



Volunteering Service

Annual Review 2019-20



Executive Summary

A few facts about the Volunteering Service:



2,046

In 2019/20, we supported **2,046** UCL students into volunteering.

Together they gave **55,700** hours to community projects across London.



55,700



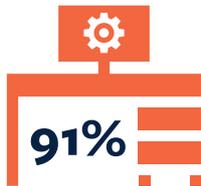
COVID

We actively addressed the **impact of COVID** upon volunteering – supporting community partners, finding new virtual volunteering roles, providing advice on safe volunteering and moving our Social Hackathons programme online.

90% of student volunteers said that their **academic studies** had benefitted as a result of their involvement.



90%



91%

91% of student volunteers said that they'd developed **useful skills** for the workplace.

75% felt that their **wellbeing** had improved through volunteering.



75%



We were successful in engaging female students, disabled students, UK students from BAME backgrounds, and UK undergrads from neighbourhoods with lower participation rates in higher education. These groups were all **more likely to volunteer** than their UCL peers.

Our Community Research Initiative supported 146 masters students, helping connect their **dissertation research** with needs within the voluntary sector.



Volunteering is a big part of the student culture here at UCL – students are keen to play their part in the life of London and become a part of the communities of this amazing city. During COVID, their efforts have become even more important, and they’ve adapted their volunteering in really creative ways. Each of them is an ambassador for UCL, creating links and making a difference. Students benefit from getting involved too – gaining insights into their academic subjects, developing new skills, and improving their wellbeing.

We’re always looking for new ways of connecting students with London’s communities. This year, our Community Research Initiative helped masters students create research partnerships with the voluntary sector, and our Social Hackathons programme gave students the chance to work in teams on business problems.

I hope you enjoy reading the report!



Ilyas Benmouna,
Activities Officer

Watch our 3 minute animated summary by visiting:
studentsunionucl.org/volunteering/about/impact

Introduction

The Volunteering Service exists to connect UCL with other communities across London, primarily by engaging students in enriching volunteering opportunities. We are a service of Students' Union UCL, directly funded by the UCL Office of the Vice Provost (Education and Student Affairs).

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.



By Students' Union UCL Volunteering Service

Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has affected almost every area of life – with volunteering no exception. Most of the volunteering opportunities we usually offer are in-person roles, reflecting our aim of connecting UCL students and London’s communities. In addition, many of our partner organisations furloughed staff or had to radically change their services. This led to a big drop in the number of available opportunities, even as interest in volunteering rose during lockdown.

Equally, many of our student-led projects had to come to a premature end as these are almost all face-to-face projects.

We took the following steps in response to these changes:

Support for partners

We conducted a mapping exercise with our community partners during the first lockdown to better understand how the pandemic was affecting their volunteering programmes. This enabled us to respond effectively when they needed support. We also co-created opportunities with partners, shared and discussed best-practice guidance, and continued to offer extra support in getting volunteer roles up on our website and advertised.

UCL Listen & Respond

We teamed up with UCL Culture’s Engagement Team to explore how UCL as a whole can best **“Listen and Respond”** to the needs of communities and the voluntary sector in London as they confront and recover from COVID-19.

Social Hackathons

As part of the Listen & Respond initiative, we ran a week of virtual one-off volunteering events where teams of UCL students and staff worked on business problems set by our community partners.

Virtual volunteering

We curated a list of good quality online volunteering opportunities, which proved popular with students.

Local volunteering

COVID-19 resulted in an explosion of grassroots support networks within neighbourhoods across the UK. Local authorities also set up COVID-19 volunteer pools. We adapted our online directory to make it easier to find and join these groups.

Guidance on safe volunteering

For those students interested in volunteering in person, we created and publicised **guidelines** on how to minimise risk.



Profile

Antonio Neves

Medical student Antonio Neves volunteered online with [Age UK Kensington & Chelsea](#).

Tell us a little about your volunteering

Every week I help conduct two online Spanish classes through Zoom, one for beginners and one at an intermediate level. These classes take about one hour each, and it takes me some additional time to prepare some exercises and texts for them to do and read. I work with about 12 seniors every class, although there is always some class skipping!

What difference do you feel you've made by volunteering?

My students have told me that they look forward to the Spanish classes every week. Having their friends and social opportunities taken away by the virus can be deeply scarring, and by creating a time and place where they get to interact with their friends and learn something along the way, I feel like I get to alleviate that burden.

What impact has volunteering had on you?

Before volunteering I was disillusioned with my quarantine situation as I had been in Spain's two-month lockdown since its beginning. But volunteering gave me a reason to wake up earlier, and it trained my Spanish knowledge and prepared me for my interactions with patients in my future career.

What's the best thing about volunteering?

