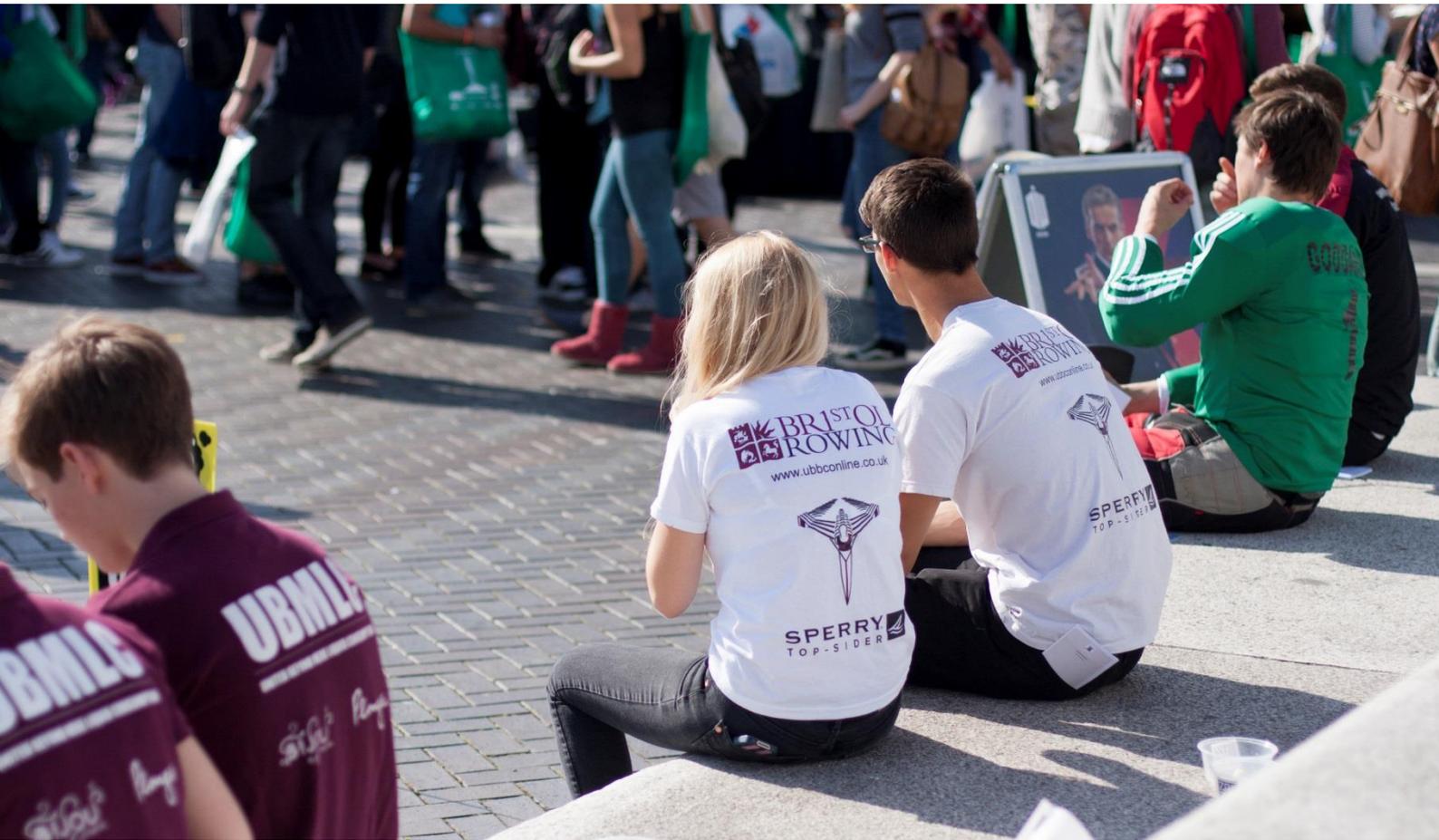


Engaging Postgraduate Students

Bristol SU Groups



BRISTOL SU
the best student life

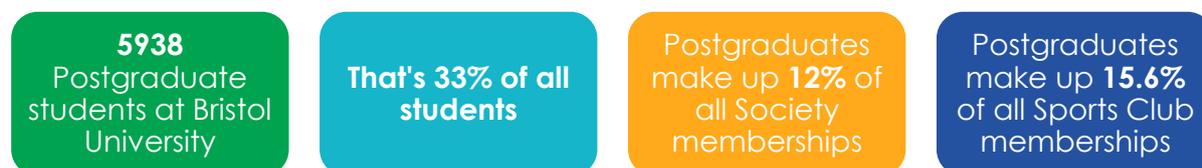


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Introduction to Postgraduate Students at the University of Bristol

Key Facts (at 2 February 2015):



Understanding key differences between postgraduate students

PGT Students

PGT stands for Postgraduate Taught and refers largely to students on a Taught Master's programme

- Most PGT students will spend one or two years at Bristol
- For the most part they will have deadlines and exams in a similar way to undergrad study
- PGT students mainly work in small seminar or tutor groups
- PGT teaching and study continues over the summer holidays

PGR Students

PGR stands for Postgraduate Research and refers to students undertaking a Research Master's, MPhil or PhD

- Most PGR students will spend a much longer time at Bristol
- For the majority of PGR students, their study is a full-time, 9-5 job
- PGR students mainly work alone with a supervisor

Additionally, postgraduate students are more likely to



This means that however much postgraduates do want to take part in student activities, their timetables and other commitments can sometimes make it difficult for them to get involved with everything. As a committee, understanding this will go a long way with your postgraduate members.

To find out how many postgraduates were involved with your group in 2014-15, contact bristolsu-development@bristol.ac.uk

What do Postgraduates bring to your group?

Postgraduates, by their very nature, have already completed an undergraduate degree, meaning that they have experienced university life before. This can benefit you and your group in a number of ways.

Previous Committee Experience

Your members may have been involved in activities as an undergrad and so have a wealth of relevant experience

Different Perspective

Students may have studied at a different University and will have fresh ideas and experiences to share with you

Useful Contacts

