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# Jisc change agents' network

## Case study

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### UCL digifest: a celebration of staff and student innovation at University College London

#### Sharing innovation across the university

University College London (UCL) is based in central London and has over 36,000 students who come from over 150 countries and over 6,000 academic and research staff.

In November 2014 the university held **UCL digifest** – a five day festival of all things digital comprising 40 individual sessions and ending with an open day to celebrate and showcase the collective achievements of all participants who took part.

*"We wanted to take a different approach and to add something new to the national picture, especially as I see so many interesting projects happening across the university behind closed doors. It seems a shame that these things don't get a broader audience".*

**Janina Dewitz, Innovation Officer, E-learning developments team, UCL.**

The programme was diverse comprising an eclectic mix of workshops, panels and interactive games that were designed to appeal to as broad an audience as possible and reach "more than the usual suspects". Examples of individual sessions include a digital music orchestra workshop, a virtual bird's eye flight experience over a cityscape controlled by body movements, the opportunity to enhance your digital footprint, digital politics, and an environmental design workshop.

#### How UCL digifest came about

UCL digifest was a first for the university, an idea that built on 18 months to two years of research and development which began in 2013. Research student Hana Mori worked with the E-Learning Environments Team at the Information Services Division at UCL to investigate **student digital literacies at UCL** and contribute to strategic conversations. Her findings were that the university didn't necessarily need to do anything new but needed to consolidate and communicate what they already did in a more holistic way to ensure that the digital practice that took place in research areas was more widely accessible across the university.

*"At UCL there is a lot of innovative practice that is not necessarily known throughout the university."*

**Steve Rowett, E-learning developments team leader, UCL.**

UCL's digifest was also partly inspired by Jisc's own 2014 DigiFest, when Steve Rowett, E-learning Developments team leader, realised that staff and students across UCL had many examples of innovative practice to share.

## An equal partnership between staff and students

The underlying principle behind digifest was that of collaboration. It was to be a partnership between staff and students– a bottom-up, 'grass roots' kind of event that engaged and enthused people and a platform to allow students to take part on an equal footing. By creating opportunities for students to lead sessions, the intention was to support the concept of student learning through curriculum and extra curriculum enquiry, to foster a growing understanding of partnership and to explore how staff and students might learn together.

*"The intention was to spark collaboration and ideas between students and staff in a very positive way and to generate ideas shared between both parties."*

Steve Rowett, E-learning developments team leader.

## Making it happen

The e-learning developments team recruited three students over the summer to lead in creating the programme and marketing UCL digifest using social media. An open call was made to staff and students to submit workshop and seminar proposals. This crowd-sourcing approach was supplemented with invitations to participate sent to known projects and research initiatives taking place in individual departments.

Physical and online planning activities were organised and an active Google+ community. A planning meeting held in March 2014 made up of equal numbers of students and staff. Participants at the meeting generated 139 ideas for sessions which were analysed to provide multiple conference themes categorised into four over-arching strands:

- › Activism | Politics | Ethics | Citizenship | Privacy | Security
- › Digital Identity | Digital Professionalism | Digital Footprint
- › Making | Sharing | Collaboration | Creative Commons
- › Learning Technology | Future University

In the end, 40 firm session proposals were received from students and staff, all of which were accepted.

Students were also involved in brainstorming workshop ideas and in the planning, organisation, stage crew and logistics throughout the event. Some of the volunteers also assisted staff to develop materials, turning initial ideas into workable activities likely to appeal to students.

*"A lot of our sessions came from student ideas and students helped out with event planning."*

Hani Samion, Masters Linguistic student, UCL (graduated 2014).

The event was open to students and staff of UCL and bookings for the sessions were taken online using **EventBrite**™. The fifth and final day of UCL digifest 2014 was an open day showcasing the entire event, hosted in a marquee in the main quad.

A Routemaster double-decker bus, also located in the main quad, was used as a 'pop-up' cinema of student produced films hosted by the UCL Film Society. The bus also hosted UCL Advance's **App Lab**, to showcase apps and offer opportunities for digital businesses and the university's students and staff.

## Innovation in action

UCL digifest is just one of a number of initiatives, research projects and public outreach at UCL designed to integrate and embed technology enhanced learning in the curriculum. UCL digifest also closely aligns with the university's **Connected Learning** initiative launched in September 2014 which promotes learning through research and enquiry as a key principle.

The full 2014 **UCL digifest programme** is available to view online but examples of innovative use of technology at UCL include:

### Laptop Orchestra

The Music Systems Engineering Research Team (MuSERT) at UCL held their first **Laptop Orchestra** session at the UCL digifest. Staff and students learned and experimented together before delivering their first performance of a piece written by PhD research student, Christodoulos Aspromallis, using digital instruments and controllers.



