



Durham  
University

Inspiring the extraordinary

North-East Pathways: Navigating  
Towards Belonging and Trust



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## WHAT IS PRO:NE? (The below can be found here: [Project pro:NE](#))

Pro:NE is a network created by five leading universities (Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside) in the North-East of England to widen access and participation racially minoritised ethnic students and staff in postgraduate research. The project aims to strengthen the pathway into academic employment for students of colour. For doing so, it has established four key pillars: **mental health**, **mentoring**, **development** and **admissions**. The project has received a total funding of over £2.5 million including a £798,972 grant from The Office for Students.

### We are ambitious with our innovative approach.

Project pro:NE, which has tremendous potential in supporting UK students from racially minoritised background, was conceived and developed by Professor Jason Arday, who continues to act as an advisor on the project, in his capacity as a Visiting Professor at Durham. It will provide several unique opportunities, activities and events including training, e-conferences, peer mentoring and PhD studentships for racially minoritized staff and students over a period of 4 years.

For the first time, postgraduate research students in the North-East will be able to access mental health services through a specialist mental health pathway that was created in collaboration with Newcastle Psychological Therapies Clinic.

The mentoring programme in pro:NE will see early career researchers paired with senior academic leaders to support mutual learning, which will complement peer mentoring across the North-East network. The project also plans to significantly increase the number of admissions of racially minoritised students across all five universities through name-blinding, unconscious bias prevention and extensive policy reviews. Pro:NE will create spaces of belonging by breaking down elitism and building local community, making each university a more welcoming place to be for students and staff from racially minoritised background.

## METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

Our Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Love (EDIL) approach is innovative and intersects research and practice using a critical race analysis to (i) challenge the endemic nature of racism and (ii) hear the lived experiences of people from racially minoritised backgrounds. We use the umbrella term 'racially minoritised' carefully and understand its controversial political and personal meanings that either empower or further subjugate ethnic groups (as with other terms e.g., BAME and People of Colour). Furthermore, our in-depth analysis requires critical engagement which is why we chose Critical Race Theory methodology to underpin participant perceptions.

### Aims (research questions)

The overarching aims (four key pillars mentioned above) of this report are to understand racially minoritised student and staff views and experiences of the PGR pathway (see overarching questions):

- 1 What are (Home and International) UG and PGT perceptions of a postgraduate research degree?
  - a. What would mentoring ideally look like, to help prepare for PGR studies?
  - b. What are UGs and PGTs views on MH support at Durham?
- 2 What are (Home and International) PGR perceptions of their PGR experience?
  - a. How did PGRs decide their program?
  - b. What type of mentoring do PGRs receive?
  - c. What does Mental health (MH) services look like?
- 3 What are academic staff perceptions towards UK PGR students of colour experience?
  - a. How do staff feel about mentoring and training courses on offer?
  - b. What do staff know about the MH services at Durham?

### Participants

The project carried out Focus Groups (FGs) and 1-1 semi-structured interview to explore student and staff perceptions of the PGR pathway. The total sample of student participants (n=30) includes undergraduates (UGs), postgraduate taught (PGT), and postgraduate researchers (PGRs); while staff participants (n=14) academic and professional services (PSS). UG and PGT made up FGs (n=2) for Home students and a FG (n=1) for International UG and PGT students. Under PGRs, there are Home FGs (n=2), International FGs (n=2), and a semi-structured interview (n=1) that had FG intentions, but participants couldn't attend. Staff consists of FGs (n=5), but only four are analysed due to a missed recording (FG 3). Consequently, this limitation and unintended consequence creates a PSS gap in the responses. While there were PSS volunteers (n=5) only one showed to the missed recording. The missed opportunity for PSS is also a chance for Durham to consider why this may have occurred. For example, fear of job security, not being heard and this is why we are only sharing gender (women are the vast majority), British/International born in the sample (see Appendices), and race/ethnicity, when necessary, in the analysis.

## Design (thematic analysis)

The researchers involved in this project deployed a Thematic Analysis for analysing and interpreting the data. The 5-step process (see below) offers critical and in-depth insights from participants perceptions with aims to reveal transformational strategies for the PGR experience. The project was reviewed by colleagues from the University (e.g., researcher, academic staff, and EDI team).

