



PGT Summer Activities Insights

Background

Commissioned by the University of Bristol Library Services, the R&I team asked PGT students who will be staying in Bristol over summer what activities, support and spaces they would like to see from the Library Services during this time, and how to reach as many students as possible with their offerings. 12 University of Bristol PGT students from a range of demographics and backgrounds participated across three one-hour focus groups in April.

Key Takeaways

- Most students plan to **study on campus during the working day from Monday-Friday** over the summer, with a minority using evenings and weekends to study.
- Students will mostly be using **quiet spaces in the libraries, followed by cafes and other spaces across campus**. Working power outlets, monitors and comfortable seating, as well as ensuring access to cheap food and drink are important within spaces.
- **Students expressed interest in activities to boost community feel** over summer, specifically surrounding studying and employment, including: workshops, short “lock-ins”, drop-in events, socials, networking and free coffee mornings/lunches.
- For a summer campaign, students felt timely **emails and Instagram posts with simple ways to sign up to consistent weekly/monthly activities** would reach most students. They felt the messaging should focus on study/career support and creating community.

Recommendations

1. Create consistency in **study space availability and opening/closing times**, accommodating for a range of different PGT study schedules and effectively **communicating this to students**.
2. **Support students with a range of needs to study comfortably** through the availability of different working environments, good working equipment, comfortable desk spaces and seating, enough space, and access to food, drinks and microwaves.
3. **Increase PGT sense of belonging and community** through events and activities that strike a balance between studying and careers, with having fun and socialising.
4. **Send out weekly or monthly activity calendar/timetables** with sufficient notice via email and Instagram, containing easy ways to sign-up and get involved.
5. Consider repetition of **activities and events on a weekly/monthly basis** to increase familiarity for students, and **focus on providing incentives** such as free food or coffee.

Themes and Insights

Summer Study Schedules

The majority hoped to adopt a consistent **“9-5” Monday to Friday study routine** working on campus, before returning home at around 6-7pm. Most planned to use evenings and weekends to work part/full-time jobs, rest, socialise, travel, do life chores or urgent work.

I’m a very 9-5 worker, I pretend it’s like a job or I go crazy... I go to campus for that, it’s what I do over the academic year and might be similar over the summer. There’s hours where I’ll go to lunch or take the morning out for a run, but I’ll go to campus. I mix up which library I go to.

Every Saturday I try to travel somewhere, exploring with friends. Sunday is fully relaxation.

I’m planning to do dissertation work in the morning at home, and then after lunch I’ll go to campus... I need a change of scenery.

A minority said they preferred **working in the evenings/nights**, either because this is when they are most productive, or because they work full time. As such, they felt having at least **one study space open later or 24/7 would be useful**, but acknowledged this may not be possible due to resource shortages. Regardless of this, students agreed **consistency over opening times** of summer study spaces and effective communication of these is important. They suggested having this information all in one easily accessible place, or announcing it via social media.

I want them to be consistent, or clear... I think some of them have different times and I don’t know if there’s a central space that tells you when they are open.

I know the opening times will be different, I know I can’t do late nights in the library. It’s not a problem to me but I know a lot of other students may benefit from having extended hours.

Study Locations and Spaces

To optimise productivity, the majority said they plan to study in **libraries mostly, followed by cafes (on campus or external) and other spaces in Senate House and the Richmond building**, and finally at home.

*“
Everywhere I can be
(classrooms, study spaces,
libraries), I will be.
”*

*“
I have a long time to work on it (their
dissertation), I don't feel the need to
stay in the library all the time.
”*

Whether students choose to study in **quieter or louder environments depended partly on personal preference** as well as the **type of work they are undertaking**. For example, for more focused work which requires a lot of concentration or tight deadlines, students may opt for quiet or silent study spaces such as libraries. While for less focused, group work or more social studying, they might work in louder spaces such as cafes, group meeting rooms, or social spaces on campus.

