ChangeMakers Report: 2014-18

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An Overview of ChangeMakers

What is it?

UCL ChangeMakers supports and funds students and staff working together to enhance the UCL learning experience, mainly through project work.

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

Starting Points & Growth of the Scheme

UCL ChangeMakers launched with a pilot in 2014-15 following extensive consultation with staff and students and liaising closely with the Students' Union UCL (SU). In the pilot year we successfully supported 10 student-initiated projects. In 2015-16, an expanded scheme saw a shift in focus from 'students as change agents' to student-staff partnerships with the introduction of staff-initiated projects. Since then, the scheme has steadily grown to a peak of 63 projects, working across all faculties and the majority of UCL's departments.

UCL ChangeMakers also grew to include other activities where students were supported to work in partnership with staff, such as Student Reviewers of Teaching Practice. From 2018 these other activities have formally joined Student Quality Reviewers, a scheme run jointly with the SU to promote and empower students working within our Quality Assurance processes.

Ethos of Student-Staff Partnerships

The student-staff partnership model believes both students and staff have an important contribution to make to education at UCL and by working together harnesses the expertise of both to bring about change. The pedagogical case for students working as partners in shaping and driving change in their education is an ever-growing field (see AdvanceHE's conceptual model for partnership work) and one that UCL is proud to make a distinct contribution through the ChangeMakers initiative (have a look at what we've been up to over the past 5 years).

Staff and students working in partnership goes beyond making educational change. Of equal importance is the cultural change it can bring about where both students and staff see themselves as part of one learning community and where all have a valuable contribution to make.

> "…having to think beyond the traditional divide and working with students as truly equal partners can bring vital insights for individuals that may well lead to lasting culture change across the institution."　　Staff Partner

Student-staff partnerships offer an alternative or counter-narrative to the consumerist model brought about by the change in fees structure. The partnership model views students as active participants rather consumers, encouraging them to engage, question and bring about change.

How it fits in

UCL is committed to working with its students as partners, as set out in the [2016-21 Education Strategy, Objective Four](). UCL ChangeMakers is one manifestation of that commitment and is relatively unique in the sector in being centrally funded and supported. Students feel this clearly demonstrates the value UCL places in them and their position in our community.

> "I think the most powerful thing about it for me was having the confidence that UCL have chosen to back and support my project."   Student Project Lead

Aims of ChangeMakers

1. To develop cultures of student-staff partnership
2. To enable educational change/impact
3. To enable student success & create opportunities to engage in educational enhancement
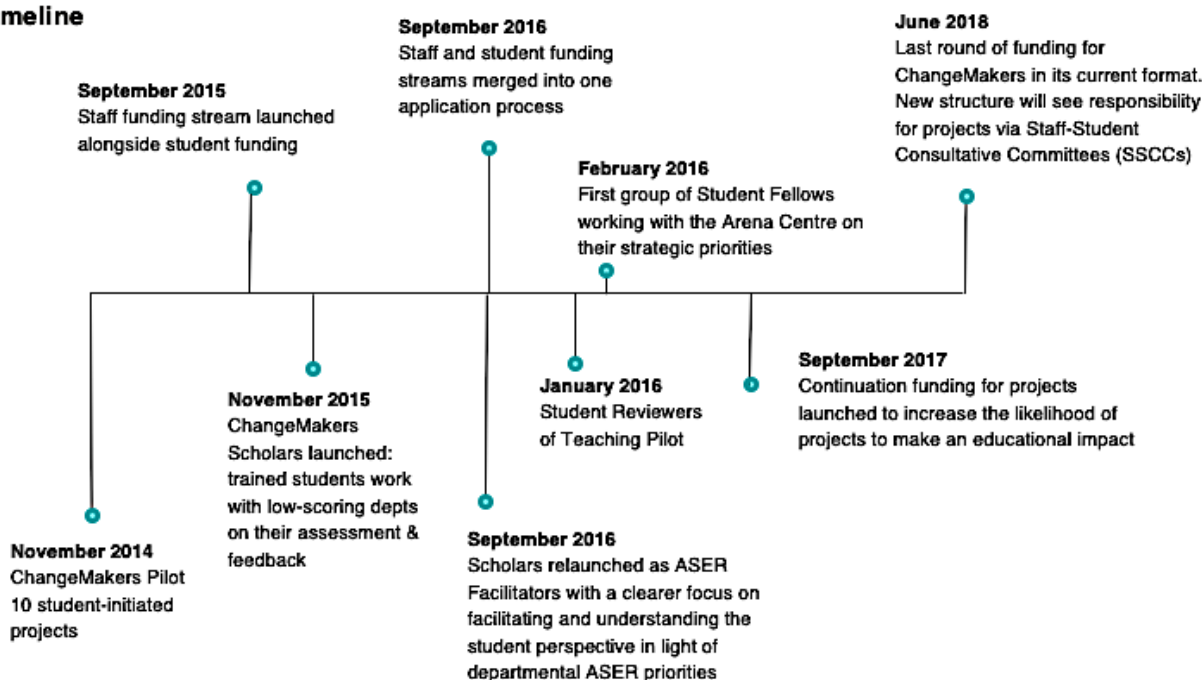4. To help staff explore their identity as educators

