

Framework of BDC support for PGR clubs and networks

1 Background

Enabling PGR students to develop and lead networks, disciplinary groups and community-building is vital to ensuring they feel a sense of belonging at Bristol; and that opportunities to connect feel inclusive, authentic and relevant to our students.

For PGR students, there is a gap in existing provision. Staff Community Networks are not generally open to PGRs' or are necessarily appropriate i.e. it can be difficult to 'relate' to the other members & meetings are often infrequent. Bristol SU networks are predominantly attended by taught students. Several PGR-led networks and clubs exist, but as these have grown organically, support for these is inconsistent and it's not always clear where they should go for help and guidance.

We appreciate the time and energy that network leads give to supporting underrepresented or marginalised identity groups. This not only benefits the student community but also the university as an institution and it is important that this is recognised.

For this reason, the Bristol Doctoral College is introducing a framework to support a defined number of PGR-led clubs and networks. This ensures that networks and clubs are well supported and resourced; that we are supporting an inclusive range of groups; and that PGRs will consistently have opportunities to meet and connect into the future.

This framework sets out how the BDC will support these groups, as well as the expectations on PGR-led clubs and networks to receive support. A joint framework is provided as both clubs and networks are important to our community, however, we recognise that there are some differing needs between these two groups so some additional support is available to network leads.

This framework will take effect from the start of 2026/27 academic year and replaces an informal arrangement with varying support and budget provided to certain groups. Existing clubs and networks, including the Be More Empowered for Success PGR Programme will be given the option to move into the new model, providing they meet the criteria laid out in the framework. New leads will need to be identified if existing leads do not plan to continue.

1.1 What is a PGR Club?

- Open to PGRs of all disciplines
- Focused on a particular interest, activity, or hobby.
- Student-led
- Please note: Sports clubs are not eligible, as BDC are not best placed to provide support for these in terms of venue, running costs or equipment. Research or disciplinary related activity is also not eligible.

1.2 What is a PGR Network?

- Open to PGRs of all disciplines
- Focussed on creating community for students from a particular identity group or protected characteristic
- Usually student-led

1.3 What should clubs and networks do?

- Clubs and networks supported by the BDC will be expected to foster community through in-person and/or online events and networking activities.
- Activities should be as inclusive as is possible and considerate to the range of students who might want to access them (but with sensitivity to particular needs of identity groups). A minimum of 4 events per year is required to receive BDC support but whilst leads are welcomed to run more, there is no obligation to do so. (see section 2 for details on limitations)

1.4 What is outside of the role network lead?

- Leads are not expected to represent PGR communities and there are no advocacy expectations. If students do want to take on advocacy work, this is outside of their role in terms of BDC expectations. However, there will be some provision to ensure that any issues that are raised through the course of network or club activity are escalated to relevant decision makers (see section 3 below)
- Leads are not required to provide time, insight or expertise to university projects. Whilst leads can do this if they wish, any requests for this type of work, will be separate to their role in the network or club and are at the discretion of the leads. If requests are made of leads to undertake additional work, it is expected that reimbursement is offered to them.

2 How is support for networks and clubs managed?

2.1 Eligibility

In order to receive approval for funding and support each year, networks and clubs will be required to produce the following:

- an annual plan of activities including at least 4 events (some may be online) per year, including one event for new students during Sept-Jan, and optional attendance at the PGR Welcome Event. If leads want to run events more frequently they are welcome to do so, but there is no requirement.
- a budgetary plan for the year of activity, which can be used to keep track of spend.
- A short annual report (1-2 page) on activities and impact, including attendance numbers, feedback and list of activities.
- a Risk Assessment produced at the beginning of the year to cover events, especially out of hours, where external speakers are being invited, sensitive political issues, security issues, where catering will be used.
- In order to maintain operational support from the BDC, Network leads are required to engage with the network leads meetings and training is expected.

2.2 How is support for networks and clubs reviewed?

The BDC will evaluate existing clubs and networks each year (and any new requests for support, if the BDC have capacity to take on extra groups) to ensure these are:

- Fit our criteria for networks/clubs
- fit for purpose in terms of our aims to foster community
- not too similar to each other and ideally that new additions fill a gap in our existing list of clubs/networks
- not better suited to funding from another source
- inclusive in approach, open to all relevant PGR students and all disciplines
- do not include budgetary requirements that the BDC cannot support– e.g. booking external venues, ongoing expensive equipment costs that are beyond the budget limit

For PGR networks, the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for PGR and SU PG Officer will also be consulted, to confirm we are supporting an appropriate range of student identity groups and there are no significant gaps.

