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That's Me! Eliminating Barriers to
Postgraduate Research Study in
the West Midlands

**REVERSING THE LIMITATIONS OF
REVERSE MENTORING BY
INTRODUCING A
CO-CONSTRUCTION APPROACH?**

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TODAY'S AGENDA

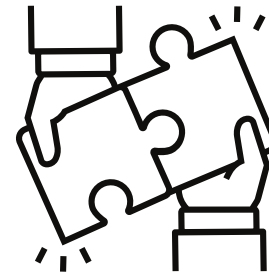
- That's Me Project, Context & Reverse Mentoring
- Co-Construction (and Theoretical Framework)
- The Scheme
- (Very) Preliminary Findings - And one big reflection
- Future Iterations

CONTEXT:



That's Me! Eliminating
Barriers to Postgraduate
Research Study in the West
Midlands

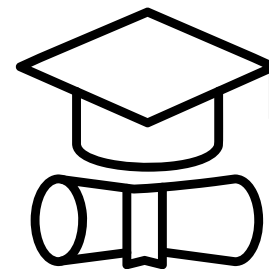
BCU and
Wolverhampton
Project



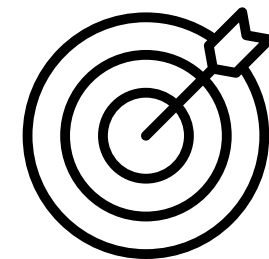
Our Project: Collaborative initiative between Birmingham City University & the University of Wolverhampton.



Funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Office for Students (OfS) across a consortium of 13 projects nationally.



Seeks to address barriers and challenges faced by Global Majority PGRs at different stages of their journey, from application to completion and beyond.



32 stakeholder agreed outputs
One of which is: **The implementation of a Reverse Mentoring Programme.**

Want to learn more? Check out our page:
<https://www.bcu.ac.uk/research/thats-me>

REVERSE MENTORING: WHAT ARE WE WORKING WITH?

- One of the required outputs of That's Me; Concerning because it hasn't got a great track record.

- Successes of the concept are largely in different sectors and with different dynamics.

- EDI focused RM schemes have largely been joyful, but ineffective in larger goals.

- Successes are individual and centre relationship building.

- Though with some notable exceptions
- RM in corporations seem more likely to succeed
- Largely volunteers, short term goals
- No evidence of a ripple effect to institutional policy
- No tracking of whether this effect happens in the future?

REVERSE VS. RECIPROCAL

Although we *call* our programme '**Reverse**', it is in practice '**Reciprocal**' – recognising that both people in any matched pair are responsible for doing the work, sharing their stories and experiences, learning, and taking action as a result.
(**Cosgrove, 2023**).

Gives **leaders** the chance to walk the walk, and to do it in someone else's shoes.
(**Branson, 2018; Virgin Atlantic**)

HOW DO BOTH PARTIES BENEFIT EQUALLY?

'the extra, unpaid, invisible labor we're [women of color] doing in organizations every day. Too often, we're expected to do all of the above — to spot, interrupt, and fix inequitable structures — without recognition or reparations.'
(**Promise54, 2021**)

SUMMARY OUTCOMES OF REVERSE MENTORING (REVIEW OF 11 PUBLICLY DOCUMENTED CASES)

THE GOOD

- Both parties feel good!
- Safe Spaces for both parties
- Networking and relationship building
- Increased awareness of focus Issue
- Proactive and involved parties
- Desire to 'learn' from both parties

(Israni, 2022)

Birmingham Successful Case!

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/effective-practice/transforming-the-west-midlands-through-reverse-mentoring/>

THE BAD

- Power dynamics hold strong
- Lack of institutional influence
- Muddled direction of meet ups
- Mentee involvement is less 'serious'
- Seen as a direct line to the 'student'/junior voice; Not expertise
- Not quite any 'paradigm shift'

(Israni, 2022)

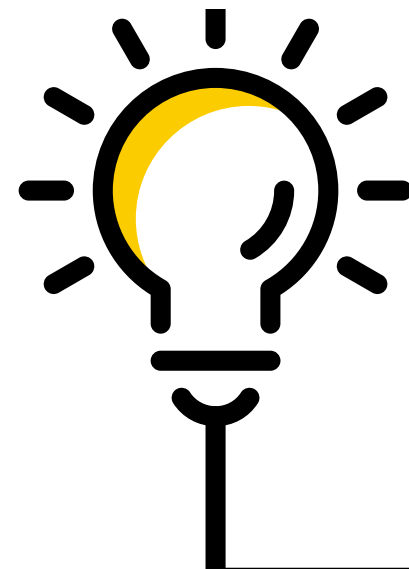
WHAT DO **WE WANT** FROM OUR PILOT?



