



# WORKING-CLASS ACADEMICS AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Improving 'Routes Out' Support  
for Doctoral Researchers

Event Brief from the M4C Dialogue Day on 12 September 2024

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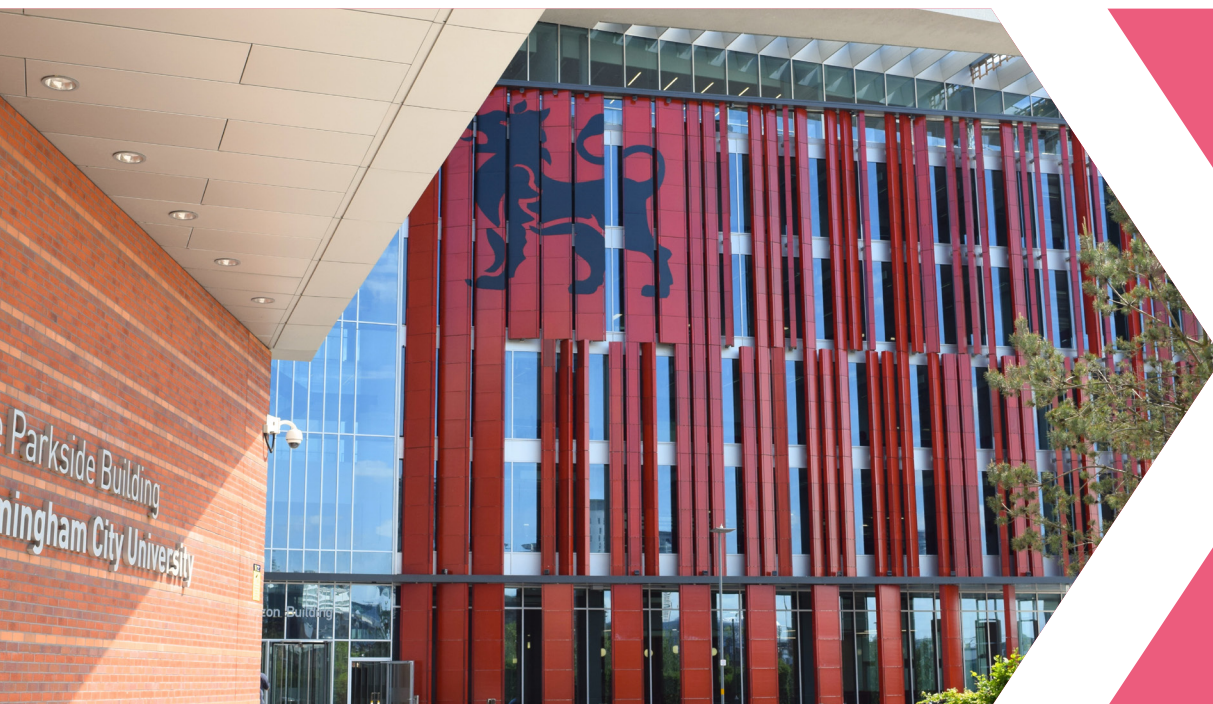
# INTRODUCTION

This event brief provides an overview of the Dialogue Day which took place on 12 September 2024 at Birmingham City University. The aim was to place an intersectional lens on the experiences of PhD study, while also practically supporting doctoral researchers across all disciplines with 'routes out' of the PhD.

Led by Dr Alice Storey (Birmingham City University) and Dr Tara Lai Quinlan (University of Birmingham), there was a specific focus on the experiences and needs of researchers from working-class backgrounds, as well as groups with a range of intersectional protected EDI characteristics.

We hope that this will be the first of many similar events and encourage other universities and academics to consider creating their own events and workshops specifically for working-class doctoral students.

We'd also like to extend our thanks to Midlands4Cities and the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding this event.



# DISSEMINATION AND FEEDBACK SESSION 1:

## ‘Working-Class Academics’

**Dr Alice Storey**  
**Senior Lecturer in Law**  
**Birmingham City University**

In this session, Dr Storey shared the findings of her pilot study, “Working-Class Academics: Improving Experiences in Higher Education.” Current literature regarding class in higher education identifies several issues (Crew 2021), including imposter syndrome, exclusion, and invisibility (Poole 2021). An initial literature search found that additional work could be beneficial in terms of (1) examining the experiences of working-class staff in higher education and (2) exploring certain intersectional experiences (Richardson et al 2020) of working-class staff and students, for example, working-class men and working-class LGBTQ+ people in academia.

