STUDENTS' UNION UCL | Volunteering Service | UCL

Community Research Initiative for Students

Annual Report *2019-20*

Welcome

Welcome to the second annual report for the newest UCL Volunteering Service initiative, the Community Research Initiative for Students. 2019-20 represents the second half of the pilot work. The service offers a number of different components, with a high degree of flexibility; students engage in the way that suits them best, at their own pace. It is a menu of student opportunity rather than a structured programme.

1 Consultation

2 Brokering

3 Skills development

4 Knowledge exchange opportunities

5 Collaborative partnership

6 Community of peers

Students

146 students expressed interest during the year, with two peak sign-up phases. The first was October and the second January. This reflects the two new communication channels we piloted: (i) offering face-to-face information sessions during the Welcome period and (ii) disseminating information through the Student's Union UCL student leadership structure, specifically the postgraduate taught master's course representatives.

A result of the menu structure of the Initiative, students can have different destinations within the service. We monitor students to their final destination (figure 1), one of four outcomes: signing up and gathering information; attending the training session or one-to-one consultation with the service manager; knowledge exchange meeting(s) with an external partner; or carrying out their dissertation with an organisational collaborator. 40% (57) students initially expressing an interest engaged further with the service: two thirds (38) of these students engaged at the training/ consultation level, a further 14% (8) completed a knowledge exchange meeting, and almost 20% (11) carried out their dissertation with an organisational collaborator.
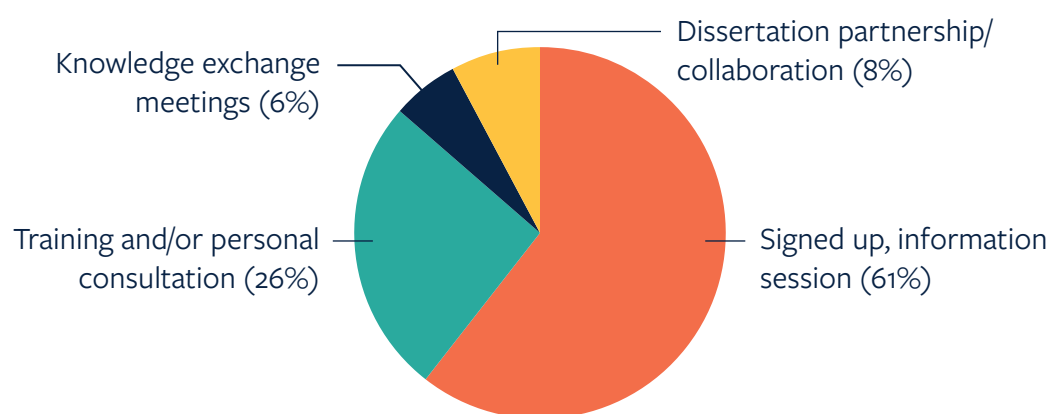
Figure 1: Final service destination for all students signed up

PGT programmes

Students from a total of 43 unique master's programmes expressed interest in the service during 2019-20. Students who engaged with the service beyond sign up and information stages represented 33 unique master's programmes, 64% MSc and 36% MA (table 1). Thus, CRIS attracted at least one student from 10 programmes to sign up or come to an information session, but they did not progress. We are doing some evaluation work to understand any barriers that may exist to students from these courses and will monitor throughout 2020-21.

Table 1: Postgraduate taught courses represented in CRIS 2019-20 cohort (beyond sign-up stage)

MA programmes (n=12)	MSc programmes (n=21)
MA Creative and Collaborative Enterprise	MSc Behaviour Change
MA Cultural Heritage Studies	MSc Child & Adolescent Mental Health
MA Development Education & Global Learning	MSc Climate Change
MA Education & International Development	MSc Clinical and Public Health Nutrition
MA Education, Gender and International Development	MSc Clinical Trials
MA Effective Learning & Teaching	MSc Countering Organised Crime & Terrorism
MA Ethnography & Documentary Film	MSc Democracy & Comparative Politics
MA Gender, Society & Representation	MSc Education, Health Promotion & International Development
MA Human Rights	MSc Environment & Sustainable Development
MA Library and Information Science	MSc Environment Politics and Society
MA Sociology of Childhood and Children's Right	MSc Genetics of Human Disease

MPA Public Administration and Management	MSc Global Health & Development
	MSc Behaviour Change
	MSc Child & Adolescent Mental Health
	MSc Climate Change
	MSc Clinical and Public Health Nutrition
	MSc Clinical Trials
	MSc International Public Policy
	MSc Medical Anthropology
	MSc Paediatric Neuropsychology
	MSc Public Policy
	MSc Science Technology & Society
	MSc Security Studies
	MSc Smart Cities & Urban Studies
	MSc Social Policy & Social Research
	MSc Reproductive Science & Women's Health

This means that students from 10 of the 11 UCL faculties accessed the Community Research Initiative during 2019-20.

