



Eliminating barriers to postgraduate research study in the West Midlands



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

08 OPEN FORUMS EVALUATION REPORT

THAT'S ME!

ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDY
IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **That's Me!** Project recognises the importance of providing safe, supportive spaces for Global Majority Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) to explore and express their identities. To complement current approaches across Birmingham City University (BCU), a series of **That's Me! Open Forums** were established at the university to enable doctoral researchers from underrepresented backgrounds to share their experiences, reflect on challenges and inform institutional action on equality, diversity, and inclusion within research culture.

Held between May and November 2025, two forums were facilitated online and one in person meeting, with typical participation between five to nine Global Majority PGRs per session. Topics covered **Navigating the PGR Journey, Supervision and Wellbeing**. The sequence of open forum topics was intentionally designed to follow the natural progression of the doctoral experience while addressing the specific challenges Global Majority PGRs face.

Contributions were captured through discussion notes and anonymised quotes, forming the basis for both qualitative analysis and dissemination through blog posts and evaluation reports. The forums were led by a postdoctoral researcher whose positionality as a Black woman with lived experience in UK higher education informed the design, facilitation, and interpretation of discussions, ensuring cultural sensitivity and authenticity in capturing student voices.

Key findings demonstrate that the forums successfully provided a confidential, structured space for attendees to articulate their identities, experiences, and challenges. Attendees valued the opportunity to engage in open dialogue, reporting increased self-awareness, strengthened peer connections, and a sense of belonging within the doctoral community. Insights from each forum discussion included:

- **Navigating the PGR Journey:** Challenges included inconsistent expectations, time management pressures, and competing responsibilities. Peer support and resilience were cited as key to success.
- **Supervision and Research Impact:** Supervision experiences varied widely; attendees highlighted the need for inclusive, culturally aware supervision, and better access to mentorship.
- **Wellbeing and Mental Health:** Feelings of isolation and invisibility were common, especially among Global Majority and international PGRs. Informal peer networks were critical in sustaining motivation and mental health.

The forums also highlighted structural inequalities, including disparities in supervision quality, funding, wellbeing provision, representation in leadership, and intersectional challenges affecting progression and belonging. Student voices provided clear evidence that addressing these barriers is essential for equitable doctoral experiences.

Evaluation indicates that attendees experienced forums as safe, inclusive, and relevant spaces that encouraged authentic dialogue, peer learning, and reflection. Positive outcomes included enhanced awareness of available support, reduced feelings of isolation, and identification of areas for institutional improvement. Feedback from attendees suggests efforts should be made to potential to broaden participation, strengthen links with institutional decision-makers, and provide additional follow-up resources, while recommendations based on forum discussions urge mandatory inclusive supervision training, expanded financial support, culturally responsive wellbeing and mentoring provision, and improved transparency around publishing, conference, and research impact opportunities for Global Majority PGRs.

CONCLUSIONS

This report concludes that Open Forums have proven to be a vital instrument for capturing lived experiences, promoting identity exploration, and fostering community among Global Majority PGRs. Continued leadership commitment and implementation of the recommendations are essential to embed lasting structural change, ensuring that BCU's research environment is genuinely inclusive, equitable, and supportive for all postgraduate researchers.