

# FIELDWORK DESIGN TEMPLATE

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHER (PGR)  
FOCUS GROUPS

## 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:

Postgraduate researcher focus groups

## 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.

We aim to carry out 5 focus groups with PGRs (one in each Faculty at Birmingham City University, plus a pilot) to gather data on current postgraduate researcher views on, and experiences of, applying for a doctoral degree at BCU, including how the process could be made fairer and more inclusive.

## Contribution to project outputs:

Output	Output description
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)
4	Set of recommendations for new approaches according to intersectionality
6	Inclusive PGR online application processes established

## 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).

There will be 5 focus groups: one pilot group and 4 additional groups, one per Faculty. We are hoping to recruit 4-8 participants each. They will be facilitated by members of the Routes-in Action Research Team. The structure will begin with introductions and then move into the main questions. These will be based around the following themes:

- » Perceptions/expectations of doctoral (PhD, Ed.D, DBA) study
- » Experiences of the application process, including contact with supervisors
- » Experiences of induction and starting the doctoral (PhD, Ed.D. DBA) degree
- » Recommendations about an inclusive application process

There are no external stimuli or prompts.

### **Questions are likely to include:**

#### Application:

- » How did you become interested in doing a doctorate?
- » When you think of a doctoral student, what do you think of?
  - Would they look like you?
  - If they didn't, would that be a deterrent to applying?
- » Why did you apply to Birmingham City University (BCU)?
- » Talk to us about your experience of applying to Birmingham City University.
- » Did you apply to other universities? If so, what was the experience like?
- » How easy/difficult was it to find out about the opportunities offered by Birmingham City University?
- » What are you expecting in terms of opportunities Birmingham City University can offer?
- » How was your experience of contacting a potential supervisor?
  - Did you find it easy/difficult to identify someone?
  - Were you able to find a supervisor who aligns with your subject area and/or geographical area of study?
  - If not did this influence your area of study?
- » How was your experience of the application process?
- » Were there aspects of the process that you found more supportive or less supportive?

## Facilitation Plan continued:

### Funding

Did you apply for funding [e.g., M4C or other scholarships]?

- » How was the experience?
- » If you're self-funding how does that impact how you engage with your research, time allocation, pressure to complete etc?

### Starting/induction

- » Talk about your experience of starting the doctorate.
- » How did you find the process of starting at Birmingham City University and being part of the doctoral community?
- » What makes you feel the most at home?

### Recommendations

- » What advice would you give to someone who wants to do a doctorate?
- » In an ideal world, what would a genuinely inclusive doctoral admissions process look like? Describe it as though you were telling a story about someone applying, being accepted and starting on a doctorate.

**Duration:**

The focus groups will be 90 minutes. We aim to carry these out in April and early May 2024.

## Delivery Information:

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

The focus groups will be online (Microsoft Teams), face-to-face or hybrid depending on participant preferences (identified in the pre-recruitment survey) and facilitator availability.

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

If they are face-to-face or hybrid, we will require a venue (on-campus or off-campus depending on participant preference); refreshments, and participant vouchers. If they are online, we would only require the vouchers. Refreshments and venue booking either on-campus or off-campus (for face-to-face or hybrid focus groups); seating arrangements will involve participants being sat around a table to facilitate discussion.

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

Sarah Bristol-Abbott (Postgraduate Researcher)

Professor Kirsten Forkert

Abigail Shaw (Postgraduate Researcher)

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

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