12

Social & Historial Sciences

7

Institute of Education

5

Population Health Sciences

2

Arts & Humanities

Bartlett (Built Environment)

1

Medical Sciences

Life Sciences

Mathematics & Physical Sciences

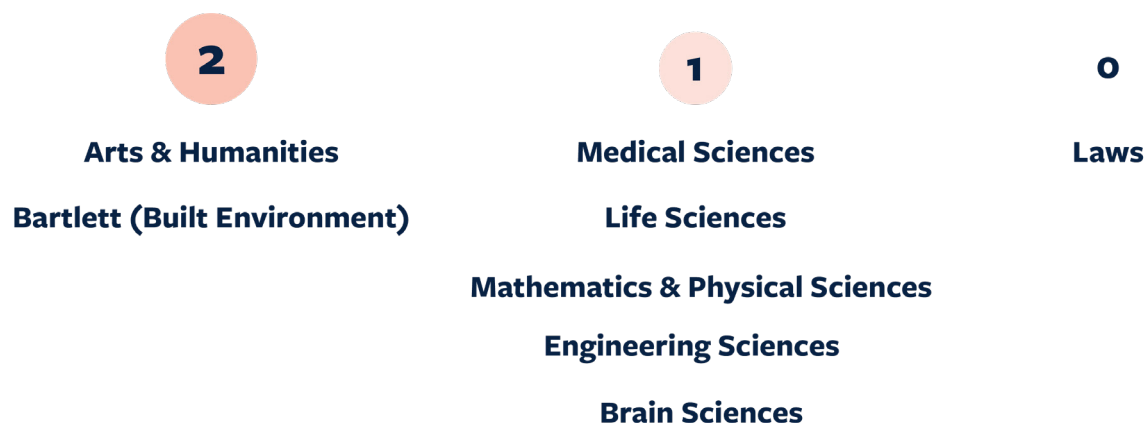**Engineering Sciences**

Brain Sciences

0

Laws

Figure 2: Number of PGT programmes by Faculty

External voluntary sector organisations

19 unique voluntary sector organisations participated in the service through knowledge exchange meetings or collaborating as a partner during a student's dissertation (table 2). Seven (41%) participated to the stage of *research collaboration* on 11 student dissertations (highlighted in table 2).

Table 2: Organisations by shared areas of interest participating in at least knowledge exchange with students

Shared interest for all partners	External organisation
Health, medicine	**Brook**
	Medical Action Film
	NHS (health play specialists)
Homelessness, housing	**Centrepoint**
	Generation Rent
	Housing London
	Barnardo's
Children, young people	**The Mix**
	Hackney Playbus
	Brent Young People's Foundation

Children, young people	Action Youth Boxing
	Team Up
	Community Links
Mental health, psychology	**Connected Lives**
Policy	Transform Drugs Policy Foundation
	Women and Girl's Network
	Release
Refugees, asylum seekers	Alyth
Environment	PPL PWR

Collaborative dissertations

There were 11 dissertations carried out collaboratively between UCL students, their supervisor(s), and an external voluntary sector organisation. Unfortunately, the global pandemic was in full flow for all of terms 2 & 3 for this cohort, the exact time when research questions are being developed and research being carried out. Incredibly, only three dissertation plans were substantially affected. This was due to students returning to home countries as per the advice of UCL and the UK but to countries outside the jurisdiction of GDPR regulations and thus data could not be shared.

MSc Public Policy, Social & Historical Sciences
+
Generation Rent

What influences the amount of enforcement activity performed by local authorities in London's private rented sector?

NHS

MSc Medical Anthropology, Social & Historical Sciences
+
NHS Health Play Specialists

How to explain chronic illnesses to children, according to Health Play Specialists in the United Kingdom

MA Sociology of Childhood and Children's Right, Institute of Education
+
Hackney Playbus

Families at Play - in the Community and in the Home

MA Library and Information Science, Arts & Humanities
+
The Mix

Optimal Web Design for Information Seeking Young People

MSc Child & Adolescent Mental Health, Population Health Sciences
+
Connected Lives

Community Collaboration Project: Scoping Review of Attachment-Based Parenting Programs for Adolescents

MSc Behaviour Change, Brain Sciences
+
The Mix (2)

A qualitative study of the barriers and facilitators of service user engagement with The Mix, an online counselling service, using the Behaviour Change Wheel.