Perhaps your postgraduate members are on friendly terms with staff in your department and can introduce you

Life Experience

Although not in every case, postgraduate students tend to be older than undergraduates, and so can bring a completely new dynamic to your group

Common Barriers to Postgraduate Students

Many barriers that stop postgraduate students getting involved with student groups are often the same at a lot of universities. To work out how to make your group accessible to all students, it can be useful to work out exactly what it is that can stop people getting involved in the first place.

Case Studies from PGT students around the UK

"There were special postgrad evenings and some events aimed at us, but they were quite few and far between and I could never make them."

"I never had the time to go to the Freshers tent or anything, I had full day workshops all of the first week.

I didn't get any kind of welcome literature from the University or Union, all my correspondence was from my department."

"All of the postgrad only events were evenings, so it was the commute. Having been an integral part of an amazing society at undergrad, I didn't fancy starting again.

Also, only being there for 1 year (and less for other people) I didn't really see the need."

"Postgrad courses are often structured differently time-wise, so I had residential courses and things.

If you have to be committed to be in the club, there's just no doing it. I can't see how you would ever be competitively engaged in a sport and go to training and matches."

"My commute meant that I couldn't come in during the evenings just for a club if I didn't have a lecture in the afternoon.

Also, I had so much extra stuff on for presentations and meetings that often I couldn't make the times for society meetings"

"I was in no way engaged, I didn't really make any friends and all I wanted to do was get off campus most of the time.

It was mostly circumstance and I had so much work to do. I know that the postgrads living in the city were much more sociable with one another - as to whether they were in societies and stuff though I'm not sure."