- 1 Researchers recorded via Zoom and reviewed the transcriptions on Microsoft Word.
  - a. Generate initial codes (descriptive and interpretative) using NVivo:
  - b. Descriptive codes describe what the participant are saying.
- 2 Interpretative codes are the researchers interpreting what the participants are saying.
- 3 Overarching themes were created to make meaning of the codes.
- 4 Codes and themes were revised throughout the writeup to make sense of the pathway metaphor (e.g., road signs and other symbolic imagery).
- 5 Project was produced.

# Summary of Findings

## Home and International UGs and PGT (summary points)

### *Miscellaneous dependency (considering a research degree)*

- Most students would consider doing a research degree (every international student considered this option).
- The absence of PGR knowledge or access support is reinforced by lack of transparency from the university or academic departments which leads to barriers for students.
- Salary, career progression and economic stability play a key role in students' decision to invest in a research degree (e.g., tuition fees, job opportunities during PhD for stability)
- International students are concerned with tuition fees and accommodation when choosing their university destination.
- Home students would rather study abroad in Europe because it is cheaper, and/or study in the South of England because of its diversity.
- The reputation of the University is also a pivotal factor (e.g., rank, research expertise, and culture), and students want honest transparency about the cultural climate of the university they consider.
- Academic advisors are mentioned as key contributors to students' awareness.
- The onus is on students to comprehend the PGR pathway.

### *Cheeky navigations (training procedures and mentors)*

- UGs are not aware of any training from the university that would support their PGR preparation, which results in a lack of trust.
- Independent sourcing (e.g., social connections and social media) become prominent navigational tools for Home and International UGs & PGTs for training and formal support.
- Training workshops (e.g., summer courses, research proposal and mentoring programs) would support student decisions.
  - International students whose native language is not English need academic writing training.
- Proper training would instill student confidence and trust towards the university.
- When choosing a mentor, similarity in lived experiences are central but not homogenous, and therefore, mentors should be assigned based on student needs. White males are less desired from many female participants throughout the themes of this report.
  - UG & PGT Mentors: (i) comparable personal characteristics and shared-lived experiences, (ii) a navigator they feel most comfortable with i.e., trust, and (iii) cares about supporting their needs.

### *Useless diversions (mental health perceptions)*

- Students see MH as a useless cycle they do not use because of its performativity and prolonged access options (e.g., signposting), which reemphasises the larger part of mistrust underpinning this report.
- Cultural barriers impacting mental health include ethnic differences, language for international students, and family culture.

- Peer-to-peer encouragement becomes a tool for racially minoritised students pursuing MH support as they find it difficult trusting someone who is White.
- White students are perceived to have a double advantage (e.g., peer + counsellor support).
- The ethnic background of a practitioner/counsellor is quite significant, as the potential MH resources available are untrustworthy.

## Home PGRS (summary points)

### *Façade Reparations (PhD motivations)*

- Some Home PGRs (HPGR) had no intention of doing a research degree in Durham, which correlates to UG and PGT perceptions.
- Most PGR participants research interest are to enhance and promote social justice for underrepresented groups.
- Academic supervisors were navigators for many HPGRs, similar to UGs & PGTs.
- HPGRs felt 'seduced' into a research degree because of funding.
- For mature participants, a research degree suited their lifestyle (e.g., career progression). However, the perception of Durham being a White space almost became a structural barrier.
- HPGRs suggest the fear and barriers of applying for a research degree is a myth and the process is straightforward.
- A master's by research (1+3 program) was a 'white gatekeep' and HPGRs knew very little about it before applying.
- A HPGR perceives a research degree at Durham to be a structural reparation because of the institutional barriers, systemic powers, amalgamated with the emotional toll.
- HPGRs trust is at an individual level rather than at the institutional level.

### *Fuel yourself! (research training and formal support)*

- HPGRs receive no formal support for research training.
- 1+3 programme may provide homogenous research skills (e.g., sociological practice)
- Predominately White departments become a barrier for HPGRs.
- Academic supervisors with similar backgrounds (e.g., understand or has a shared lived experience) bring comfort, belonging, and trust. Thus, HPGRs want a higher representation of staff from racially minoritised backgrounds.
- The lack of formal support by the university results in a forced peer-to-peer support for HPGRs.

### *Unwelcomed (mental health services and support)*

- MH services is suggested to be a space for Whiteness.
- Research experience is perceived as harder for racially minoritised HPGRs.
- Race and MH support intersect in nuanced ways by advantaging white people on the one hand but disadvantaging racially minoritised PGRs on the other.
- MH assistance is a university-wide problem, and undergraduates are perceived to be prioritised over postgraduates.
- HPGRs need tangible support on their PGR pathway to gain their trust.

