

Shared Training and Employment Programme (STEP) 2019-2020

Final Report



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Introduction

This report will reflect on my, Mohammed Rahman's, 8 month experience as a trainee at UCL Culture through STEP (Shared Training and Employment Programme). My placement at UCL Culture was with the exhibitions and engagement teams and spanned from November 2019-June 2020. I will be completing the rest of my STEP placement at Foundation for Future London (FFL) from June 2020-November 2020.

What is STEP?

STEP is a programme run by Create Jobs and Creative Access which provides paid traineeships and professional development for young east Londoners entering the arts and culture sector over the course of a year (November 2019- November 2020). Candidates must be aged 18-30 and from the Olympic boroughs of Newham, Waltham Forest, Hackney and Tower Hamlets. STEP offers placements at the institutions moving to the East Bank cultural quarter in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Stratford- many placements are split between two organisations across the year. UCL is among these institutions with the planned opening of the UCL East campus in 2022.

This year's STEP cohort (2019-2020) consists of 14 trainees with placements across the following organisations:

BBC Proms	Bow Arts	Foundation for Future London
Stratford Circus and Arts Centre	Prettybird	3 Mills Studios
London College of Fashion	UCL	V&A Museum
East London Dance	Worldwide FM	

The professional development side of STEP includes a series of masterclasses run by Creative Access in partnership with leading organisations in the cultural sector such as Channel 4 News and Facebook. In addition to this Create Jobs runs skills workshops such as CV surgeries, goal setting and LinkedIn guidance as well as periodic check-ins for pastoral support. On top of this, STEP trainees are provided an industry mentor through Creative Access who is matched based on their interests- for example, my mentor this year has been Natalie Chen, a book cover editor for Hodder & Stoughton.

A key aspect of the programme is the fact that the experience is shared across the cohort with socials to build a support network between the young east Londoners. There is also a collaborative brief to produce The Great Get Together 2020, an annual community festival founded by the Jo Cox Foundation and held in the Stratford Olympic Park, which has sadly been cancelled this year due to the covid-19 outbreak.

My background and why I applied

In 2018, I graduated from SOAS, University of London where I received a BA in Social Anthropology. In the years that followed I have been developing my skills as a visual artist and writer as well as pursuing a career in the cultural sector, specifically with museums.

I have been involved in two other Create Jobs-run programmes in 2019. The first of this *Creativity Works: Arts Festival Leaders* (Spring 2019) in which I helped produce the 'I Am At' arts festival for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and a Tate Late event with Tate Modern. The second was *STEP into the Smithsonian* programme co-run by Create Jobs and London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), which took place in May-June 2019 and allowed young east Londoners an insight into the Smithsonian through an intensive series of talks, meetings and tours in

Washington D.C. I have a lot of faith in Create Jobs' frankly life-changing programmes! I had also gained experience in youth-work with National Citizen Service (NCS) and volunteering with the children at the Karaserbes Roma settlement, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina for two years with my college, United World College in Mostar. I feel strongly about involving the local community in the planning and workforce of East Bank and believes more opportunities like STEP should be available.

I applied to the Community Engagement and Exhibitions STEP role at UCL Culture for several reasons:

- 1) I hoped the longer term placement compared to my previous experiences would allow me to form deeper working relationships with colleagues, mentors and partners at a world-class institution and learn best practice from them.
- 2) Being an east Londoner myself I am interested in the development of east London and am keen to provide a local perspective to the organisation.
- 3) I was drawn to UCL Culture's interdisciplinary approach and being in a variety of roles, which I thought would be good to gain some perspective, seeing as I am at an early point in my career.
- 4) I wanted the experience of full-time work as I had not had this before and come from a background where this is particularly valued i.e. growing up with parents who were unemployed for large portions of my life, being the first generation in my family to go to university.
- 5) I wanted to improve my IT literacy and be supported in learning new skills.
- 6) I wanted to improve my professional development so I would be better adjusted to workplace culture and better equipped for future roles.