As mentioned above, PGR students often have a 9-5 approach to their work, and with more years to spend in Bristol, perhaps feel they have the time to get involved.

"I never found out about Freshers or anything. Then when I joined the choir I didn't even really enjoy the first few weeks so I left and then came back.

Coming back was the best decision I made, though I'm still not quite sure what made me do it. Afterwards it was easy to stay because I got a feel for how things worked and I ended up as President of the society two years later. With dance, I probably did it because my friends were going too. So I think in a way word of mouth got me into societies. But I had to work for it."

Identifying Barriers

From the above statements and the key differences between postgraduate students and undergraduates outlined previously, we can make a list of things that might put students off joining groups.

- Lack of time
- Too much academic work
- Job commitments
- Caring responsibilities
- Worry about committing to fixtures, meetings, matches etc
- Not knowing anyone else
- Financial restraints
- Commuting
- Lack of knowledge about opportunities
- Cultural/Language barriers
- Feeling out of place with younger undergrads

It will be useful to keep all these concerns in mind whilst working through the rest of the tool kit.

Chinese Students & Scholars Association: Top Postgraduate Group

"The reason why they [postgraduate CSSA members] appear not to be enthusiastic about joining other societies may be that they have never tried that before and not sure whether it is the right choice (what if it isn't?) - or what is expected (what if they are not good at this and others are experts, what if it will make them embarrassed?). Well, it might sound weird, but indeed it is their concern."

Reaching Postgraduate Students

As demonstrated previously, you can't ever assume that postgraduate students will have been to the Welcome Fair, found student groups on the Bristol SU website, or know anything about the 300+ student groups.

This means you will have to put a bit of effort into reaching them!

Postgraduate Network

The Postgraduate Network is Bristol SU's student-led network for all things postgraduate. It seeks to develop an active, strong and vibrant postgraduate community at Bristol, inspires postgraduate students to get involved in organising and attending social events, and provides a platform through which students can effectively feed into and influence the decision-making and priority-setting of Bristol SU and the University of Bristol.

The bottom line, is that the Postgraduate Network can help you reach students who may not have heard of your activity before. They can help you with:

Advertising
your events on
the PG
Network
Facebook
page

Collaborating
with your
group to
organise joint
events

Sense-
checking your
ideas
alongside the
Development
Team

Promoting
benefits of
getting
involved with
student groups
to their
members

To get in touch with the Network, contact bristolsu-pgnetwork@bristol.ac.uk, and remember, the Network can help you engage with Postgraduates, but it is your responsibility to make your new members feel welcome.

Ju Jitsu: Top Postgraduate Group

*"We do try to make any postgraduates feel equally welcome as anyone else who wants to join.
- I think our close knit social life is the key to making postgraduates come back - they feel more inclined to stay as they want to remain part of our club's social life as they have made good friends at our club."*

Some advice from Ben Hudson, Vice-Chair of the Network:

"Actively promote ALL activities and events to postgraduates as well as undergrads"

Linking up with Departments

This is particularly useful for Academic societies. Set up a meeting with a member of staff to see how you can help one another in the coming year.

See if a member of staff can send a department wide email on your behalf

Collaborate with your department in co-hosting talks or events

Organise to do a shout out for your group in postgraduate lectures

Put posters advertising your group/ events on departmental notice boards

The more you can get your department on-side, the more likely they are to sign-post students towards your group. Make sure staff have your contact details, a calendar of your events and a link to your social media.

DinoSoc: Top Postgraduate Group

"As a department, Earth Science is fairly small with about 350 undergraduates and around 40 masters students, so each year is fairly close knit. I think this helps with the postgraduate membership.

- I have also found that having frequent research talks and allowing members to present work has encouraged postgraduates to join in.*
- Advertising to the incoming postgraduates separately can also help. They have their own induction days separate to freshers where going and meeting them in person would be very beneficial."*

Bristol Doctoral College

The BDC supports all postgraduate students working towards a postgraduate research degree such as a PhD, EngD, DDS, EdD, DEdPsy, DSocSci, MPhil, MLitt or MMus. PGR students can get advice and guidance with everything from University policies to personal development and well-being.

