

UCL Consultancy Challenge 2022 - Impact report

About the Consultancy Challenge

The UCL Charity Consultancy Challenge ran from 13 – 18 June; seven teams of 6 – 9 UCL student volunteers helped seven different not-for-profit organisations find solutions to business problems. Projects included: finding innovative ways to recruit volunteers; devising powerful publicity campaigns; developing new products and services for social enterprises; and undertaking business planning and research activities.

The Volunteering Service invited organisations to propose initial project ideas. We then hired and trained three PhD Consultancy Assistants, who worked with two or three organisations each to develop their ideas into a full project brief and timeline of tasks and activities for the Challenge Week.

The Challenge Week involved student volunteers drawn from all of UCL's faculties, and included postgrads and undergrads, UK and international students. They had never met each other before, and so had to quickly form their consultancy teams and get to work on their projects.

The first day of the Challenge was a chance for all the teams to get together – we ran some training on consultancy skills and project management, and the groups got to start thinking about their brief.

During the week, the teams spent some time with their partners to get a better understanding of their charities and worked together to start researching and exploring solutions.

Then, by Friday morning, they presented their findings to their partner organisation, and then took part in a reflective session run by UCL Careers where they identified what they'd learned during the week.

In the afternoon, everyone came together again to share what they'd discovered. This is where the 'challenge' part came to the fore – the group judged to have delivered the best project won £1000 for their host charity to help put their work into action.

The aim of the Consultancy Challenge was to expand the range of work-place learning opportunities for UCL students, giving them the chance to utilise and develop valuable skills whilst making a difference. The programme built upon our successful [Social Hackathon series](#), where inter-disciplinary groups of students have worked on business problems over the course of one day. We also drew upon our experiences running the [Community Research Initiative](#) and the Voluntary Sector element of UCL's [Global Citizenship programme](#).

The Consultancy Challenge was funded as a one-off programme through UCL's HEIF allocation and was a collaboration between [Students' Union UCL's Volunteering Service](#) and [UCL Careers](#).

Participation Data

Thirteen organisations applied to be one of the seven host organisations. Hosts were selected by a panel of UCL students and representatives from other community organisations.

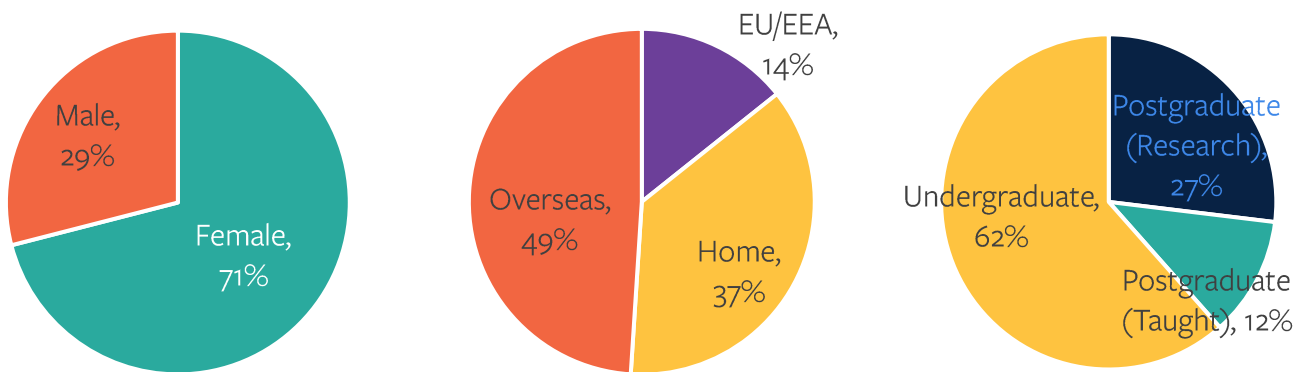
All undergrad and PGT places filled up in 12 days (4 – 16 April). We reserved spaces for PGR students, and these were filled within 5 weeks.

We originally allocated 48 places for volunteers on 6 projects but recruited 77 students to allow for drop-outs, based on our experience with running training and one-off volunteering activities. In the end,

we had fewer drop-outs than expected, with 52 participating. Thomas Pocklington Trust kindly stepped in to offer a project for these additional students, bringing our total project list to 7.

We also ran a waiting list. Over 5 weeks, 148 students signed up for the programme.

The gender, fee status and course level of the students were as follows:



Faculty	Postgraduate (Research)	Postgraduate (Taught)	Undergrad	Total
Arts & Humanities	2		8	10
Brain Sciences	3		1	4
Engineering	2	1	1	4
Institute of Education		2	6	8
Life Sciences	1		1	2
Mathematical & Physical Sciences	4		8	12
Medical Sciences	1		1	2
Population Health Sciences	1			1
Social & Historical Sciences		3	6	9
Total	14	6	32	52

Impact - students

We sent students a survey asking them to rate different aspects of the week, how they had benefitted, and what they liked, disliked and would change about the Consultancy Challenge. 38 volunteers completed the survey, a 73% response rate.

In summary, the volunteers rated the process of signing up and the introduction to Consultancy Skills session most highly. The least favourite aspect was the session on Agile Project Management.

Every student stated that they'd improved their skills as part of the Consultancy Challenge. The most frequently improved skills were Team Work (97%), Consultancy (76%), Problem Solving (66%) and Project Management Skills (66%).

In addition, 79% of students said they'd made new friends, 79% said they'd learned about charities and not-for-profits, and 79% said they'd learned about how charities and universities can share knowledge.

