

Building the Ageing Research Community at UCL

Background

UCL has significant strength in ageing research, particularly in cohort studies, dementia, neurodegenerative disease, inflammation and biology and animal models of ageing. There is also considerable expertise in age associated cardiovascular disease, age-related and neurodegenerative disease and many other age-related syndromes. Furthermore, the UCL Crucible Centre has a cross-disciplinary research remit to facilitate the wellbeing of older people. There are also 68 researchers in 29 Institutes or Divisions identified in the [UCL IRIS ageing theme](#). The total active current grant income of these researchers is ~£98,067,960. Although not all of this income relates to ageing, these figures identify the considerable success in funding and expertise available for the investigation of ageing and age-related degenerative processes at UCL.

However, key researchers at UCL that work on ageing are often unfamiliar with other scientists who work in different age-related disciplines. This is a missed opportunity, especially given the increased focus on lifelong health and wellbeing in the Government's current priorities for research funding. The UCL Population Health domain seeks to address this.

Aims

The [UCL Populations & Lifelong Health Domain](#) has adopted 'Ageing' as one of its main themes in 2016/17. Through bringing this diverse range of researchers together to network, the Domain intends to help to:

- consolidate ageing research and expertise across UCL
- encourage new collaborations
- prepare possible responses for future funding opportunities.

The first step to realise these aims was through the running of an event in February 2016.

Event

UCL Ageing Research Event: Towards collaborative Interaction

A half-day event was run by the [UCL Populations & Lifelong Health Domain](#) on 29 February 2016.

The event was invite-only and was attended by 51 UCL academics. Attendees were UCL Senior Principal Investigators and Lecturers who work on ageing research in a wide variety of disciplines, including epidemiology, bioscience, neuroscience, engineering, economics and infection and immunity.

The event comprised of:

- Seven plenary talks on of the key areas of ageing research at UCL
- Opportunities for networking
- Round table session to encourage networking and foster collaborations.

Questions addressed during the round table session

1. What do you see as the top three research questions in ageing?

Responses included:

- How to define ageing?
- What is the role of physical and social environmental aspects on healthy ageing?
- Extending health-span and not only lifespan.
- Do gender differences contribute to differences in the biology of ageing?
- Does ageing have a similar effect on different diseases?

- Can we map different interventions to specific groups of older individuals? Can we intervene specifically at different ages (children, adolescent, elderly people)?
- How can we stratify clinical data to identify at risk individuals before disease onset?
- How can we integrate cohort data with basic science investigations?

2. How can we work across the disciplines to meet these three challenges?

Responses included:

- Improving information sharing
- Providing further opportunities for networking
- Looking at new ways to use the cohorts housed at UCL

3. What do you think are the three most significant barriers to cross-disciplinary ageing research?

Responses included:

- Funding availability
- Not having a shared language
- Problems Identifying key people and networks at UCL
- Scientific barriers

Meeting Outputs

Feedback

31% of attendees (16 people) completed the feedback survey -

- 93.75% rated the Symposium as 'Excellent' or 'Good'.
- 100% rated the quality of the presentations as 'Excellent' or 'Good'.
- 100% rated the organisation and administration of the event as 'Excellent' or 'Good'.
- 100% thought that the event was 'Highly Effective' or 'Effective' in meeting two of its aims of consolidating ageing research and expertise across UCL and encouraging new collaborations.
- 31.25% thought that the event was 'Not Effective' in meeting its aim of preparing possible responses for future funding opportunities.
- 43.75% said that they met new people at the event who they now plan to contact regarding research/collaboration.
- 56.25% think we should organise regular Ageing events every year.

New Connections

A number of meeting delegates reported that they met other UCL academics who they did not know previously and that they particularly valued meeting people working in different disciplines to their own. Examples of interactions include:

- Connection made between Wolfson Drug Discovery Unit and MRC Unit for Lifelong Health and Ageing to investigate ageing and cognitive tests in men (Pepys, Chaturvedi, Walters)
- Discussions on the role of inflammation in age-induced pathology (Akbar, Salama, Chaturvedi)

Consolidating ageing research and expertise across UCL

At the February event a list of research on the topic of ageing was compiled. Approximately 25 studies have been identified.

This list, alongside other outputs from the meeting will be placed on the [UCL Populations & Lifelong Health Domain](#) website. The intention would be, over time, to increase the content on this website to provide a reference point for UCL researcher working in aging to find others at the university with whom they could collaborate.

Next Steps

To address the issues raised at the February meeting the [UCL Populations & Lifelong Health Domain](#) intends to run a further event in Autumn 2016 which will be aimed at a wider group of UCL researchers working on all aspects of ageing (at all career levels). This event will have a strong focus on networking and we plan to invite funders to speak (BBSRC, MRC, Wellcome). We intend to establish a UCL steering group on ageing involving academics at all career levels with Professor Arne Akbar as Chair.

We anticipate that both the spring and autumn 2016 meetings will facilitate new collaborations and lead in time to research grant applications and peer reviewed journal publications. As and when any relevant major grant calls emerge the domain will use the newly established ageing network at UCL to provide a response as appropriate.