



UCL

UCL Building Bridges and Co-designing Learning Event Findings Report



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1. Executive Summary

1.1. This report describes the findings of the **Building Bridges and Co-designing Learning** event (3rd of June, 2019). The event brought together UCL students, representatives from London's voluntary and community sector and UCL academic and professional staff. The purpose of the event was the co-design of co-curricular and curricular opportunities for students' learning inside and outside the classroom. The event was organised by Students' Union UCL Volunteering Service, UCL's Public Engagement Unit and UCL Arena. These findings will inform the Community Engaged Learning Service to ensure an inclusive offering that meets the needs of students, academic staff and community partners.

1.2. Co-designing Learning

The second part of the event explored how the partnership between students, community organisations and academic staff could enhance student experience and enrich assessment practice as well as benefit the community partners. Students, community partners and academic staff worked on a couple of Activities that consisted of a Self-reflective and a Group Discussion part. The idea was to initially encourage self-reflection and then contribute this reflection to Group Discussions. With this way, there could be an understanding of the perceptions of the individual groups, but also an understanding of what comes out from the discussions and interaction. The Activities specifically explored **Skills and Knowledge (1a/b)** and **Assessment (2a/b)**.

1.3. Activities

The below activities were given to the participants during the second half of the event. They were completed within 90 minutes. The activities took place around 5 tables that consisted of students (18 in total), community partners (15 in total) and academic staff/Teaching Fellows/Staff supporting learning (8 in total). Different questions were asked for **part a** and **part b** of each Activity, as shown below.

Activity 1 - Skills and Knowledge

Activity 1a: Self-reflection

- Students: "What skills, qualities and knowledge do you want to gain by the end of your programme?"
- Community Partners: "What skills, qualities and knowledge do you think graduates should have to work in your organisation and/or address some of the challenges you face?"
- Academic Staff/Teaching Fellows/Staff support learning: "What skills, qualities and knowledge do you want students to gain by the end of their programme?"

Activity 1b: Group Discussion

- “What skills, qualities and knowledge do you think graduates should have to address (local) challenges?”

Activity 2 - Assessment

Activity 2a: Self-reflection

- Students: “How do you like to be assessed? How do you see the role of external partners in your assessment?”
- Community Partners: “If you were to collaborate with students on a project as part of their programme, what role would you like to have in their assessment, if any?”
- Academic Staff/Teaching Fellows/Staff support learning: “What do you think is the most beneficial assessment for your students? How do you see the role of community partners in the assessment?”

Activity 2b: Group Discussion

- “What could assessment look like when students and community partners collaborate to ensure benefit for everyone involved?”

1.4. Overall Findings of the Skills and Knowledge Activity

The overall findings of the Skills and Knowledge Activity can be summarised below. Appendix 1 includes all the responses and how they were analysed.

In activity 1a, the mostly referenced Skills and Knowledge across all 3 groups were the **Communication/Interpersonal Skills** as well as **the Expertise in a discipline or variety of disciplines/ability to apply degree knowledge to real world scenarios**.

In the Group exercise (1b) and in the question: “What skills, qualities and knowledge do you think graduates should have to address (local) challenges?” the **Communication/Interpersonal Skills** were still the ones mostly referenced. However, **Problem-solving and Entrepreneurial Skills** came second and **Planning and Management** came third. This is interesting as in the self-reflection part of the exercise, there wasn't that much emphasis on the above two skills.

In more detail:

Activity 1a: Self-reflection

In the question: “What skills, qualities and knowledge do you want to gain by the end of your programme?” students mostly referenced:

1. Communication skills/Interpersonal Skills/Networking Skills/Presentation skills
/Listening skills

2. Expertise in a discipline or variety of disciplines/ability to apply degree knowledge to real world scenarios
3. Research skills

In the question: “What skills, qualities and knowledge do you think graduates should have to work in your organisation and/or address some of the challenges you face?” Community Partners mostly mentioned:

1. Communication skills / Interpersonal Skills/Networking Skills/Presentation skills /Listening skills
2. Expertise in a discipline or variety of disciplines/ ability to apply degree knowledge to real world scenarios
3. Proactivity; Problem-solving /Entrepreneurial Skills/Creativity; Project Management/Project design were equally referenced.

In the question: “What skills, qualities and knowledge do you want students to gain by the end of their programme?” academic staff mostly referenced:

1. Expertise in a discipline or variety of disciplines/ ability to apply degree knowledge to real world scenarios
2. Communication skills / Interpersonal Skills/Networking Skills/Presentation skills /Listening skills
3. Problem-solving / Entrepreneurial skills / Creativity; Team working; Resilience; Thoughtfulness; Research skills; Empathy

Activity 1b: Group Discussion

In the question: “What skills, qualities and knowledge do you think graduates should have to address (local) challenges?” the three mostly referenced Skills and Knowledge in the Group discussions were:

1. Communication skills /Interpersonal Skills/Networking Skills/Presentation skills /Listening skills
2. Problem-solving / Entrepreneurial skills / Creativity / Innovation /Resourcefulness
3. Planning/management / Time management

1.5. Overall Findings of the Assessment Activity

The overall findings of the Assessment Activity can be summarised below. Appendix 1 includes all the responses and how they were analysed.