How do we embed the real-life experience of PGRs in a functioning scheme?



How do we design out the limitations of previous research?



***THE PGRS DESIGN THE
SCHEME***

CO-CONSTRUCTION WORKSHOP

OUR PROCESS

1

Presentation by
RM Project Leads

- Cited limitations of RM
- Presented a framework for our overall objectives
- Listed the practical restrictions on the scheme

2

Group Design
Activity

In groups PGRs develop and design different aspects of the scheme, ensuring the limitations

3

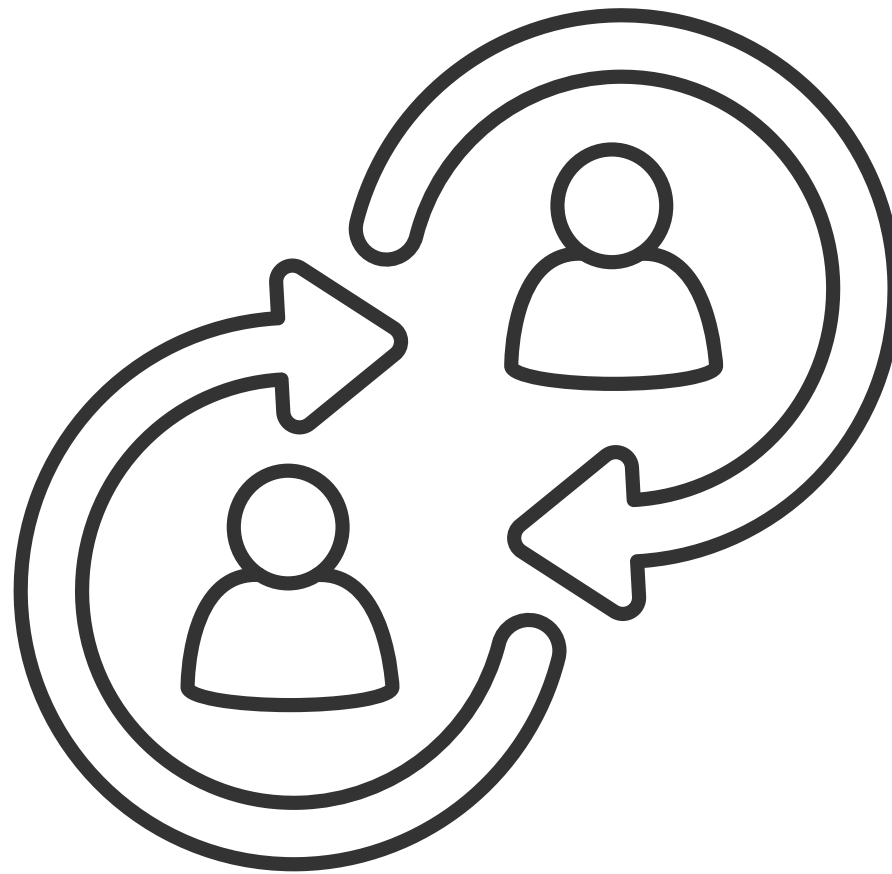
Ranking and
Decision Making

Group decision-making process where all designers chose the ideas that resonated with them and rank them - leaving a final consensus

4

Collate &
Produce Scheme
Details

FRAMEWORKS BEHIND OUR



REVERSE MENTORING

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING THEORY

1

- **Paradigm shift.**
- **Critical awareness** of how our previous knowledge and understandings might have **constrained** us.
- Acting on **new understandings**. (**Mezirow, 1991**)
- Rejecting your learning as a receptacle vs actively engaged criticality.
- Deeper meanings and new perspectives.
- **Contrast** to assimilative learning (fitting into pre-existing knowledge structures).

