

A photograph of the UCL Arena Centre interior. The space is a long, bright hallway with a high ceiling. The ceiling features a series of large, circular, illuminated light fixtures. The walls are white with vertical panels and large windows on the right side. Several people are seated at tables, working on laptops. The floor is a light-colored, polished material. A green vertical bar is visible on the left side of the image.

ChangeMakers Report 2020-21

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Summary

- ChangeMakers projects saw a surge in applications in 2020/21 because of a renewed interest in students and staff working together to address the challenges of the pandemic.
- Altogether we funded 85 projects, up from 18 projects the previous year.
- Projects were funded across all faculties, and UG, PGT and PGR levels of study were all represented.
- Additionally, we funded faculty level projects in Arts & Humanities, Social & Historical Science, the Bartlett, Institute of Education and Maths and Physical Science.
- We have also continued to work with students on institutional-level projects as the need has arisen. Twelve student fellows were based in the Arena Centre in 2020/21, working on: evaluating the capstone assessments; evaluation of online open-book exams; developing resources for Unitu; and developing a study skills hub.
- 2020/21 saw the return of deadlines and a centrally managed light-touch approval process to make it easier for students and staff to put in project

applications and negating the need to go via Student-Staff Consultative Committees (SSCCs).

- However, some useful elements were retained or slightly adapted from the review period such as transferring funding to departments, demonstrating why the project was important to students (e.g. it arose during SSCC discussions) and we asked for staff sign-off of student projects to ensure there was support from the outset.
- The pandemic presented an extra layer of challenge to project teams who needed to establish how to communicate with each other; with other students and staff in the department; and how to manage the project alongside the stresses and uncertainty of a global pandemic.
- Projects teams demonstrated resilience, flexibility and supportive environments in order to overcome challenges. Some of the solutions to the challenges presented by the pandemic will undoubtedly be retained in 2021/22 as we move more fully back to campus, such as online meetings which can enable more students to get involved than ordinarily could due other constraints on them.
- Equally, the ChangeMakers team adapted to the pandemic, moving much support online and taking a compassionate and supportive approach to helping project teams tackle their projects. We provided a lot more guidance on adapting original project plans to cope with unexpected events and being mindful of the wellbeing of team members.

An overview of ChangeMakers

What is ChangeMakers?

Running since 2014/15, UCL ChangeMakers supports and funds students and staff working in partnership to enhance education and the student experience at UCL. Typically, this is done through small projects grants. ChangeMakers champions collaboration, innovation, and evidence-informed decisions to bring about change for the benefit of everyone in the UCL community.

Aims of ChangeMakers

In 2018, following a period of review, ChangeMakers has the following aims:

1. ChangeMakers is more embedded in departments, with staff buy-in of student projects from the outset.
2. Projects align with student priorities in the department.
3. ChangeMakers involves students in educational enhancement work at departmental, faculty and institutional level.
4. ChangeMakers creates a culture of student-staff partnership working.

Benefits of ChangeMakers

“Lovely initiative, I would call it a flagship for UCL: it makes staff and students work together, improving partnerships between them.”
Student Lead

1. Students who undertake projects become more engaged, responsible and pro-active learners – students with a stronger sense of belonging.
2. Departments gain the expertise and enthusiasm of students motivated to help make positive change at UCL.
3. Both staff and students learn from the experience of working with each other to develop a relationship of trust, equality and mutual gain.

“We are extremely grateful for this opportunity and have learned a great deal from it. It is also an incredible opportunity to conduct research on our own and gain experience for our careers.” Student Lead

Evolving the scheme

UCL ChangeMakers launched with a pilot in 2014/15 and successfully supported 10 student-initiated projects. Since then, the scheme has steadily grown, working across all faculties and the majority of UCL's departments.

TABLE. 1: CHANGEMAKERS PROJECTS PER YEAR

Year	No. Staff-led applications	No. Student-led applications	No. Joint applications	Total no. of funded projects
2014/15	0	10	0	10
2015/16	23	27	0	50
2016/17	22	21	0	43
2017/18	25	35	3	63
2018/19*	17	14	3	34
2019/20**	17	1	0	18
2020/21	25	1	59	85
Totals	129	109	65	303

* ChangeMakers review year

** start of COVID-19 pandemic, Jan 2020

In 2018/19, ChangeMakers went through a period of review to explore how to sustain the increasing number of projects it was funding and better embed the initiative within departments. Changes to the initiative included:

- Empowering student-staff consultative committees (SSCCs) to discuss and agree on a ChangeMakers project for the year, signed off by Departmental Teaching Committees.
- Guaranteed funding of one ChangeMakers project per department.
- Guaranteed funding of one ChangeMakers project at faculty level, agreed by Faculty Teaching Committee.
- Removal of application deadlines so that projects could be 'activated' when needed to address student priorities.
- Project funding transferred to departments.

