

Scaling Belonging: Library Community Development in an Academic Setting

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Context & The Postgraduate Challenge

The Isolation Gap: Departmental PTES data routinely flags PGT isolation. High-stakes forced social events (mixers, receptions) see low engagement and drive social anxiety.



The Discovery: Departmental research revealed PGT students felt a strong sense of community in the Library, rather than in academic departmental spaces.

The Strategy: We bridge this gap by balancing a passive, high-trust atmosphere with active operational co-design..

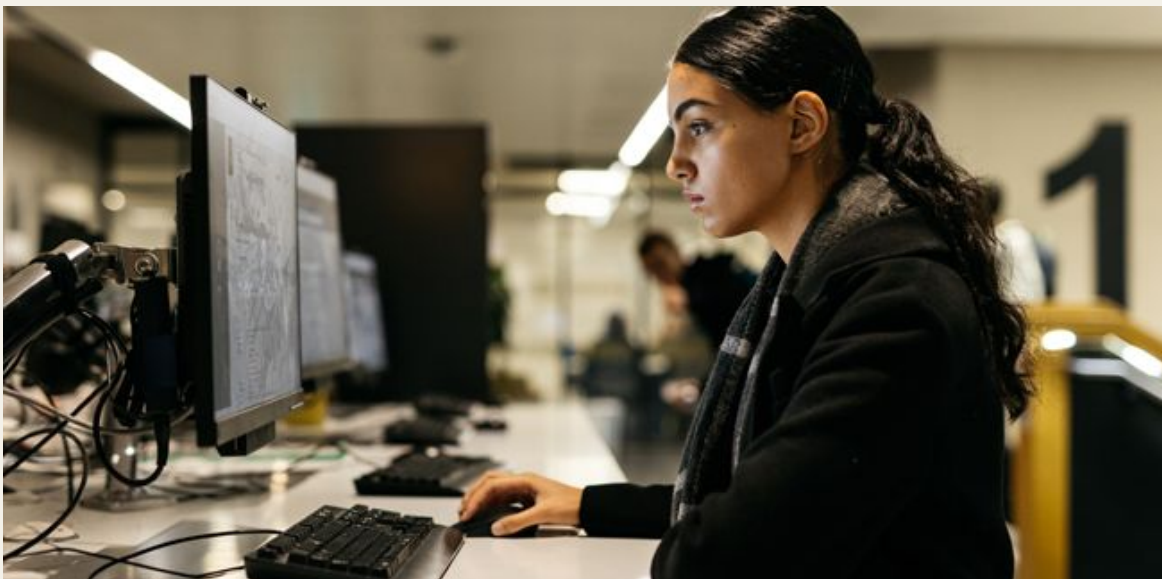


The Intangible: Fostering "Passive Belonging"

Supportive Solitude: Offering a shared sanctuary where students feel "propped up" by the quiet focus of peers, without pressure to perform socially.

Foundational Trust: Operating as a neutral, reliable presence—reassuringly there whenever students need it.

Positive Presence: Building community simply by being: a low-barrier physical space built on equity and sanctuary.



Practical Steps: Scalable Operations

Visual Signalling: Rolling awareness month displays at main entrances immediately signal an inclusive, representative environment.

Serendipitous Wellbeing: Ad-hoc, zero-commitment touchpoints (PAT dogs, message trees) with no sign-ups or pressure.

Integrated Support: Co-locating key campus partners (Careers, IT, Wellbeing) directly into library spaces to create a centralized support hub.



Co-Design & Achieving Strategic Impact

UX Insights: Employing PGT "Student Shapers" and using creative cultural probes (e.g., student "love and break-up letters" to the library).

Targeted Support: Translating data into Academic Skills Centre initiatives like PGT Essentials and peer-to-peer Dissertation Conversations.

Departmental Partnerships: Showing Education Leads how to stop fighting for attendance at empty seminar room mixers and integrate students into an existing high-trust community.



Key Takeaway

Community is not built on big, forced events. It relies on the value of an "unremarkable" presence, low-barrier physical sanctuary, and daily staff kindness.



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