

CO-CREATING RESEARCH FUTURES

REFLECTIONS ON A
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH
SECONDMENT SCHEME

Presented by
Dr Sulayman Bah &
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THE BIGGER PICTURE

Why Secondments?

- **Barriers for Global Majority students.**
- **Paid, mentored research opportunities.**
- **Values**

**Collaboration
Equity
Flexibility
Care.**



WHAT THE SCHEME OFFERS

- **Experience**
- **Validation**
- **Creative freedom.**
- **Mentorship,**
- **Institutional contribution**
- **Personal approach.**





THE STRUCTURE

How It Works?

- Recruitment across PGT, PGR, and postdocs.
- Mini-projects aligned to That's Me! goals.
- Flexible structure, supportive mentorship.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



- **Collaborative tone, creative freedom.**
- **Asked about what I can gain and contribute.**
- **Trust and validation from the beginning.**

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Relational, mutual learning.
- Skills gained communication, confidence, clarity, peer
- support, institutional insight.
- Feedback-driven evolution.



REFLECTIONS FROM THE WORK







**JOIN US ONLINE
30TH JUNE AT
11:30AM**

**AS WE WRITE A
LETTER TO OUR
YOUNGER SELVES**

ONLINE EVENT AIMED AT GLOBAL
MAJORITY POST GRAD STUDENTS

Just a little...
Look back to where you came from...
stayed... look at where you're going...
Believe in yourself...
to... so much... it's difficult...
Keep going... far away, but before you know...
to happen, just keep trying and believing in...
yourself! You can do this, keep on moving. Keep...
going, this is all for something. They'll realise...
your potential. It just takes time. Have a little...
patience. Believe in yourself, you'll get through...
all of this. All of the...
...et need a little...

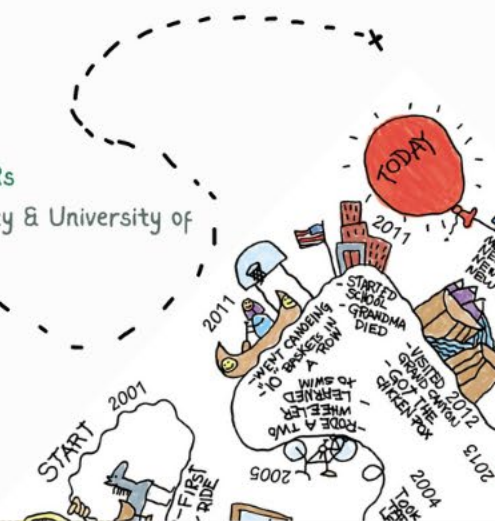
Life Mapping Workshop

Together, let's map the moments that shaped us.

Limited spaces. Register your interest

Thursday 10th July 2025
11:00 am – 2:00 pm
At Parkside Atrium,
Birmingham City University

Open to Global Majority PGRs
at Birmingham City University & University of
Wolverhampton



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WHAT COULD BE BETTER

Evolving Through Feedback

- Onboarding,
- System access
- Clearer briefs.
- Calls for structured peer support
- Orientation and ongoing engagement.



PRESENTATION & VISIBILITY



- Each secondment ends with a presentation.
- Safe space for sharing, not performance.
- Thoughtful, real feedback.

WHY THIS MODEL WORKS

- **Trust, recognition, care, mutual respect.**
- **Value of Global Majority voices.**



A RESEARCH CULTURE WORTH BUILDING

- Centres lived experience as knowledge.
- Researchers valued holistically.



THANK YOU



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Co-creating Research Futures: Reflections on a Postgraduate Research Secondment Scheme

Presented by: Sulayman Bah & Shameela Yoosuf Ali

Birmingham City University

Slide 1: Introduction – Who We Are

Shameela

Hello everyone

I'm a doctoral researcher at BCU and currently involved in the That's Me! Secondment scheme. I also work as a research assistant who is in charge of Community engagement projects in That's me Programme. Today, I'll be reflecting on what the scheme offers from the inside, as someone navigating research, community life, and identity all at once.

Sulayman

And I'm Sulayman Bah. I've been part of the That's Me! research and programme team, working on widening participation in postgraduate education. I'll speak to the design of the scheme, its purpose, and how it's evolving based on participant feedback like Shameela's.

Slide 2: The Bigger Picture – Why Secondments?

Sulayman:

We know postgraduate research is not equally accessible. The Global Majority of students face multiple barriers, including economic, cultural, and systemic.

This secondment scheme was developed to create short, paid, mentored research opportunities where participants could contribute to real institutional work while gaining experience, confidence, and a sense of belonging in academic research environments.

We designed it around key values: collaboration, equity, flexibility, and care.

