



Eliminating barriers to postgraduate research study in the West Midlands



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

07. DEVELOPING AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH INDUCTION AT BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY

THAT'S ME!

ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDY
IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the **That's Me!** Project, Birmingham City University (BCU) has made targeted interventions to provide a more inclusive and engaging induction for postgraduate researchers (PGRs). Since 2024, the BCU Doctoral Research College (DRC) has shifted from a heavily presentation-based format towards a more interactive, community-centred experience. Recent iterations—particularly the May and September 2025 induction programmes—demonstrate a clear intent to foster belonging and accessibility, with innovations such as the professional-services carousel, a student-led “What I Wish I’d Known” panel, and efforts to create a welcoming atmosphere through music, open seating, and informal networking opportunities.

Feedback from Doctoral Research College staff and Global Majority PGRs indicates that these developments have strengthened first impressions and improved clarity around doctoral processes. The induction programme delivers a comprehensive overview of essential information; however, challenges persist, including inconsistent attendance among international and part-time students and perceptions that the single-day format can at times feel overwhelming. Global Majority researchers, in particular, report gaps in belonging, representation, and early peer connection. They often encounter difficulties navigating BCU’s systems and understanding supervision processes, with some participants describing the induction as “boring,” “passive,” or “hard to connect with.” The evidence suggests that inclusivity is currently embedded through tone and atmosphere, but not yet through structure, representation, or co-creation. The Doctoral Research College’s next step should, therefore, be to reconceptualise induction as a multi-stage, developmental journey rather than a one-off event.

This report proposes a future-facing model for PGR induction at BCU—an inclusive blueprint inspired by the UKRI and Office for Students-funded **That's Me!** Project and its successful **Talent Xchange** initiative, one of the project’s key outcomes demonstrating best practice in inclusive researcher engagement. This induction model emphasises five interlinked phases: (1) pre-arrival digital onboarding; (2) central induction (interactive, co-created); (3) harmonised school welcome event; (4) community-building through a Global Majority Welcome; and (5) continuous engagement through mentoring and reflective spaces.

The report concludes that BCU is well positioned to lead sector practice in inclusive PGR induction, provided that future design foregrounds co-creation, sustained engagement, and intersectional inclusivity.

In this context, ‘**Inclusive Induction**’ is understood as a holistic process that recognises and values the diversity of PGR identities and experiences, providing equitable access to information, networks, and support. It cultivates belonging and psychological safety through representation, dialogue, and community connection, and encourages co-creation—where PGRs are active participants rather than passive recipients of information. Crucially, it extends beyond a single event to form a continuous onboarding system linking orientation, researcher development, and community-building throughout the doctoral journey.