

TAKING PART IN BRIGHT CLUB

PhD student Persona

Personas are a research tool used to bring together and represent key users or audience groups' needs or experiences. Personas are commonly used in design and marketing. We have created a persona to capture the experience of a PhD student who has taken part in Bright Club. It is not based on an individual, but is a general fusion of experiences of those people who have taken part in Bright Club. The important factors to note are:

- it is fictitious character, but based on knowledge captured through interviews undertaken those who have been involved in Bright Club
- it is edited from narratives of actual experiences
- it provides a snapshot of their combined experience
- it conveys the information to explain motives, experience and outcomes from being involved in Bright Club

Alex Brewster is a PhD student at UCL, in their second year. They are interested in communicating their research to people outside of the university. They have been on presentation, communications and outreach training.

1) Overview

"My message is: you should do Bright Club! You will have waves of doubt and you will lack confidence, but it is definitely worthwhile. Most of all, you can actually do it, anyone can do it!

Bright Club is an unexpectedly fun evening, I thoroughly enjoyed taking part – it was good event. My friends came for the evening event and they enjoyed it to".

2) Previous Experience

"I have taken part in some schools outreach before – going into schools talking about my subject and why I went to university. But I would say that I am new to the idea of public engagement. I have been on "how to give a presentation" training and I took part in a course run by the UCL Doctoral School on "Connecting with the public: Research Communication, Public Engagement and Outreach" and this is how I heard about Bright Club.

I had never spoken in front of that many people before, so it was a big deal for me. I think around 60 people attended, however, I didn't notice how big it was when I was on stage".

3) Preparing for Bright Club

"The UCL Public Engagement Unit provided training on how to perform at Bright Club. I thought the training covered everything that I needed to know – about the event, about what to expect, about what I needed to prepare. Above all it made me feel that it was possible to do this, to perform at Bright Club.

I also took part in the rehearsal the day before the show, which was really useful. I got lots of feedback and was able to make some changes to my talk. I enjoyed seeing what the others were going to talk about and how they pitched their talks. Everyone was really different; each presenter had their own style.

I wrote my set whenever I had a chance – after signing up to do Bright Club I was thinking about it all the time: on the tube, when I was cooking dinner, when I was out with friends. I was just having ideas, whenever I could. I then started to piece it all together. I asked friends what they thought of some of my ideas, and my jokes. I practiced my talk in front of some friends, who gave some friendly, constructive suggestions".

4) Student Experience

"I found that Bright Club was a great break from doing my PhD; at that point I felt that my work wasn't going very well and I was worrying a lot about my fieldwork. Bright Club was a great way to have a break and helped me refocus when I got back to my studies.

I also find that with my PhD that there are no short term outcomes and I might not see the outcome of my work for a couple of years, at least. However, with Bright Club there is a clearly defined time scale and you see the outcomes pretty quickly, which is great. It is satisfying to see the achievements from your actions.

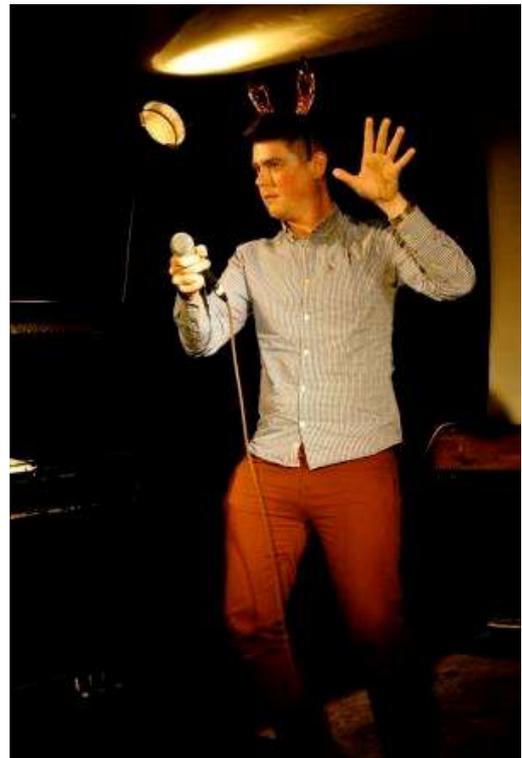
I enjoy speaking to people about my subject, about university life and about my PhD – it a bit cheesy, but I get a nice feeling speaking to others, to go and talk to other people who are outside your subject area about what you do. I find that people can see value in your work or highlight what they see as important – and it is nice to have these insights from other people.

It was a disappointment that not all my colleagues or friends could come and see me perform. At the event I performed at, I found that the ticket sales were a bit strict, you have to be pretty organised to buy them in advance. This meant that some of my friends could not come, as they only decided to come on the day".

5) Skill Development

"I have been on a number of training courses related to how to communicate my research. Bright Club provided me an actual opportunity to try out what they have learnt. In doing Bright Club I learnt loads about how to translate and communicate my research – how to give an engaging, entertaining, short talk.

My supervisor was happy about me performing at Bright Club, but I only told them afterwards. I was concerned about the amount of time it does take up to prepare for these kinds of things, and I wasn't sure how they would react. I think engagement and outreach can be seen as time consuming and not academic – therefore a waste of precious time. However, I would challenge that. Although Bright Club is a certain type of engagement: communications, I think public engagement is becoming more and more important for a career in academia. You can no longer just be a good student or a good researcher; that is not enough. You have to be excellent at research, but you also have to push yourself, get out of your comfort zone and push your subject outside academia. I think the Bright Club experience will be good for my career development".



6) Next Steps

"I would like to do more engagement, but I can see how these kinds of activities could distract me from my studies. My supervisor is encouraging me to concentrate upon my studies and not get too distracted by other things. However, I would be keen to do more. Oh, I just remembered ... I am going to perform at Bright Club at the Green Man Festival; this shouldn't be too much work though as I am going to use the talk I developed ... I have also loads of ideas for my own projects, but these will have to hold off until I have finished my PhD".