



Eliminating barriers to postgraduate research study in the West Midlands



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

04. INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSES TO UNDERSTAND ROUTES INTO, THROUGH, AND OUT OF DOCTORAL STUDY

THAT'S ME!

ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDY
IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

That's Me! explores the experiences of Global Majority students across undergraduate (UG), postgraduate taught (PGT), and postgraduate research (PGR) levels and Alumni at Birmingham City University. The focus is on how representation, cultural heritage, and institutional structures shape access to and progression within doctoral education.

The study employs structured interviews and focus groups to examine UG, PGT, PGR and alumni understanding and experiences of doctoral education. Using an intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Collins, 1991), the study examines how multiple social identities, race, gender, class, and immigration status/migration, intersect to influence the doctoral journey. Intersectionality allows for a nuanced understanding of how structural inequalities and cultural expectations converge to shape Global Majority students' pathways into, through, and out of higher education.

This executive summary is based on the findings presented in the full report titled **'Intersectional Analyses to Understand Routes into, Through and Out of Doctoral Study'**.

KEY FINDINGS

Routes into Doctoral Study:

Global Majority students face financial, structural and cultural barriers in accessing doctoral study, including opaque admissions processes, limited access to information and networks, and myths concerning doctoral study (Arday, 2020; Badrie, MacDonnell & Patel, 2023). For some, visa restrictions and international fee policies act as additional gatekeepers, reinforcing systemic inequities (UKRI, 2023).

Experiences Through Doctoral Study:

Once enrolled, students frequently describe racialised isolation and underrepresentation within academic and supervisory contexts. The lack of role models from similar cultural or racial backgrounds heightens feelings of marginalisation, while representation among staff is seen as key to fostering belonging and intellectual safety (Ahmed, 2012; Mirza, 2015). Some supervisors actively promote inclusion by facilitating community connections early in the doctoral process, illustrating how inclusive supervision can mitigate structural exclusion.

Cultural and Gendered Expectations:

Cultural norms and familial expectations, particularly for women and first-generation scholars, compound barriers to pursuing a doctorate. Domestic responsibilities, financial insecurity, and perceptions of academia as a "white, middle-class" space further restrict access and continuation (Pilkington, 2013).

Routes Out of Doctoral Study:

Global Majority PGRs report limited career development support, especially around academic progression. Despite diverse UG and PGT cohorts,

institutional structures remain white-dominant, constraining postdoctoral opportunities and perpetuating racialised hierarchies in knowledge production (Arday & Mirza, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Global Majority students' experiences demonstrate how intersecting systems of race, class, and gender inequality shape doctoral pathways. Addressing these disparities requires universities to move beyond representational diversity toward structural transformation, including transparent admissions, equitable funding, immigration literacy, inclusive supervision, and targeted career support.

Cultivating intersectional awareness across institutional policy, supervision, and leadership will be essential to dismantling systemic barriers and enabling Global Majority scholars to gain access and to thrive within academia.

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