*MSc Smart Cities & Urban Studies, Bartlett (Built Environment)
+
Centrepoint (2)

Unable to complete collaboration

*MSc Smart Cities & Urban Studies, Bartlett (Built Environment)
+
Brook (2)

A qualitative study of the barriers and facilitators of service user engagement with The Mix, an online counselling service, using the Behaviour Change Wheel.

Stakeholder experiences

Simran Singh, MSc International Public Policy

I actually missed my window of being able to do something interesting with the community during my dissertation and then when I finished I thought okay dissertation over and that's probably it. But now, after I have finished my course, I would say I can actually see the difference CRIS made more now because in my job right now I'm engaged in a corporate social responsibility project that involves engaging with the community. I hadn't thought that I would be bringing in CRIS or the material I had learned from CRIS into this. So I would say the difference CRIS made was very foundational in my ways of thinking of academia.

I think it is very important to look at academia with a critical eye. You need to be able to challenge academia's shortcomings and I think my conversations with CRIS helped me do that because it made critique what I was reading or hearing in my lectures: 'okay, but what is being done? How does this relate to what's being done in practice?'. When I first came across CRIS, I started looking at academia in a different way and not with that awe: "this is a sacred thing, and no one can touch this knowledge that everyone produces in their dissertations", but more in terms of "What does it mean, what does it do for the people you're speaking about? are you speaking to them or you just speaking about them?"

And now, as part of my corporate social responsibility project, I'm bringing in a lot of the lessons. So I had gone to one of the workshops as part of CRIS where it was a lot about being able to present a pitch, as well as the power of listening, which really stood out for me: how do you respond to a problem if you don't listen to that problem in the first instance. And I feel like it's a very intuitive message, but it's not that obvious when you're actually doing the work. So that's something I'm finding when I'm engaging with this charity.

It's one of those things where I feel like even if you didn't go through with a collaboration for your dissertation, every student should be involved with CRIS for the process of developing ideas because it helps create that change in the way you think about academia and how a lot of us, post grads or students, anyone in the academic world, we're more motivated to impact, you know, to create change and we're more ambitious in that sense. And so this is the perfect platform for us to kind of situate and root all of these ideas in a more grounded way instead of abstract theories.

Paulina Perez-Duarte Mendiola, MSc Medical Anthropology

The best thing about joining CRIS was the people. They are truly interested in helping you find your way. They are not going to tell you, "This is what we have, you have to do this". At the beginning, I thought they were going to tell me, "This is the research we need, you go and do the research". But I started learning that CRIS is more like, "This is what's available and this is what you want - how do you want to put this together?". So I think it is very, very useful for those students that know that they want to have social impact, but they don't know how.

Sigrun Clark, MSC Population Health

Who did you meet with?	Women and Children First.
How did you feel before the meeting?	Excited and well prepared from the discussions I had with Anne prior to the meeting.
What was the best thing about the meeting for you?	Getting an understanding of what happens in a charity organisation, the research they conduct, and requirements needed before research can be rolled out globally.
What has changed for you, if anything, after the knowledge exchange meeting as you develop your dissertation ideas?	Even though primary data collection may be challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic there are so many alternative research methods that can contribute to meaningful research outcomes.

Student skills development 18/02/2020

During 2019-20, I collaborated with UCL Culture's Public Engagement to pilot a student skills development session. 23 students signed up to this session, co-designed and co-delivered with Ben Littlefield. The 2-hour session focused on collaborative research skills and gave students the chance to practice these with their peers. 18 (78%) students attended on the day.

We received evaluation feedback from 12 (67%) students. On self-rated skills (10 highest score), students reported

>a mean **confidence** score of **7**/10;

>mean **motivation** score of **9**/10;

>mean score of engagement skills of **8**/10; and

>a mean **engagement skills** score of 4/5 (5 highest score).

Students would highly recommend this course. Here's some of the reasons why!

> *"What has changed for me after this session is that I have more confidence and more excitement about community engagement. I feel more willing to take a more 'difficult' route with my dissertation"*

> *"Everything in this session was on point!"*

> *"Made me think beyond the research and about the long term relationship you build and not breaking the trust"*

> *"It was good to be able to practice presenting and learning from my peers"*

"The best bits for me were definitely the storytelling skills as part of collaborative research"

"My toolkit for approaching engaged research is definitely expanded now!"