The warm feeling you get when you make someone smile and feel like you have improved their day.

And the most challenging? How did you overcome the challenges?

It is often challenging for me to be clear whilst speaking as English is not my first language and I tend to mumble when I talk; being understood is sometimes hard. I try to face these problems by focussing on calming myself before facing this challenge and remembering the strategies that have helped me to overcome them before.

I felt like volunteering was a way of both improving my people skills and helping someone along the way.

Read More

See the full interview with Antonio on our [newsfeed](#).

Volunteer Numbers

In 2019/20, we recruited and supported 2046 UCL student volunteers, who contributed 55,700 hours of their time to projects across London.



Note that the number of students we've helped to volunteer is likely to be somewhat higher. Our [student survey](#) suggested that around 340 students found volunteering through our website but had not told us about it – and so were not counted in our figures. There was probably a similar degree of undercounting amongst students who'd signed up via our volunteering fairs.

Read More

Read the results of our student survey on our [Impact web page](#).



Profile

Sadashiv Nayanpally

Sadashiv Nayanpally is a master's student studying Education and International Development at the IOE. He's been volunteering with [Refugee Council](#) and told us his experience as a Refugee Integration Advice volunteer.

Tell us a little bit about your volunteering.

I work as a Refugee Integration Advice volunteer with the Refugee Council in Stratford. I support people who recently received their refugee status to access their benefits and entitlements as well as help them in integrating into UK society. I normally volunteer one full day a week and sometimes two days too. I have been volunteering since end of October 2019.

What difference do you feel you've made by volunteering?

I feel like I've helped some of the most vulnerable people in London access their basic entitlements and supported them in integrating into London's multicultural society.

What impact has volunteering had on you?

Volunteering has helped me connect with people who have seen immense hardships in life and are still going strong in overcoming them. They have been an inspiration for me personally, and also a humbling reminder of how privileged I am. I have learned to communicate with people using interpreters, and have managed to connect with them despite language barriers. I have also got a good understanding of welfare policies of the UK for people in distress and this knowledge will help me later in my career in this sector.

What's the best thing about volunteering?

Creating genuine connections – with clients and my colleagues. Refugee Council has provided a great space where such connections can be made since volunteers do most of the client engagement work, while providing an excellent support system to help us do that effectively.

Tell us about something memorable that's happened to you whilst volunteering

I had a particularly distressed client, who was also a victim of hate crime in London, and had lost complete faith in the system and was on the verge of giving up hope on us as well. Over the course of a few weeks, I was able to help calm his anxieties and help him access the support services he required.

Read More

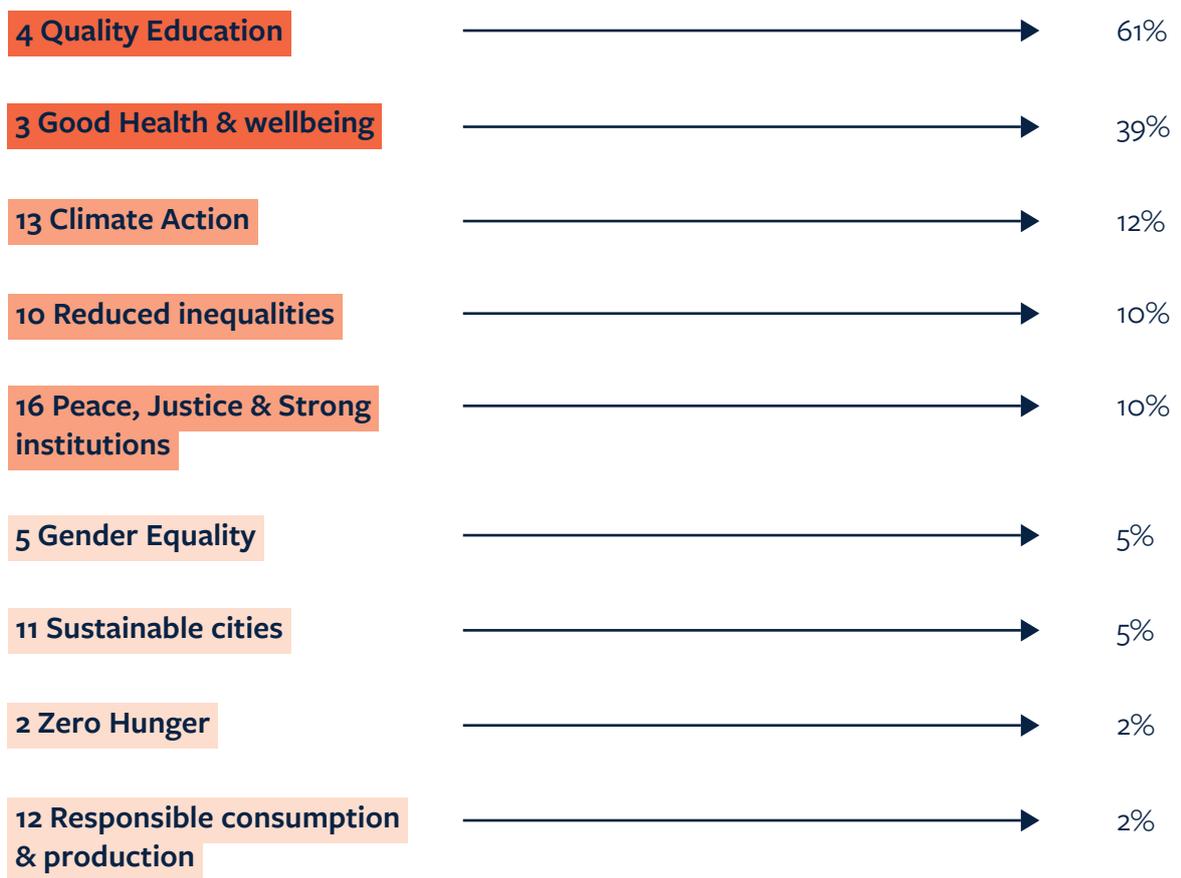
See the full interview with Sadashiv on our [newsfeed](#).