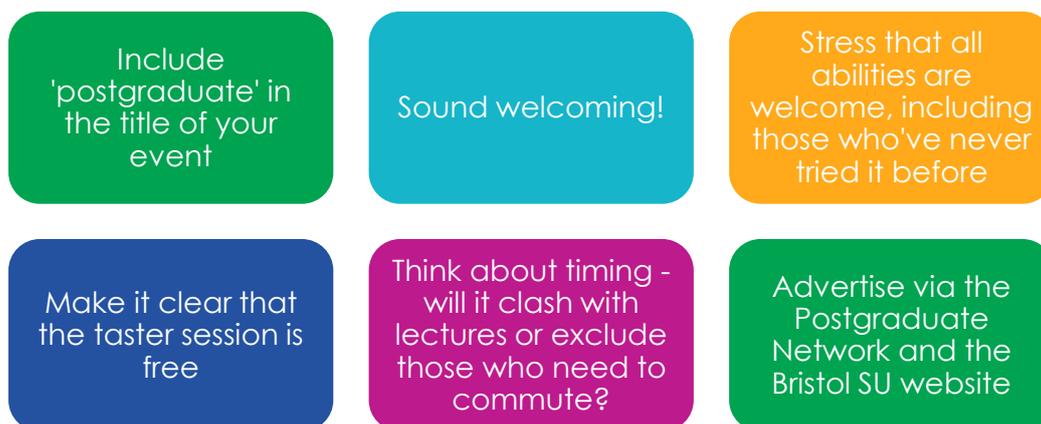
The BDC are keen to collaborate on events with groups looking to engage postgraduate students, and have a regular newsletter which may be open to advertising your group's opportunities.

The Bristol Doctoral College can be contacted at doctoral-college@bristol.ac.uk.

Postgraduate-targeted Taster Sessions

Bristol SU's research has shown that many postgraduates are under the misconception that they will be not welcome alongside undergraduates at events. As well as making sure to be extra-welcoming and friendly, Bristol SU has found that running targeted sessions massively raises postgraduate engagement.

Taster session checklist



Taster sessions are a great way to let people try out your activities in a pressure-free environment, but remember that your end game is for these students to feel confident in joining your regular sessions.

Athletics and Cross Country: Top Postgraduate Group

"We run regular sessions which are aimed at students who may have inhibitions about joining the team - including postgrads, international students, new students, those who are new to sport and those who lack confidence in their ability.

- Hopefully the course will boost the confidence of these runners to the point where they feel they can join the club, at which point we will be there to welcome them."

When organising your sessions, remember this excellent piece of advice about misconceptions from Tom Phipps, your Union Affairs officer:

"Not all postgraduates like cheese and wine events!"

Removing Barriers to Postgraduate Engagement

Removing barriers which get in the way of students participating in your group is all about understanding what stops people getting involved in the first place. Remind yourself of the barriers that face postgraduates on pages 3-4.

Time and Commitment

As discussed earlier, postgraduates traditionally have a lot more demands on their time than undergraduates, including timetabling, work, caring responsibilities and commutes.

The ten sports clubs with the highest percentage of postgraduate members in the year 2014-15 only included one team sport, which backs up the idea that postgraduates have concerns about committing to activities where their lack of time might let others down.

Riding: Top Postgraduate Group

"Due to the nature of the sport, it is quite accessible as timings are very flexible.

- I find that a lot of the postgrad students email me before signing up for lessons as the times when they are free tend to be much more specific than for our undergrad members, so they want to make sure that their requirements are plausible before buying membership.

- When sorting out lessons, we will usually place them first so that we know that their requirements are met. "

To try and remove these worries, discuss the following with your committee - thinking about different ways to approach commitment will help you become more flexible.

