

That's Me!

The BCU Project Team



The Project

This project seeks to provide a holistic approach to the elimination of barriers to successfully accessing postgraduate research (PGR) for students from minoritised groups and communities in the West Midlands.

The project is co-lead by the University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University. It is funded by the Office for Students and Research England.

This booklet introduces the BCU project team for 23/24.

That's Me!



Abigail Shaw

Through their participation in That's Me! Project, Abigail will become acutely aware of the barriers that we must overcome. Over the past eight years, Abigail has focused on her professional and academic development, taking part in projects that seek to challenge the current and longstanding cultures and procedures in various institutions. Abigail's main area of focus has been the Criminal Justice System, where they have observed the lack of support, resources, and opportunities available to Black women with offending histories. In her doctoral thesis, Abigail is using intersectionality as an analytical tool to examine how gender, race, and class intersect to shape systemic inequalities.

Dr Adam Whittaker

Adam has been doing lots of research in recent years around barriers to entry and progression in the UK education system, especially around geographic and socioeconomic inequalities (and inequities) of access. Adam wants to be part of this project because he is keen to better understand student experiences of PGR study, share some of his knowledge and experience of working with various datasets, and participate in research that can help us better understand the current landscape and perceptions of doctoral study.

Dr Amanda French

Amanda is an Associate Professor in Teaching and Learning at Birmingham City University in the College of Education and Social Work. She has worked as an educator in the West Midlands in FE, HE and Adult Education for over 30 years. Amanda has a longstanding commitment to creative and collaborative methodologies related to academic and professional literacies, HE policy and pedagogies and professional development, with a particular focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This is reflected in her current research around global majority students' access and progression on to PGR study, working class pupils' aspirations for HE and professional and academic literacies in higher education. As an experienced doctoral supervisor Amanda is particularly interested in developing innovative and student-centered approaches to doctoral writing development, especially for those students belonging to under-represented groups. She has published in the fields of PGR literacies, EDI and professional development both nationally and internationally.

Anne-Louise Crichlow

Anne-Louise Crichlow is a PhD student and Assistant Lecturer at BCU and a lifelong advocate of racial equality, empowerment and inclusion. With over 25 years of experience in education and social work, she is a seasoned professional whose commitments have led her to use her personal, professional and academic lived experiences to advance empowerment and social justice for the global majority.

Her research work focuses on the individual lived experiences of global majority people in education with racial injustice and decolonisation being key features.

As a Black, Female of African-Caribbean heritage and British nationality, her intersectional inequalities have been a barrier to her academic progression. Anne-Louise's involvement with 'That's Me' allows her to tackle the underlying factors which are the cause for her and the global majority academics alike.

Alongside the global majority as her peers, being involved with the project will enable her to make a positive contribution to knowledge, informing academic practice for future generations of the global majority, to help assist in overcoming the barriers that are experienced within PGR education making positive steps towards decolonising the practices that currently occur.

Dr Ben Colliver

Ben Colliver is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Birmingham City University. His research centres on issues of inclusion, marginalisation and exclusion. He has adopted an intersectional perspective throughout his career and co-edited the first collection that showcased intersectional, criminological research in the United Kingdom. Ben's research primarily focuses on LGBTQ+ communities, addressing issues of exclusion within these communities. He also holds the role of 'School Lead for EDI' and is therefore keen to be involved in the 'That's Me! Project' to continue affecting change at an institutional level, to make higher education a more inclusive and accessible space.

Emmanuel O. Adesuyi

Emmanuel is a registered nurse and midwife with over 10 years of experience within and outside the UK. He has worked as the Chief Operating Officer of the Institute of Nursing Research, Nigeria, where his research focuses on digital nursing education, public health, cancer, genetics, and genomics. He is currently a doctoral researcher and assistant lecturer at Birmingham City University, UK. His doctoral research explores teaching and learning in digital spaces in nursing and midwifery education. Emmanuel is excited about joining the "That's Me! Project", an initiative that aligns with his desire to contribute to upholding equity within the research landscape, removing obstacles and thus ensuring success for most researchers.