Student-Led Volunteering Programme

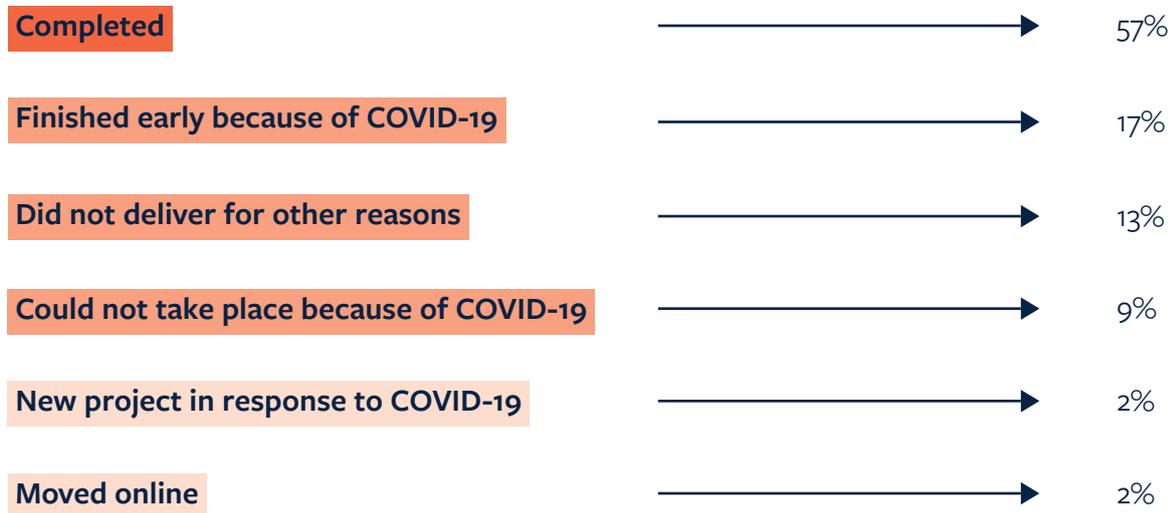
We supported 70 student-led projects in 2019/20. These groups involved 916 students as volunteers and 173 as leaders.

Overall, their activities directly benefitted 1830 people who were not UCL students, and they worked in partnership with 30 London schools and 25 other not-for-profit organisations.

We mapped the impacts of the projects against the UN Sustainable Development Goals:



As with our other activities, Student-led Projects were affected by COVID-19 – most of the projects take place between January and March. Nonetheless, only 9% had to be completely abandoned, with 17% finishing early:



We asked project leaders an open question about how they felt they'd benefitted from their leadership role. The most frequent response types were:



What community partners think

“The students involved in the delivery of the Save A Baby’s Life sessions in Camden Children’s Centre were a pleasure to work with. Always reliable, punctual and very engaging. The parents that attended the sessions commented on how they felt informed, their anxiety reduced and that they were more confident in how to respond in an emergency. We would gladly welcome the students into the centres again in the future”

Jane McGrath, Camden Early Years Service.

“My Girlguiding group greatly enjoyed a visit from the UCL Parkour Society earlier this year. It was fantastic for the girls to be able to challenge themselves and try something new, especially as parkour is often seen as a male-dominated activity. The UCL students who visited us were friendly, polite and worked well with the girls in our group to get them all to join in and have fun.” **Rachael Graham, Girlguiding St Pancras.**

“Students from the Data for Good project helped The Mix to better understand our users and user journeys through analysing our service data. The team provided valuable insights that fed into our website research work that will inform design of our new website.”

