



Driving Digital Transformation: How UCL is Building a Data-First Culture

Through its partnership with Cambridge Spark, UCL has successfully fostered a data-first culture, enrolling **70+ staff members** across multiple technical disciplines. In doing so, they have successfully replaced manual workflows with automated, **high-impact** processes & unlocked **significant operational ROI**.



£1-2 million

In annual savings made more accessible.

L3 & beyond

Multi-disciplinary growth pathways.

70+ Learners

Enrolled since 2023.



Client Profile

University College London (UCL) is a world-leading multidisciplinary university with a community of more than 50,000 students and over 18,000 staff. Consistently ranked in the global top 10, UCL is dedicated to driving innovation and excellence. Through its "Making UCL Work Better" strategy, the institution is focused on streamlining operations and empowering its professional services staff to deliver world-class support for research and education.

The UCL Data Apprenticeship Journey

At the heart of UCL's mission is a commitment to innovation, not just in research, but in how the institution itself operates.

In 2023, UCL launched a strategic partnership with Cambridge Spark to transform its administrative and operational backbone through data and AI upskilling.

Through Data & AI Apprenticeships, UCL empowered its workforce to move beyond legacy processes. With **over 70 staff members** already enrolled across a massive breadth of technical disciplines, and more cohorts launched in early 2026, UCL is rapidly building a sophisticated, internal data community.

Strategic Alignment: Making UCL Work Better

The Data Apprenticeship Programmes are a vital pillar of UCL's strategic approach to skills development. Rather than treating data literacy as an isolated skill, UCL has integrated these programmes to directly support its mission of becoming a **more efficient, data-driven organisation**.

As Martin Howell, Director of Data & Insight, highlights, these apprenticeships are essential for fulfilling specific skill gaps and ensuring the university is prepared for the future of AI and digital transformation.

"Data apprenticeships are directly making UCL a better place to work by making UCL work better. It is a vital part of our strategic approach to investing in our staff."

Martin Howells, Director of Data & Insight
University College London



"I was able to build a benchmarking tool that identified roughly a million to two million of annual savings that were previously found through an extremely laborious manual process now accessible in minutes of running the code."

Jack Anannd, Senior Commercial Analyst
University College London

Measurable ROI: Productivity and Profitability

The transition from theory to practice is a defining feature of the partnership. Learners are not just gaining qualifications; they are actively applying new skills in **Python, SQL, and data visualisation** to their daily roles. This hands-on approach has led to tangible improvements in how teams function, moving from manual, time-consuming data processes to automated, high-impact workflows that drive real organisational ROI - including cutting data-merging tasks in half and building benchmarking tools that **identify £1–2 million in annual savings.**



“Its reduced significantly the amount of time I spend merging data, which used to be a big part of my job. I would say I've cut that down at least by half if not by more.”

Alison Sidebottom, Degree Apprenticeship Manager
University College London

A Culture of Support and Diverse Growth

With further cohorts launching in 2026, the momentum at UCL shows no signs of slowing. The programme has moved beyond individual learning to become a collective movement, fostering a culture where staff feel supported by both their managers and the wider UCL community.

UCL has fostered an environment where staff from all backgrounds, regardless of their starting point, can thrive in a data-driven world. The programmes celebrate a diverse range of learner journeys, from those returning to learning after years in the workforce to those mastering advanced AI specialisms. This growth is made possible through a robust support network involving line managers and a collaborative peer community.



[Read more at CambridgeSpark.com](https://www.cambridge.org/9781107688519)