Principles underpinning ChangeMakers

ChangeMakers is a scheme set up for the wider UCL community. In order to make it a scheme that speaks to the needs of that community, there are a number of principles that have governed our practice and how we have developed to take the scheme forward. These include:

- Community engagement
- Paid Student Fellow roles
- Student-staff panels to award funding
- Student-staff Steering & Development Groups
- Close ties with the Student Union UCL

Evolution of ChangeMakers

Timeline

September 2015
Staff funding stream launched alongside student funding

September 2016
Staff and student funding streams merged into one application process

June 2018
Last round of funding for ChangeMakers in its current format. New structure will see responsibility for projects via Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs)

February 2016
First group of Student Fellows working with the Arena Centre on their strategic priorities

November 2014
ChangeMakers Pilot 10 student-initiated projects

November 2015
ChangeMakers Scholars launched: trained students work with low-scoring depts on their assessment & feedback

January 2016
Student Reviewers of Teaching Pilot

September 2016
Scholars relaunched as ASER Facilitators with a clearer focus on facilitating and understanding the student perspective in light of departmental ASER priorities

September 2017
Continuation funding for projects launched to increase the likelihood of projects to make an educational impact

Number of projects funded over the years

Year	Staff Projects	Student Projects	Joint projects	Totals
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
Totals	87	107	6	200

The Impact of ChangeMakers

> "ChangeMakers was indeed a changing experience for me. It made the academic year much richer, improved my understanding and provided key insights I otherwise would not have gained."   Student Project Lead

ChangeMakers promotes partnership working between students and staff. As such, we view it as a relational process that takes time to foster and develop rather than being a standalone activity. This means that the kind of impact ChangeMakers is able to make is both tangible as a direct result of the work being undertaken but also more nuanced and focused on the development of the individual or culture of the department/institution. We value different kinds of impact equally and celebrate them below as we reflect back over the past five years of the scheme.

> "It's been so rewarding working with students as a collaborator. It really feels like a win-win for student partners, staff, and future cohorts. The student partners get valuable experience, transferable skills and some valuable material for their CVs! The staff partners get a willing team of collaborators and the chance to see undergraduates as colleagues. Future cohorts benefit from an enriched UCL adventure."   Staff Partner

Barriers

We also want to acknowledge that working with students as partners does come with its challenges and requires investment, commitment, resilience and enthusiasm of students and staff. Some barriers we have identified include:

- Time available to students and staff;
- Commitment/championing from senior staff in departments;
- Role of staff and their ability to make (wider) change;
- Engaging Postgraduate Taught students in a meaningful way;
- University/Faculty/Departmental systems and processes can sometimes work against partnership;
- Time needed to bring about change in a large institution;
- Students not seeing the impact of the change or not knowing whether their suggestion was taken up
- Project success tied to the enthusiasm/drive of an individual (single point of failure)
- Ensuring partnership work is inclusive and accessible to all

Some of these barriers should be overcome by the restructure to ChangeMakers (discussed later in the report) but others we will need to continue to work on with the wider community.