Bohdana Dock, The Mix.

Read More

Find out more on our [Student-led Volunteering webpages](#).





Profile

Leigh Beaulieu

Leigh Beaulieu is the project leader for the [Amnesty International Volunteering Project](#). Earlier this year, before they could deliver their sessions in schools, all volunteering was shut down due to COVID-19, so they came up with the idea of delivering video classes.

What impact do you think your project has had?

Our online project was built in a way that students could engage with various human rights topics creatively and at their own pace. The content was exploratory and artistic, creating lots of room for students to make the project and activities their own. Poetry, film, visual arts, drama and online media were just a few of the ways we used to engage students in thinking about human rights.

We were very pleased to hear that our school partners are eager to continue using the online project as enrichment material for years to come, and we hope to expand to other schools in the future as well!

What impact has volunteering had on you?

The project was such a wonderful experience. It was challenging, meaningful, and deeply fulfilling. I got to meet new people, exchange ideas, and work for a cause that we all care deeply about. It has made me want to be even more active as a volunteer and inspired many ideas for future projects.

Were there any learning curves or difficulties in the role?

Coronavirus was certainly an unexpected difficulty! We were all set to deliver our project to three schools and barely a week or two away from our first day, we were told that all face-to-face projects were to be cancelled. It was a huge blow and it was honestly very difficult to swallow. We had worked so hard and were really looking forward to working with the kids and building really interesting arts-based projects around human rights.

One of the best things about the arts, however, is the flexibility it offers and so we used that to our advantage to imagine and create online content. Our partners needed the content fairly quickly and my outstanding, awesome, stellar volunteers rallied together. We were able to whip together nine pre-recorded online sessions that covered nine different human rights topics and included tons of learning material, media, presentations by volunteers, and tons of arts-based projects and activities. It was stressful and definitely a learning curve! But we were incredibly proud of what we turned out and our partners were extremely pleased with the final result.

Read More

See the full interview with Leigh on our [newsfeed](#).

Where UCL students volunteer

UCL Students volunteered in 28 London boroughs. By far the most popular was Camden – naturally enough, as this is where UCL is located.

387 students gave 9470 hours of their time in one of the 5 east London Olympic boroughs. This represents 17% of volunteers – down from 23% last year, but up from 13% in 17/18.

	Number of volunteers	% of volunteers
Camden	1015	43%
Westminster	262	11%
Tower Hamlets	231	10%
Islington	142	6%
Southwark	110	5%
Newham	83	3%
Haringey	70	3%
Hackney	65	3%
Kensington and Chelsea	65	3%
Outside London	51	2%
Brent	45	2%
City of London	44	2%
Hammersmith and Fulham	41	2%
Lewisham	39	2%

Boroughs with less than 2% of volunteers not shown.

Read More

See more information about where our students volunteer on our [impact webpages](#).



Profile

Community Partners

We asked a few of our community partners to write a short piece about our student volunteers – here’s a bit more about them and their thoughts on our volunteers this year.

Eye Heroes – Liz Wilson

Eye Heroes is the UK’s first child-led campaign to fight avoidable blindness. Children are trained through volunteer-led interactive workshops to become eye health champions and inform adults in their communities about eye health and the benefits of regular eye tests.

“Katrina Wang who is our Volunteer Lead at UCL has been a brilliant source of support for us at Eye Heroes. Katrina always attends meetings, she has volunteered to take on work, and she has great ideas about how to move the project forward. I have found her to be reflective about her work and open to constructive feedback to help develop her skills.”

Holborn Community Association – Shamoli Mostafa

Holborn Community Association is a community anchor organisation based in central London which aims to encourage community integration, increase opportunities for local people and reduce social and economic inequalities in our community.

“UCL volunteers have been very committed and enthusiastic, showing real interest in our Street Engineers project. It’s nice to have volunteers that are willing to learn and adapt with the audience we are working with. It has also been great to see some of our student volunteers’ confidence increase through the term.”

The Literacy Pirates – Rosanna Hutchings

The Literacy Pirates are an educational charity supporting young people aged 9-13 to develop the literacy, confidence and perseverance that will help them achieve both in school and the world beyond.

“We have four UCL students that have joined our Virtual Ship which opened especially for lockdown. It’s a more regular commitment (every week) and we’ve been particularly impressed with Arif Bin Roslan who has done over 6 sessions on our Virtual Ship - joining us each week. He’s been very flexible and has got himself stuck in whatever group of children he’s working with.”

PPL PWR – Natacha Madaule

PPL PWR are a collective who aim to encourage new ideas and technologies to power sustainable change through workshops in festivals and schools.