Dr Eveleigh Buck-Matthews

Dr Eveleigh Buck-Matthews is an interdisciplinary social scientist and Lecturer in Criminology at BCU. Her research interests revolve around the social and spatial construction of youth communities, participatory methods and music landscapes. Eveleigh's published works explore recreational drug user narratives and music spaces. She is a co-investigator on the PAR People and Dancefloors Project. Externally Eveleigh is Chair of the Participatory Geographies Research Group, a collective whose members aim to raise the profile, and further the understanding and use of participatory approaches, methods, tools and principles within academic geography and beyond.

Dr Fadia Dakka

Fadia is a senior researcher in Education, with significant knowledge and competence in the fields of higher education theory, policy, philosophy, and practice. Postgraduate research and supervision are at the forefront of her teaching practice, being actively involved in postgraduate researcher education through teaching, supervision, and mentoring.

Fadia has always been committed to making equality and diversity cornerstones of my academic practice, trying to ameliorate – through a praxis of inclusion and rigorous self-reflectivity- experiences of everyday marginalisation across class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. 'That's Me!' represents in this sense a unique opportunity to redress deeply embedded social inequalities at the critical juncture of doctoral education, weaving together creatively policy, theory and practice.

Hannah Roberts

As a doctoral researcher at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Hannah is currently investigating the pedagogy of Clara Schumann and its applicability in modern-day practice. Alongside this, on a placement funded by M4C, Hannah has conducted a research project with Awards for Young Musicians, which assists young people from low-income households in overcoming social and financial barriers. Underpinning both her research and pedagogical practice is the drive to bring awareness to the issues of equality, equity, and inclusion within the classical music scene, and to be part of the process of removing some of these barriers. Hannah is delighted to be a part of the 'That's Me!' project, which enables her to further her interest in the educational barriers faced by students from minoritised groups and communities in higher education.

Huafeng Lu

Huafeng holds BA in China and MA in Germany, and recently continue her academic journey as a PhD student at BCU focusing on the digital divide and inclusive city planning in public transport. With years of experience as an architect and design manager in Europe, Huafeng possesses a diverse skill set and confidence in engaging with various stakeholders, providing her with a global perspective and mindset. "That's Me" project resonates deeply with her as an international student with a Global majority background, especially concerning routes in barriers and strategies for navigating routes out in the context of the UK.

Dr Jacqueline Taylor

Dr Jacqueline Taylor is an artist, writer, researcher and Senior Lecturer in Research Practice at the Faculty of Arts, Design and Media. She has worked solely with PGRs for over ten years, including PGR supervision, examination and in a strategic capacity as the faculty's doctoral education lead. Jacqueline's research incorporates two strands; the first explores performative and provocative pedagogies for doctoral researchers in the arts. The second, explores the intersections between art and language, with a focus on poetics and semiotics, to articulate otherness in aesthetic practice. She exhibits her art practice internationally, and presents, performs, and publishes her research globally, often in alternative hybrid forms. Inclusion, equality and dismantling power structures that maintain difference are at the core of her teaching and research.

James Boston

James is the Race Equality Charter Project Manager at Birmingham City University. He is currently leading on the bronze Race Equality Charter submission by working collaboratively with multiple stakeholders to acquire, analyse and utilise key quantitative and qualitative data to better understand and remedy racial disparities within the university.

In his spare time, James coordinates a race equality initiative which seeks to advance efforts to manifest reparatory justice and decolonisation by engaging government and other key stakeholders with a view to informing UK and global policy change.

The That's Me project represents an opportunity to continue to engage with initiatives that endeavour to deconstruct barriers that prevent students from having equal access to opportunity's for personal and educational prosperity.

