Enhancing postgraduate research cultures: co-creation in professional development and educational change programmes

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Introduction

The UCL context:
- Multidisciplinary – 11 Faculties
- Large and complex – 6,000 research students & 13,000 staff
- Geographically disparate – central London + satellites
- Strong history of autonomy & risk taking – i.e. lack of centralisation.

Our roles:
- Academic Development Lead, Organisational Development
- Principal Teaching Fellow, Arena Centre
- Shared interest in developing research students and staff.
As access to doctoral provision is heavily influenced by the type of prior institution, the question is not only who goes on to do a PhD but also where – carrying significant consequences for access and the subsequent experience of pursuing a doctorate.

Pásztor & Wakeling, 2018
[Research] focus should extend beyond [UG] access and transition, to include the exploration of broader research degree and post-doctoral experiences. If students from under-represented groups are given access to postgraduate study, it is essential that they have the same likelihood of success as peers from more privileged backgrounds.

McCulloch & Thomas (2013)
Within a broad and comprehensive training offer, PGRs also given the opportunity to design, develop and deliver their own professional development – learning experiences.

Co-creation & professional development: application, budget management, delivery, evaluation, leadership, networking, visibility.

Criteria – broad and inclusive

Especially focused on enabling those from marginalised groups

Gap analysis for development programmes
Examples of projects from Researcher-led Initiatives

- Networks, writing retreats, training in innovative new software, public engagement

Response to inclusivity:
- Minorities of STEM
- Balancing Act – Maintaining my Identity
- Career development for Women in STEM
- (Workplace Culture – Bootcamp)
- Decolonial Approaches to Scholar Activism

Range of Applicants
- Representative

Mode – direct and grassroots
Students and staff working together to bring about educational change at UCL

Open to students at all levels, with over 200 projects supported since 2014, in 78 depts

Projects could be staff or student initiated

Vehicle for UCL’s strategic objective to work with students as partners to imagine, articulate and initiate improvements to education (UCL Education Strategy, 2016-21)

“Lovely initiative, a flagship for UCL: it makes staff and students work together, improving partnerships between them.” ChangeMakers Student
Examples of projects from UCL ChangeMakers

- IOE Centre for Doctoral Education Mentor Programme
- Inspiring Academics: PhD Career Training
- Shut Up, Write-Up: Doctoral and Early Career Researcher’s Writing Retreat
- Making our Research Visible (staff-initiated)
- An interdisciplinary journal club between LIDo PhD students and undergraduate Natural Sciences students
Examples of projects from UCL ChangeMakers

The A to Z of a PhD: improving informational needs for PGR students at the Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care (IEHC)
Demographics of PhD students taking a ‘lead role’ in UCL ChangeMakers
(Data for 2016/17 & 2017/18 project only)

PGR Lead Project Students:
• 25 in total
• 80% female
• 32% Home / 28% EU / 36% International
Demographics of PhD students taking a ‘lead role’ in Researcher-led Initiatives (Data for 2016/17 & 2017/18 project only)

- PGR Lead Project Students:
  - 19 in total
  - 56% BME
  - 58% Home / 16% EU / 26% International
  - 63% female
Implicit and explicit badging of inclusivity

• One initiative explicitly badged for inclusivity and one didn't,

• RLI = deliberate choice

• What are the early indications here?
  • They reveal similar concerns among PGR student body
  • Institutional citizenship; management skills; governance; sense of belonging
  • Networking; environment; sense of belonging; cultural change... are areas of particular interest
Raising questions

- What does this tell us about marginalised groups in research?
- How much does language matter?
- How to move from an initiative to an embedded part of research culture?
- Do we hold a more objective position away from embattled departmental space?
- What is the potential of these initiatives?
What next?
References


Credits

- We are grateful to Abbie King, UCL ChangeMakers Manager for the data relating to this initiative. For further information about the programme, contact abbie.king@ucl.ac.uk