Why do we need a digital palette?

1. Accessibility

We should be lead by accessibility and we have a legal obligation to ensure our digital products meet the minimum obligations. The current UCL brand colour palette has a number of colour options which do not meet the minimum requirements for WCAG 2.1 standards and there are limited pairing options, within the existing set of colours.

2. Repeatability

UCL, in 2022, has a very large digital estate with a huge array of touch points, from the main UCL website and apps, through to digital signage and externally developed applications/products. Where these have been based on the existing palette, designers and developers have needed to make ad-hoc decisions to change colours to try to increase contrast. In addition to this, the wide array in screen types, which vary in quality, means that some of these colours can appear quite different from one screen to the next. Whilst this is inevitable to some degree, we should strive to limit the amount of hue shift across all touch points and strengthen our visual identity.

3. Reduction in overhead

The existing brand palette is vast. This creates additional overhead when developing and maintaining colour options across the digital estate and adds little value to the user. This can also cause confusion and additional decision requirements for editors and stakeholders.

4. It is time to refine

The existing brand palette was created almost two decades ago. It was focused on print being the largest consumer and initially didn't consider digital requirements. Although it has been revisited since the initial conception, this has been more about inclusion of additional colours (such as IOE Blue), rather than refining existing colours and ensuring it is still fit for purpose.

What are the challenges?

1. Balance

We need enough options to keep users of systems happy but without becoming overwhelming. The options have to be lead by accessibility, logic and colour theory.

2. One UCL is still a big UCL

We want to project 'one UCL' through our digital estate but we still need to be able to demonstrate our diversity and scale.
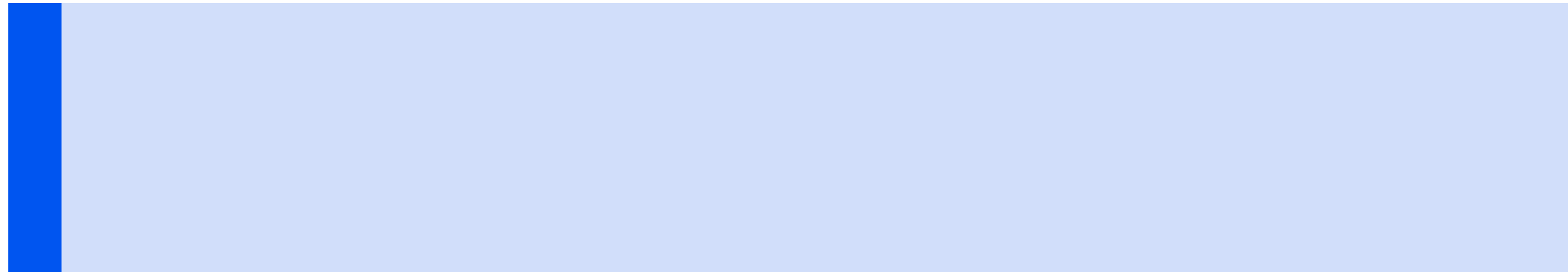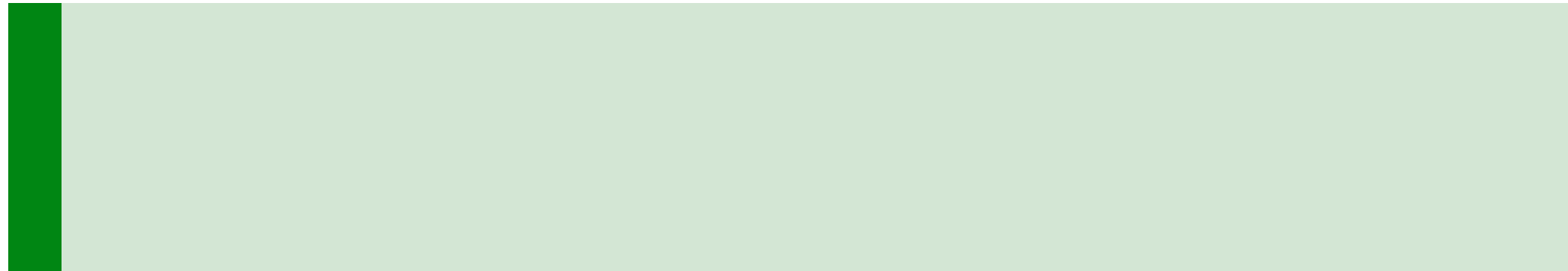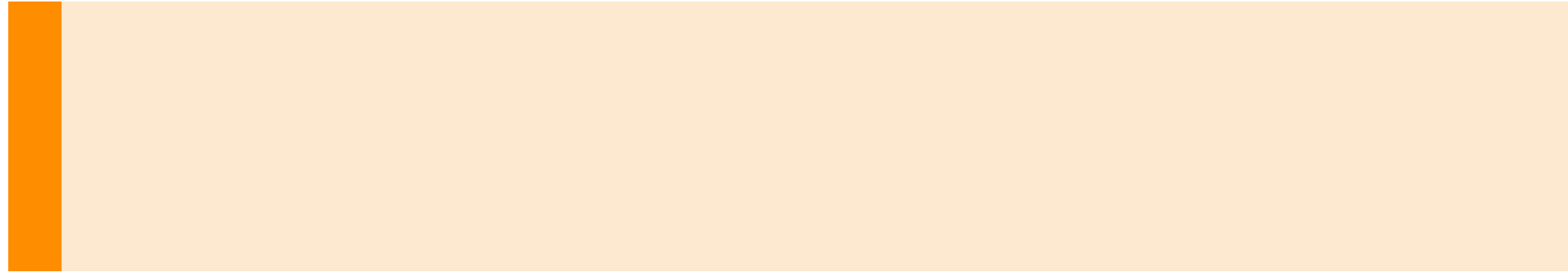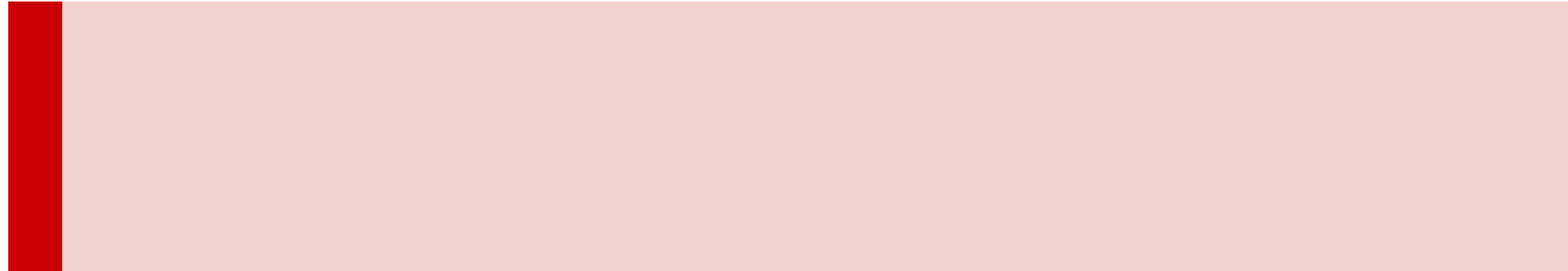
3. Historical marriages