Jessica Wythe

Jess Wythe is a higher education lecturer and doctoral researcher in Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) for the department of Childhood, Youth and Community at Birmingham City University. She is also a first-generation postgraduate student and is in the third year of her Doctorate in Education (EdD) at BCU. Her research ethos concerns promoting educational equity for learners with SEND and facilitating for all individuals to have their voices, opinions, and stories heard and shared. Jess is looking forward to joining the 'That's Me!' project to learn more about different people's past and current postgraduate research journeys and experiences, and to participate in a project that makes postgraduate research routes more inclusive and accessible for prospective researchers in the West Midlands.

Jo Shemmans

Jo is an AHRC-funded Midland4Cities PhD student with an interest in the presentation of marginalised groups in literature. Her doctoral research considers how William Wordsworth's poetry engages with eighteenth century and contemporary debates around the perception of those experiencing homelessness. Jo is also interested in how academic research in the arts can find ways to influence policy making in addition to traditional outcomes. As a mature student from a working-class family, Jo was drawn to the 'That's Me' project through a desire to widen access to the arts and academia to those from under-represented groups and less affluent backgrounds.

Joy Ellis

Joy is a jazz pianist, composer, educator and PhD researcher, currently beginning her third year part-time at BCU, exploring reasons for women's underrepresentation in instrumental jazz music.

What excites Joy about being involved in the 'That's Me!' initiative is that, as well as being closely aligned with her own research examining issues around equality and equity of opportunity, the project offers the chance to work alongside seasoned researchers to create meaningful change.

As a female jazz pianist accustomed to feeling underrepresented in her professional life, Joy is passionate about redressing the gender imbalance prevalent in so many industries, and the promotion of greater diversity in society.

Dr Karen Patel

Karen is a Research Fellow in the College of Media and English, and Director of the Centre for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Arts (CEDIA) at BCU. Her research interests centre on the creative industries, particularly inequalities and intersectionality. Karen wants to be a part of the That's Me! project because she is passionate about equity and inclusion in the creative sector and in academia. Karen wants to be a part of making positive changes to ensure more people from marginalised groups have a chance to make a career in academia and/or the creative sector.

Dr Kate Thomson

Kate has been PGR Director for 'Health' research degrees at BCU since 2015, overseeing PhDs and the Professional Doctorate in Health Practice (which started in 2021). Most Health doctoral researchers study part-time and/or have a health practitioner background. This led to recognising the need for our PGR population to mirror the local community/health employment environment, particularly to ensure that Global Majority people have equitable opportunities to advance their careers through research /pursue academic careers. In my 'pastoral' role Kate is also made aware where PGRs experience difficulties during their studies, including in interpersonal and institutional contexts that are racialised

Professor Kirsten Forkert

Kirsten Forkert's research interests focus on questions of migration, nationalism and race, and she also has a keen interest in methodological experimentation and collaborative approaches to research. She is the author and co-author of four books, most recently *How Media and Conflicts Make Migrants* (2020) and is developing new work revisiting histories of anti-racist and migrant justice activism in the UK, and considering how these might be used to imagine alternatives. She also currently teaches on race and the media. Kirsten also chairs one of the working groups for BCU's Race Equality Charter application

Melisa Oleschuk

A first-generation immigrant from Ukraine, with a working-class background, Melisa offers a unique and underrepresented perspective in the realm of higher education. Melisa is deeply committed to advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion by shining a light on a seemingly overlooked group of students in research, those who navigate higher education as migrants, particularly those with varying circumstances with the Home Office which often hinder their potential. Despite these hinderances, her journey involves active engagement in staff/student research projects and international training, all aimed at enriching her expertise in human rights advocacy and civil society engagement. Notably, Melisa secured her spot as one of 58 candidates chosen from a pool of over 800 applicants worldwide for the 61st United Nations Graduate Study Programme in Geneva. Her PhD research focuses on empowering civil society in the US through the UPR, aiming to create a model for these CSOs to advocate for targeted, accessible, and human rights-aligned law reform using the UPR. Now, in her role as a research assistant on the That's Me Project, Melisa brings her passion for academic research, diverse skill set, and unwavering commitment to fostering inclusive academic spaces, with the aim of making a significant impact on the PGR community.