“Working with UCL students, I have enjoyed the most their enthusiasm and drive, as well as the quality of their output. UCL students are the backbone of PPL PWR; without them and other

without them and other driven volunteers there would not be any PPL PWR. Thanks to their reliability, excellent work ethic and delivery, I have been able to delegate and share many tasks.”

Salisbury World – Lucy Elgood

Salisbury World is a charity that supports refugee and asylum seeking children and families. They provide educational, social and emotional support for refugee children, and support parents and the wider refugee community.

“We particularly value the reliability of UCL students – we can count on them to come along to the sessions week in, week out. They provide our young people with much-needed stability and reassurance. The support of a friendly, thoughtful and compassionate UCL student volunteer has made an enormous difference to the confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing of many of the children and teenagers we support.”

Read More

Find out more about what our partners think, who we work with and how we assess new partnerships on our [info for recruiters page](#).

Experience of volunteering

In our survey, we asked students what they liked, didn't like and would improve about their volunteering. These open questions were then analysed to give us a picture of the joys and challenges of volunteering, and to help us find ways to improve students' experiences.

What did you most like about volunteering? Open question, n=371, VS Volunteers only, top five response categories.

Category of response	Number of responses	% of responses
Making a difference	194	52%
Meeting other people / interacting with clients	133	36%
Learning new skills / knowledge	62	17%
Getting a sense of achievement	29	8%
Being part of the community	18	5%

What did you least like about volunteering? Open question, n=371, VS Volunteers only, top five response categories.

Category of response	Number of responses	% of responses
Time commitment	63	18%
Travel time / costs	59	17%
Nothing!	48	14%
Poor organisation	36	10%
The impact of COVID-19 on my volunteering	29	8%

How could your volunteering have been improved? Open question, n=293, VS Volunteers only, top five response categories.

Category of response	Number of responses	% of responses
Specific improvements to how my project is run	35	12%
Better organisation of volunteering	34	12%
Nothing	27	9%
I should manage my own time better	21	7%
No COVID-19	20	7%

Read More

Find out more about what students thought about their volunteering in our [student survey report](#) – along with details about how we plan to adapt our services.



Impacts on students

In our annual student survey, we looked at how volunteering connected with students' academic work. 90% of volunteers said that it had benefitted their studies, most commonly by giving them relevant skills or experience, helping them put their studies into a social context, or enabling them to pass on their academic knowledge to other people.

“To what degree would you agree with the following statements? Because of my volunteering ...” % agreeing or agreeing strongly, Volunteering Service volunteers only, n=382



We also asked volunteers whether they'd developed skills that would be useful in the workplace - 91% said that they had. In addition, 75% of students said they felt that volunteering had improved their wellbeing. These impacts were covered in more depth in our [18/19](#) and [17/18](#) surveys.

Read More

Find out more about the impact of volunteering on students in our [student survey report](#).



Profile

Ameerah Patel

Ameerah Patel is a third-year Psychology student. She spoke to us about her experience of volunteering as a mentor with education charity [IntoUniversity](#).

Tell us a little about your volunteering.

I volunteer as a mentor for an organisation called IntoUniversity that provides support to students through one-to-one sessions. Once a week I mentor a student in year 7, providing support and guidance in various aspects ranging from academia, developing social skills and future planning.

Why did you want to become a volunteer?

I wanted to volunteer because I have an interest in helping others and making a difference. Undertaking a psychology degree, I hope to work within the psychological field and wanted to gain experience working with others and improving my personal skills.

What impact has volunteering had on you?

Volunteering has had a huge positive impact on my own social skills and mental wellbeing. It has helped me develop my communication skills and overall confidence; I often introduce or lead the sessions, which requires a level of leadership.

What's the best thing about volunteering?

The best thing about volunteering is seeing the progress of your mentee first hand. Knowing that you are helping someone else with their struggles (be it academic or social) and that you are having a positive impact in their life, is a rewarding feeling that makes volunteering a worthwhile experience.

How has COVID-19 impacted your volunteering and how has it changed what you do?

Despite the pandemic, I have still been able to have my mentoring sessions online. Besides the occasional network issues, mentoring online has in some ways opened up other avenues for us to explore and come up with ideas that are both entertaining yet beneficial. I have been able to focus on tailoring sessions towards current affairs and initiate interesting and insightful conversations whilst being in the comfort of our own homes.