Slide 3: What the Scheme Offers

Shameela:

From a participant's perspective, what this project offers is very clear. And it is unique.

It's not just about getting experience. It's about being placed in an environment that recognises your potential from the beginning. You and your team are paired with a mentor, you're given a project that contributes to wider institutional goals, and you're given room to bring your own approach.

It acknowledges that research journeys don't all look the same. For someone like me, coming from a Sri Lankan Muslim background and returning to academia after a period of work, activism, and motherhood, that approach feels both refreshing and validating

Slide 4: The Structure – How It Works

Sulayman:

Participants are recruited from across the PGT, PGR, and postdoctoral communities.

They are placed on mini-projects aligned to the That's Me! Programme, such as website audits, data analysis on doctoral access, building mentoring frameworks, or designing inclusive outreach tools.

Each mini project has a brief, deliverables, and timelines, but they're not rigid. Participants are encouraged to shape the work with their own disciplinary strengths and lived insights.

Mentors are there to support, not to direct or control.

Slide 5: First Impressions

Shameela:

When I joined, I remember thinking: *this feels different*.

There was no need to prove yourself first before being trusted, which in itself made a big difference. The tone was collaborative and respectful. People asked me what I wanted to gain and what I could contribute, not just what boxes I could tick. The flexibility and the creative freedom within the mini project are an absolute joy for me.

It made me realise how rare that is in research environments and how powerful it can be when done well.

Slide 6: The Learning Environment

Sulayman:

We tried to build a research environment that feels relational, where learning is mutual.

And that's what we saw in the feedback. Participants talked about gaining

- Communication skills
- Confidence to speak and present
- Clarity on their research identity
- Peer support
- A deeper understanding of how institutions work behind the scenes

This wasn't just about building CVs. It was about building capability and voice. Feedback was gathered through a post-secondment survey, and responses helped shape the scheme's next phase.

Slide 7: Reflections from the Work

Shameela:

In my own secondment, I was placed on a project focused on community engagement, exploring how we can build inclusive, creative spaces for postgraduate researchers to connect, reflect, and share..

As part of this, we have co-designed three events: *Letter to My Younger Self*, a *Cultural Exchange* gathering, and a *Life Mapping* workshop.

So far, we've delivered Letter to My Younger Self, a really moving event that invited participants to reflect on their academic journeys, challenges, and hopes through writing and shared storytelling. It sparked honest conversations and allowed people to connect beyond titles and research topics.

We're preparing two more events, a cultural exchange and a Life Mapping workshop in July. These events are designed to bring people together through food, memory, creativity, and conversation.

What's been meaningful for me is drawing on my background in journalism, writing, and activism, and seeing those skills valued in a research context. This hasn't just been about outputs. It's about building something participatory, rooted in lived experience, and reflective of our communities.

Slide 8: What Could Be Better

Sulayman:

We know no programme is perfect.

Participants have flagged areas for improvement, onboarding processes, timely access to systems, and clearer project briefs at the start. These are being addressed.

We've also heard requests for more structured peer-to-peer interaction, better pre-project orientation, and opportunities for continued engagement beyond the secondment itself. All of this helps us refine and iterate.

Slide 8: Evolving Through Feedback

Shameela:

As someone now helping to shape the scheme from within, I've seen how seriously feedback is taken.

Things don't just get noted, they get implemented. That in itself models what inclusive research practice should look like: responsive, reflective, and constantly evolving.

It's rare to feel like you're helping improve a programme while still inside it. But that's what makes this model unique. It's designed to grow with its people.

Slide 9: Presentation and Visibility

Sulayman:

Each secondment ends with a presentation day where participants share their work, reflections, and even challenges.

Shameela:

It's a moment where researchers, many of whom have never spoken publicly in an academic setting, take up space.

You're not performing; you're sharing. It's structured, but it feels safe. And the feedback is real, not performative, but encouraging and thoughtful.

Slide 10: Why This Model Works

Sulayman:

This model works because it's built on trust. It starts by believing in the value of the Global Majority researchers' contributions.

It's about paid opportunities, yes. But it's also about values, care, time, flexibility, and mutual respect.

Slide 11: A Research Culture Worth Building

Shameela:

For me, this scheme points to the kind of research culture we need to cultivate, one that doesn't just include people, but centres them. Where lived experience is

recognised as knowledge, not treated as an optional extra. And where researchers are valued as whole people, not just for what they produce.

Sulayman:

From the programme side, we've seen this scheme shift not just individuals, but teams. It's changed how we think about researcher development.

Shameela:

Being part of this scheme has reshaped how I view my place in academia, not as someone on the margins trying to keep up, but as a researcher with perspective, insight, and a rightful place at the table.

Slide 12

Thank you so much.