In Activity 2a, the importance of co-designing projects/assessments came out strongly from all partners. Community organisations seem keen to provide formative feedback and mostly about the development of students’ soft skills. The Group Discussions (2b), reinforced the idea of co-designing assessment, whilst the importance of transitioning to a Fail/Pass assessment system (rather than a grading system) was highlighted.

In more detail:

Activity 2a: Self-reflection

In the question: “How do you like to be assessed? How do you see the role of external partners in your assessment?” students seem to think that the three most important things are to:

1. Design research questions together
2. Receive feedback on projects from the partners (formative assessment)
3. Work on a research question with the partner/do volunteering with them

In the question: “If you were to collaborate with students on a project as part of their programme, what role would you like to have in their assessment, if any?” community partners referenced a number of ideas with similar weight:

1. Lead a pre-planned session
2. Set tasks/coursework to give students (incorporate this with the type of sector)
3. Give feedback to students
4. Assessment with academic staff; not by myself
5. Students to become part of our team/long term partnership

In the question: “What do you think is the most beneficial assessment for your students? How do you see the role of community partners in the assessment?” academic staff mostly referenced the below:

1. Co-design feedback criteria with students, staff and community organisations
2. Community partners can provide feedback on students’ skill development /how the project has met the outcomes /formative feedback
3. Range of assessments (written: essay, portfolio, report, case studies); oral presentation (individual, group); social media output (blogs etc); other art, animation, comics

Activity 2b: Group Discussion

In the question: “What could assessment look like when students and community partners collaborate to ensure benefit for everyone involved?” the most important aspects discussed were:

1. Co-design assessment with communities, students and staff - criteria, skills, work to be done
2. Mutually beneficial outcomes with feedback / Evaluate what all the parties have learnt
3. Assessment can be about Fail or Pass and not a grading system, especially when collaborating with external partners; it is difficult to establish assessment criteria and there needs to be transparency as to how students get assessed

1.6. Discussion and Future steps

The above findings will further inform the Community Engaged Learning Service as well as our approach to community partners in terms of building their capacity to get more involved in the curriculum. It becomes clear which skills students, staff and community partners consider important and what the role of the community partners can be in assessing those skills. The importance of co-designing learning activities and assessment was also strongly highlighted for a mutually beneficial relationship, as well as the use of various assessment outputs. This approach will also inform our advice and support to academic staff when they wish to embark on a collaboration with community partners in their teaching.

We hope to organise more co-design sessions in the academic year 2019-2020 to enrich our understanding of how to best support student-staff-community partnerships in the curriculum.

Appendix 1 - Analysis of responses

The participants captured their responses on flip chart paper during the event. The responses were recorded and weighted below according to the number of times referenced. Weighing the responses felt appropriate in terms of understanding what are the most important Skills and Knowledge for the different partners and what are the most important considerations for designing Assessments when external partners are involved. All the recorded responses are found below.

Activity 1 - Skills and Knowledge

Activity 1a: Self-reflection

Students

“What skills, qualities and knowledge do you want to gain by the end of your programme?”

Responses	No of responses
Time management	1
Communication skills / Interpersonal Skills/Networking Skills/Presentation skills /Listening skills	14
Research skills	7
Academic/Professional writing	4
Cultural Awareness	1
Global outlook	1
Leadership skills	2
Teaching/Mentoring (able to transfer skills/information to people of different ages)	1
Team work (ability to share information/ideas with others)	4
Collaboration with people from different backgrounds/disciplines	3
Expertise in a discipline or variety of disciplines/ be able to apply degree knowledge to real world scenarios	9
Ability to learn effectively	1
Ability to be adaptable within a range of situations	1
Critical thinking	2
Numerical skills	1
Management / Organisational skills	3
Policy	1
Career inspiration / understanding of career paths	2
Ethics	1
Working experience / practical skills	2
Digital skills	1
Statistics/Data analysis/Interpretation	1
Fundraising skills	1

Community Partners

“What skills, qualities and knowledge do you think graduates should have to work in your organisation and/or address some of the challenges you face?”

Responses	No of responses
Communication skills / Interpersonal Skills/Networking Skills/Presentation skills /Listening skills	9
Strong (work) ethics	1
Professionalism	1
Empathy	1
Personable	1
Relatable	1
Patience	1
Resilience	2
Proactivity	3
Problem-solving / Entrepreneurial skills / Creativity	3
Learnability	2
Digital skills (social media)	1
Commitment	1
Data analysis	1
Teaching skills /Pedagogy	2
Empowered, confident, passionate	2
Volunteering experience	1
Fundraising /Budgeting	2
Project management / Project design	3
Research skills	1
Expertise in a discipline or variety of disciplines/ be able to apply degree knowledge to real world scenarios	5
Strategic thinking	1
Knowledge: Media/Creative; Youth work	1
Challenge: Find new ideas to engage young people	1

Academic Staff/Teaching Fellows/Staff support learning

“What skills, qualities and knowledge do you want students to gain by the end of their course?”