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY

2

- Emerged as a way to **conceptualise** fairness in individualised work arrangements (**Shanahan; Smith 2023**).
- Refers to the unwritten set of **expectations** between employees and employers.
- Helps explain the **dynamics** of the employer-employee relationship and how mutual expectations impact workplace behaviour, motivation, and overall organisational effectiveness.
- The contract resides in the **interaction** rather than in the individual or the organisation.
- Two parties, each of whom may have their own agenda and each of whom may not be aware of the agenda of the other party. (**Guest, 1998**)

FRAMEWORKS

HOW DO WE OPERATIONALISE THIS CHANGE?

INFORMATION PACK FOR
MENTORS AND MENTEES



[WALKTHROUGH]

LOGISTICS OF THE SCHEME

- **8 pairs** of mentor/mentees starting; **6 completing** the pilot
- **7 Mentors** come from a **Global Majority** background; **3 Mentees**
- Mentees are **Senior Research Leaders**
From Research Lead in a College to Head of Doctoral Research in a large faculty
- Meet **once per month over a four month period** of June 2024 – Sept 2024
- Routine blanket **check-ins** for all parties
- One meeting will be **face to face**
- Ongoing Mentor **support** throughout the process
- Mentors **take the lead** in setting the agenda, choosing meeting locations, and guiding the focus of the meetings
- **Debriefing meeting/Exit Interview** at the completion of the scheme with members of the That's Me! team

OBJECTIVES & SUCCESS METRICS

The That's Me! Reverse Mentoring Scheme aims to foster an environment where PGRs can have their voices heard and their lived experiences recognised and turned into actionable change.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES*

- **Amplifying** the **voices** and **needs** of PGRs within the organisation.
- **Reporting** on these voices in **Senior Leadership (SL)** meetings to ensure they are **taken into account** in decision-making processes.
- Ensuring that the **lived experiences** of participants in the **Global Majority** are acknowledged, trusted and valued.
- Provide a **platform** and **role** for PGRs to feel **empowered, confident** in their expertise and experiences *as well as an opportunity for development*
- **Evaluation** of the **impact** of the program on **both mentors and mentees** *as well as the institution.*
- *Potential areas for further development and expansion of impact*

*Non-exhaustive list

**THE 'ANSWER' TO THE
QUESTION WE'VE ALL BEEN
WAITING FOR...**

HAVE WE REVERSED THE LIMITATIONS OF
REVERSE MENTORING BY INTRODUCING A
CO-CONSTRUCTION APPROACH?

**'DON'T KNOW WHERE WE
GO FROM HERE, BUT WE'RE
BOTH ON BOARD.'** (MR1)

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS*



ONLY SAFE PEOPLE CREATE SAFE SPACES

'He's real, he's not just an academic'
(MR2)

'He exposed his vulnerabilities' (MR2)

Low expectations were challenged (NA)

'Long lasting professional relationship'
(NA)

'He didn't join this just to be like, 'I've
ticked this box' (MR1)

He's my go to now. (MR1)

**KEEPING UNSAFE OR UNKNOWN PEOPLE AWAY FROM THE SCHEME IS
THE ONLY WAY FORWARD.**

2

FEELING HEARD

'If voices are heard that can help them put things in place to eliminate those barriers we've been talking about.' (MR1)

I couldn't believe how comfortable I felt sharing some really traumatic things, I just thought it was worth it for her to hear it
(NA)

'Gave me the power and control over how we managed everything... and the space to take the lead' (MR2)

'I felt heard in the space.' (MR2)

'I felt seen and heard in the space – that's the least we ask for and if someone accomodates that it is a good start.' (MR1)

A MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECT ITSELF - SUCCESSFUL (PRELIMINARILY).

**IS SIX (OR 20 EVEN) PEOPLE BEING HEARD BY ONE PERSON ENOUGH TO START MAKE THE CHANGES WE NEED?
MAYBE IT IS. MAYBE IT'S NOT.**

REFLECTION

MAYBE IT'S NOT?

- 'Students were enabled and supported in their mentor role by using the concept of being **'equal thinking partners'** in the mentor-mentee relationship. This allowed vulnerability, trust, shared humanity, and self-compassion to enter the mentoring space.'
- '**Facilitate an environment of psychological safety** where both parties can say what is on their mind without fear of judgement or reprisal'

(Waddington, Husbands, and Bonaparte, 2023: 1-6 *pre-print*)

MAYBE IT IS?

