



Eliminating barriers to postgraduate
research study in the West Midlands



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

FIELDWORK DESIGN TEMPLATE

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHER (PGR)
FOCUS GROUP ON SUPERVISION

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:

Postgraduate researcher (PGR) focus groups on supervision

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.

To gain insights from existing doctoral research students, the Routes Through Action Research Team will be holding two focus groups (one with PGRs who identify as from Global Majority backgrounds and the other open to all PGRs). These focus groups will provide a forum for discussions about postgraduate researcher experiences of supervision.

Contribution to project outputs:

Output	Output description
3	Report on barriers (stand-alone and interrelated)
4	Set of recommendations for new approaches according to intersectionality
5	Equitable inclusive supervisory good practice document
11	Recommendations for enhanced EDI training and policies
12	'Safe space' created for Global Majority PGRs
13	Peer to peer network established
29	Case studies sharing learning and challenges and how these were overcome

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).

Two focus groups are planned. They will be led by postgraduate researchers, with academic staff support available as necessary. The facilitators will co-ordinate the discussion with participants. They will also confirm consent in line with approved processes. The focus groups will be recorded on approved recorders and contemporaneous notes will be taken by the facilitators (if possible). These notes will be digitised and destroyed in line with ethical approval.

Participants to be recruited via the Count Me In Survey and wider sign-up mechanisms (e.g. via emails from supervisors).

Questions

1. Introduction and framing (2 minutes)

2. Check that all participants have read the Participant Information Sheet and signed the hard copy consent form. Collect consent forms (3 minutes).

3. Supervisor Selection (10 minutes)

What are your experiences of finding/being allocated a supervisor?

- *How were you introduced to your supervision team?*
- *To what extent were you involved in selecting your supervision team?*
- *To what extent would you have liked to have been involved?*

4. Relationships (10 minutes)

What is your relationship like with your supervisor(s)?

- *What kind of relationship were you expecting to have with your supervisors?*

How comfortable are you with raising issues with your supervisor?

- *What kind of relationship do you have with them?*
- *How would you characterise the relationship you have with your supervisors? Do you have different kinds of relationship with each supervisor?*
- *How easy/difficult do you find it to discuss any difficulties that you are experiencing with your supervisors?*
- *How much do you think your supervisors should know about you – e.g. in terms of educational, cultural, personal background?*
- *To what extent does your experience of doctoral supervision provide space for 'knowing your supervisors'? Do you think 'knowing your supervisors' is important. If so why? If not, why not?*

5. Community/Peers (10 minutes)

To what extent do you engage with your postgraduate research community?

- *Do you talk much about your supervisors and your relationship with them with*

Facilitation Plan continued:

other postgraduate researchers -do you think this is/ would be useful?

- In what ways does Birmingham City University reach out to the whole doctoral supervisory community (as well as across the whole sector) to support postgraduate researchers?*
- To what extent do you have contact with other doctoral students in Birmingham City University – i.e. other disciplines etc?*
- To what extent do you have contact with doctoral students anywhere other than Birmingham City University?*
- Are you a part of any online/social media postgraduate researcher networks? If so, do you find them useful?*

6. Systems (10 minutes)

Do you feel there are processes in place to discuss your supervisory experiences?

- Under this question, standards for good supervisory practice will be referred to (Policy for the Support and Development of Academic Staff Supervising Research Degrees). This will have been shared with a framing rubric a week before the focus groups to ensure accessibility. Participants will be asked for comment and what they think should be included.*
- How could we improve/create mechanisms for feeding back on your supervisory experiences? During or after your doctoral journey?*
- Do you know what to do if you have a complaint or concern about your supervisor/supervisory team? How comfortable would be feel about making a complaint?*

7. Opportunities (10 minutes)

To what extent do you engage with PGR opportunities at BCU?

- Are you/were you aware of the different kinds of educational conventions e.g. research skills, doctoral writing that doctoral students need to know about – how much have your supervisors helped you identify /deal with such issues?*
- What sorts of professional development support have you received from your supervisory team?*

8. Wrap up (5 minutes)

Is there anything that you would like to say that you haven't said?

Information about support services will be shared at this point as appropriate for issues that may have arisen. Facilitators will remind participants of the anonymisation of contributions and the withdrawal process.

Duration:

60 minutes

Delivery Information:

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

Postgraduate Research Hub at Birmingham City University or online via Microsoft Teams.

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

If the focus group is undertaken in person, chairs will be laid out in a horseshoe shape with the table positioned for recording.

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

Dr Amanda French

Hannah Roberts (Postgraduate Researcher)

Neesha Sahota (Postgraduate Researcher)

Professor Rob Smith

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

Participant incentive vouchers, in line with the project's budget protocol.