## International PGRs (summary points)

### *International traffic (motivations and application process)*

- Motivations include career progression and the benefits of autonomy in British academia.
- Hard for IPGRs to find suitable supervisors if not attending Durham as an UG or PG.
- IPGRs navigated the application process on their own will, which could explain why HPGRs have less awareness of the PGR pathway.
- Smooth application process with assistance from academic supervisors and some departments.
- Visa process is time consuming and can become a barrier without proper guidance.
- IPGRs need to know about funding, the reputation of the university, and time accessing a visa to spark initial motivations.

### *PGR perks (research training and formal support)*

- DCAD training is a relevant resource as with independent self-development. However, IPGRs who display higher confidence in responses to work independently had close research networks (e.g., family and/or friends in academia).
- Promotional emails aren't used by students and the lack of experience around SharePoint create diversions on their pathway i.e., too much wasted time navigating apps.
- The teaching culture becomes a barrier due to language, how research is executed, and thus IPGRs must adapt to their academic spaces (similar to staff).

### *Across the mentor (mentoring process)*

- College mentors are impactful and offer IPGRs a sense of belonging (e.g., help adjusting to UK lifestyle).
- IPGR participants have no formal mentoring and perceive their secondary supervisors as mentors.
- White male representation makes it hard to imagine receiving proper support.
- Similar to HPGRs, the most important trait of a mentor is their willingness to enhance their PGR experience. However, a mentor from a similar background is not as pertinent.
- Many IPGRs insist family support is less reliable due to cultural differences.
- IPGRs rely on each other with peer-to-peer support through PGR reps and community-centered approaches (e.g., getting together for food and willing to become PGR mentors).

### *Proceed with caution! (mental health services and support)*

- MH services are understood as conventional providing no meaningful connection.
- Most participants are unaware of 'Nihari' which is pairing students with counsellors from racially minoritised backgrounds.
- The MH process is time-consuming.
- Faith-based approaches are used for MH (e.g., churches)
- The majority of IPGRs self-cope with their MH, and the time differences become a barrier to communicate with peers back home.
- The race/ethnic background of a counsellor/practitioner are less prominent for IPGRs, but practitioners should speak their language.

- IPGRs are cautious of confidentiality because of the extensive MH process (e.g., filling out forms and interview process).

## **Staff (summary + recommendations)**

### *Avoiding early disruptions (thoughts on leaky pipeline)*

- Staff suggest costly affairs in the PGR pipeline include lack of funding, scholarships, representation, and built-in bias for doctoral candidates.
- The curriculum does not include histories of racially minoritised communities (e.g., ‘you cannot be what you do not see’).
- Students who feel they do not have the accepted forms of cultural capital drift away from attempting a research degree.
  - There are hierarchies within the processes and systemic barriers.
- Building students confidence and motivations require early stages of recruitment and delivering awareness on research opportunities.
- When specific underrepresented groups are targeted for research opportunities outside of race/ethnicity, selectors at predominately White universities unconsciously/consciously choose White candidates.
- The lack of representation becomes extra labour for racially minoritised staff who want to support students.

### *Array of Pathways (gaps and training experience)*

- Staff were frustrated about the training skills they received which resonates with student perceptions. Staff also share similar sentiments about UGs being prioritised over PGRs.
- Training skills implemented to navigate the PGR pathway are present and well-intentioned but deemed insufficient.
  - Staff suggest the current training on offer requires enhancement, consistency, and the removal of Oxbridge training style (e.g., inclusion matters, careers team and teacher training).
- Staff advocate for the implementation of PGR competitions to recognise student potential, as with training on grant writing skills and teaching certificate.
- Staff insist PGRs should value their existing language skills as linguistic capital.
- A reciprocal onus where responsibility and action are required by both students and staff on the PGR pathway is pertinent.
  - Staff communal approaches correlate with students but is seen as culturally different from many UK universities.
  - The community-centred values become a barrier when staff suggest the academic culture is about looking out for oneself, and this is why many teach abroad or move to culturally different universities.
- Efficient networking is a great tool for PGRs for career enhancement and the university should assist with this (e.g., network training courses).
  - Staff perceive that being White produces network capital and for racially minoritised staff to progress they needed to assimilate and have White ally support.

### *Reciprocal Onus (mentoring perceptions)*

- Most staff had no formal mentor during their PGR experience.