- What is the minimum time commitment necessary to participate in your activity?
- Can your sport introduce a casual membership?
- Could you organise a postgraduate intramural team with training and fixtures at a suitable time?
- If students can't commit to a team/ensemble/group is there still the opportunity to participate socially?
- Do you clarify exactly how much commitment is needed? It may be less than people are expecting.

Many postgraduate students could be put off by BUCS commitments on Wednesday afternoons.

- Do you have other matches, leagues or events during the rest of the week?
- Do you advertise this?

Orienteering: Top Postgraduate Group

"In competition terms it is an individual sport but it is also very sociable, with lots of weekends away. Therefore it is probably easier to continue with than say a team sport, where you might become close to your original team and the idea of joining one at a different university (and trying out with all the freshers!) could be less appealing."

Variety of Events

It comes up in all student group training, but the important of planning a variety of events at a variety of times can't be underestimated when it comes to catering for everyone.

A new postgraduate student on the Bristol SU Facebook page:

"Hey, I'm a new PG student starting this September. Will there be a 'freshers week' for PG students or can we just tag along with the UG students to their parties? Also, does the SU organise other things except club nights during freshers week? I just can't stand a week of hangovers..."

Athletics and Cross Country: Top Postgraduate Group

"While there are many in the club who enjoy an inebriated evening on the town, there is never any pressure to drink on socials.

- We have specific casual and non-drinking socials (laser quest, go karting, bowling etc.)
- The culture is very much friendly, fitness and fun. I think postgrads appreciate the opportunity to get to get to know people in this way"

Explorers: Top Postgraduate Group

"We are not a society which advertises itself as a 'drinking'/'clubbing' society but more of a pub quiz/pub social group. I think this would probably to appeal to postgrads.

- I would suggest that looking at the social calendar for a society is definitely the best place to start in order to attract more postgrads. "

DinoSoc: *"My top tip would be to have a variety of events - not just nights out"*

Have a go at filling out the table below with ideas for a variety of socials and events.

Type of Event	Time of Day	Pros	Cons
Coffee Group (PhotoSoc have weekly trips to Boston Tea Party)	Any!	Low-cost Can be run by one committee member	A larger group can be difficult to sit together and get involved with
Table Tennis Tournament	Afternoon	Most people have played before Fun!	Competitive nature could put shy students off
Reading Group	Early evening	Can be adapted to any theme Stress-free and quiet	Requires ongoing commitment and preparation
Bowling	Evening	Low-pressure Encourages bonding	Intimidating to get into teams with strangers
....
....
....
....
....
....
....

Be nice!

As simple as it sounds, being nice and inclusive really is key to making people feel welcome and accepted in your group. This is especially important for postgraduates who might be worried that all student group activity is aimed at undergraduates.

- Take the time to talk to people who look interested but unsure
- If someone tells you they're a postgraduate, make it clear you're pleased they've come along
- Introduce your postgraduate members to each other

Tell people what they need to know

If your group welcomes all abilities, tell people!

Volleyball: Top Postgraduate Group

"A bonus with volleyball is it's really easy to pick up and we offer something for all ranges of abilities!"

Athletics and Cross Country: Top Postgraduate Group

"We never turn anyone away from training or competitions. If you want to run with us you can! It could be this obvious inclusivity that makes postgrads feel more comfortable in joining our club."

Ju Jitsu: Top Postgraduate Group

"Martial arts like jitsu are easy to pick up at any time, its a skill as well as good exercise."

Table Tennis: Top Postgraduate Group

"I think we get high numbers because Table Tennis is a sport everyone has tried at some point, recreationally or competitively."

Other things you may want to include on your promotional material:

- Make it explicit that postgraduates are welcome. Literally say 'we welcome both postgraduate and undergraduate members'
- If the commitment needed is low, specify this!
- Details the costs of your activity and any equipment needed
- Include contact details and make it clear you welcome any questions

Retention of Postgraduate Members

So you've been very welcoming, removed barriers, successfully introduced lots of postgraduates to your activity and everyone's having a great time – how do you now make sure your new members want to stay?