*“
I like that the ASSL where there are places
where it's just studying quietly, and others
where there is socialising and a place to
take a break from my work.
”*

*“
The library can be stressful because it is
quiet (as in silence) ... so I like using the
social spaces in Senate/Richmond Building. I
like to have a bit of space to spread out a bit.
”*

Within study spaces themselves, discussion centred around **equipment optimisation and comfort to make studying for longer periods easier**. This included ensuring there are enough working power outlets, comfortable seating, large enough desks, enough/dual monitors and “booths” for meetings.

Students also highlighted the importance of **light environments, with access to green spaces** where they can take breaks or meet friends. **Access to cheap food, drinks and water refills** were also mentioned, whether through vending and coffee machines for convenience, or ensuring there are enough microwaves to heat packed lunch.

*“
Sometimes you go somewhere and
there's no power, and it's so
frustrating because you have to
move somewhere else.
”*

*“
I know digital pods are very limited, there's
only 3 in the ASSL... But it's nice because it
is very quiet. Also, a place with light, so it
doesn't feel so depressing...
”*

Community Feel and Activities

Most students view the **libraries primarily as study spaces** rather than for structured activities, but value them as places to either congregate with friends and initiate socialising over lunch, or facilitate spontaneous chats. However, students agreed that **campus becomes very quiet over holiday periods**, with societies inactive and fewer friends around. Due to this reduced sense of belonging, students expressed **appetite for more of a community feel** during these times.

It's weird... it goes from being busy and then it just drops off in June ... There's essentially no one and it's very odd. ... There's a shift from the libraries being full to it being completely empty.

I see the library as a study space but it's nice to see other people beside you studying. If it was completely silent, I couldn't focus.

Students emphasised that **wellbeing support**, and **career advice in particular, was an important service to provide over summer**. They suggested provision of careers-based activities such as: CV writing support, 1-1 career advice, networking, focus on grad jobs, job application “lock-ins” and domestic and international job support.

I would absolutely make time for the external events that the Careers Service supports, such as networking events or conferences (industry specific, etc.).

I prefer CV writing support, maybe someone can guide me one-to-one and give detailed advice to polish the CV.

Students also suggested putting on **academic-focused activities with networking elements** where they could connect, study and socialise or discuss dissertations and exchange ideas. Suggestions included: shorter group study “lock-in” style drop ins, dissertation workshops, writing retreats, writing skills sessions, library coffee mornings or lunches, social events on Fridays. Having these **activities online or in-person is a trade off between convenience and engagement**. Teaching/lecture focused activities may be better online, attracting greater numbers, whereas networking style events may be more effective in-person.

Fridays people seem to be in a jolly mood... I think people would come for something fun over the summer.

I don't want to do that (study lock-in events) because it's committing for a whole day... I want a thing where I can dip in or dip out. Something a bit shorter but more often... even if you aren't chatting with people, being able to be near other people is nice.

Optimising Reach

Campaign name ideas were scarce but included: “**PGT Students: Activate Your Summer**”, “**Summer is for Postgrads**” and “**Here For You**”. Opinions on campaign messaging centred around letting students know support or spaces are still available, dissertation or careers support, creating community and connection, not being alone, wellbeing, work-life balance, and having fun in Bristol while studying.

Students agreed social media (**mainly Instagram**) and **email would be the most effective marketing channels**, followed by posters. Most agreed that sending out timely weekly or monthly “**What’s on this week for Postgrads...**” **style guides/calendars in Instagram posts and emails, which include a combination of photos and text would be the most effective marketing strategy**. They stressed the need to ensure the call to action is as simple as possible, such as simply adding an event to their outlook calendars or following links to short registrations of interest or sign-up forms.

“A calendar for each month would be awesome. People like to plan when to visit home etc. and might not want to miss out.”

“I’m pretty good at seeing the events (when advertised), but it’s more about the time that it was advertised and the time the event is. The problem is that events are advertised sometimes too late to make the accommodations to be able to go.”

Students emphasised the need for **consistency and repetition of activities** on a regular weekly/monthly basis so they can familiarise themselves with the events and form connections with the other students. They also discussed the importance of **providing plenty of notice and how far simple incentives can go towards increasing attendance**, such as making activities cheap or free and providing free snacks, food or coffee.

“I notice that everyone will go if free food is available...”

“A few things done well, rather than loads of stuff.”