Social Hackathons

Social Hackathons are our problem-solving events that give UCL volunteers a first-hand insight into the Third Sector. UCL volunteers are placed with a not-for-profit organisation for one working day, collectively developing solutions to business issues the organisations face. In teams, UCL students develop skills, learn about the Third Sector and connect with new communities across London. This year, we organised two series of events:

November 2019

In November, we held Social Hackathons at four organisations: London Museum of Water and Steam, Holborn Community Centre, Action on Hearing Loss and Museum of Brands. They had a wide range of problems for our students to solve, including:

- Revising a volunteer recruitment process.
- Creating a museum engagement strategy.
- Assessing the viability of a social enterprise.
- Designing a sensory garden.

July 2020

In July 2020, we organised another round of Social Hackathons in collaboration with **UCL Listen & Respond**. We hosted three Hackathons with organisations based in the borough of Camden (One Housing Group, Opening Doors London, ASPIERATIONS) and two in East London (Poplar HARCA and Anna Fiorentini Theatre and Film School). The projects included:

- A campaign to source free digital tech devices to people on low incomes.
- Creating a more inclusive recruitment process for people with Asperger's.
- Helping a theatre school source funding to keep the school running.
- Reviewing the organisation's website to see how it could be more engaging to different stakeholders (service users, potential funders etc.).
- Devising ways the organisation could make a digital transition and boosting their online presence.

Due to Covid-19, we completely revamped the entire Hackathon process, using Zoom and Microsoft Teams to host the events. Our July 2020 series had the highest number of Hackathon applications from students ever recorded, with 160 applicants for roughly 75 places. UCL volunteers took the virtual aspect of the Hackathon in their stride and delivered exceptional results – one group produced a 30 page report in the span of six hours, full of ideas for the organisation to implement. The Hackathons were all delivered successfully, with positive feedback from organisations and students alike. This gave us the confidence and know-how to host more virtual Hackathons in the 20/21 academic year.

“It was an incredibly rewarding experience to see our ideas be brought to life and accepted whole-heartedly by the charity.” – **Hackathon volunteer**

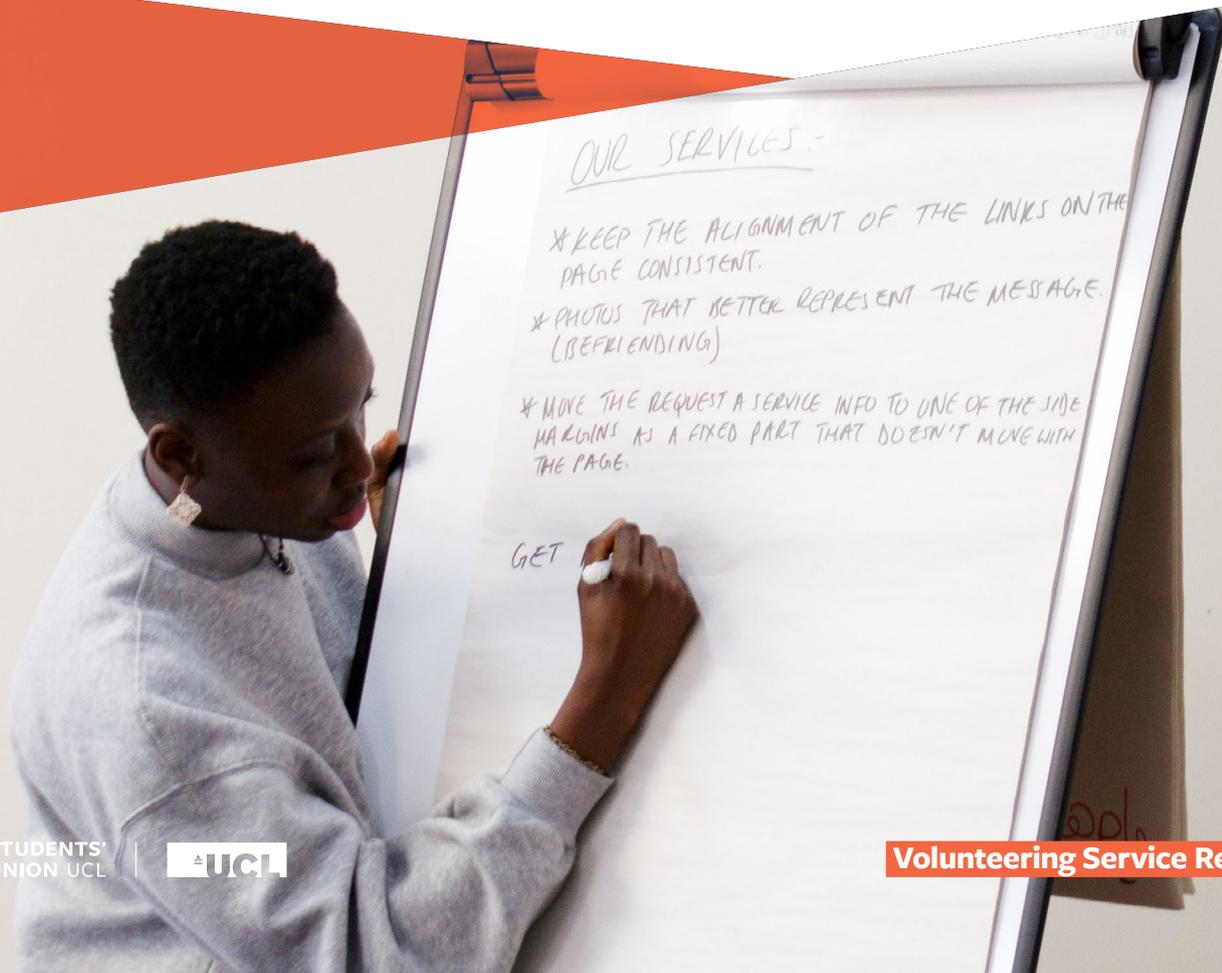
“Social Hackathons are a great way to get out of your student routine and try something new, which also has a positive impact on your community.” – **Hackathon Volunteer**

