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What makes an equitable research culture? Centring an ethics of care for our postgraduate researchers

Embedding equity in research integrity –
UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)

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Introductions

Dr Maisha Islam

Research Culture Lead (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) at the University of Southampton

Co-Chair of an Office for Students and Research England Steering Group – BAME PGR funding programme.

Co-editor – *Uncovering Islamophobia in Higher Education: Supporting the success of Muslim students and staff* (Palgrave Macmillan)



Before we begin...

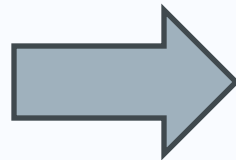
- Discussions around race, religion, gender and other protected characteristics.
- **Brave space** – Be curious, courageous and compassionate (Chiu, 2024).
- Self-disclosure and vulnerability is not mandatory but **encouraged** – I'll be doing the same!
- **Chatham house** rules



The importance of inclusive research cultures



“Research culture encompasses the **behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes** and **norms** of our research communities. It influences researchers’ career paths and determines the way that research is conducted and communicated.”



- Actively promote **collaboration**, transparency, and open communication in research practices.
- **Recognise** and **celebrate** diverse contributions to research, including those from research support staff and **underrepresented** groups.
- Engage in **ongoing dialogue** with colleagues to identify and address **systemic barriers** to inclusion.
- Support initiatives that prioritise the **well-being** and professional **development** of researchers at all career stages, especially those early in their career.

Two sides of the same coin – Research integrity and research culture

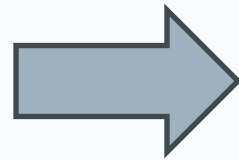
Honesty

Rigour

Transparency

Respect

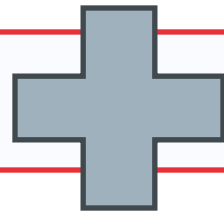
Accountability



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Inequalities at PGR and possibilities through partnership

- Access to PGR is rife with **multiple challenges** (McGloin Smith *et al*, 2024).
- **Loneliness**, isolation and mental wellbeing concerns = normalised aspects of doctoral study (Pitkin, 2020).
- **'Belongingness'** has been negatively impacted for racially minoritised PGRs (ICS, 2022).
 - **Differential access** to professional development – particularly impacting **racially minoritised** and **part-time** doctoral students (PRES, 2023).



Double neglection = PhD students occupy a liminal space of student *and* (often) staff.

PGR Student Partners Scheme (June 2023) :

- A team of PGR students are hired on a **paid, part-time** basis (8 hrs/week).
- Recruitment has **clear focus** on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and encourages representation of minoritised groups.
- PGR Student Partners work with and are **fully embedded** within the Doctoral College.

PGR Research Culture

- PGR survey; in-person engagement; focus group = Insights from **500 PGRs** through survey, shaping views and aspirations on research culture.
- Practical recommendations gathered relating to students' **communication** preferences, **engagement** and inclusion **enablers** and **blockers**, and **community-building** events.
- Actionable output supporting the Doctoral College's plans and upcoming initiatives.





Understanding and exploring the experiences of Black and Asian Postgraduate Research (PGR) students

AUTHORS AND RESEARCH TEAM:

MAISHA ISLAM
Doctoral College Research Culture Lead
(Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion)

NANDINI DAS
PGR Student Partner and 2nd year PhD student in Sociology

LILIAN ODARO
PGR Student Partner and 2nd year PhD student in Gerontology

FOUNDING
MEMBER OF THE
**RUSSELL
GROUP**

Racialised inequalities for PGRs

- Access to PGR = **elusive**; entry dependent on **academic staff**; perceptions of **tokenism**.
- Everyday instances of racialised inequities, ‘**cultural in-betweenity**’ (Bulhan, 1980) and ‘**satisfied settling**’ (Islam *et al*, 2019).
- Burgeoning mental health issues which require **culturally competent** care.