Running Events Throughout the Year

Postgraduate students often live in Bristol year-round rather than just during term time - PGT students especially continue their courses over the summer. Bristol also has a very high retention rate over the holidays, with many undergraduate students staying in the city after terms ends.

With this in mind, if you know that your members are still around, keep organising! Training sessions or big socials might not work with a smaller membership, but you can still make the most of all the Bristol has to offer as a group – go bowling, meet for coffee, have a BBQ.

If you decide to do this, make sure you **advertise** that you'll still be around in the summer. Talk to your members, ask them what they'd like to see from the group over the holidays. The Postgraduate Network can really help you here, as they also have a summer programme of events.

Postgraduates on Committee

Although we've discussed the various time commitments that Postgraduate students are likely to face, this doesn't always apply to all PGT and PGR students. Some postgraduates are more likely than others to have the time and interest in being part of a committee – for example the PG Network committee are all postgraduate students! If someone is passionate about being an integral part of something they love, odds are that they will make time for it.

This applies to committee positions in your group, so make it clear that postgrads are **eligible** and **encouraged** to stand. Perhaps you'll want to introduce a Postgraduate Officer position to your committee, to make sure you always consider a wider range of students when making your decisions.

Responsibilities of a Postgraduate Officer could include:



Postgraduate-branded Events

As mentioned earlier, targeted sessions have a high success rate among Postgraduates. There's nothing like an event saying 'Postgraduate training' to let Postgraduate students know that they're welcome!

Try not to worry about excluding your undergraduate students – you're not being exclusive, you're just trying to create a space to make your postgraduate members feel valued and accepted.

Postgraduate Social!

"Come along and meet other Postgraduate members"

Postgraduate Training Session!

"Missed a few training sessions due to timetabling issues? Catch up together next week!"

Postgraduate Forum!

"Let us know your thoughts - come along for a coffee and a chat about how we can better cater for postgraduates"

Postgraduate Community

If you know you have a number of postgraduate members, take the time to introduce them to each other. Knowing that other people are having a similar experience to you can be really reassuring when you're participating in a group activity.

Volleyball: Top Postgraduate Group

"We tend to target postgrads we know and ask them to invite their postgrad friends along. In my opinion postgrads tend to gravitate toward each other so if you have a few members early on you can then ask them to encourage more to come along!"

Ju Jitsu: Top Postgraduate Group

"I think postgrads feel welcome as we have a good mix of undergrads and postgrads"

Hot Air Ballooning: Top Postgraduate Group

"As pilots of the balloon have to commit minimum of 4 years to (2 training years and 2 flying), they often persuade their friends into the society."

Ben Hudson, Vice-Chair of the Postgraduate Network on collaboration:

"The PG Network is keen to collaborate, coordinate and work with societies that are particularly keen on having postgraduates involved in their groups, plus those who have a large postgraduate membership already."

Planning Checklist

This document has provided you with the knowledge and tools to make your student group more accessible to postgraduate students. Use the checklist below to see how much you can do to welcome postgraduates into your group.

We'd love to hear how you get on, and any other ideas you have about how to make your groups even better for your postgraduate members.

Action	Thoughts	Complete?
Sense-check your activity for potential barriers		
Contact the PG Network and BDC to introduce yourselves and outline your plans		
Meet with your department to discuss promotion		
Create targeted promotional materials		
Hold postgraduate taster sessions		
Introduce different levels of commitment		
Look at the schedule and timing of your events		
Hold a variety of socials!		
Hold events throughout the summer		
Create a postgraduate rep committee position		
Make yourself aware of your postgraduate members and introduce them to each other		
Invite your postgraduate members to a feedback session		

For further information please contact bristolsu-development@bristol.ac.uk