Projects

How they work (2014-18)

Applications for projects were open to anyone at UCL. Projects needed to focus on improving the student learning experience but could be exploratory in nature. There was up to £1000 in funding available plus money to pay student stipends of £150 for lead student, £100 for treasurers and £50 for support students. Stipends are in recognition of the valuable contribution to improving learning that students are making rather than payment for their time. All projects had to have a Staff Partner and at least one Student Lead. Project proposals were looked at by a multi-disciplinary panel of staff and students. Most projects took place over two terms. There were three deadlines for applications across the year in April, June and September (increasing from a single November deadline in 2014/15 and 2015/16). Support was given to teams from ChangeMakers in the form of Q&A sessions, proposal writing sessions, online resources on Moodle, project kick-off meetings, drop-in sessions, ad-hoc meetings and both face-to-face and online training.

Impact on Staff

Direct impact on education in departments:

> "Two years on I still refer to the report from this project when planning support for the next academic year…"

> "This ChangeMakers project has been a huge success in improving the student experience in Physics & Astronomy at UCL. The experiment that we developed as a student-staff collaboration is now an established part of the practical physics curriculum for second year physics undergraduates and medical physics undergraduates. We are shifting the emphasis of the second year teaching labs towards a research-led environment; new experiments will offer students some freedom to explore and create. The engagement works both ways, too - I've found that the additional freedom and responsibility has made the students more engaged."

> "I was very pleased to see that the SEQ results for the module that this project related to significantly improved this year, with fewer concerns raised about the challenges of learning to program. I believe this was, in large part, due to our ChangeMakers project driving improvements in the teaching of this module in a number of ways."

Improved relationship between staff and students:

> "I enjoyed working with the students. It felt like we were learning from each other; which I think has changed my relationship with students more generally. Now, I feel more inclined to really engage meaningfully with students. At times it was hard but we developed a good relationship, which meant that we were committed to supporting each other to finish the project and really make the most out of it."

Staff valued what students have to offer:

> "The discussions about [x's] project were interesting and thought provoking and made me appreciate the sometimes untapped energy and innovative spirit of PhD students."

Impact on Students

Demonstration to students of the commitment to make improvements:

> "It has helped show students on our programme that we are committed to working with them to create an excellent degree course and that they are at the centre of everything we do."

Student identity:

> "…don't be complacent about the way the university is run. Imagine yourself as a ChangeMaker rather than a consumer of the education experience. I think that is key. To change your mindset about yourself."

Greater sense of community & belonging:

> "I genuinely feel more involved with the department and my academic studies, and I am happy to add something to the [university] experience for future students…"

Scholars / ASER Facilitators

ASER refers to the [Annual Student Experience Review](#).

How it works

Selected departments (selection criteria vary per year) are offered ASER Facilitators to help them explore particular – often reoccurring – issues related to the student experience. Having an ASER Facilitator is optional, although most departments do take up the offer. ASER Facilitators - now working in pairs although previously they had worked alone – work with departmental staff, student reps and the wider student body to explore priority areas raised in departmental ASER action plans. They write reports with recommendations based on the needs and expectations of different stakeholders in the department but with a focus on shedding light on the student experience of the identified issues. ASER Facilitators are paid a stipend of £150.

Impact on staff

The findings of the ASER Facilitators often influenced future work or how it was approached:

> "The advice in this project has fed into much wider discussions on nature of feedback and how to ensure students understand what feedback is and how to use it. Wider advice on the student experience have been considered."