How would you rate ..	% of volunteers rating "Good" or "Very good"
The process of signing up	97%
The Introduction to Consultancy Skills session	95%
The information you received before the Consultancy Challenge Week	87%
The reflective session on Friday	81%
The initial briefing session with your partner charity	76%
The Intro to Agile Project Management session	42%

Did you improve any of the following skills during the Consultancy Challenge?

Team work skills	97%
Consultancy skills	76%
Problem Solving skills	66%
Project Management skills	66%
Presentation skills	50%
Report writing skills	47%
Negotiation skills	34%
Business planning skills	29%
None of the above	0%

% indicating that they had improved the skill.

100% of students felt they'd improved in at least one area.

Did any of the following things happen as a result of the Consultancy Challenge?

I made new friends	79%
I learned about charities and not-for-profits	79%
I learned about how charities and universities can share knowledge	71%
I applied learning from my course in another context	37%
I acquired skills / experience that is relevant to my degree	37%
None of the above	0%

% indicating that the stated impact had happened.

On our open question about what the volunteers liked, the two most commonly cited responses – with 10 mentions each – related to the insights they’d gained into consultancy and to the team work involved in the projects.

I really liked working in a team and getting the experience to work outside the university. I had a really amazing experience with my team but also with a challenge. It has pushed me to both pursue consultancy and maybe start this challenge for high school students.

I enjoyed working with new people and learning skills I can implement if I were to become a consultant

Students also enjoyed the mix of the groups, and having a practical, real-world project.

I loved meeting people from different disciplines and learning to work together. We all had different skills and different experiences that all contributed to the team

I liked how we were able to work with charities and apply the knowledge we have/gained in a real world setting. I also enjoyed being able to work at the office and make friends from different departments.

What did you like about the Consultancy Challenge?

Comment type	Number of comments
Insight into consulting	10
Team work	10
Diversity of group	8
Practical project	7
The first day sessions	5
Meeting other people	4
I liked the charity	4
I made an impact	4
Creativity / independence	3
Developed skills	2
The final plenary	2
A week is a good length of time	2
Visiting the charities' offices	2
It was useful work experience	2
Expenses were paid and food provided	2

32 students provided comments. Some comments covered more than one category. Showing all comment types with at least two students agreeing.

We asked students what they disliked about the Challenge. The most common type of comment – 7 in total - related to feeling pushed for time:

It felt a bit rushed.

I understand that the CC shouldn't take too long, but it looks like that one-week is also too short for a real consultancy experience.

Whilst some students clearly enjoyed our session on Agile Project Management on the Monday, many did not feel it was useful:

I found the presentation on agile project management long and disengaging.

The third most popular comment (given by 5 students) was that there wasn't anything they disliked!

What did you dislike about the Consultancy Challenge?

Comment type	Number of comments
Not enough time to do the project	7
The Agile session	6
Nothing!	5
Not enough time for final presentations	3
Not enough lunch money	3
The competitive element	2
Not enough support from project	2
Not enough team work	2
The structure on the first day	2

29 students provided comments. Some comments covered more than one category. Showing all comments with at least two students agreeing.

Finally, we asked students what they'd change about the Consultancy Challenge. By far the most popular request was for more time for team building, given by 8 students:

I would have liked to spend more time on Monday getting to know my fellow team members and the charity we worked with.

I'd be inclined to introduce the members of each team beforehand so that they can get on with work more quickly.

4 students asked if we could make the Consultancy Challenge longer, and the same number requested better guidance on the final presentation and report:

The time period may be longer so that we can discuss in more detail of our report and came out better results.

I would recommend having sessions or recommendations of videos etc that show what an actual consultancy report and presentation should look like.

In what ways could we improve the Consultancy Challenge?

Comment type	Number of comments
More time for team building	8

Make it longer	4
Better guidance on final report / presentation	4
More manageable projects	3
Improve Agile session	3
Shorter training sessions day 1	3
More time for final presentation	2
More money for lunch	2
Better briefs	2
Some guidance on careers in consultancy	2

29 students provided comments. Some comments covered more than one category. Showing all comments with at least two students agreeing.

Five students agreed to be interviewed for our webpages. You can read their stories by following these links.

- Peng Peng Chen, BSc Geography. ([read more](#))
- Jerome Boyd, MSc Global Governance & Ethics ([read more](#))
- Mya Patel, BSc Human Sciences ([read more](#))
- Deborah Leem, Digital Humanities PhD ([read more](#))
- Emma Bunting, Neuroscience PhD ([read more](#))

Impact – Partners

We conducted interviews with the partners a month after the Challenge. The key findings were:

- All partners felt it was an enjoyable and useful experience, and all said it met or exceeded expectations.
- They are all using the outcomes of the students' consultancy work.
- They all said they'd take part in the Consultancy Challenge again.
- Everyone said the process of applying for a place was straightforward and brief.
- They appreciated the support given in the run up to the week, but some mentioned that we could have been clearer about what kind of help the Consultancy Assistants could offer and how long they would be involved.
- Students' attitudes, perspectives and positivity were most often mentioned as one of the best parts of the challenge.
- The time constraints were raised as an issue; the majority of partners said that it would have been nice to have an additional day with the students, for instance by completing the first day induction and workshops during the previous week. However, one partner did say they'd have trouble committing to more than one week.
- Some partners suggested that the presentations should be changed – for example, to have one instead of two, or at least make it clearer what the purposes of the two presentations were and how the final one was being judged.

Volunteering Service
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