Michelle Strauss

Michelle completed her undergraduate degrees and went straight into the workforce in 2007. So when she considered PGR in 2022, the thought of pursuing further study was daunting as university seemed a distant memory! She was also concerned about how being away from the workforce during her PhD may impact re-entry. Her experience navigating the postgraduate process from this perspective and exploring the various paths in, through and out has provided invaluable experience to draw on for the That's Me Project. Michelle believes that integral to this transition from work to PGR is enabling those considering PGR to have resources they can look to, to help inform their own PGR journeys. As an immigrant twice over Michelle has an understanding of the complexities and challenges of being an "outsider" in the workforce and higher education. She is extremely excited to contribute to this exciting and worthwhile project.

Neesha Sahota

At Birmingham City University (BCU), Neesha is investigating “NEET” (not in education, employment or training) young people’s experiences in third-sector and NHS mental health services. Outside of BCU, Neesha’s professional development consists of supporting various Community Interest Companies to develop and deliver social inclusion projects for individuals from diverse sociocultural backgrounds.

The ‘That’s Me!’ project resonates deeply with Neesha due to her [personal journey as a “NEET” and past experiences in higher education \(HE\)](#). While this underpins her current research, she has drawn on her recent HE experiences and assisted BCU colleagues with preparing new students for PGR study. Neesha is keen to further her commitment to equal opportunities in the ‘That’s Me!’ project by collaborating with teams to create initiatives that enable individuals from diverse backgrounds to access and complete HE.

Dr Oliver Carter

Oliver Carter is a Reader in Creative Economies at the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research at Birmingham City University. He chairs the Faculty of Art, Design and Media's Ethics Committee and he is the Site Director for the AHRC Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership, which funds world-class doctoral research in the arts and humanities. Since 2014, Oliver has occupied a number of leadership roles in PGR researcher education and development, and has been actively involved in widening participation in doctoral education. Being involved in That's Me is an exciting opportunity for him to continue this work and learn more about the barriers that exist for students wanting to embark on PhDs and transform doctoral education at BCU.

Dr Pelham Carter

Pelham is a senior lecturer in Psychology. He did his PhD at the University of Hull, and has worked at the University of Suffolk (UCS), the University of Huddersfield and now BCU. Pelham has been involved in PhD supervision and examining for around 10 years. Over the course of that decade, and across several institutions whilst he have seen lots of success stories Pelham has also come across lots of examples of barriers and issues that have stopped individuals from either being able to embark on a PhD or engage with the PhD journey to the same extent that others from more privileged backgrounds have been able to. He has seen many potential students not be able to take that first step on a PhD for reasons that are not fair. As someone from an area where people traditionally don't go this far in education it bothers Pelham. Without luck and a studentship Pelham wouldn't have been able to do his PhD, but luck shouldn't really be a factor

Dr Rebecca Smyth

Committed to intersectional feminist praxis and critical pedagogy, Rebecca is determined to work collectively to make universities inclusive, transformative communities for the public good and social justice. Rebecca comes from a multi- and interdisciplinary background, with a particular interest in gender studies and human rights. As principal investigator on two other research projects, Rebecca has had the privilege of conducting socially engaged research and developing qualitative and participatory action research experience. She is excited and grateful to have the opportunity to contribute this experience to That's Me.

Professor Rob Smith

Rob is a Brummie and a Professor of Education. Over fifteen years his work has explored the impact of marketised systems on education. Rob has researched and written about education policy and its impact on practice, often in collaboration with practitioners and students in further and higher education settings. Rob sees education as a means of bringing about equality and fostering social and community cohesion. Education should be about hope and positive change. This is essential in a global city like Birmingham. Rob's family and friends include people from African-Caribbean and other backgrounds.

Sarah Bristol-Abbott

Sarah is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Education, with a Bachelors and Masters in Black Studies. Her academic journey has revolved around delving into the challenges and triumphs of global majority communities, so she is thrilled to have the opportunity to be a part of the That's Me! Project, an initiative that deeply resonates with her passion for equity, institutional accountability, and inclusion.