> "Lecturers have been provided with a template for module syllabi that incorporates many of the ideas from this work on what students need to know and most are making some use of this."

> "Along with other input it has led to the decision to significantly decrease the amount of summative assessment and increase formative."

Increased the confidence of decision-makers:

> "It gives me more confidence about making impactful changes as I know it will be appreciated."

Changed the way departments worked with students:

> "We do tend to consult students more about changes we are planning to make..."

Students themselves also hoped their work would lead to longer last cultural change:

> "I hope that my contribution can be summarised as being able to open and facilitate dialogue between students and academics/ staff. But, more importantly, encouraging long lasting dialogue that will exist year on year - even after I have left."

Impact on students

Students are able to better appreciate what goes into running a department and making improvements to the student experience:

> "I was also able to see the amount of effort departments put into ameliorating their students' experience, and this is really helpful for me in order to reassure students who do not necessarily have this insight and often think their concerns are being overlooked."

They developed a more nuanced appreciation of how students and staff need to work together and listen to each other in order to solve issues and bring about change:

> "I enjoyed being able to hear the students' honest opinions and also see how that fits in with the agenda of the course leader but despite that, there are differences, and this is where communication and effort from both sides are important."

> "I have gained a lot of insight from being part of the ASER process. Holding focus groups and speaking to the course leader has given me the ability to see departmental issues from both sides of the spectrum. It allowed me to play a more important role to liaise and facilitate between staff and students, which I do not take for granted."

There were also a huge number of soft skills that students developed, including a contribution to their identity as professionals:

> "I gained strong skills regarding team work in the first place. To work with another person, to take into consideration another person's opinion is definitely crucial in order to work well and to grow up professionally."

> "Aside from the great sense of pride it brings to know that I may have been able to help another department, the experience has developed a lot of necessary skills. As I prepare to leave UCL, and begin applying for jobs, I reflect on my time at UCL and the skills I have developed. I find a lot of my examples of skills return back to the Facilitator role."

Student Reviewers of Teaching

How it works

Staff can choose Student Reviewers of Teaching as their option for peer dialogue in an academic year. They apply to the Arena Centre via an online application form, and are matched up with a pair of students outside the module under review. We work with staff to identify what would make a good pairing and match them as best we can. Students undertake a minimum of 3 hours classroom observation and also review Moodle and any assignments. There is some degree of flexibility in this model so that we can accommodate other types of teaching e.g. distance learning. Staff and their Student Reviewers should meet prior to the first observations to get to know one another and identify any areas they would particularly like to focus on. They then meet fairly regularly throughout the review period. We recommend that partners meet as soon as possible after each observations to discuss what they have observed and plan any future observations Students write up a report and should discuss this with the staff member they have been

working with. Students get paid a £150 stipend for participation and are fully trained by the ChangeMakers team.

Impact on staff

Confidence in their teaching:

> "It's given me more confidence in interacting with students about my teaching and seeing it as a way of enhancing my teaching, rather than something to worry about."

Confidence in any changes they want to make:

> "I am making a number of changes to the module next year, particularly the assessment, and they reinforced that my plans were a good idea."

Developing their understanding of what it is like to be a student now:

> "I have never been a student in this system and therefore struggled to understand some of the students' difficulties and reactions. Working with the reviewers helped me a lot."

Developing their identity as teachers:

> "…I value my teaching more and want to spend time on improving it."

They can also share their learning more widely with colleagues:

> "I implemented several of their ideas and one idea in particular was adopted by three of my colleagues which is just amazing!"

Impact on students

Students are able to better appreciate what goes into teaching:

> "It made me realize that sometimes I am too quick in evaluating my lecturers' ability to teach on the basis of them not offering a lecture tailored for me. I think this is an invaluable lesson that needs to be remembered when giving feedback to my lecturers."

They are able to reflect this back on their own learning:

> "I got to know in greater depth how assessment, Moodle layout and course structure are determined and therefore can relate these back to my course…"

Make a difference to the learning experience of others:

> "It's always nice to be able to contribute in shaping the experiences of students in partnership with staff."