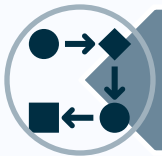
Demystifying the PhD



Weekly, delivered information series



Online, self-directed modules



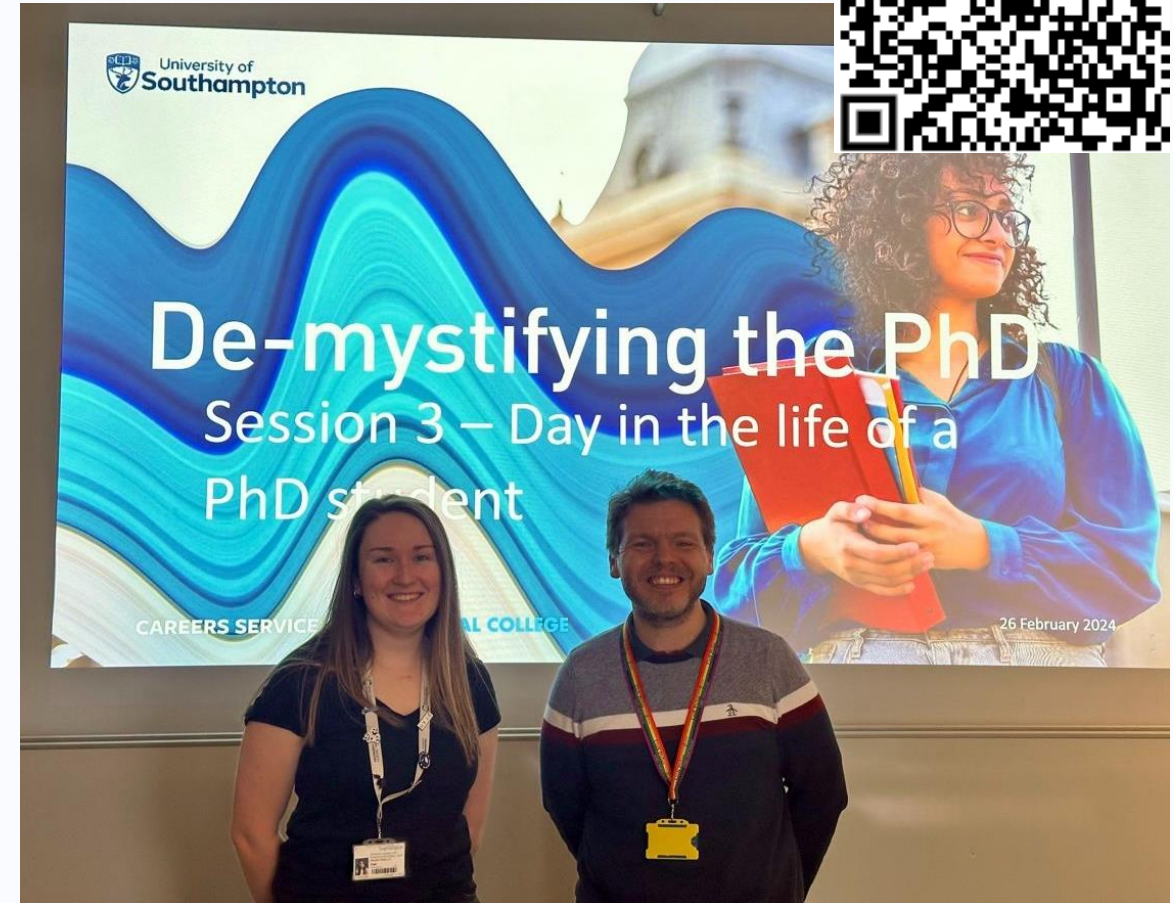
Tailored PhD roadmaps



'Progress to PhD' peer mentoring



Undergraduate Summer Research Internships





Supervisor & Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Partnership Agreement



Building the supervisory relationship

- Supervision = **core element** to inclusive doctoral student experience (Duke and Denicolo, 2017).
- PURPOSE - **Open** and **honest** communication about **shared** and **mutually agreed-upon** expectations (with space for negotiation to meet individual needs).
- Promotes **active support** for students' integration into broader research culture (university and discipline).
- Builds awareness of and discussion around **mental health** and wellbeing; and **EDI considerations**.

Lessons for equitable PGR Research Culture

- **Budget for Equity** – remunerate the expertise and labour of students (also recognising students’ financial concerns/hardships).
- **Adopt Critical Frameworks** – utilise social justice and equity-based theories to inform your approach and ensure meaningful impact.
- **Calibrate Values of Partnership** – ensure expectations and working patterns are discussed and collectively agreed upon, with room for flexibility.
- **Foster Collaboration** – place key emphasis on relationships and cohort-building (between Student Partners, and staff stakeholders).



**Thank you for listening
and feel free to ask any
questions!**