My Roles at UCL

Overview

My job title at UCL Culture was Engagement and Exhibitions Associate and my main work was with east London schools engagement outreach, and planning and installing exhibitions on campus. Towards the end of my placement- there was a 2 month extension in light of the Covid-19 outbreak- I undertook more communications-based roles: posting weekly engagement blogs and working on the user experience of the blog itself.

My experience was a lot more complex and varied than the work listed above, having undertaken numerous training courses, one-on-one meetings within the department and across departments and socials. On top of this, I undertook a number of one-off jobs for additional experience outside of my formal remit for example, creating contact databases, events facilitation, photo-editing and reviewing funding applications. This has given me an immense amount of experience and perspective in a relatively short space of time. One thing I really enjoyed about my placement was the amount of crossover these types of work had: making e-flyers for the "Make An Impression II" exhibition, which was based on artwork created by pupils in the engagement workshops, unified my exhibitions, engagement and communications work all in one task. I feel as though my practice was better informed as a result of applying these transferable skills from different areas of my role, i.e.

applying accessibility awareness gained from my exhibitions role during a label-making ICT workshop on a school outreach. I gained a lot from working with collections and researchers given the sheer diversity of subject matter I was exposed to- from primate skeletal structures at the animal movement schools workshop in the Grant Museum, to helping plan and install an exhibition on modern pottery techniques from Thailand, Nepal and Palestine in the Cloisters. This was a very rewarding aspect of the role for me.



Engagement

The Engagement aspect of my placement was managed by Emma Bryant, Schools Engagement Manager at UCL Culture. Over my placement I co-facilitated 8 schools outreach sessions (4 on campus, 4 off campus). The off-campus outreaches consisted of several printmaking outreaches with Slade Alumni at east London schools and sixth forms and an ICT accessible label design workshop at a primary school. The outreaches on campus included a printmaking day at the UCL Art Museum and Slade, as well as a bio-robotics, animal movement and label making workshops at the Grant Museum of Zoology.

I was involved with liaising with schools, alumni, MA students and BA students at UCL who were involved in running outreach workshops. I also organised with various members of staff including technicians and tutors at the Slade School of Fine Art with regards to the printmaking project which was great as I got a glimpse into their roles.

I undertook numerous admin roles such as preparing materials for outreach sessions, inputting evaluation data onto the system, creating session plans, liaising with teachers, maintaining project planning documents, obtaining permissions and photographing sessions. Before a printmaking outreach, I prepared the portable printmaking studio, which essentially is a press, scribes, and materials that fit into a large suitcase, topping up materials between outreaches and taking on feedback for example cutting larger plate sizes. As a practicing artist, preparing the materials for the printmaking workshops was beneficial as it gave me an insight into paper, pigment and plate types. Facilitating the outreaches was also very valuable as I gained an insight into the techniques involved in intaglio and chine-collé printmaking- skills I myself was learning for the first time.

One of the most rewarding parts of the experience and of my placement so far has been working with colleges and schools from east London. I often sense a good rapport between myself and the pupils, being young east Londoners, and it felt good to know that by virtue of representation I had helped make higher education and employment appear like more of an option in the minds of the pupils. Though I've been to university, I come from the same underrepresented demographics as many of the pupils and understand higher education's many obstacles and the life-changing power of role models. I think a great part of the STEP placement at UCL Culture is that it provides young east Londoners like myself a platform to be a part of the engagement in our own communities.



Exhibitions

The Exhibitions aspect of my placement was managed by Darren Stevens, Exhibitions Manager at UCL Culture. Over my placement I helped produce and install 10 exhibitions and permanent displays (7 temporary exhibitions, 3 permanent displays) across the UCL Bloomsbury campus and its museums. These include the case graphics for Jeremy Bentham's auto-icon in the Student Centre, a permanent display in the Petrie Museum's entrance, the graphics in the Object-Based Learning Lab, and the Witnessing Terror exhibition in the UCL Art Museum as well as numerous other temporary exhibitions in the Cloisters. This involved hanging, agreeing on arrangements, creating mounts, framing artworks and resurfacing panels.