Responses	No of responses
Expertise in a discipline or variety of disciplines/ be able to apply degree knowledge to real world scenarios	8
Communication skills / Interpersonal Skills/Networking Skills/Presentation skills /Listening skills	4
Be autonomous in managing tasks/project	1
Socially conscious, responsible	1
Problem-solving / Entrepreneurial skills / Creativity	2

Time management	1
Team working	2
Resilience	2
Thoughtfulness	2
Research skills	2
Empathy	2
Adaptability	1
Openness	1
Sharing	1

Activity 1b: Group Discussion

“What skills, qualities and knowledge do you think graduates should have to address (local) challenges?”

Response	No of responses
Awareness of local challenges	1
Communication skills /Interpersonal Skills/Networking Skills/Presentation skills /Listening skills	7
Confidence	1
Technical competence in the volunteering sector / Volunteering Experience	3
Be autonomous / Critical thinker	2
Patience	1
Willingness to learn /Passionate	2
Leadership	2
Planning/management / Time management	6
Language skills	1
Data analysis	1
Empathy	2
Research skills / Impact measurement	2
Willingness to commit / Take responsibility	4
Able to take initiative / Self-starting	3
Problem-solving / Entrepreneurial skills / Creativity / Innovation /Resourcefulness	6
Digital/Marketing skills/IT Skills	3
Be reflective	1
Ability to work with people from different backgrounds	1
Ability to write reports	1
Resilience	1
Risk-taker	1
Diversity: Ability to see things from different perspectives	1
Flexibility	2
Fundraising / Write funding applications / Budget management	3

Exercise 2 - Assessment

Exercise 2a: Self-reflection

Students

“How do you like to be assessed? How do you see the role of external partners in your assessment?”

Response	No of references
Coursework than exam-based; more easily integrated with charity organisations/community partners	1
Year abroad projects	1
I would like to know how much external partners will be involved in an assessment/project	2
Potential to take on different roles/responsibilities as you improve/progress	1
Review your progress	1
Greater emphasis on the relevance of volunteering on your HEAR report	1
Acknowledgement of commitment	1
A clear plan before - how much communication/contact?	2
Design research questions together	4
Feedback on projects (formative assessment)	4
Work on a research question with the partner/do volunteering with them	2
Assessing applicability of a project	1
I don't think that a strong formal assessment is necessarily positive; conversations are more important than marks. Encouragement of self-reflection	1
Community partners might be more involved in the division of the assessment rather than the weighting of the assessment itself	1
What the community partner want you to reflect on most from this experience	1
Benefit the community partner and the student	1
I can use my skills and ability and time to help them on their work and they can provide me with chances to join the social events and communicate with others and help me improve myself in all sorts of aspects	1
Assessing through oral/poster presentation	1
Group work exercises/assessments	1
Exams, coursework: Volunteer integrated modules based on the topic of the module	1
Assessed by professors and community partners; grade division between the two 80% - 20%	1

Community Partners

“If you were to collaborate with students on a project as part of their course, what role would you like to have in their assessment, if any?”

Response	No of references
Lead a pre-planned session	1
Set tasks/coursework to give them (incorporate this with the type of sector)	1
Give feedback	2
Assessment with academic staff; not by myself	1
Students to become part of our team/long term partnership	1
Would like to support and advise on their project and give supervision and feedback to students and assessors (academic staff)	1

Academic Staff/Teaching Fellows/Staff support learning

“What do you think is the most beneficial assessment for your students? How do you see the role of community partners in the assessment?”

Response	No of references
Co-design feedback criteria with students, staff and community organisations	2
Feedback on skills /how the project has met the outcomes /formative feedback	3
Feedback on how the community group has benefited/what they have learnt	1
Range of assessments (written: essay, portfolio, report, case studies); oral presentation (individual, group); social media output (blogs etc); other art, animation, comics	2
Role of community partners: discussions to understand what might bring change – useful to inform student projects	1

Exercise 2b - Group Discussion

“What could assessment look like when students and community partners collaborate to ensure benefit for everyone involved?”

Response	No of references
Co-design assessment with communities, students and staff - criteria, skills, work to be done	6
Valuable to co-create projects for developing genuinely impactful projects. Community organisations: not interested in a purely academic project. Co-design from day 1	2

Valuable to co-create modules (liaison between students, staff, community organisations)	1
Community organisations can assess abilities (soft skills) and not discipline-related knowledge as it is out of their expertise	2
Assessment can be about Fail or Pass and not a grading system, especially when collaborating with external partners; it is difficult to establish assessment criteria and there needs to be transparency as to how students get assessed	3
Co-design assessment criteria with community partners and students	2
Mutually beneficial outcomes with feedback / Evaluate what all the parties have learnt	3
Important for the student and the community organisation to form a team and have a longer partnership to ensure impact and for the students to develop soft skills	2
Community organisation - Qualitative feedback, not influence the final grade	2
Equality/ethical and practical considerations in co-design	1
Decolonising the curriculum	1
Align the assessment to meet the different needs	1
More support from UCL to build community capacity; UCL to ensure quality outcomes from the partnership	1
Various assessment types: report for the community organisation, blog, case studies, video diary, funding proposal	2