Developing a better understanding of what is needed to bring about change:

> "I was able to better understand how the curriculum and pedagogy is organized and how to help in improving it whilst being aware of the limits of resources."

The opportunity for staff and students to discuss teaching:

> "I enjoyed the staff's enthusiasm and her open and friendly attitude to us. I particularly liked the feedback sessions I had with the staff partner as they offered both the reviewers and the staff the opportunity to support their views and discuss any points that we had different opinions about."

There were also a huge number of soft skills that students listed that they have developed including: communication, observational skills, teamwork, analytical skills, creative problem-solving

The Future of ChangeMakers

Distinction between ChangeMakers and Student Quality Reviewers

The first major change has been to formally split off the projects from the Quality Assurance (QA) roles, ASER Facilitators and Student Reviewers. This has gradually been happening since 2016/17 as we have been aligning our training, support and recruitment with the two roles managed by the SU; students as reviewers on Internal Quality Review (IQR) and Programme and Module Review (PMAP) panels.

Summer 2018 Review

Over the summer of 2018, we undertook a big review of ChangeMakers.

It had always been our intention to move the scheme away from the centre and embed projects in departments and faculties all the while championing and supporting the work of these projects centrally. The review provided an opportunity to celebrate the strengths of the scheme and look at how this kind of move could mitigate some of the potential weaknesses; for example ensuring all projects had departmental backing or increasing the likelihood of students to get involved in projects addressing assessment & feedback or curriculum design. We also wanted to ensure that ChangeMakers remained open to students as all levels and that students continued to have opportunities to work on projects of faculty or institutional significance.

New Structure for ChangeMakers

The changes to the scheme were agreed by Education Committee in December 2018 and approved by the Student Experience Committee (StEC) in January 2019 following consultation and engagement with the wider community including: Student Academic Representative Steering group; Faculty Tutor Forum; a ChangeMakers consultation event for staff and students; and the ChangeMakers Steering Group.

Departmental Projects

All departments are guaranteed funding of £850 for one project per year. SSCCs are responsible for developing projects that are then put forward to Departmental Teaching Committee (DTC) for approval. We will continue working with the SU to develop student academic representative and lead student academic representatives to take on an active role in driving forward ChangeMakers projects.

Faculty Projects

Each Faculty has guaranteed funding of £1500 for one project per year. It is envisaged that projects will arise from the faculty academic representative forum, the faculty office or from the priorities of the Vice Dean (Education) and will be approved by Faculty Teaching Committees.

Postgraduate Research Projects

Each Faculty has guaranteed funding of £1000 for one project per year focussing on the postgraduate research student experience. Projects are likely to arise from the faculty academic representative forum or from the priorities of the faculty graduate tutor and be approved by faculty research degree committee.

Institutional Projects

There will be two institutional projects per year with funding for two Student Fellows taking on a paid internship-style role for each project. The two projects should arise from the priorities of Anthony Smith, Vice Provost (Education & Student Affairs) and the Educational Sabbatical Officer. StEC provides oversight for the institutional level projects.

Support for all projects & project teams

We have been developing a ChangeMakers Moodle Resource (requires UCL ID and password) to support projects and teams. The resources is structured in such a way that participants can dip in and out of it as

needed, enabling them to build up their skills and knowledge of partnership work over time. There is also training for students 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.

The Moodle resource will be supplemented by a number of face-to-face sessions and events that are open to staff and students.

Our Thanks and Acknowledgement to our Community of ChangeMakers

We would like to thank all the students and staff, both at the forefront of the work and behind the scenes, who have contributed to the many successes of the scheme so far.

We would like to give particular thanks to members of the ChangeMakers Steering Group and all the Student Fellows who have worked with us. You have all invested an incredible amount of time in ChangeMakers and its successes are a testament to your dedication.