Some institutions feel wedded to particular colours. It is inevitable that we will encounter difficult conversations as to why specific colours are not within scope of the project.

4. The system rules

We have four "system colours" which need to be protected. These are used for utility messaging and are required to stand-out from the content within the page - for example; bright red is used to alert the user to a failure message.

Our system colours

#0055f0

Information

#008613

Success

#ff8d00

Warning

#ca0007

Failure

ⓘ Alert message – Information

⚠ Alert message – Warning

✓ Alert message – Success

✕ Alert message – Failure

These are the system (or sometimes referred to as 'utility') colours that communicate purpose. They help users convey messages. For example, green has a positive connotation and we use it to convey a success or confirmation message. These colours need to stand-out from the content as they represent something which the user needs to do, or is in relation to something they have done.

Full UCL palette

Digital sub-palette

We have reduced the palette by removing hues close to our system colours and then further reduced by current usage across the digital estate to refine down to 15 colours with the addition of black & white. IOE Blue (identified by the pink outline) is still represented until a further decision is made around this. UCL Mid Purple and Blue Celeste are protected, as these are the UCL core brand colours.

Colours suggested for adjustment

UCL Grey

UCL Bright Green

UCL Dark Red

UCL Bright Blue

UCL Yellow

To achieve better accessibility pairing options (with other colours within the palette), improve contrast ratios, increase vibrancy and provide the best palette range with consistency, it is necessary to adjust some of the options for the digital estate.
The original "print" version is shown by the slash on the top left, the revised "digital" hue represented by the main part of the swatch.

Proposed digital sub-palette

DARK

VIBRANT

MUTED

MONOTONE SET

Grey

Bright green

Blue Celeste*

80% black

Black

Dark red

Bright pink

Light green

60% black

White

Dark blue

Yellow

Light blue

40% black

Dark purple

Mid purple*

Light purple

20% black

Mid blue

Bright blue

Stone

10% black

The groupings of dark, vibrant and muted will provide a large range of accessible pairings, flexibility and should address the majority of user needs. We also feel it provides the most longevity and will remain contemporary through the use of selective pairings.

Also shown is the suggested monotone range, these greys are used for backgrounds when defining areas on websites and form elements etc.