“While helping out my community I was also able to hone my problem solving and team work skills!” – **Hackathon Volunteer**

“We loved the enthusiasm and commitment of UCL volunteers, our staff were impressed with what they had to offer. Some volunteers even had more ideas after the hackathon and followed up with Opening Doors, which was lovely.” – **Opening Doors London**

“What volunteers produced in that short space of time was just amazing – the calibre of work they produced was great.” – **One Housing Group**

“It was great to have so many people round the table – we’ve already identified the gaps in our service.” – **Poplar HARCA**



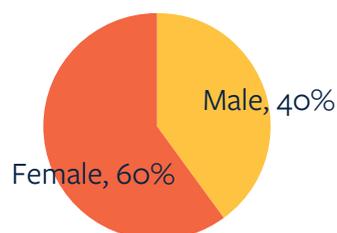
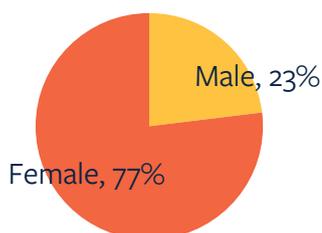
Who Volunteers?

As in previous years, women, Undergraduates, and students from outside the EU/EEA were more likely to volunteer.

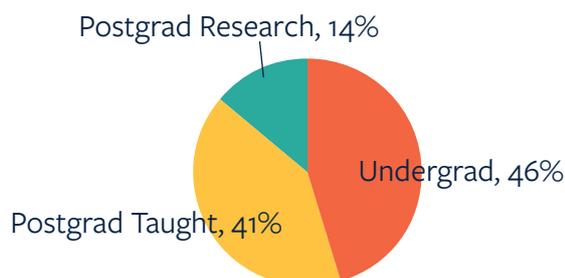
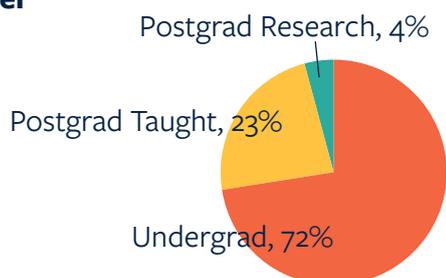
Volunteering Service

UCL

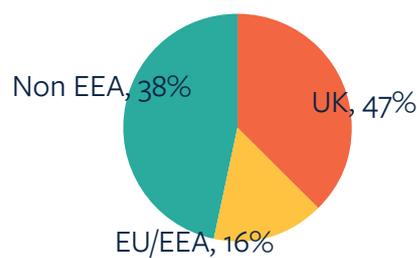
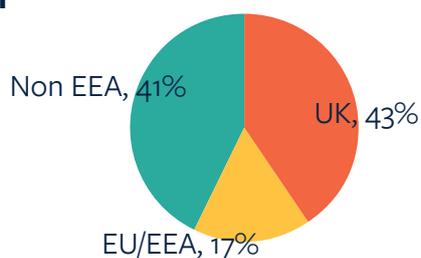
Gender



Study Level



UK/International



The following groups of students were also more likely to volunteer:

- Students with disabilities.
- UK students of non-white ethnic origin.
- International students of Indian ethnic origin.
- UK Undergraduates from neighbourhoods with lower participation rates in higher education.