- The mentoring process is rendered useless by staff.
- From staff perceptions, supervisors should not be mentors.
- The overrepresentation of people who are White at the university make staff participants rely on peer-to-peer support like students mentioned above.
- Staff suggest a mentoring relationship should be developed informally by giving PGRs a voluntary space to choose or be chosen by a mentor and that White mentors should also be involved (e.g., informal matchmaking).
- Staff perceive a mentor as a sponsor and a critical friend that enhance PGR skills by conveying awareness to remove barriers and narrowing gaps.
- Adapting in academic spaces was essential for racially minoritised staff, with the assistance of White allies (to note adapting was mainly expressed by international staff).
- Staff insinuate trusting White staff becomes a challenge because many White men do not see racially minoritised experiences as issues.
- As with students, staff trust individuals over the institution and home participants are more concerned with transforming the hierarchical structure compared to internationals.
- PGRs need role models who look like them.
- Policies for mentorship should not explicitly state a mentor and PGR pairing should be characteristic to characteristic, but a list of mentors should be available for PGRs to choose for personal autonomy.
- A mentor's identity can't be fixed but should understand the lived experiences of the PGR (correlating to student perceptions).

#### *Hidden reserves (mental health)*

- Staff who participated in researching MH and racism at Durham found counsellors had little awareness of racially minoritised experiences.
- The qualitatively different experience between White counsellors and PGRs create barriers.
- Onboarding processes are difficult to navigate at Durham, like with students, staff mention it is a war dealing with SharePoint and signposting.
- Peer-to-peer spaces need to be enhanced by the university and academic departments.
- The invisible labour of racially minoritised staff needs to be addressed with visible recognition (e.g., institutional support).

## Recommendations (4 pillars)

The following chapters of this report illustrate the need for North-East communities and universities to repair and enhance the PGR pathway for students and staff from racially minoritised backgrounds. When we amalgamate the four themes and search for our innovative approach the four key pillars of admissions, development, mentoring, and mental health are addressed as follows:

#### *Admissions, reflect on...*

- ⇒ Known built-in biases impacting representation.
- ⇒ EDI training for all staff needs re-enhancement.
- ⇒ Students lacking motivation because of visible barriers (e.g., underrepresentation across all networks).

- ⇒ Visible and invisible barriers make students consider a postgraduate study away from the North-East.
- ⇒ Role models with similar backgrounds need to be included and visible.
- ⇒ Funding and community-led approaches would increase motivation.
- ⇒ Policies should be underpinned with 'positive action' methods.

#### *Development, reflect on...*

- ⇒ Intensive collaboration across academic departments for PGR development is crucial and the university should build a platform for this.
- ⇒ Research training offer needs to increase and become easily accessible.
  - Meet students where they are rather than where the university want them to be.
  - Student skills are heterogenous (Home and International students have diverse needs)
- ⇒ Networking being a primary navigational tool (e.g., networking training courses, open conferences).
- ⇒ Essential skills for students (e.g., CV workshops, co-authoring, grant writing, SharePoint navigation, transferable skills, and appreciating their linguistic skills).
- ⇒ Creating competitions for PGRs to enhance their skills and receive perks. As racially minoritised students are also at different levels amongst each other, it is pertinent to use these 'competitions' as enhancing the students' skills rather than creating further hierarchies.
- ⇒ Flattening the hierarchical culture (e.g., teacher methods)

#### *Mentoring, reflect on...*

- ⇒ Mentors matter and 'You cannot be what you do not see'.
- ⇒ Mentors being sponsors and critical friends.
- ⇒ Matchmaking with mentors informally.
- ⇒ A communal element to mentoring being considered (e.g., more than one).
- ⇒ College and academic department collaboration to create mentoring schemes.
- ⇒ Supervisors working with mentors. (Formal roles must be separate)
- ⇒ Mentors sharing and/or being conscious of the designated student's experiences.

#### *Mental health, reflect on...*

- ⇒ Similarities with mentors, it's important to bear in mind shared backgrounds and lived experiences.
- ⇒ International Students? needing counsellors and practitioners who speak their native tongue or dialect.
- ⇒ Transforming the space for whiteness as a space for everyone.
- ⇒ PGR safe spaces being university- and department-led (as with cross-collaboration)
- ⇒ Paths where MH access is less time consuming.

The combination of the four pillars in connection with the analysis suggests a sense of belonging only comes with trust. We will re-emphasise many of the programs listed and expressed in the following chapters are already developed. However, cross-collaboration and enhancing current initiatives must be the priority.

