



Eliminating barriers to postgraduate
research study in the West Midlands



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

FIELDWORK DESIGN TEMPLATE

ONLINE INTERVIEWS WITH EMPLOYER BOARD MEMBERS

THAT'S ME!

ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDY
IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

Published by BCU

That's Me! is funded by UKRI and The Office for Students
Date: 25th October 2025

Name of Fieldwork Activity:

Online interviews with the Employer Board members

Content of the Activity:

Research Statement (50-100 words): Summarise the fieldwork activity, including information about target groups. This will be used as part of promoting fieldwork. Please draft in appropriate terms.

This fieldwork engages members of the Employer Board through online semi-structured interviews. They aim to build on baseline data gathered through initial surveys with employer board organisations and complement a case study of good practice undertaken with University Hospitals Birmingham (UHB). The interviews will elicit qualitative data to explore in more depth employers' experiences in supporting staff to undertake doctoral study (both challenges and good practice) and benefits to their organisation. They also seek to understand the barriers for those who do not yet support employees to undertake doctoral study, including the perceived benefits and future ambitions.

Contribution to project outputs:

| Output | Output description |
|--------|---|
| 1 | Report on pathways for Global Majority PGRs, including employer progression routes |
| 2 | Workshops held to explore barriers – 1 for HE, students, employers and 1 for parents, relatives and communities |
| 3 | Report on barriers (stand-alone and interrelated) |
| 16 | Baseline data set on Global Majority staff undertaking PGR degrees for regional employers, with a framework developed in collaboration with UHB |
| 17 | Recruitment report, including set of principles and checklists for employers – co-produced with Global Majority PGR students |
| 18 | Inclusive workforce development strategy for the region developed |
| 34 | Open educational resource created |

Design:

Facilitation Plan: Describe the planned approach for facilitating the fieldwork, including a structure (e.g., introductions, question themes and prompts, role of the moderator and any physical or virtual prompts or stimuli to be used).

The interviews engage with members of the Employer Board to explore their experiences, aspirations and perceptions of supporting staff to undertake doctoral study. They aim to understand the ways that organisations currently support their staff to pursue doctoral study, including the challenges, benefits, and the impact on the career development and trajectories of staff members after completing their doctorate. For those organisations who do not yet support staff to undertake doctoral study, the interviews similarly seek to understand the ambitions, barriers and perceived impact on careers development.

This activity aims to build on and enrich the data that has already been collected via the UHB case study and the Employer Board survey. The interviews bring together fieldwork by the Routes In/Through and Routes Out teams, combining what was originally a planned focus group and interviews to streamline activity.

Initial informal conversations about the interviews took place with some Employer Board organisations at the University of Wolverhampton on 14 November 2024 to gauge interest and enhance engagement through in person connections. The remaining organisations were contacted via the Employer Engagement Board contact list (managed by the That's Me! external engagement officer). Ideally 6 interviews, representing different sectors, will take place to support the elicitation of rich and in-depth qualitative data.

The interviews will be scheduled for one hour online on MS Teams. The interviews will be in a semi-structured format to allow for consistency across questions to different organisations and Participants will be asked to complete consent forms in advance of the interviews. These will be based on the standard consent forms and participant information used for That's Me!

Interview structure and indicative questions:

The interviews will begin with an introduction from Dr Bah. The then participants will introduce themselves. The questions will be centred around the following prompts:

1. Please tell me about the organisation you work for and your role.
2. Do you have any staff in your organisation who have been supported to do a doctoral degree? If yes:
 - a. Please tell us about how the plan for your colleague(s) to pursue the doctoral degree came about, and how this related to their role and the needs of your organisation. Please also tell us about the process of setting up doctoral study for your colleague.
 - b. What are your perceptions of the challenges or barriers they experienced? How were they resolved?

Facilitation Plan continued:

- c. What advice would you give other organisations who are interested in supporting their staff to do doctoral degrees?
- d. How has doctoral study shaped the careers of staff you have supported? What have they gone on to achieve?

If no:

- a. What do you think doctoral research is?
- b. Do you think doctoral research could benefit your organisation?
Follow up: If so, then how? If not, then why?
- c. What are your perceptions of the challenges or barriers to support PGRs at your organisation, and more generally within your field? How could they be resolved?

3. As you understand it, what are/what could be the benefits of staff pursuing a doctoral degree for your organisation and more generally?
4. What sorts of knowledge and insights has/can doctoral research bring to your organisation and your field?
5. What sorts of skills and attributes does/could a doctoral researcher bring to your organisation and your field?
6. What attributes do you think global majority PGRs specifically would bring to your organisation?
7. What specific challenges do you think global majority PGRs might face in your organisation/career progression more broadly?
8. Thank you for your time. Do you have any other general comments and reflections from anything we have discussed?

Participants will be sent the prompts in advance, so they have time to think about them before the interview.

After the interview has formally finished, the process for managing incentives for participants will be outlined. This will be, followed by a debrief where information relating to the interviews will be reiterated, and other information such as information on support, contacting the project team and withdrawing data/participation, will be provided. Recordings will then be uploaded for transcription, and followed the agreed process for the checking of transcripts and data handling and deletion for That's Me!

Delivery Information:

Location: Specify the location(s) where the fieldwork will be conducted, including any details about the venue or facilities.

The interviews will take place online on MS Teams. Participants will require access to a stable internet signal and a quiet room to participate in the focus group without interruption. A face-to-face alternative can be offered if enough participants demonstrate an interest, but for practical and ethical purposes the default offering will be MS Teams.

The date and time will be arranged with the participants based on their availability.

Logistical Requirements: [List any logistical requirements for the fieldwork, such as equipment, seating arrangements, refreshments, creative resources etc.]

There are no direct costings involved as the interviews will be online.

Delivery team: Identify the members of the research team involved in delivery of the fieldwork, along with their roles and responsibilities.

Dr Sulayman Bah.

Budget: Provide an overview of the budget for the fieldwork, including any expenses related to participant compensation, materials, etc.

None, in line with the project's budget protocol.