The That's Me! project's commitment to dismantling barriers and cultivating a more inclusive research environment provides a unique opportunity to make a substantial impact on the representation and success of global majority researchers. Sarah is looking forward to co-creating solutions and working alongside fellow researchers to drive positive change in the West Midlands and beyond. Together, we can eliminate obstacles, empower global majority researchers, and celebrate their contributions to research and academia.

Professor Sarah Cooper

Sarah is a Professor of Interdisciplinary Criminal Justice at BCU's College of Law, Social and Criminal Justice. Sarah serves as Chair of the Faculty for Business, Law and Social Sciences' Research Degrees and Environment Committee, which governs around 400 doctoral researchers and supervisors, and as a Site Director for the AHRC Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership, which funds world-class doctoral research in the arts and humanities, making hundreds of awards to date, across 8 universities in the region. That's Me! speaks to Sarah's interests in interdisciplinary research, cross-institutional working, and creating environments that enable all members of PGR communities to thrive

Dr Sian Vaughan

Sian is Associate Professor in Research Practice in the College of Art and Design at BCU and she has been actively researching and trying to improve doctoral education for more than a decade. An experienced PhD supervisor and examiner, Sian was formerly Art & Design PhD programme lead (2015-2022) as well as Site-Director of the AHRC-funded Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership (2018-2022). Sian has led on the development of doctoral community support, supervisor development activity, and policy at BCU, as well as publishing widely on doctoral experience, PhD supervisor development, and doctoral regulations. Sian co-leads an international doctoral supervisor development network and reviews for several education journals. Sian's most recent work has been around issues of privilege and inclusion in practice research at doctoral level.

Dr Steph DeMarco

Stephanie is an Education Developer on the Academic Practice Team. She did her PhD at The University of Edinburgh where she looked at the American Middle Class and its role in inequalities.

Growing up in a deprived area, Stephanie was fortunate enough to have parents who provided her a level of educational advantage that she only appreciated once she began researching inequalities in education. This led to her looking at how privilege reinforces advantage rather than focusing on those who are disadvantaged by institutional inequalities.

She got involved with this project because much of Academia, and more specifically postgraduate research, has historically been an insular (and exclusionary) place for so many. The That's Me! Project is a pivotal moment for BCU to better understand where institutional barriers to entry come from and how we can remove them.

Suliaman Alramahi

Suliaman is a dedicated engineer with a background in teaching and a passion for empowering students. He holds an MSc in Engineering Management from Northumbria University and a BSc in Mechanical Engineering from Abu Dhabi University and is currently pursuing his PhD in sustainable supply chain management and digital transformation. Suliaman is also involved in the IT industry with 3 years of experience in SAP/Data and AI account management/business development. His passion for creating impactful change, coupled with his Palestinian heritage's emphasis on education, drives his motivation to join the That's Me! project, where he aims to contribute his expertise in interdisciplinary research and cross-institutional collaboration to empower PGR communities.

Yvonne Leslie

As a Black woman, being part of a project that advocates for the expansion of the Global Majority academic community is important for Yvonne personally. Having spent time investigating the gap in attainment faced by students from minoritised backgrounds in UK universities, Yvonne realises the importance in diversifying the research community. That's Me! allows for Yvonne to be part of a change. The project aims to challenge the established practices that create barriers into postgraduate research for Global Majority people. These barriers exist both in and outside of academia, so being able to engage external organisations is key for Yvonne.

Routes-In

Applying an intersectional lens, the *Routes-In Team* will explore the pathways into and barriers to accessing postgraduate research study through engaging with, including via workshops, a range of stakeholders, including BCU PGRs and their families, BCU staff, regional employers, and wider communities. The *Routes-In Team* will make recommendations for improving pathways, reducing barriers, and fostering inclusivity, especially in the context of PGR application and induction processes, and which can be piloted. In this context, the *Routes-In Team* will also investigate pre-research degree models, which aim to bridge the gap between UGT/PGT and PGR study, with a view to making recommendations for a best practice model.

