

RESEARCH MATTERS

Celebrating research success and opportunities at the University of Wolverhampton

ISSUE 14

Eliminating barriers for postgraduate researchers

The University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University have been successful in a bid to improve access for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups (BAME) in postgraduate research study in the West Midlands.

Following a bid approved by Research England and the Office for Students (OfS), the University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University (BCU) will work in collaboration to tackle persistent inequalities that create barriers for postgraduate research students from BAME groups across the region.

The project 'That's me!: Eliminating barriers to postgraduate research study in the West Midlands' will focus on three large key professional and practice-based subjects – Health, Education, and Business & Law.

According to HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) data, these subjects accounted for 20% of all postgraduate research students in 2019/20 with less than 25% from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

The project aims to eliminate barriers and improve access to postgraduate research study by tackling university cultures and processes, creating an enabling regional employment environment, and facilitating outstanding supervisory and peer support, geared towards championing successful research and researcher careers.

The project focuses on access to research degrees from three key entry points: 1) Undergraduate (UG) 2) Postgraduate taught (PGT) and 3) professionals from historically excluded groups wishing to return to postgraduate (PGR) study and tailors interventions to the needs of learners at these junctures.



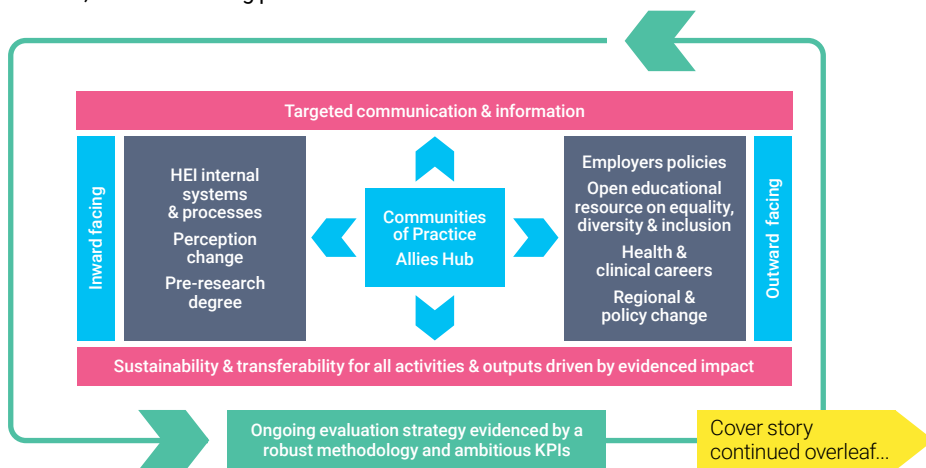
A regional consortium of employers, policymakers and relevant networks are involved in the project with a role to:

- Create a pipeline for their own employees to access PGR study
- Contribute to an employers' forum to shape career paths for doctorates and influence organisational and regional policies
- And raise the profile of the project through a range of media and communications platforms.

The project will include two major vertical workstreams; an inward-facing process

and culture change workstream for Higher Education Institutions, and an outward-facing workstream to create sustainable change at regional level via open educational resources (OER), policies of participating employers, and a wider regional workforce development strategy.

Targeted communication and information will run as a horizontal workstream and sustainable and transferable considerations will be woven into all project activities. Alongside this, an ongoing robust evaluation will be at the heart of the project.



EDITOR'S WELCOME

Welcome to the New Year and I hope you all had a peaceful and relaxing break with your loved ones.

In 2021, we consulted on and finalised our Vision 2030 Research and Innovation Sub-strategy with ambitious targets for improving the relevance and increasing the quality and volume of our research. In the strategy we agreed on three strategic priorities – 1) addressing societal challenges, 2) creating vibrant research communities and 3) having research-inspired learning. Work on these has commenced: for example, we had the first interdisciplinary cross-university working group on the green economy.

In this issue of Research Matters, we are showcasing some of projects and initiatives that are underway to achieve our Vision 2030. I am truly pleased that our headline story is about the 'That's me!' project – one of only 13 projects that got funded as part of the OfS/Research England funding competition. Over the next four years, we will work with our students from black, asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, Birmingham City University, and many regional employers to dismantle barriers to research study for historically excluded groups. In the bid development, our research students were telling us about problems they experienced, and these are also well documented in the literature. We urgently need to move from talk to action and this project is one of many initiatives to make a real change. A range of exciting new projects are funded through our institutional Research Investment Fund RIF4 and we will be bringing you updates on these in the near future.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue.

Silke Machold, Dean of Research
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Front cover story cont.

Eliminating barriers for postgraduate researchers

Dr Ada Adeghe, Associate Dean of Inclusivity at University of Wolverhampton said: "I'm delighted to see the move towards breaking down the barriers for BAME students, and so pleased we will be leading on this project along with BCU to improve access across the region.

"This strongly demonstrates the University's commitment to the values and objectives of our Race Equality Charter in proactively supporting BAME groups in progressing in their careers."

Priscilla Eke, Researcher at the University of Wolverhampton said: "This is great news and a powerful step in the right direction.