In addition to this I was also involved in the planning stages of 6 exhibitions, including an upcoming exhibition addressing UCL's Eugenics Inquiry in the Octagon. This involved participating in meetings between artists, researchers and the exhibitions manager. During these meetings, I was given the space to ask questions, and felt as though my contributions were valued.

I gained many practical skills and much knowledge of materials along the way, which as a practicing artist was something I valued greatly from this aspect of my placement. I used various hand tools such as drills, tab guns, glue guns, Stanley knives, spirit levels and paint rollers. As we worked to exhibit many different media, I gained a knowledge of various wall fixings, adhesives, colour-matching, frames and mount materials. I was keen on the problem solving and mental maths involved in this which improved over my time on placement. I was given plenty of support and guidance when using new techniques.

I was also involved in the maintenance of ongoing exhibitions for instance adding edited labels, changing display case monitors and removing damaged work. In addition to this, I also produced large print accessible texts for 2 exhibitions at the Grant Museum and UCL Art Museum.

I also gained experience in writing exhibition panel text, as well as designing various to-scale displays, graphics and exhibitions panels using Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop, to UCL Culture brand specifications. Towards the end of my role, during the covid-19 outbreak, my work also included digitising work, liaising with UCL's in-house web design team, researching other online exhibitions and producing my own online exhibition.



Communications

The communications aspect of my placement was managed by Briony Fleming, Community Engagement Manager at UCL Culture. Over my placement I have posted 8 blog posts and have written 4 blog posts of my own. I have worked to a content plan to release a weekly post on the engagement blog which I have then promoted through Twitter and emailing relevant faculties.

I also collaborated with fellow STEP trainee Caroline Francis in creating a plan to improve the user experience of the UCL Engagement blog. I learnt how to use a WordPress blog for the first time and Twitter for the first time in a professional capacity as I tweeted to publicise new blog posts through Tweetdeck. I have also created 2 E-flyers for events, using Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop to UCL Culture brand specifications. For these and the blogs above, I used photographs I had taken and/or edited from my outreaches.

Training

Over the course of my placement I have undergone numerous training modules, some mandatory but many self-chosen or recommended by my managers. These include:

- GDPR Online Training
- Diversity in the Workplace Online Training
- Safety Induction Online Training
- Unconscious Bias Online Training
- Information Security Online Training
- Freedom of Information Online Training
- Environmental Awareness Online Training
- Prevent Duty Online Training
- Object Moving Training
- Stress Management Training
- Accessibility Awareness Training
- Evac Chair Training
- Podcasting Made Easy
- Creating Accessible Word Documents
- Excel Tips and Tricks



Miscellaneous experiences

Some of the other miscellaneous but nonetheless relevant experiences I have undertaken:

- Edited photos for UCL Art Museum's communications.
- Recorded and edited video of a schools workshop on Premiere Pro.
- Facilitated a matchmaking event for the 'Trellis' programme which connects researchers and artists.
- Evaluated 2 Train and Engage funding applications against funding criteria.
- Compiled a database of east London creative sector freelancers.
- Met with the Special Collections team at the Institute of Education Library to find out more about their work.
- Attended a BA crit (a tutor-led group discussion of student artwork) at the Slade.

Highlights

Make An Impression II

Throughout my time at UCL I co-produced and co-curated the 'Make An Impression II' project, a continuation of the 'Make An Impression' project Edinam Edem-Jordjie, the STEP trainee from 2018-19 at UCL Culture founded with Emma Bryant which combines schools outreach with exhibitions. This three part outreach programme involves inviting east London schools and colleges onto campus to get a first-hand insight into life at UCL, and then making intaglio and chine-collé prints during outreaches led by Slade alumni at the schools. The pupils are then invited to UCL to see their exhibited works.

