

PGR Communications Focus Group Schedule

Two facilitators and one note taker are needed for each group. The facilitators should ensure that participants have a name sticker and have given consent to be recorded, plus completed written consent forms, before starting.

Introduction & Ground rules

We're from Library and Learning Services, which is made up of the library and services which support your learning like the Centre for Learning and Study Support and the Maths Learning Centre.

We're here today because you've volunteered to talk to us about how we communicate with PhD students. Lots of the activities will look more broadly at your PhD, because we're aware we're one small service among the many that you might use or interact with during your study.

The recordings and transcripts of these focus groups will only be accessible to the team working on this project. Anything you say in this group will be anonymised for presentation, and we will make sure that you that you can't be identified in quotes or other materials by removing identifiable details concerning your PhD.

Ground rules:

- *There are no right or wrong answers.*
- *We are members of LLS staff, but neither of us designed the way that we operate or communicate with you! We're equally happy to accept positive or negative feedback.*
- *Everyone's PhD is different: feel free to contradict with each other and describe how things have worked for you.*

1. Warm up exercise

Each student is given a piece of paper, marked "The first time I heard about the Library during my current degree was..."

The point of this activity is to get you thinking about an example of an interaction you've had (directly or indirectly) with LLS. First, we'd like you to use the pens you've been given to complete the sentence in front of you.

Wait until all students have completed in their sentences.

Now we'll go round the table: can you read out your sentence and tell us a little bit more about what you've written?

At the end of the discussion, ask if anyone else has written something similar. If so, ask them to contribute. If not, proceed around the group.

2. Timeline mapping exercise

Students receive a big sheet of paper. The facilitator draws a big line and marks “The first day of my PhD” and “submitting my final thesis” at either end.

Next, we’d like you to complete this timeline of your PhD journey. We’d like you to add key milestones in your PhD, and people or departments who have communicated with you along the way. They can be internal to or external to the university.

Potential prompts (to get back on track or to spark debate):

- *What other milestones are there in your PhD?*
- *Who did you communicate with at that stage of your PhD?*
- *Did you set that goal yourself?*
- *Was everyone’s experience of x similar to Ben?*

During this stage the note taker should write each new actor (individual in a particular role e.g. supervisor, fellow student etc., or service e.g. CLaSS, Graduate School Office) down on a new card.

3. Discussion of timeline

The facilitator picks out key points of interaction with services or individuals to discuss.

Tell me more about this milestone. How well did x communicate with you?

Try to pick out a mixture of shared experiences, e.g. compulsory training, and experiences which weren’t shared (taking place at different times, supported by different actors, only relevant to some of the group). Encourage students to compare and contrast their ideas. Select around 4-6 milestones with actors for the students to discuss.

4. Card sorting exercise

You’ve mentioned a number of different people or services who have important in your PhD. In terms of help and advice, please put these in order, with the most important at the top, and the least important at the bottom. You may have different ideas, but try and negotiate an order works for all of you.

Students should be encouraged to debate and negotiate the order of the cards.

Sum up

Thank you for coming today, it has been really helpful. We’ll be in touch by the end of March to let you what we plan to do to follow up on the groups, and to give you the timeline in which we plan to implement any changes.