



Eliminating barriers to postgraduate  
research study in the West Midlands



**BIRMINGHAM CITY**  
University

# FIELDWORK DESIGN TEMPLATE

INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE  
RESEARCHER INTERVIEWS

## 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



Research  
England

Office for  
Students



### Name of Fieldwork Activity:

International Postgraduate Researcher interviews

### 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.

These interviews target current international Postgraduate Researchers who identify as members of the Global Majority. Their purpose is to understand the views and experiences of international Postgraduate Researchers in relation to the application process (both for a place at BCU and for a student visa), and their experience of starting their course at Birmingham City University and moving to the UK. We wish to find out how supportive Birmingham City University and the UK are as environments for international PGRs, and what recommendations participants can offer on how Birmingham City University can better support international Global Majority PGRs.

### Contribution to project outputs:

Output	Output description
1	Report on pathways for Global Majority PGRs, including employer progression routes
3	Report on barriers (stand-alone and interrelated)
4	Set of recommendations for new approaches according to intersectionality
6	Inclusive PGR online application processes established
7	Induction processes redeveloped

### 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).

These interviews will be semi-structured, based on an interview guide but also allowing the interviewee to suggest other topics depending on the direction of the conversation. There will be no physical prompts.

Interview questions will focus on the following themes:

- » Thoughts/experiences on applying to Birmingham City University.
- » Thoughts/experiences on applying for a student visa, including visa fees.
- » Thoughts/experiences on starting the doctorate.
- » Experiences finding a research community.
- » Thoughts on their sense of belonging at Birmingham City University and in the UK.
- » Their views on how Birmingham City University can be more supportive of international Global Majority Postgraduate Researchers.

### Indicative questions

*Note: We will not ask all these questions – they will be finalised after the pilot.*

### Motivations

- » Why were you interested in applying for a doctorate in the UK?
- » Tell us about your experience of applying for a doctorate.

### Visa and Fees

- » Did you need to apply for a student visa?
- » Tell us about the visa application process – how did you find the experience?
- » To what extent were all stages of the process clear?
- » How did you manage the visa costs and paying international tuition fees?
- » What do you think of the government policies affecting visas and fees.
  - Follow-up: were you planning on applying for the Post Study Work visa, and if so, do you have any thoughts on its status?
- » Did you at any point reconsider your decision?

### Application Process

- » To what extent if any did the process affect your research area?

### Facilitation Plan continued:

- » How did you find the process of applying for a place as an international student?
- » How supportive was the university of your application?
- » How did you find the process of identifying a supervisor and establishing a relationship with them?

#### Starting/Induction

- » How did you find settling in and starting the doctorate?
- » How was your experience of coming to the UK?
- » How do you find living in the West Midlands?
- » What has been your experience of finding a community?
  - Follow up: What has this been like within your own College and Faculty, particularly in terms of the research environment and PGR culture? Are there any positive experiences you would like to highlight?
- » How do you find the process of monitoring students for UK visa checks – how is this affecting your progress?
- » Have you experienced culture shock or homesickness? If so, what were those experiences like? Are there spaces where you feel the most at home?

#### Political Environment

- » What do you think of the discourse around UK immigration in the media?
- » Has UK government environment impacted on your sense of belonging (how welcome do you feel)?

#### Recommendations

- » If you had advice for international students who are interested in applying for a doctorate, what would it be?
- » How can institutions be more supportive of international doctoral students?

#### Duration:

60 minutes per interview – expected to take place in June 2024.

### 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 (Microsoft Teams) or in person, on campus or off campus, depending on the participant's preference (they will be asked to indicate this in the pre-recruitment survey, and also list their access needs).

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

In-person interviews will require refreshments (non-catering, involving getting a coffee/tea for the interviewer and interviewee). For in-person interviews, we will require access to a quiet location and an approved dictaphone/recorder. We will consider the accessibility of in-person spaces to ensure that the location does not present a barrier to participation. In instances where participants have specialist needs, we will discuss on a case-by-case basis. Transcription will be conducted using the ethically approved software Macwhisper. Participants will be provided with debriefing materials, including mental health support.

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

Dr Pelham Carter

Professor Kirsten Forkert

Dr Adam Whittaker

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

Incentive /coffee vouchers for participants in line with the project's budget protocol.