In the future, we will expand our skills development offer to students and, in addition, will undertake work to understand what capacity building measures would benefit out community partners. Other models across UCL e.g. the Evaluation Exchange deliver capacity building sessions to a mixed group of students and partners and we explore this to do this in the future.

Events

Networking event 11/02/2020

48 students and 14 voluntary sector organisations signed up to our student-community networking evening event. The aims were twofold: to give students the opportunity to meet with multiple external organisations to understand the voluntary sector context and specific objectives of these organisations and to give organisations the opportunity to meet with multiple top quality UCL students to exchange ideas that might form research topics. In addition to the external partners described in table 2, we engaged with a further eight organisations during this event: Home Start Camden, Resources for Autism, The Mill, The Erith Exchange, Artillery CIC, International League of Dermatological Studies, One Housing, and the Access to Justice Foundation. 25 students who signed up to the event were unique to the service. We had a 30% turn out at the event (18/62). 18 participants answer the question "what does research mean to you" (figure 3). 30% (6) attendees gave post-event evaluation on the extent to which their expectations of the event had been met. All had their expectations mostly or completely met. 56% (10) would come to a future event. The main reported reason that the event failed was through not meeting the expectation "meeting someone with the same research interests". This became a problem due to a lower attendance than anticipated.

Figure 3: Mentimeter word cloud output in response to "what does research mean to you?" (n=18)

Staff-community research co-design event (23/09/2020, digital)

This was the only event during 2019-20 to be affected by the first 2020 national lock down in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. We utilised a free trial of the platform REMO, the closest digital platform on the market that recreates networking and engagement. This was fantastic and crucial to the success of this event. It was extremely well received by both external partners and academics: 76% who evaluated the use of REMO responded 'excellent, loved it' or 'very good' to the statement 'Compared to face-to-face meetings, I found using REMO'. 71% found it 'perfectly fine' to use with their device and internet connection.

I deliver this event at the end of one academic year so that UCL teaching staff with supervision responsibility for the following academic year can meet voluntary sector organisations and, through a series of networking and engagement activities, discover organisations with shared research interests. The event gives space and time to these new relationships to start the process of co-design research topics or questions. Supervisors leave the event with projects that can be advertised to the incoming PGT cohort. This event is modified from the Community-University Partnership Initiative delivered by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement. 26 people signed up: three 'link' people from central UCL professional services e.g. public engagement; nine UCL teaching staff; and 14 voluntary sector external partners.

24 people attended, spending an average of 151 minutes in this 180-minute event, demonstrating a high level of commitment to the event and what it was trying to achieve. Eight co-design research ideas were produced during the event. These will be monitored throughout 2020-21.

17 (71%) people provided an evaluation of the event. Nine (five teaching staff) attendees had not attended the co-design event in the previous year. 88% (16) had their expectations met almost entirely and completely. 94% learned something new to share with their teams. Examples of what attendees felt was the best aspect of the event for them:

Seeing how my research interests could be translated to real life, discussing issues with people involved in the community	**Being able to speak with a huge range of academics and have their perspective insight into my narrow field of work**
The interaction that was possible across different 'tables' thanks to REMO	**The flow and organisation and feeling of involvement/productivity**
Working out if there was a match	**Listening to what others are working on and exploring connections**

Spoiler alert! 2020-21

- Interest and engagement in the service from day one of the 2020-21 session has dwarfed the pilot years! At the time of writing (January 2021), there are **325 students** signed up to the service. We have delivered two of the four planned skills session. 77 students signed up to these with 52% (40) able to attend on the day. Students are facing challenges with rapidly changing circumstances and timetable amendments and we are delighted with the attendance. Feedback has been positive.

- This year we have set up a **bookable consultation service for student** to discuss ideas with the service manager. 46 students made appointments during semester 1.

- **25 students have already meet with an external organisation** to share ideas and begin to develop a collaborative research question for their dissertation. We have one research partnership agreement signed.

- The service is also a partner and case study in the **ISIKLE research study**, funded by the Office for Students and Research England. This funding contributes 0.5 FTE of the manager's salary until summer 2022 and has facilitated the rapid expansion of the service due to the manager position becoming 1.0 FTE and additional administrative support. Most notably, the web pages have been revamped, a comms strategy has been devised, and student stories are being consistently collected.

- The service was invited to be part of a **European grant bid to the ERASMUS+ funding stream**. This will be announced in February 2021.

- The University of Glasgow has engaged with the service to **develop a practice sharing network** due to our well developed processes.