Abigail Shaw

Dr Adam Whittaker

Dr Kate Thomson

Professor Kirsten Forkert (Lead)

Jo Shemmans

Joy Ellis

Sarah Bristol-Abbott

Dr Pelham Carter (Lead)

Routes Through

The *Routes Through Team* will explore and define best practices about key aspects of the PGR experience, with a view to making recommendations that can be piloted. These include supervision dynamics, styles and practices; EDI training and policy; the provision of 'safe' and 'home-from-home' spaces for PGRs; and the design and use of peer-to-peer networks, which see PGRs interact with each other direct to share knowledge, skills and experience, and reverse mentoring programs that involve PGRs mentoring experienced HE staff to share insights and guidance to promote learning, knowledge exchange and growth.

Dr Amanda French

Hannah Roberts

Dr Karen Patel (Lead)

Neesha Sahota

Dr Sian Vaughan (Lead)

Dr Fadia Dakka

Jessica Wythe

Melisa Oleschuk

Professor Rob Smith

Dr Steph DeMarco

Routes Out

The *Routes Out Team* will engage with and broaden the *That's Me* regional employer board to foster connections, including career opportunities, between regional employers and PGRs, across a range of industries and sectors. They will investigate the workforce needs of the region, the extent of existing regional employer involvement with and understanding of postgraduate research(ers), and strategies for engaging employers as coaches, allies, and mentors. This will be done with a view to collaboratively developing an inclusive workforce strategy, including recruitment practices, for the region that values and harnesses its postgraduate research portfolio and widens routes out opportunities for PGRs.

Emmanuel Adesuyi

Dr Ben Colliver

Anne-Louise Crichlow

Huafeng Lu

Dr Eveleigh Buck-Matthews

Michelle Strauss

Dr Jacqueline Taylor (Lead)

Dr Rebecca Smyth (Lead)

Yvonne Leslie

The BCU Team

Sarah Bristol-Abbott - Research Associate
Dr Oliver Carter - PI
Dr Pelham Carter - Co-PI
Dr Ben Colliver - Research Associate (staff)
Professor Sarah Cooper - PI
Anne-Louise Crichlow - Research Associate
Dr Steph DeMarco - Research Associate
Joy Ellis - Research Associate
Professor Kirsten Forkert - Co-PI
Amy Mckenzie - BCU Project Manager
Neesha Sahota - Research Associate
Yvonne Leslie - Employer Engagement Officer
Huafeng Lu - Research Associate
Melisa Oleschuk - Research Associate
Abigail Shaw - Research Associate
Joanne Shemmans - Research Associate
Dr Jacqueline Taylor - Co-PI
Professor Rob Smith - Publication Strategy Development
Dr Rebecca Smyth - Co-PI
Michelle Strauss - Research Associate
Jessica Wythe - Research Associate
Dr Eli Ashong - Postdoctoral Research Assistant
Sulayman Bah - Research Associate
Sabreen Jan - Peer Researcher
Roxanne Korda - Research Associate
Amélie Doche - Research Associate
Jenny Harding - DRC Director
Melanie-Marie Haywood - EDI Advisor
Anne-Louise Crichlow - Research Associate



The BCU Team

Previous team members

Emmanuel Adesuyi - Research Associate

James Boston - Race Equality Charter Project Manger

Dr Eveleigh Buck-Matthews - Research Associate

Anne-Louise Crichlow - Research Associate

Dr Fadia Dakka - Research Associate

Dr Amanda French - Research Associate

Francis Hine-Hughes - BCU Project Manager

Dr Karen Patel - Co-PI

Hannah Roberts - Research Associate

Michelle Strauss - Research Associate

Dr Kate Thomson - Research Associate

Dr Sian Vaughan - Co-PI

Dr Adam Whittaker - Research Associate

