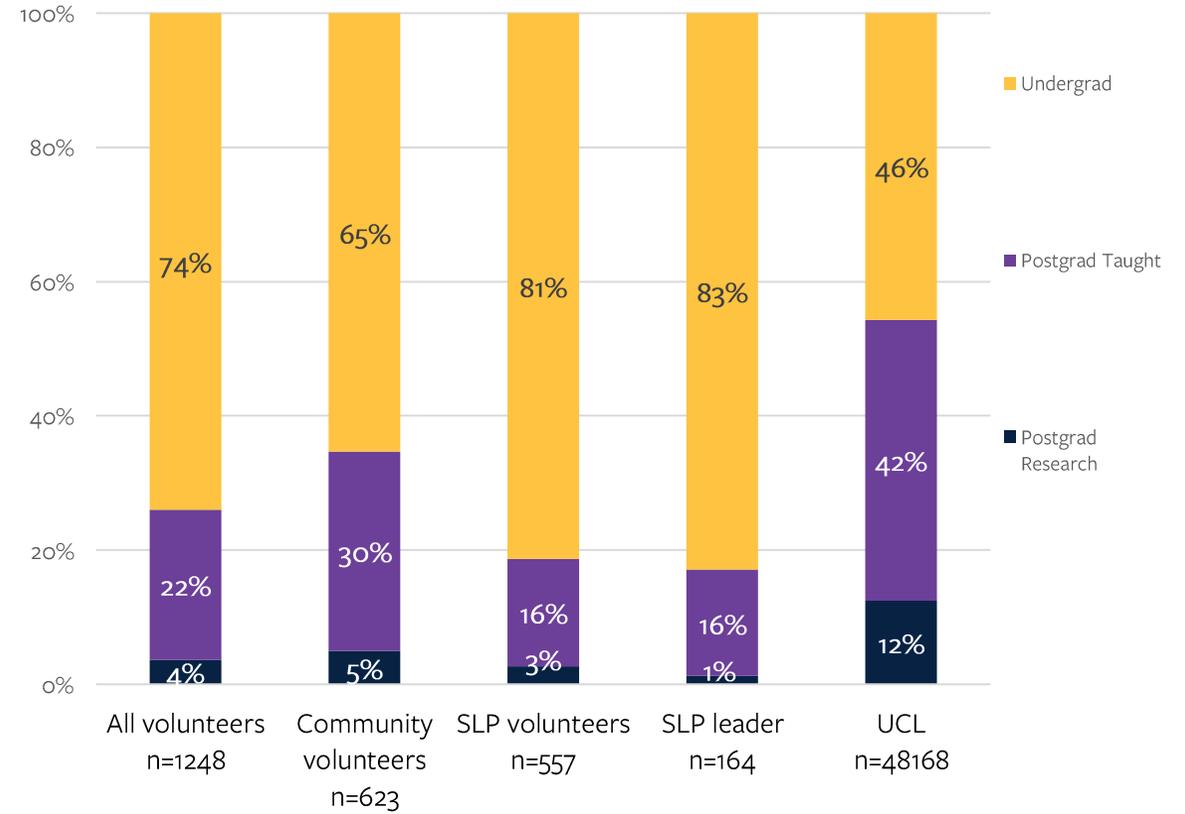
Community Volunteers are those placed with our community partners
SLP volunteers and leaders are students involved with one of our Student-led volunteering projects

Community Volunteering Strategy

During Spring and Summer 2021, we worked with students, colleagues and community partners to draw up a new three-year strategy with the aim to increase participation in community volunteering. The strategy puts forward five goals:

1: Making volunteering more visible and appealing

2: Making it easier to volunteer

3: Enhancing the experience of volunteering

4: Supporting the Voluntary & Community Sector

5: Connecting volunteering with the rest of UCL

Find out more at studentsunionucl.org/volunteering/about/strategy

Students' Union UCL Community Volunteering Strategy

2021-24

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where **more** happens