"I am delighted to see the partnership of these amazing institutions and the impact the That's Me! project will make in bridging the gap between research and the BAME community and raising voices that would champion research relevant to their communities."

Tanya Mpofu, PhD Researcher at University of Wolverhampton said:

"It's certainly delightful and exciting news that we have been successful in the That's Me! project bid."

"It gives so much joy and hope for the future as a BAME student. This is a defining moment and hopefully the future of BAME students to come will be easier and better than what it has been for the past decades."

Partners on this project also include Arthur Terry Learning Partnership, Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, City of Wolverhampton Council, University of Wolverhampton Multi Academy Trust, NIHR Clinical Research Network, Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, C Brandauer and Co Ltd, The Active Wellbeing Society, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, West Midlands Combined Authority, City of Wolverhampton College, Black Country Chamber of Commerce, Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust and Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

University joins nationwide network to support researchers

The University of Wolverhampton is proud to be part of the newly established British Academy Early Career Researcher (ECR) Network in the Midlands, led by the University of Birmingham, and comprising of twelve Higher Education Institutions.

The Network, which is being piloted over the next two years, will be responsive to the career ambitions, needs, and interests of ECRs in Humanities and Social Sciences, through skills development, networking opportunities, research showcasing opportunities, workshops, and events.

Dr Benjamin Halligan Director of the Doctoral College and Academic Lead for the University's contribution said: "We are delighted to be part of the British Academy initiative, which will enable many opportunities for support and advancement for our ECRs, and for networking with likeminded colleagues in other universities. I'm looking forward to working collaboratively with our partner universities to take another step towards providing wider engagement across the Midlands."

The University will be offering a series of sessions for network members,

developed and run by the Faculty of Arts, Business and Social Sciences and the Doctoral College. For further information and to join [visit the British Academy website](#).

Humanities and social sciences researchers who have completed their PhD qualification, and who identify as an ECR (within ten years of their PhD award, taking into consideration career breaks, parental and medical leave periods, and other exceptional circumstances) are invited to join the network by [completing this registration form](#).

Funding opportunity for early career researchers

The call is now open for Lord Paul Early Career Researcher Fellowships. The Lord Paul Early Career Researcher Fellowship invites applications for multidisciplinary research programmes, from a team of researchers that is led by an early career researcher. A bid can be made for up to £10,000 of funding. The closing date for bids is 12 noon on Friday 18 March 2022. Further information about the fellowship and the application form is available on the [Doctoral College website](#).



Professors in clinical practice and medicine

Professor James Cotton



Professor James Cotton is a consultant interventional cardiologist at the Heart and Lung Centre based at New Cross Hospital in Wolverhampton.

He has a special interest in the treatment of patients with coronary artery disease (angina and heart attacks) and also the treatment of patients with aortic valve stenosis using trans-catheter techniques. He acts as the local principal investigator for a number of large national and international clinical trials in the field of clinical cardiology and is the research lead for cardiovascular research at New Cross Hospital.

His main research areas include:

- The treatment of patients with ischaemic heart disease, using anti-platelet drugs
- Novel techniques aimed at measuring the severity of angina and heart attacks

Professor Cotton's research has added to the international knowledge base surrounding the drug treatment of patients with angina and heart attacks, and his current research aims to further

understand the mechanisms underlying the development of aortic dilation. He is also currently co-leading a collaborative project part-funded by the NIHR, exploring distance medicine for patients with aortic stenosis using a smartphone app interface – a technology that could markedly improve access to healthcare at a time of huge healthcare reorganisation.

Professor Supratik Basu



Professor Supratik Basu is the Haematology and Oncology Lead, Clinical Research Network West Midlands, National Institute for Health Research (NIHR),

with a principal area of research interest in haematology and haematological cancer, where he primarily focuses on developing cancer drug treatments for myeloma.

Professor Basu's work developing cancer drug treatments has led to over 30 global and national trials, through collaborations with institutes such as University of Birmingham, Oxford University and University College London. This work has been disseminated into pivotal publications in highly respected journals such as the New England Journal of Medicine, Nature and Lancet. Several of the drug trials he has been involved with have led to drug approvals in the UK, EU, and USA.

Professor Rousseau Gama



Professor Rousseau Gama is a consultant chemical pathologist serving the Black Country Pathology Services, supporting The Royal Wolverhampton NHS

Trust. His major research interest is in laboratory healthcare delivery to improve patient safety, care and outcomes, and he works in an award-winning clinical laboratory and treats patients with endocrine and metabolic disorders.

Professor Gama's work has led to the introduction of a 'chest pain pathway' at New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton, which allows patients reporting to the Emergency Department with chest pains to be immediately tested using a hsTnI test, to reliably measure their levels of Troponin proteins. These proteins increase when the heart muscle is damaged during a heart attack, so recording a low level allows a heart attack to be ruled out early. Due to this early stage testing, admissions to the hospital for patients reporting with chest pains have reduced from above 60% to below 40% - saving money and staff time, and reducing stress on patients.

Saving our forests

The University's Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT) has welcomed a landmark agreement and supporting pledges to protect and save the world's forests.

