

# UCL Festival for Digital Health

Festival chair: Patty Kostkova

Events coordinator: Raquel Velho

The UCL Festival for Digital Health (UCL FDH) was a series of events showcasing work in the realm new digital technologies and their intersection with human health and wellbeing. It was held at UCL in June 2014, and was funded by various departments, institutions and organisations (for a full list, please visit our website). There were two full weeks, with a total of nine events, and we have learnt many lessons with this experience which we would like to share with anyone else considering organising something similar.



## UCL Festival for Digital Health Top Tips for UCL Festivals

The UCL FDH ran 20th June – 3 July 2014. It aimed to showcase the work of UCL academics (staff and students alike) involved in the world of digital health, and to provide them with opportunities to meet colleagues from academia, both from UCL and beyond, as well as network with professionals from the industry and healthcare sectors.

We organised a large range of events, from a full-day workshop on Global Public Health to our Student Conference and Competition, from Speed-Networking at our opening ceremony to closed roundtable discussions on Opendata for Healthcare. Various models were explored, some of which were criticised (the closed roundtable debate, particularly due to the topic on-hand, was perceived as particularly ironic), and some of which can be tweaked. Nevertheless, both Dr Patty Kostkova (the festival chair) and Raquel Velho (the events coordinator) gathered some tips to be shared.

- 1. Estates and catering:** It's no secret that prime real estate in UCL is becoming harder to come by as our numbers within the university expand and the number of buildings stagnates. Getting in touch with Estates and telling them your exact requirements as early as possible is an absolute must. This also means telling them whether or not you will be providing catering, and then ensuring that you are well-acquainted with the spaces you have booked in terms of logistical requirements. Walking participants between the event venue and the catering venue was necessary on a couple of occasions but created additional logistical headache (for example, our experience with hosting an event in the Cruciform Building in a downstairs lecture theatre while the café was located 2 floors above caused delays at every catering break and was detrimental to discussions and networking, thus was not deemed an ideal venue). Do not forget that UCL Estates does not permit catering in lecture theatre!
- 2. Planning Networking sessions:** Networking was one of the major aims of the Festival which we met beyond all expectations with a number of receptions continuing well beyond the initially scheduled time. We suggest allowing for an extra hour or two after an official/structured networking session to allow catering and security to be prepared and appropriately staffed.
- 3. Organising committee and helping hands:** The FDH was delivered by nine event leads responsible for each particular event who defined the scientific content, invited

speakers and assisted with promotion. The overall coordination was provided by an events coordinator who kept everything (and everyone) on track. We followed the advice from the UCLoo Festival recommending to hire a project manager (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/public-engagement/casestudies/FotP/UCLoo>). However, Raquel Velho is a full-time PhD student, meaning that at one point she felt that the UCL FDH was taking over her academic life. We recommend that future event chairs consider hiring someone who can, around a month or two before the event, work full-time on it, and not feel encumbered by the various requirements to keep such a large-scale event on track. We recommend to hire the coordinator on a part-time basis at least 6 months in advance. We also recommend hiring student helpers for separate events, particularly those with over 50 attendants predicted. Our student helpers were invaluable for running events smoothly.

4. The power of (combined) media: While the FDH website ([www.fdh.ucl.ac.uk](http://www.fdh.ucl.ac.uk)) was useful for detailed information and schedule, social media is the word of the day. We used Twitter to publicise the events, promote calls for submissions and high profile speakers. Learning how to deal with hashtags and mentions is a great way for getting people involved. However, Twitter is a single platform. We recommend using other platforms, as well as other media, to get the word out about your event, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. However, beware of posters and flyers – economically, they can get pricey; environmentally, they are questionable. Some posters in eye-catching areas of campus should do the trick. Communications coordination across Faculties, UCL, Events and UCL Partners did not prove to be straightforward either. However, in the process a master mailing list was created while the FDH website attracted many sign-ups – this fulfilled the aim to identify interest in digital health at UCL and beyond making it easy to engage with interested parties in the future. Also, more active and structured promotion outside of UCL would be beneficial: engagement of the healthcare sector beyond UCL Partners and wider involvement of industry/MedTech/start-ups would increase the outreach of the event.
5. Registration and catering. As FDH was free to attend we experienced about 50-60% show-up rate in comparison with the Eventbrite sign-ups. Further, for longer events (half a day etc), only about 50% sign-up participants actually stayed for the networking reception. This should be taken in to account when ordering catering.
6. Use the resources available at UCL: There are countless people at UCL who have accumulated vats of knowledge on how to put on a successful event. We looked to those who had more experience to help us in our own work, and they definitely provided us with insight. If you are not sure where to start, asking your department's administrator for help is a good hint, or even a search through your faculty staff for people involved in past event organisation.
7. Students engagement: engaging with students interested in digital health across UCL was a mammoth task as there were no easy-to-use mailing lists or contact points beyond personal and professional links of the events organisers. Scheduling the Festival student activities during term time (although these might differ across UCL, between part-time and full-time programmes, etc) will increase participation, in particular, among undergraduate students. Co-organising with existing student competitions and activities run by departments would further simplify the planning. Further, screening PDF "posters" on screen(s) in major foyers rather than running a traditional poster session with poster boards could be considered, while scheduling all

student events on the same day (the FDH poster display ran for 3 days before the Student conference) would further simplify the logistics.

8. Less can be more: The UCL FDH was huge. It involved over 70 speakers, and totalled over 500 attendants. In the future, we may thematise to particular areas of digital health. Concentrating efforts on shorter events could reduce the overhead and prove to be more beneficial for the event organisers and participants.

If you have any questions about these tips, please don't hesitate to contact the team: Patty Kostkova, Computer Science; and Raquel Velho, Science and Technology Studies.