

UCL and IBM Cloud address COVID-19 challenges

To tackle the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, UCL and IBM have collaborated to create the IBM Industry Exchange Network (IBM IXN). This educational partnership aims to develop an experimental program to enable students in the UK and beyond to work on proof of concept research and development projects using IBM technologies.

In the face of the brutal impact of COVID-19, schools and universities have had to adapt their curricula rapidly to offer online teaching. The IBM IXN program, a collaboration between UCL's Industry Exchange Network (UCL IXN) and IBM, aims to support this new way of learning for students in the UK and across the world. To disrupt mentoring and other programs that would have traditionally taken place face to face, the online IBM Acclaim tutorials are being tested so that students can be mentored and upskill in AI and Cloud online.

The IBM Academic Initiative offers university students free access to IBM products, allowing them to get 'hands-on' with the technology and develop projects as part of their course. By following this program, a student does not need to go to class to learn – the only things needed are an internet connection

and a laptop.

Having been a partner of the [UCL IXN education programme](#) for almost a decade, this new IBM IXN initiative will allow IBM technologies to reach a number of universities in the UK on high visibility project requirements.

One of the latest UCL IXN proof of concepts that uses [IBM Watson Assistant](#) and Watson Speech services is a customised, immersive social experience to help the users, such as the elderly, feel less socially isolated. This proof of concept is especially timely given the current strict social distancing rules that have been put into place amid the COVID-19 pandemic, where the general population, including the elderly, may increasingly be socially isolated.

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“Closing the gap on the technology skills shortage is one of the most important issues of our time. We need to ensure students are fully equipped with the

right technical and professional skills to participate and flourish in this digital economy. Through this new collaboration, we will work closely with UCL to ensure curricula aligns with industry needs and trends, and ensure students are equally prepared for life and a career beyond their degree.” – Naguib Attia, Vice-President of Global University Programs, IBM

Dr Dean Mohamedally and Dr Graham Roberts, the UCL IXN creators have open-sourced all methods and practices for other universities to join and operate their own IXNs. This will enable schools and universities to create a strategic network of problem-solving learning models and collaboration opportunities for all industry sectors. Several IBM partner universities are already a part of this UK government recognised teaching methodology.

“Being able to offer our students as much as we possibly can, beyond academic learning, is our top priority. From an industry perspective, this new IBM programme will enable students to develop the next generation of prototypes supporting their interoperability, efficiency and innovation streams with IBM technologies and partnerships. The students will gain by using technology that helps to shape and develop their innovation, creativity and inspiration in problem-solving for real user needs. We are incredibly excited to be working with IBM to

help equip our students with the skills they need to go on to change the world around them. We hope to see many students publish their work through this programme.” – Dr Mohamedally at UCL

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