The 34 projects funded in 2018/19 were 'legacy projects', which were projects we had committed to funding ahead of the review process.

Following the changes to the programme there was a drop in department project applications in 2019/20. This was likely due to a number of factors including new processes not yet being embedded, a lack of deadlines/triggers for activity and the

arrival of the pandemic. Several 2019/20 projects were withdrawn, paused or disrupted by the pandemic, but some changed in focus or design to work successfully wholly online.

2020/21 saw a return to a light-touch central approval process by the ChangeMakers and wider Arena team, with the rationale that ideally there should be as few barriers as possible for staff and students to apply at a time where many wanted to try new approaches and activities. It would also enable new students to apply who may be especially keen to develop a sense of belonging by taking part in a partnership project whilst studying remotely and/or overseas.

We funded 85 projects in 2020/21, with the majority submitted jointly by staff-student teams. Support was offered through online drop-in sessions which were open to both staff and students, plus new guidance documents such as FAQs.



The impact of ChangeMakers during a pandemic

“Thank you so much for the opportunity and I look forward to continuing this project at the UCL School of Pharmacy and hopefully translate outputs across to the Life Sciences Department, and potentially global outreach.” Staff Partner.

ChangeMakers promotes partnership working between students and staff, these relationships can take time to foster and develop in order for a project to become impactful rather than a standalone activity. **It was especially important to encourage this relationship-building after the pivot to online learning in a challenging year.** For 2020/21, applications for projects were open to anyone at UCL. Projects needed to focus on improving the student learning experience as a general theme, especially in relation to the pivot to online learning. Applications for sustainable and impactful projects were preferred, but we also accepted projects that made smaller impacts that focused directly on current needs and challenges for students studying remotely.

“Thanks to this grant, we found a mechanism to bring together seven undergraduate programmes in the faculty and we have finally started to build a very interactive community of learners.” Staff Partner.

We retained two aspects of the 2019/20 model that we felt important as they seemed to be working well: transferring funding out to departments; and asking for a justification as to why the project was important to students. We also added a further check in that student projects needed to be signed off by a member of staff to give their support to the project. This was to ensure there was buy-in for student-initiated projects which would help make them more impactful, sustainable, and to ensure they were linked in with the aims and priorities of the department.

“This project has also led to the fruition of external collaborations with the University of Monash, Australia and University of North Carolina, USA.” Student Partner.

Many 2020/21 project applications we received already had a named team of staff and students, **indicating collaboration and shared interest in the project from the very start.** As per the table above, the previous two years saw a much heavier weighted response from staff in terms of applications. Some projects had a very tight focus on e.g. assessment changes for a named module, whereas others took a wider look at creating a sense of belonging within a department/faculty, designing online events and conferences, others addressing issues around liberating the curriculum, gender gaps and mental health and wellbeing.

“Evaluation from students was thorough and informative. It will serve as an invaluable basis to improve next year’s course design.” Staff Partner.

Despite everything we faced as a community, both within ChangeMakers, UCL, the UK and worldwide in 2020/21, an amazing **97% of project teams who reported back said they achieved all or most of what they set out to do with their project.**

“Despite [these challenges], we managed to achieve what we set out to do, which was to bring together faculty members and students from diverse academic and personal backgrounds” Student Partner.

Barriers

66% of project teams who reported back encountered some sort of challenge or barrier to achieving their objectives. Most of the barriers were pandemic related, especially considering students and staff were dealing with a new way of learning, not meeting with their peers for face-to-face classes, as well as dealing with the added stresses of lockdowns and world events.

Barriers included:

TIME: not having enough time to complete the project, which was linked to the ever-changing Covid-19 restrictions and changes to university life.

“Students were very busy and the realities of teaching in a Covid-19 year meant that staff were impacted too.” Staff Partner.

ENGAGEMENT: Some staff reported it was hard to find students to work on the projects with them and that the project was often delayed due to the disruption caused by the pandemic.

“All of my students were very stressed because of COVID, so the project has been pushed back considerably.” Staff Partner

ATTENDANCE: it was reported there was low engagement with activities put on during the projects e.g. events and focus groups.

