



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

DOCTORAL SCHOOL

Empowering PGRs to lead EDI enhancement initiatives

Prof Katherine Yates, Dr Hannah Helm, Dr David Gilbert, Dr Keren
Poliah, Adam King, Mus'haf Khan

University of Salford

Doctoral School EDI leads

- One year bursary to undertake a small EDI related research project (one day a week)
- Self-funded doctoral students in year 2 or 3 (or PT equivalent)
- Project must be directly related to PGRs at the University
- Recruitment considered project fit, potential for impact, skills, passion for topic, and contribution to the PGR community



**DOCTORAL
SCHOOL**

Decolonising the PhD

Keren Poliah

k.poliah1@salford.ac.uk

Aims:

Raise awareness of doing research through a decolonising lens

Liaise with other institutions engaging and encouraging their postgraduate researchers

Understand how to support the University of Salford's PGRs engaging with diverse modes of research and decolonising theses



**DOCTORAL
SCHOOL**

Outcomes

International symposium in April 2023

- 250 registrations, thousands of views, hundreds of downloads
- https://figshare.com/authors/Keren_Poliah/15445814

Collected narratives about the lived experiences of postgraduate researchers with decolonising theses

- Raised awareness and supported institution-wide conversations
- Some became scripts that are used to encourage discussion in supervisor training

Article: Poliah et al (2024) An Act of Love: Three Experiences of Self-Decolonization in the Academic Community of the United Kingdom. The February Journal.

Outcomes

- I met esteemed decolonial scholars like Prof Alberto Gomes (director and founder of Global DEEP Network)
- I became project coordinator for the [Global Decolonising Circle](#)
- Also became communication coordinator for the [Global DEEP Network](#)
- Made friends for life (other EDI leads)
- Improved skills like being very organised and coordinating activities
- Recognised at university for work on decolonising – secured a [role](#) with the Decolonising English Literature at SAMCT after my viva
- Worked with Changemakers Unlimited Ltd at the University of Manchester as Lead Researcher for how the students are affected by racism, microaggressions, and barriers to learning



Widening participation in Research

Hannah Helm

h.j.helm@edu.salford.ac.uk

Aims:

Examine barriers to participation in research degrees

Explore current widening participation programs

Pilot a widening participation programme aimed at undergraduate students, between second and third year



**DOCTORAL
SCHOOL**

Outcomes

- Internal report and plan for pilot, with costing
- Highly successful pilot with 12 UG students
- Outcome led to permanent adoption of the scheme, for 32 students annually, as part of wider pipeline package
- Article in press: Helm *et al* (2024) Addressing Barriers in the Student Pipeline to Improve Access to Research Careers: A Widening Participation Case Study at the University of Salford. *Journal of Widening Participation and Life Long Learning*

Outcomes

- New skills and greater confidence
- Employment opportunities: EDI role within an AHRC DTP consortium, role within the decolonising English Literature group at University of Salford
- Connected with area I am passionate about and gave me an opportunity to develop expertise in it
- I got to do something really valuable

The experiences of International PGRs

David Junior Gilbert

D.J.Gilbert1@salford.ac.uk

Aims:

Understanding the needs of international postgraduate researchers (PGR) in settling into the UK academic setting.

Assist stakeholders within the University (and beyond) to understand these needs and offer possible interventions that could support international PGRs.



**DOCTORAL
SCHOOL**

Outcomes

- Data and narratives that supported revised supervisor training
- Pilot Buddy scheme
- AdvancedHE blog (with Keren and Hannah)
- Manuscript in progress for submission to peer reviewed journal

Outcomes

- Increased confidence in stakeholder negotiation
- Honed my networking skills
- Collaboration skills with colleagues from other disciplines was enhanced
- Receipt of student engagement partnership award from SEDA (with Keren and Hannah)
- Learnt a lot about the working of academia
- Secured 5 year Fellowship

Neurodiverse PGR Thesis and Post-Viva Feedback

Adam King

A.P.King@edu.salford.ac.uk

Aims:

To explore the viva feedback provided to openly neurodiverse Post-Graduate Researcher's (PGRs) compared to neurotypical PGRs.



**DOCTORAL
SCHOOL**

Outcomes

- Internal report on evaluation of feedback
- Creation of a neuro-assets sheet
- Training material for PGRs and Supervisors
- hands-on experience in applying experimental skills to live data, which has been especially beneficial for my PhD work and will likely prove invaluable throughout my career
- Valuable experience on academic collaboration
- Experience to showcase on my CV



Empowering Neurodiverse Researchers

Mus'haf Khan

M.M.Khan6@salford.ac.uk

Aims:

Examine the academic experiences, outcomes, and the barriers neurodiverse postgraduate students face.

Critically assess institutional policies and support systems.



**DOCTORAL
SCHOOL**

Outcomes

- Enhanced research skills in critical analysis and synthesis
- Deepened understanding of neurodiversity and inclusive practices
- Expanded knowledge of equality, diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) frameworks
- Improved communication skills through outreach and collaboration

Impact on three levels

- Individual development: greater confidence, enhanced skills, expanded network and new opportunities
- Institutional PGR community: more EDI conversations, better understanding of our PGR community, improved supervisor training, additional support provision
- Global PGR and HE community: dissemination of learning

Empowerment

- Individual ownership, with coaching approach to supervision
- About them as much as the project, supporting and building on their passion
- Collaboration encourage throughout, recruited in multiples, networked
- Monthly group and 1-2-1 meeting
- Training in voice/presence - Vox
- Space to showcase – SPARC, AdvancedHE conference and blog
- Support but lots of freedom, which comes with risk, protect as part of empower

Limitations

- Legacy - Projects are for a single year “The worst part is possibly not seeing someone pick up the work started on decolonising again”
- Some projects have more opportunities/tangible benefits to leads than other, e.g. not all projects will have same publication possibilities
- Leads have to juggle multiple activities, challenging to do this alongside a PhD (though removed/reduced need for paid employment)
- Supported, but self-driven: risk that outcomes just won't be delivered

More to come

- Focus is PT PGRs and PGRs that are carers
- Exploring experience of both PGRs and supervisors
- Looking potential interventions/support provision

Please share what you know...they would love your input...

Experiences of/feedback from PGRs who are part-time and or carers – Kingsley Omon: U.Omon@salford.ac.uk

Supervisors' experiences of support PT candidates or candidates with caring responsibilities – Tania Goddard: T.L.H.Goddard@edu.salford.ac.uk

Experience of setting up PGR community support groups (PT/Carers) – Lauren Holmes L.P.Holmes@edu.salford.ac.uk

Take Homes

- We don't necessarily know what's needed
- PGRs are very capable of successfully leading institutional-wide projects (might get better access)
- Not all projects, or aspects of projects will succeed, be prepared to fail
- Manage expectations
- We saw benefits across three scales with many unexpected ones
- Don't underestimate the impact these opportunities can have on individuals and what they go on to do
- Empowerment and independence key (accept the risk)

Thank you for
listening



Prof Katherine Yates
k.l.yates@salford.ac.uk



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

**DOCTORAL
SCHOOL**