*Denotes core brand colour used in graduations etc

Outliers

Bartlett

Purple — Convert to mid purple

Turquoise — Convert to bright blue

IOE

IOE blue
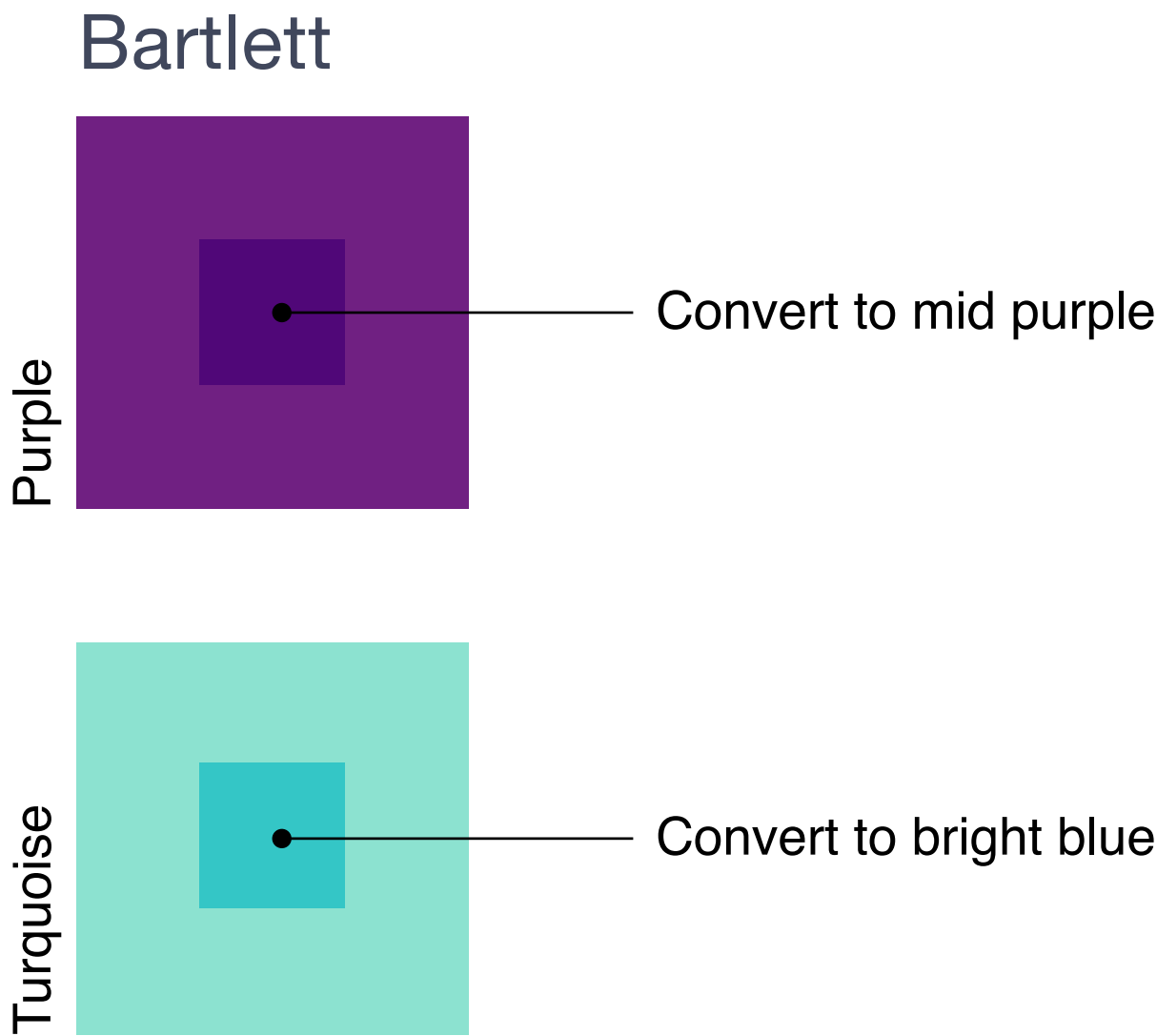
Bartlett have requested the purple and turquoise from their 100 campaign.
These are not from the UCL palette, but we hope they might be open to
converting to the UCL mid purple and the adjusted UCL bright blue.
IOE still use their own blue which came over when they joined UCL.
We need to decide if future versions of the UCL website still honours
this blue, or if they should transition to the core palette.

DARK	VIBRANT	MUTED
Grey	Bright green	Blue Celeste
Dark red	Bright pink	Light green
Dark blue	Yellow	Light blue
Dark purple	Mid purple	Light purple
Mid blue	Bright blue	Stone

Accessible pairings

The above illustrates the large number of accessible colour pairings we can pull from the suggested palette. This is based on a minimum WCAG 2.1 AA rating with small/normal text. In a vast amount of cases we go further and achieve a AAA rating. There is a full technical document showing the outputs and individual WCAG 2.1 ratings available.