### VoxBox

**VoxBox** is an innovative way of gathering feedback and gauging the mood of audiences at events. By sharing the concept others have suggested further potential uses, enabling the prototype to be tested and refined.

### Interactive bus stops

The **Interactive Bus Stop** projects designed by the Department for Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering were UCL's contribution to Transport for London's 2014 'Day of the Bus' and the **musical and the constantly changing bus stops** were designed to stimulate thought about the role of buses in our urban lives.



## Reflecting back on the UCL digifest experience

Feedback on UCL digifest was very positive. The creative ethos of UCL digifest extended to how the success of the event was evaluated and a range of evaluation techniques were used including use of a Google form to gather participant responses where the feedback was algorithmically matched to moods and music in the Spotify catalogue to generate a playlist and an interactive talking photo booth where participants were encouraged to write how they felt about UCL digifest on pieces of paper and have their photo taken.

The students who participated either as part of the festival event team or as leaders of sessions are clear about the benefits of being involved:

*"Taking part in UCL digifest sparked an interest in videography and I am now taking a module on ethnographic and documentary film-making which I am really enjoying. I think I have a much more confident email manner as well as being more confident in talking to groups and people in general."*

Anuka Teggart, Student, UCL.

*All I knew about in relation to technology before UCL digifest was Moodle. I really learned a lot about technology, other digitally related things and the e-learning initiatives that are available. I gained awareness of how technology is used in other departments like the 3D scanning of museum artefacts. I also improved my organisational and communication skills."*

Hani Samion, Masters student, Linguistics, UCL (graduated 2014).

*"I learned a lot about project management, having to manage the initiative from start to finish. I also learned about working as part of a wider project team and managing myself in that team as well as marketing and ticket management."*

Edward Conder, 2nd year Geography student and President of UCL Film Society.

For staff too, there are advantages in promoting research interests to a wider audience and to use the opportunity as a platform for further research and outreach work. The UCL Laptop Orchestra interactive session has since been adapted for year nine students in London schools as part of an engineering series of Saturday morning master classes run by UCL and the Royal Institution.

*"In addition to the value of outreach activities, digifest provided a live learning opportunity as we had to address a whole host of technical issues, set the timings carefully and factor in the rigging and de-rigging aspects and we had never done anything like this at UCL before."*

Dr Nicolas Gold, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computer Science, UCL.

## Emerging impact

The full impact of UCL digifest has yet to emerge but in addition to the active participation of so many participants, early signs of impact include:

- › Participants securing opportunities to work with other departments and on other UCL initiatives
- › The concept of curriculum co-design is being taken forward in at least one academic department
- › UCLOrk (the laptop orchestra) will be performing at the UCL Arts Festival in May 2015
- › A presentation at the UCLU Education conference in February 2015

## Looking to the future

The E-learning developments team very much hope to run further UCL digifest events in the future and are reflecting back on some of the lessons learned from this first experience:

- Student engagement in initiatives like digifest may be transient – some students may have an impact for a period of time, some will stay involved throughout. Be prepared for this and manage succession issues.
- The iterative nature of the project meant that later groups of students sometimes questioned or changed decisions made by earlier groups.
- Despite strong student engagement and use of many different channels of communication it proved difficult to reach the wider student body. Students suffer from email fatigue - more focused approaches may be more successful.
- Getting the message out early is key, especially in the first year.
- Explore having some longer workshops to allow participants to explore a topic in greater detail.
- Advanced room scheduling for such a large event can be difficult but is necessary for marketing and communication purposes.
- Consider allowing a percentage of over-booking to compensate for potential 'no shows'.
- Promote the intrinsic and longer-term benefits of involvement and consider internships and engaging PhD students who are likely to be there for the longer term and have much to offer (including continuity).

Throughout the final showcase day student participants were keen to express what they had learned from their UCL digifest experience, over and above the innovative use of technology and the value of skills development that transcend their subject discipline. This is perhaps best expressed by Professor Anthony Finkelstein in his closing remarks.

*"Events like UCL digifest allow the borderlands between subject disciplines to be investigated and help to build a sense of community and create ecologies of skills"*

Professor Anthony Finkelstein, Professor of Software Systems Engineering and Dean of UCL Faculty of Engineering Sciences.

## Find out more

For further information on UCL digifest please visit the web page at [www.ucligifest.org](http://www.ucligifest.org) or watch the two-minute video '[UCL digifest in a nutshell](#)'.

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You can also find out more about Jisc's work through the [change agent network](#) and see the [recording of the webinar featuring UCL digifest](#) with Steve Rowett and JaninaDewitz as part of the [Jisc change agent network webinar series](#).