

Tess Pilkington

My experience as Penta UK's first ever volunteer.

This summer was far from ordinary. As Covid-19 rapidly spread from continent to continent, shutting down schools, businesses, and keeping everyone locked indoors besides essential workers, the entire globe went into autopilot mode as it tried to tackle this unprecedented disease. Slowly yet surely, I let go of my hopes to volunteer in the office of a forward-thinking non-profit for the first time, something I had been looking forward to since I began university. Fortunately, I made contact with Dr. Siobhan Crowley, and discovered the Penta Foundation, who actively took on the challenge of Covid-19 as a means of strengthening its efforts to contribute to infectious disease research.

Dr. Crowley took me on as the first ever volunteer for Penta UK, the recently established UK branch of the broader Penta Foundation. The spirit of the Penta network over the summer made working from my laptop, sitting at the kitchen table, feel like traveling between the London and Italian headquarters, participating in board meetings and grabbing coffee with board members to discuss their goals for the charity.

My most substantial task for the summer was creating a database of possible funding opportunities for the charity as it kickstarted its work in the UK. In addition, I was given the opportunity to write policy documents, gaining hands-on experience with the more legal side to charity work, and working on the website, communicating with the charity to figure out how to best communicate with the general public. Each day brought a new set of thought-provoking challenges, which the network encouraged me to take on confidently and over the three months of my position, I gained an eclectic set of skills.

Under Dr. Crowley's guidance and the help of the Board, I felt supported the whole way through my experience with Penta. The network was incredibly welcoming from the get-go and provided me with an outlet to voice any concerns, worries, or queries I had, from the wording of emails to the layout of my final presentation. Since I have started back at University, I am more confident in my abilities as a writer, presenter, and student. Be it researching for sources for my history degree, or embarking on my career in the non-profit field, my experience with Penta this summer has prepared me for success.