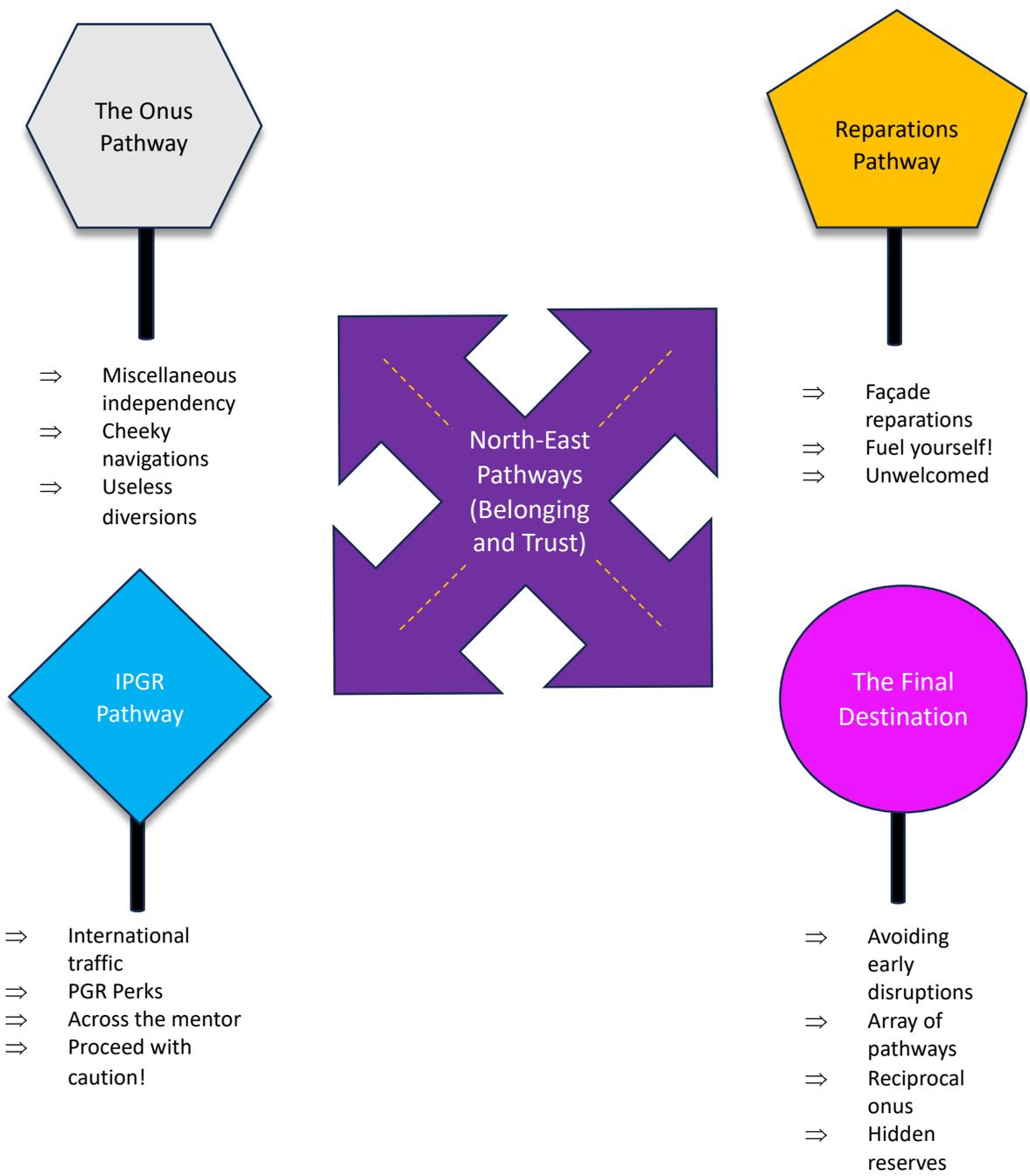
## This Ain't a Tick Box! (Thematic Road Signs)

The analysis of this report has been developed into four themes which underpin the overarching pillars of pro:NE for a wider illustration to enhance the PGR pathway. The first theme, 'Onus Pathway', conceptualises UG and PGT students' awareness of the PGR pathway. Their perceptions reveal a lack of trust towards the university due to minimal transparency on PGR information and no consideration of their race/ethnic identity. The lack of trust impacts their sense of belonging, which decreases their motivations over time, and the minimal support from the University (e.g., departments and MH services) requires students to source and survive the path on their own. Secondly, the 'