



Eliminating barriers to postgraduate research study in the West Midlands



BIRMINGHAM CITY
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030, 031 FROM REVERSE MENTORING TO RECIPROCAL SPONSORSHIP: EVALUATION REPORT

THAT'S ME!

ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDY
IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Anti-racism work in higher education continues to grapple with a fundamental tension between approaches that seek to change hearts and minds and those that aim to reform policy and structure. At Birmingham City University (BCU), the **That's Me!** Reverse Mentoring Pilot Programme was designed to explore whether altering traditional power dynamics between senior leaders and Global Majority postgraduate researchers (PGRs) could generate meaningful institutional learning and contribute to lasting cultural change. This report documents our journey—sharing what was learned through the pilot (and related literature) and how those insights inform a future vision that proposes a shift from reverse mentoring to what we term '**Reciprocal Sponsorship.**'

Section 1 situates the pilot within the wider literature, highlighting that while care and connection are vital to effective anti-racist practice, they remain insufficient without reciprocity, recognition, and structural embedding. From this review, five key design principles emerge: **structural integration, reciprocity, reflection into practice, care and wellbeing,** and **scaffolding** and **sustainability.** Section 2 details our approach to piloting a Reverse Mentoring Programme at BCU, including regarding participant recruitment, programme design, pairing and inducting mentors and mentees, providing support, and evaluation.

Section 3 presents our findings, which emphasise the importance of **care, clarity of identity and purpose,** and **reciprocity** in ensuring that mentoring relationships are ethical, equitable, and transformative.

Section 4 outlines our vision for evolving our pilot into a **Reciprocal Sponsorship** mentoring model. In this approach, informed Global Majority PGRs mentor white senior leaders by sharing lived experience and guiding them toward becoming anti-racist practitioners capable of embedding social justice into supervision, teaching, and institutional strategy. In turn, senior leaders actively sponsor these researchers—amplifying their expertise, creating access to institutional spaces, and advocating for their progression. The aim is for both parties to leave the process changed, having derived tangible reciprocal benefits. We offer a series of considerations for bringing this vision to life, including in terms of operationalising and sustaining a programme.

The report concludes that for mentoring to drive genuine change, it must be **care-full rather than careless, clear rather than ambiguous, reciprocal rather than extractive, structured rather than ad hoc,** and **institutional rather than individual.** Through this lens, the proposed model offers a sustainable, ethically grounded, and transformative pathway for embedding anti-racist practice within higher education.

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