Curating this project spanned my entire placement and included a dizzying plethora of tasks:

- Photographing sessions
- Writing and designing exhibition panels on Adobe Illustrator
- Creating and maintaining a Microsoft Excel project plan with actions and timescales
- Organising project meetings
- Booking spaces through the central UCL system
- Facilitating outreaches at schools
- Running evaluation sessions
- Preparing materials for the outreaches which would feature in the final works
- Recording and applying feedback for subsequent sessions
- Liaising with schools
- Circulating e-flyers
- Maintaining an inventory of prints
- Creating a timetable for a crit and opening event
- Digitising prints and cleaning them on Adobe Photoshop
- Researching other online exhibitions and making a digital outline
- Working with CAM (Communications and Marketing) and ISD (Information Services Desk) to produce an online exhibition

I felt like the wide scope of my involvement on this project really pushed me and helped me develop a myriad of transferrable skills organically. Taking on so much responsibility over a prolonged period

of time has also given me a great deal of confidence. I was given a great deal of support and independence throughout the process.

I particularly enjoyed the printmaking outreaches as it was very rewarding to connect with the pupils and watch their printmaking skills grow under the instruction of the masterful Slade alumni. The pupils at participating schools and colleges were very engaged and created some really impressive work.

As a working class east Londoner myself, engagement programmes are especially important to me as I know first-hand how systemic barriers can make it difficult to get into and stay in higher education and the creative sector. In an economic climate of cuts to the culture sector and increasingly privatised education, the stigma against getting a degree in the arts is at an all-time high. It's been an inspiring opportunity to challenge that stigma and be on the forefront of uplifting the youth from my own community through this programme as well as creating an entire exhibition.

Due to the covid-19 outbreak, considerable aspects of this programme were restructured and cancelled. While difficult, this experience has been incredibly valuable to me as I have had to rise to the challenge and learn new skills on the go. I had no previous experience in web design, so thinking about user experience and formatting images and text for web has been incredibly eye-opening. I had also developed many transferrable skills throughout my placement, such as photo and text editing, liaising with others and accessibility awareness that I was able to apply during this project. I am pleased with the end result and have gained a great deal of confidence in my abilities.

Jeremy Bentham Move

I was involved in the historical moving of Jeremy Bentham's auto-icon on February 20th 2020. After many decades in the South Cloisters, Bentham's remains were moved to the new student centre. I assisted the installation of the case graphic, bug traps and monitors in his new case as well as serving as a runner between the teams involved and to pick up materials and tools from the workshop. It was a very well-oiled operation and I felt honoured to be included in the briefings and undertaking of this task.

Producing Witnessing Terror: French Revolutionary Prints, 1792-94.

I was involved in the production of *Witnessing Terror: French Revolutionary Prints 1792-94*, a temporary exhibition at UCL Art Museum. I worked closely with exhibitions manager Darren Stevens and curator Andrea Frederickson, as well as the collections team over several weeks. Producing this included many practical tasks of varying nature, from formatting labels and colour matching, to framing and hanging works. I really enjoyed the on-the-job learning, as well as understanding the role of a curator better and learning about the history and media of the artworks exhibited. It was also very rewarding to attend the opening event which many showed up to.

Challenges, learning and recommendations

While I have gained and learnt a great deal, my time at UCL has also had its challenges. Many of these stem from UCL being a non-diverse workplace and the attitudes, assumptions and values that come with that. In addition to this there have been several logistical barriers regarding payroll and access as well as the fact that my placement coincided with the inherently difficult covid-19 outbreak and lockdown.

I have been part of a number of conversations about evaluation, reflection, and being honest about what has not worked as well as what has. I hope that these observations and recommendations can be considered to action meaningful change for future STEP trainees and UCL as well as UCL Culture as a department.

Inclusion and privilege

UCL as a whole, and UCL Culture specifically are overwhelmingly White and elitist, with poor representation of BAME, working-class and young people across its workforce. It has been alienating to work in an environment where people who look like me are almost exclusively employed as cleaning staff, buildings maintenance and catering. As a young, working-class, person of colour I have often felt erased and abnormal through the attitudes of some members of the team and the lack of address and consequent normalisation of privilege in the workplace i.e. affluence and Whiteness.