This pilot study aims to identify the experiences of working-class staff and students at Birmingham City University, with a particular focus on intersectional characteristics, including race, gender, sexuality, disability etc. The initial objective of the study is to make improvements in relation to (1) the student experience and graduate outcomes, and (2) the working environment for staff. To achieve this, an online survey opened to staff and students at BCU on 9 October 2023 and closed on 8 of December, receiving 220 responses.

The participants discussed the thematic findings, having conversations about how their own experiences related to the data, bringing fresh perspectives and suggesting new ideas for future research. The group affirmed a key sub-theme of the data, that a support network for working-class staff and students at BCU is needed.

### **BCU Working-Class Network**

The project’s data, and attendees at the Dialogue Day, asked for a support network to be created for working-class staff and students. To achieve this, the BCU Working-Class Network has been created by Dr Alice Storey. This will be a supportive and collegiate space that allows for discussions and mentoring to take place, as well as opportunities to share experiences of navigating academic studies and the workplace as a working-class person.

The BCU Working-Class Network will launch soon - if you would like to join the Network, please email Dr Alice Storey: [Alice.Storey@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Alice.Storey@bcu.ac.uk)

# DISSEMINATION AND FEEDBACK SESSION 2:

## ‘Tracking Young People’s Lived Experiences’

**Dr Tara Lai Quinlan**  
**Associate Professor in Law and Criminal Justice**  
**University of Birmingham**

Dr Quinlan led an interactive group discussion of the preliminary findings from her project that analyses the University of Birmingham’s annual survey of law students engaged in criminal justice and criminal law modules.

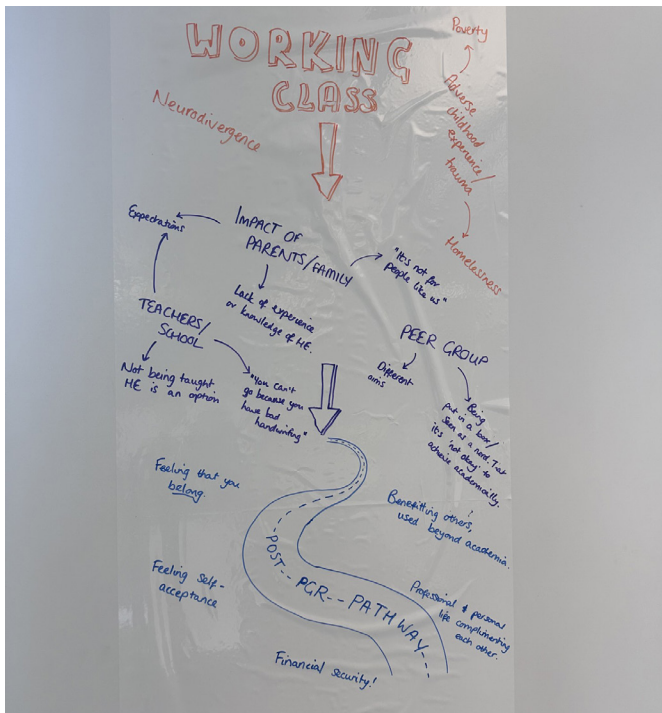
The research examines the opinions about and experiences of the criminal justice system from students with intersectional backgrounds. The session also examined the ways lived experiences of students with intersectional backgrounds could be better incorporated into research and in the classroom. The group reflected on the data and findings, sharing their lived experiences, and contemplated best practices for including lived experiences in teaching and research.

# ROUTES OUT SESSION 3:

## ‘That’s Me! Revisioning minoritised PGR Pathways’

Anne-Louise Crichlow, Yvonne Leslie, and Jacqueline Taylor

This interactive session invited participants to explore their own experiences and aspirations relating to routes out of the doctorate. Centred around the provocation What is a ‘route out’? the session considered multiple and intersecting forms of minoritisation and oppression in realising PGR career pathways. In doing so, the participants explored the decisions that drive them in pursuing their pathways as well as the idea of post-PGR imaginaries that include the inside, outside and peripheries of academia.