“The students faced considerable challenges recruiting other students to join the focus groups. The lack of face-to-face social interaction this year seriously hindered the recruitment process as many students felt uncomfortable taking part in online discussions.” Staff Partner

On the whole, **project teams worked together, persevered and came up with creative solutions in order to overcome the challenges** that were faced. Often this involved finding new ways to communicate within the team and with students

and staff in the department more widely, incentivising engagement and regular comms updates to maintain awareness of the projects.

*“We really struggled to get people to attend the focus groups - to reduce participation bias I offered the possibility of providing written feedback and this allowed us to gather twice as many responses.”
Staff Partner*

There was also a strong sense of the team supporting one another through difficulties and remaining flexible.

“The only barrier was finding time for the meetings, however the student leads persevered with this and we had very effective meetings that included the whole project group.” Staff Partner

44% of projects who reported back said that they changed their activities from their original plan detailed in their application form. We usually expect some changes as projects progress and resilience to change is often an important developmental aspect of undertaking a ChangeMakers project for students.

“The team taking the project in new directions has definitely been the most exciting part.” Student Lead

The effect of multiple and extended lockdowns, not returning to campus in term two as hoped and the emotional toll of a pandemic certainly added to need for projects teams to change course during their projects. For example, some projects widened their scope, some narrowed the scope by focusing on a specific aspect of the project, and some changed their primary focus entirely.

“[The project had] a flexible timeline (as a result of allowances from both the ChangeMakers team and staff involved in project)” Student Lead

The majority of the barriers highlighted should be overcome by a return to campus in 2021/22 rather than posing a significant long-term challenge that needs to be structurally addressed. Further, there is plenty of scope to retain some of the positive solutions to the challenges faced, e.g., online meetings/focus groups can be more inclusive for attendees and can be recorded/transcribed much more easily. For other barriers, such as timings of surveys and other activities, and how to access and spend funds, these can be addressed in further guidance that we can provide for project teams.

Projects

In 2020/21 we fully funded 85 projects at either £450 or £700 across 35 academic departments and three central departments. Projects were funded across all faculties, and UG, PGT and PGR levels of study were all represented. Additionally,

we funded faculty level projects in Arts & Humanities, Social & Historical Science, the Bartlett, Institute of Education and Maths and Physical Science.

Project proposals were reviewed by the ChangeMakers team, plus the relevant faculty lead in Arena. As usual, we advised that projects should take place over two terms, but with the Covid disruption, many projects took much longer. There were three deadlines for applications across the year in November 2020, January and February 2021. The January deadline was added as a shared date for BAME Awarding Gap projects, and also served as an additional ChangeMakers deadline.

We were unable to fund 11 projects. This was due to a combination of factors – some did not meet the remit for ChangeMakers in 2020/21, i.e. must be able to conduct the project wholly remotely/in line with current Covid regulations, or were unfeasible in general, i.e. wished to involve members of the public in their research. One member of staff withdrew their application due to time constraints.

The most common project cost was student stipends, with vouchers for focus group attendance/survey completion the other main expense. 84% of project teams who reported back stated that their funding was sufficient to complete their project goals.

Support was given to teams from ChangeMakers in the form of Q&A drop-in sessions prior to application deadlines, project kick-off meetings, and ad-hoc meetings (all online).

Outputs of projects included: [blogs](#), articles, [conferences](#), posters, reports, [websites](#), toolkits, [workshops](#), [videos](#), [portfolios](#), Moodle pages, [webinars](#), card games, presentations, [podcasts](#), marking rubrics, resource lists, Instagram pages (e.g. @sexinscience), FAQ pages. [Case studies](#) were also collected from several projects as a requirement of the reporting process.

We have also continued to work with students on institutional-level projects as the need has arisen. Twelve student fellows were based in the Arena Centre in 2020/21, working on: evaluating the capstone assessments; evaluation of online open-book exams; developing resources for Unitu; and developing a study skills hub.

Impact on Staff

Direct impact on education in departments:

“The outcomes were valuable regarding students perceptions about consistency across Moodle module and key content. This will be used to develop a rubric and shared with the department and across UCL.” Staff partner.

“The two student/analysts produced a final report that summarises their analysis... This will form an important basis of my teaching next year.” Staff partner.

“This project has also encouraged other staff to incorporate [the topics of the project] into their own modules at the UCL School of Pharmacy which I will lead with them” Staff partner.