Through my time at UCL I have become more aware of the work being done around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The rhetoric from the most senior figures indicates that it recognises it needs to change, and while my presence in the workplace via the STEP programme is a part of this, I feel as though UC'Ls measures are still to some extent tokenistic. At UCL Culture, there seems to be a reluctance in taking risks for positive departmental change or challenging problematic behaviours. Issues of inclusion (specifically around working-class and BAME representation) often feel like the elephant in the room and there is no mention of how privilege benefits members of the team and its role in enabling marginality.

While discussions and mandatory training around inclusion, diversity and widening participation centre protected characteristics and marginality, they miss half of the picture if they do not address privilege and charge it with its due responsibilities. Staff at UCL, both academic and professional services, must be more active in these discussions as it currently falls on those who are most othered to explain and educate. Projects, meetings or conversations should actively acknowledge the privilege and power in the room, and who is not included. UCL needs to be bolder in how it moves forward to become more inclusive. I think UCL Culture, especially as a more public-facing faculty, should lead by example rather than waiting for senior institutional management to make changes.

Attitudes and space for discussion

I have experienced many interactions at my time in UCL where the person I was talking to asserted their opinion on an issue in an absolute or condescending manner. I have also been shut down when discussing aspects of my own lived experience, my community work outside of UCL as well as issues

such as colonial history. This is micro-aggressive behaviour compounds the sense of erasure experienced by people like me who are visibly underrepresented at UCL.

While these silencing attitudes are not held across the board, I feel there is little space to challenge marginalising thoughts, behaviours and systematic processes of social injustice in general. As a result, I have found discussions on certain topics reductive and reactionary and have found myself in many degrading interactions where there was pressure to frame thoughts and feelings in a solely positive light despite them being actively harmful towards me beyond the realm of discussion. I felt like when issues that were affecting me and my community were brought up, we were spoken about as vague abstractions instead of people with our own agency, nuance and internal diversity.

Being one of the most junior members of the team, the balance of power has always sat with the person enacting micro-aggressive behaviours; they were generally older, had more experience, were a permanent member of staff, or more senior. The weight of challenging these attitudes falls on the person with least power when instead it should be the greater responsibility of people with more power to safeguard others in the workplace.

If UCL claims to be a world-class and historically progressive institution, there should be safe, non-judgemental space for outrage, challenge and critique. These issues are not just confined to work-related meetings but are also present in informal conversations. UCL should reflect on actions and steps it can take to create inclusive spaces, where opinions, feelings and experiences can be shared and meaningfully learnt from. This needs to be implemented both in formal training (i.e: on micro-aggressions and their impact) as well as in office culture.

Responsibility and discomfort

The main office I worked in was open plan and often busy- there were few private spaces which were at a premium. While this was beneficial in the sense that I interacted with many colleagues more often, it was challenging as conversations could often be overheard. In my time I heard comments that I found hugely problematic, including dismissive comments on cultural appropriation, and language which I consider to be paternalistic and micro-aggressive. This was uncomfortable in itself, but it was compounded by the fact that no-one else in the office challenged the comments and attitudes. While it may have been that others simply did not hear, this was indistinguishable from complicity where I felt that others validated these comments with accepting silence. As a result, I felt less able to speak out, and rarely spoke about aspects of my life which I felt would be unfairly judged in the office.

I feel as though there needs to be more of a culture of taking risks in challenging problematic comments and behaviours- it seems that the discomfort of addressing these issues takes priority over the longer-term lived discomfort of people experiencing issues first-hand. I feel like staff at UCL would benefit hugely from training in this area, both how to spot and challenge micro-aggressions, but also in how to be an ally for less represented colleagues. Everyone has a different lived experience, and it is important to forego assumptions and check in with people around what they need and how they feel. As I mentioned before, whilst one may be discussing an issue abstractly (e.g: effects of Covid-19 on BAME communities), others may be living the issue day-to-day.