Visualisation of one group’s journey into academia and post-PhD pathways

The session drew upon the Routes Out strand of the [‘That’s Me! Eliminating Barriers to Postgraduate Research Study’](#) research project, which seeks to identify and work towards dismantling the barriers that global majority PGRs face in pursuing pathways out of their doctoral studies.

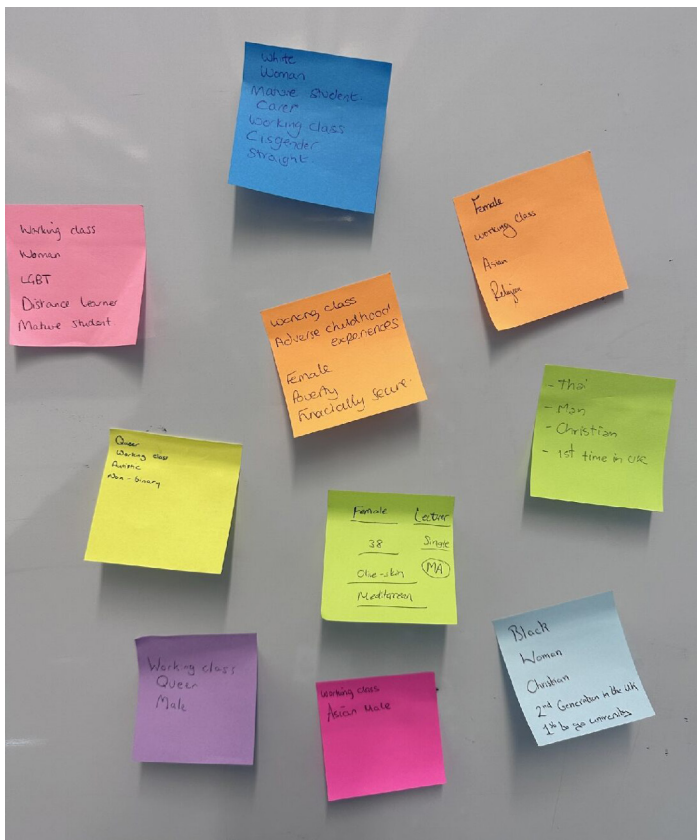
Birmingham City University is proud to partner with the University of Wolverhampton to deliver That’s Me! Eliminating barriers to postgraduate research study in the West Midlands, a highly prestigious project funded by the UKRI and Office of Students as part of a nationwide programme to widen participation in postgraduate research.

# ROUTES OUT SESSION 4:

## Support and Coping Strategies

Hannah Kibirige, Head of Inclusion and Equity  
with the Social Justice Collective

This interactive session for doctoral researchers from intersectional backgrounds focused on the challenges students face during their PhD studies. This session was led by Hannah Kibirige, Head of Inclusion and Equity with the Social Justice Collective, who has expertise in working with professionals from traditionally marginalised backgrounds. This session asked students to reflect on challenges they encounter as intersectional doctoral researchers over the course of their doctoral studies.



*Participants were asked to reflect upon their own intersectional characteristics*

It helped doctoral researchers reflect on coping mechanisms they have already developed, what means of support are currently available to them, and what networks they use. It asked attendees to think about what tools they might need to cope with difficult situations and outcomes in their professional careers.

# FEEDBACK AND NEXT STEPS

## Feedback from attendees included:

“A huge thank you from me for yesterday. It was so valuable and an experience I have never had before and it had such an impact on me and my research in so many ways. Really affirming the elements that are important.”

“It felt really empowering to be able to share experiences and barriers I’ve faced with others in a safe space.”

“This is the first event I’ve been to where being working class has been recognised and forefronted. Very inspiring. Really enjoyed the speakers’ contribution. I came home and told my husband I had found my people.”

“It was really insightful! Really hit home how important intersectional experience is. Was really empowering to be in a space where people ‘get it’, and it helped to challenge some of the isolation that comes with being a working class PGR.”

## Next Steps

For BCU staff and students, we are creating the BCU Working-Class Network to be a source of support and discussion. If you are interested in joining the Network, please email Dr Alice Storey: [Alice.Storey@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Alice.Storey@bcu.ac.uk)

We would encourage other universities to create events and support networks for students from working-class and traditionally marginalised backgrounds. If you are interested in discussing this further, please contact Dr Storey on the email above.



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