- ' Allowed me to **question what I do and how it impacts on others**, in a safe, honest and open environment.'
(Raza and Onyesoh, 2020)
- 'It's not about the big impacts the programme can have but the **very small changes in attitudes and behaviours** which make a difference.' - mentor (RM eval, U of Wolverhampton, 2022)
- 'I promoted awareness of equality and diversity to my mentee by **challenging, educating and sharing my lived experiences as a black woman, I believe'** (RM Eval, U of Wolverhampton, 2022)
- Mentor 4: "The overall thing for me was the fact that there's somebody there in the authority, they didn't just listen, you know, **they actually took on board what we said**. They followed it up." (Leeds,;Case Study, 2022)



OUTSIZED REWARD FOR THE MENTEE

Wanted to ask for help with a post-doc proposal; but I didn't want to change the dynamic (NA)

The mentee used the mentorship 'as a way to navigate the successes of the university.'
She was also advised on ways to use storytelling, narrative and lived experience in presenting research. (ME1)

'I would have valued talking to someone a little more senior; I thought I would get a lot more out of it.' (MR2)

'One of the first things I asked was, 'What do you need from me?' (MR1)

'He asked how I would approach an emerging situation; That was empowering.' (MR2)

THE (MOSTLY) UNPAID LABOUR IS ALMOST ENTIRELY FALLING ON THE JUNIOR POC. THERE IS NO 'TANGIBLE' BENEFIT FOR THE MENTORS, EVEN WHEN GIVEN AN AUDIENCE WITH A SENIOR MEMBER OF STAFF.

Adding in Reciprocal Models (**Goerisch, 2019**)

Adding in Sponsorship Models (**Ibarra, 2022**)

FUTURE ITERATIONS

Mandated Access –
Not Mandated People

Centring key meetings, decision making and stakeholders

Reframing the process as easy wins for the University:
i.e. 'We have GM PGRs advising/present at all stakeholder meetings'



THANKYOU

QUESTIONS?

Further questions please contact **Stephanie.DeMarco@bcu.ac.uk**
or **Melisa.Oleschuk@mail.bcu.ac.uk**

You can also follow our project by visiting our webpage at
[https://www.bcu.ac.uk/research/thats-me.](https://www.bcu.ac.uk/research/thats-me)

Case Studies

Leeds University. <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/student-success/dir-record/profiles/21124/institutional-reverse-mentoring-project-2022>

Northumbria University. <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/news-events/news/unexpected-lessons-from-reverse-mentoring/>

Queens University Belfast: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/my-queens/ReverseMentoring/ReverseMentoringPilot2023/>

Manchester Met with Greater Manchester Police. <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/628510/1/GMP%20Reverse%20Mentoring%20Report%20Q-Step%20Final%202021.pdf>

Imperial College. <https://www.fenews.co.uk/skills/imperials-reverse-mentoring-scheme-returns-following-successful-pilot/>

University of Westminster. <https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/item/vx7w5/leaving-egos-outside-a-reverse-mentoring-study-of-bame-psychology-students-and-senior-university-leaders>

Wolverhampton <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/media/departments/equality-and-diversity-unit/documents/Pilot-REVERSE-Mentoring-programme--evaluation-Nov-2022.pdf>

Middlesex University <https://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/policies/equality-diversity-inclusion/reverse-mentoring-framework>

University of Birmingham, Birmingham Newman University, University College Birmingham. <https://www.newman.ac.uk/news/reverse-mentoring-success-with-ofs-transformation-west-midlands-project/>

University of Gloucestershire. <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/8245/1/8245-%282020%29-Peterson-%26-Ramsay-Reducing-the-gap%21-Reciprocal-mentoring-between-Black-Asian-and-minority-ethnic-%28BAME%29-students.pdf>

Cambridge University

<https://inews.co.uk/opinion/columnists/cambridge-university-ethnic-minority-mentors-white-academics-racism-scheme-30957>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/07/02/cambridge-university-run-reverse-mentoring-scheme-staff-combat/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/mar/14/cambridge-may-drop-bame-mentoring-of-white-academics>

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/cambridge-s-reverse-mentoring-scheme-was-always-going-to-fail/>

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