In November last year, over 120 world leaders and delegates from across the globe gathered in Glasgow, Scotland for the [COP 26 Conference](#) to debate, take stock and drive ambition towards addressing the global climate challenges.

In one of the first deals achieved at COP 26, leaders from over 100 countries agreed to end deforestation by 2030

Part of this agreement includes a pledge of £14 billion of public and private funds required to support land restoration and provision of support to indigenous peoples. An additional £1.1bn fund will

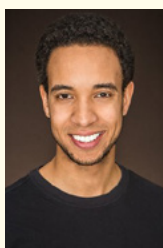
be established to protect the world's second largest tropical rainforest, in the Congo Basin.

Professor Aurelian Mbzibain at the University of Wolverhampton said: "This is a crucial milestone towards achieving the global climate goals.



We must now work to ensure that these pledges are translated into actions on the ground given that similar pledges in 2014 have not yielded reductions in global deforestation. In fact, global deforestation has continued with close to five million hectares lost between 2010 and 2020."

New research considers how the **history of the British musical** was **whitewashed**



Sean Mayes, a New York City and Toronto-based music director and Sarah K Whitfield, Reader in Musical Theatre at the University uncovered the truth about the historical importance of the contribution of black performers to musical theatre.



Sean and Sarah teamed up to research and write a new book 'An Inconvenient Black History of British Musical Theatre 1900-1950' which launched in September 2021.

Their research presents a complicated and brilliant reality that black performance practice has always been an essential and vibrant part of British culture, but their names and works have never been included in histories of the British musical - until now.

Sarah said: "As a historian and researcher I've worked on searching archives and digital databases to find more about this vital missing history - building on the work of earlier researchers in revealing astonishing stories about the ways in which black theatre practitioners reshaped and challenged musical theatre in the UK. The inconvenient reality means restating this glorious truth of so many black performers and practitioners who shaped musical theatre."

Research culture **rated among the best in the country** by postgraduate students

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is a national survey run by Advance HE to gather information about the experience of any research student on a doctoral or research Master's course.

The survey focuses on postgraduate students' experiences of their supervision, resources, the research community, progress, assessment, and wellbeing.

The findings highlight a strong research culture at the University with satisfaction ranked 5th out of the 89 institutions that took part. The results also showed the University was 11th for professional development and 12th for research supervision. The University had the second highest response rate in the UK to the PRES survey, with 83% of eligible students taking part during 2021.

Research Investment Funding - RIF4

After pandemic-related delays to the Research Investment Funding round, we finally launched RIF4 in August 2021. Out of a total of 27 submitted bids, we funded six projects under two priority themes – theme one 'Developing New Areas of Research Excellence' and theme two 'Research Infrastructure'. The successful projects are:

Theme one	
Project:	An innovative diagnostic test for bile acid malabsorption in Crohn's disease patients (ID-BAM)
Faculty/Department:	Faculty of Science and Engineering/Research Institute of Healthcare Sciences
Project lead:	Professor Matthew Brookes
Team members:	Dr Hafid Omar, Dr Sharon Moore, and Dr Niall Galbraith
Funding secured:	£151,411
Project:	Exercise in disease management and rehabilitation (EDGE)
Faculty/Department:	Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing/Faculty of Science and Engineering/Research Institute of Healthcare Sciences
Project lead:	Professor George Metsios
Team members:	Various
Funding secured:	£498,224
Project:	Biosciences research
Faculty/Department:	Faculty of Science and Engineering
Project lead:	Professor Gary Hix
Team members:	Dr Stefano Vaglio and Professor Iza Radecka
Funding secured:	£1,000,000
Project:	Reducing inequalities, improving wellbeing, and building inclusion in a digital age
Faculty/Department:	Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing/Institute for Community Research and Development
Project lead:	Professor Laura Caulfield
Team members:	Prof Maria Uther, Dr Chris Fullwood and Dr James Rees
Funding secured:	£409,618
Project:	Centre for Practice and Performance Research in the Arts (CePPRA)
Faculty/Department:	Faculty of Arts, Business and Social Sciences/The Centre for Practice and Research in Performing Arts (PResPA)
Project lead:	Dr Richard Glover
Team members:	Dr James Lovelock, Dr Mat Dalglish, Dr Sarah Whitfield (CCHIP), Dr Ian Lahart (FEHW), Dr Desmond Case (FSE), Dr James Rees (ICRD)
Funding secured:	£281,773
Project:	Responsible Digital Humanities Lab (RIGHT)
Faculty/Department:	Research Institute of Information and Language Processing (RIILP)
Project lead:	Professor Ruslan Mitko
Team members:	Dr Opinderjit Kaur Takhar, Dr Emad Mohamed, Professor Mike Thelwall, Dr Le Ha
Funding secured:	£1,098,794
Theme two	
Project:	Creating research services that drive a dedicated research support ecosystem at the University of Wolverhampton
Faculty/Department:	Research Policy Unit (RPU)
Project lead:	Dr Camelia Dijkstra
Team members:	Professor Silke Machold
Funding secured:	£723,977
Project:	Research data management systems
Faculty/Department:	Directorate of Student and Academic Services
Project lead:	Jo-Ann Watts
Funding secured:	£137,464