Improved relationship between staff and students:

*“A particular success of the project was the strength of the partnership established with collaborating members of staff.”
Student partner.*

Staff valued what students have to offer:

*“Our partner students created fantastic assessment and showcase portfolios that we will be using as gold-standard examples that future students can use as an inspiration to create their own portfolios.”
Staff partner.*

Impact on Students

Demonstration to students of the commitment to make improvements:

“We received valuable feedback about doctoral students’ experience of the department’s PhD programme and have compiled a number of concrete, realistic pedagogical changes that can improve the taught modules for research students.” Student Lead.

“Students appreciated the opportunity to have a prominent role in education planning and decision making in the department.” Staff Partner.

Student identity:

“I am personally grateful due to the immense personal growth that I have experience as a consequence of this project, which also led me into winning the Rep of the Year award at the Faculty of Brain Sciences.” Student Partner.

Greater sense of community & belonging:

“Our forum was attended by people from both inside and outside the department, which shows that our aim to provide a space for reflections on race and colonialism is worthwhile and pertinent to the wider community.” Student Partner.

Project legacy:

“There were some fantastic academic discussions and we all learned a lot from the experience. We will repeat the same festival next year!” Staff Partner.

The future of ChangeMakers

For 2021/22, ChangeMakers projects will continue to provide funding for staff and students wanting to conduct innovative work to improve the student experience. There will be two deadlines, 19 November 2021 and 25 February 2022. Any member of staff or student can apply, but it is strongly recommended that teams apply. Any student application should have a statement of support from a member of staff who will be championing the project. Every department can apply for either £450 or £850, depending on the scope of the project.

Project applications received will be reviewed by a panel of staff and students who will approve/reject projects with recommendations and feedback. Applications and a score sheet proforma will be disseminated to panel members and any ‘amber’ or ‘red’ projects will be the main focus for discussion at the panel, any ‘green’ applications will be carried and funded. ‘Amber’ projects will require a further meeting with the ChangeMakers team to address any feedback from the panel, and may require re-writes of all or certain parts of the application form. This is to ensure that project applications that are nearly there get the chance of a developmental conversation and opportunity to address panel feedback rather than needing to wait for a subsequent ChangeMakers deadline. This reflects the fact that ChangeMakers is a developmental process and a supportive initiative.

Projects will continue to be embedded in their departments/faculties, with the ChangeMakers team providing support and guidance as needed. Summer activity will be planned with any unallocated funding after the Feb deadline.

Project teams will be asked to submit under a specific theme. This is to ensure that the projects are a good use of student and staff time and will address areas of greatest priority to students. Themes are informed by the [Student Priorities For Education Report](#) producing by the Students’ Union.

Change and Innovation Themes for 2021/22:

- Learning communities & belonging;
- Inclusivity in the curriculum;
- Developing authentic and inclusive assessment;
- Academic development and support.

Research & Evaluation Theme for 2021/22 (pilot):

- Building on what we’ve learnt from remote and blended learning.

Faculty funding will be available at the £1000-1500 level, these projects can be developed by Faculty Education teams with their Arena Faculty Leads at any point throughout the year, using a brief form to outline the aims of the work.

We aim to work with eleven [Student Fellows](#) on work focusing on work at an institutional level. Rather than working on individual projects as our student fellows did in 2020/21, they will form a part of the Student Engagement & Experience team to work with us as well as the SU and with Arena Faculty Leads on partnership activity on a termly basis.

Support for project teams

We have been developing a new look website, including a [resource bank](#) to support projects and teams. The '[You Shape UCL](#)' website has also been revamped to bring together the menu of options for students in a more coherent way.

Via the ChangeMakers website, students can find resources and training to help them undertake their projects in a scholarly way, as well as advice for staff on how to ensure projects make a sustained impact and that they are able to demonstrate this impact. A number of [new case studies organised by theme](#) could provide some inspiration and examples of what can be achieved practically. Resources from the ChangeMakers Moodle site are now housed on the website, aside from the ethics training and forms, which remain hosted on the Moodle.

Further resources regarding accessing and spending funds will be produced as this was a common comment in our feedback:

“A sample budget and examples of funding distribution (perhaps from similar projects in the past) would have been useful, especially in understanding how funding distribution works.” Student Partner.

We now have some sample budgets detailed on the ChangeMakers website, as well as guidance for claiming expenses (for stipends and project spending). Clearer signposting could be made, as well as stronger guidance and reminders that funding needs to be spent by financial year-end

These resources will be supplemented and enhanced by a number of face-to-face and online drop-in sessions and events that are open to all staff and students.

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