Access

Throughout my placement I have had issues with accessing buildings on campus using my associate staff card. While this was not so much an issue in the main building, it was prevalent on campus where I often worked. This resulted in me often being locked outside of buildings or having to frequently ring buzzers despite working at the buildings for months e.g.: the Petrie Museum, the student centre, Grant Museum and the OBL. Not only was this inconvenient for my work, but it also re-emphasised my different status as associate staff which felt exclusionary. I also initially had trouble getting access to Creative Cloud as well as administrative access to the UCL Engagement Blog.

During my time at UCL Culture, I experienced various inconveniences with my pay. Before MyHR was introduced, I had persistent trouble accessing payslips which were mailed to me in paper form and which mostly came after chasing up HR. Once a payslip arrived at my address without an envelope, which was alarming in terms of data protection. Even after this, I encountered an issue with late pay in February 2020 which I was only informed at the end of the month, and in person. From April-May 2020, I also had to undergo a lengthy process navigating reimbursement for auto-enrolment onto a pension scheme despite not opting into the SAUL pension scheme when initially signing my contract.

Lockdown

Covid-19, lockdown and three months of working from home were incredibly challenging for me in terms of mental health, time perception and motivation. Sitting in front of a screen for hours also took a physical toll. Due to the hands-on aspects of exhibitions and engagement work, working from home was a drastic shift in the pace of life and content of work, especially towards the very end of my placement where increasing numbers of the team were put on furlough and several projects were put on pause.

What I will take from this

Due to the massively varied experience, I feel as though I have left this placement much better informed of potential career trajectories I hadn't fully considered before and with a wealth of contacts. Working alongside curators, researchers, museum visitor services, installation contractors, engagement and programmes managers I have mostly been able to freely ask about a huge variety of jobs that go into running a cultural institution. What is more is I have worked alongside people on all levels, across many areas who have largely been incredibly skilful, generous and welcoming.

Over the course of my traineeship I have improved my IT literacy, using a broad range of software I have rarely if ever used in a professional setting such as Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Teams, Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop. I have also used several kinds of software for the first time such as Premiere Pro and Wordpress. I feel better equipped and more confident with learning new software in the future.

Working full time at a large institution gave me the experience of getting to know the Bloomsbury area and a whole labyrinth of UCL buildings which was incredibly rewarding. What is more is grasping a very complex organisational structure and the links between a dizzying number of departments was a massive learning curve, but one that will no doubt come in handy in the future. There is so much on offer at UCL, the real challenge is filtering it out.

Since this is my first experience of full time work, I also gained a good footing of the administrative side of keeping a work calendar, booking annual leave and accessing wellbeing resources. Since I

normally have several projects and freelance work on the go outside of my job, this was a great learning experience in terms of getting the most out of everything while also maintaining a good work/life balance.

Getting to know the sheer variety of work UCL Culture is doing, I simultaneously understand that it is doing amazing work in the community and also has a long way to go in terms of learning and sensitive engagement with east London communities. I have a better understanding of how UCL Culture operates, the engagement programmes it offers and what institutional change is being effected from within for it to become more inclusive and accountable moving forward.

Special thanks

Briony Fleming for being my guide through this experience and making such a life-changing programme possible. I couldn't have done it without her much appreciated honesty, consideration, integrity and evergreen sense of humour.

Darren Stevens for his incredible patience, skill, attitude to his work and fun facts- I'll be forever in awe of his ability to juggle a million projects and still have time for coffee!

Emma Bryant for accepting me onto the programme, illustrating the need for conscious engagement and putting so much trust in me.

The Engagement team for being incredibly welcoming, especially the departmental Public Engagement Team for their incredible energy.

The Museums and Programmes team, especially the Public Programming team for being exceptionally kind to me.

The Collections team, in particular Lucy Waitt and Ignacio 'Nacho' Echeverria Faccin for sharing their skills and humour with me and being very patient.

Isobel Napier, Nia Fekri, Mataio Austin-Dean and Taylor Jack Smith of the Slade present and past for being so welcoming, motivated and a pleasure to work with.

The Museum Visitor Services team for being a pleasure to work alongside.

All of the pupils, teachers, artists and researchers I have learnt so much from on my placement.