If the decision is made to cease funding and support for a certain club, the decision will be communicated to club leads by the BDC. If this decision relates to a network, the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for PGR and SU PG Officer will be required to approve this decision, and the network will be allowed a 'right to reply' to justify need for continued funding.

3 What support is available?

3.1 Network leads will receive the following:

- An annual honorarium of £500 per Network to recognise the time and energy given to this role, or this can be split between lead and co-lead/s. This will be paid via a one-off payment form - amount will be split so you will receive half in Autumn and half in Summer.
- Strategic support from a named staff member from the Bristol Doctoral College – including troubleshooting issues, raising problems, support with planning events, budget planning and shaping programme of activity, as needed, navigating asks on their time and advocating for themselves,
- Advocacy support: While advocacy is not part of the role of network leads, the BDC will provide escalation routes if there are any issues raised by network attendees that feel like they need broader institutional attention. These will include a touchpoint with a manager within the Doctoral College to flag any issues and 3x network lead meetings per year with the Doctoral College and Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor (PGR) where key issues can be raised and are also a chance to share experiences with other leads and consider intersectional approaches to networking
- Training and support with navigating running a network: running events, facilitation, leadership, establishing boundaries in the role, etc.
- NOTE: this support is not available to Club leads

3.2 Clubs and networks will both also receive the following:

- Small-scale financial support up to £500 per Network per annum and £300 per Club per annum– for consumables, start-up costs (e.g. banner), and materials up to a limited amount (including guidance on eligible costs). Expensive or ongoing requests for materials beyond budget specified will not be supported. Larger purchases will be made on behalf of the club on network, on our corporate credit card, and smaller ones can be reclaimed via expenses to the BDC budget code. Guidance and training on common processes and tasks, including booking rooms and catering is provided ([Guidance for student leads - BDC support for clubs and networks](#))
- Logistical support from a named staff member from the Bristol Doctoral College – although networks and clubs will be expected to organise their own events, and to book rooms and catering themselves, BDC can assist if there are any issues.
- Communications and marketing support from the BDC Comms and Engagement team, including: help with sharing network and club events with all PGRs via the BDC Bulletin, social media and other channels, including guidance and best practice.
- [Code of conduct](#) and support with managing inappropriate behaviour
- Signposting for wellbeing or pastoral issues
- Note on limits of BDC support: As a small team, we do not have capacity to support a large number of events so support will be focused on providing guidance to support the leads own organisation. We do not support organisation of large-scale events or conferences, and do not support with booking external venues or other UOB venues – this will need to be done through the Events team or room booking system.

4 Risks and mitigations

4.1 Legacy planning and managing network leads

- Clubs and networks should ideally have 2-3 leads in case one lead is unable to provide support at a particular time and to assist with continuity if a lead leaves the role/university.
- If students do not want to continue to lead a club or network, 2 months' notice is suggested, along with notifying the BDC as soon as possible.
- The BDC may provide some bridging support to ensure a group can continue to operate (depending on the strategic importance of the target audience), however this is not a long-term solution and a club or network may fall into abeyance if a suitable replacement is not identified. The BDC will support with promotion of a vacant lead role, if there is no one suitable within the existing club or network membership.

4.2 Managing behaviour, risks and issues

The activities of networks and clubs are covered by the universities policies including freedom of speech and appropriate behaviour. A [Code of Conduct](#) has been developed for clubs and networks to support creating safe inclusive spaces.

- Staff or students are required to escalate concerns to Bristol Doctoral College management if there is behaviour from a member or lead that does not adhere to this code. The university is dedicated to providing a harassment-free experience for everyone, regardless of gender,

gender identity and expression, age, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, religion (or lack thereof), or technology choices. If there are concerns, please contact our team as soon as possible through our email at bdc-engagement@bristol.ac.uk who may need to escalate where necessary

5. Evaluation

We will review both the support mechanism itself and the clubs and networks to ensure the overall approach is beneficial to the student community and communities of students who both lead and engage with these groups.

BDC support mechanisms

- The support mechanism will be reviewed via 1-1 conversations with network leads, using a predefined question set. This will happen 3 months into the academic year and in the summer (TBC).
- Training and guidance for leads will be reviewed after a pilot training sessions has been conducted and feedback will be gathered by email.
- The role of BDC staff will be reviewed with staff members, to ensure the mechanism is proving time effective on staff supporting the groups.

Impact of the support on students

- Clubs and networks will be reviewed via annual reports and review process including review of number of events, attendance, feedback from attendees, availability of network leads and any risks/mitigations for the support.