The departments with the highest participation rates were:

Faculty	Department	Total VS volunteers	% of students who volunteer	% of undergraduates who volunteer
PHS	Institute of Cardiovascular Science	15	13%	7%
PHS	UCL Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Institute for Women's Health	13	12%	41%
MDS	UCL Medical School	216	11%	13%
ART	Arts and Sciences BASc	50	10%	10%
LAW	Laws	90	9%	12%
MAP	Natural Sciences	39	9%	10%
LIF	Division of Biosciences	157	8%	10%
ART	European and International Social and Political Studies	29	8%	8%
MDS	Division of Medicine	44	8%	12%
PHS	Institute for Global Health	22	8%	20%
ART	English Language and Literature	31	8%	8%
ENG	Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering	26	8%	14%
SHS	Geography	48	7%	9%
SHS	Economics	76	7%	8%

Read More

Read our full participation report on our [Impact webpages](#).

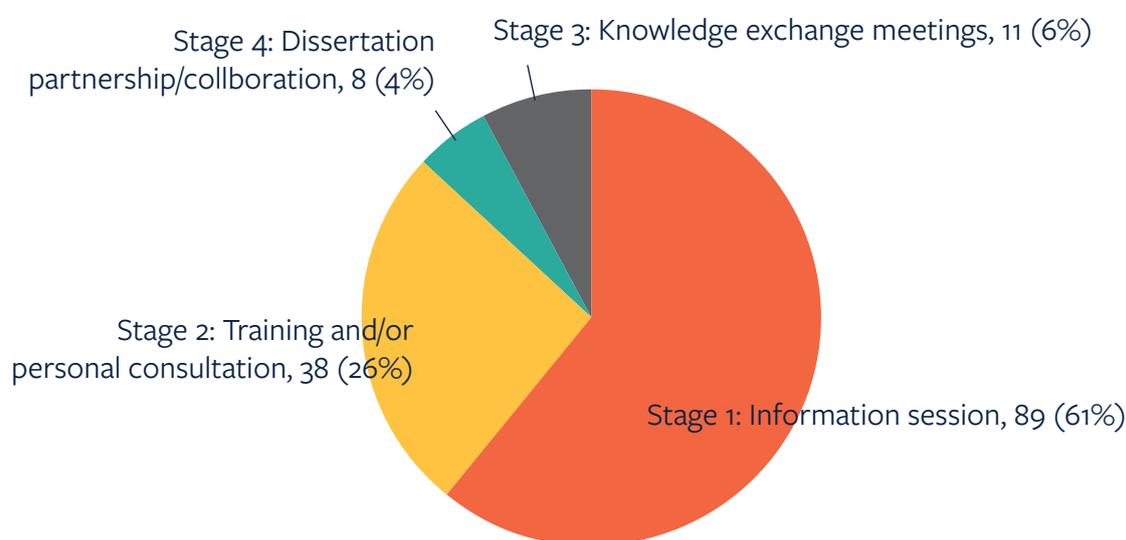
Community Research Initiative for Students

The Community Research Initiative for Students (CRIS) exists to enhance the experience of UCL's postgraduate taught students (PGT) by supporting them to undertake their dissertation in collaboration with not-for-profit organisations. CRIS is a cross-UCL service open to any PGT student.

19-20 was the second year of operation for the service – we developed the service beyond the initial trial and experimented with new activities. These included:

- Offering information sessions for PGT students during the Welcome period.
- A networking event bringing together 48 students and 14 external partners.
- A skills development session for students delivered in partnership with UCL Culture Public Engagement.
- A research co-design event, where academics and organisations met and co-designed research topics and questions for incoming PGT cohorts.

146 students engaged with CRIS during 19/20, five times more than the previous year. Students from 33 different MA and MSc programmes took part in stages 2-4 of CRIS.



17 not-for-profit organisations took part in CRIS activities through knowledge exchange meetings or co-designing a research project.

Projects included:

Community Collaboration Project: Scoping Review of Attachment-Based Parenting Programs for Adolescents – **MSc Child & Adolescent Health and Connected Lives**

What influences the amount of enforcement activity performed by local authorities in London's private sector? – **MSc Public Policy and Generation Rent**

A qualitative study of the barriers and facilitators of the training of counsellors working for The Mix, an online counselling service, using the Behaviour Change Wheel – **MSc Behaviour Change and The Mix**

Optimal Web Design for Information Seeking Young People – **MA Library Skills and Information Studies and The Mix**

CRIS was part of UCL's successful bid to the Office for Students (OfS) and Research England Knowledge Exchange Fund, announced in March 2020. The **'Increasing and Evaluating Student Impact in Knowledge and Learning Exchange'** (ISIKLE) programme is led by Professor Andy Green in UCL Institute of Education. ISIKLE aims to demonstrate and evaluate effective practices in student engagement in knowledge exchange (KE) activities. CRIS's inclusion in this programme will enable us to expand our activities and better evaluate its impact on students and communities.

Read More

Find out more about the Community Research Initiative on our [CRIS webpages](#).



Read More

The full survey reports and the demographic/course data are available at:
studentsunionucl.org/volunteering/about/impact

January 2021

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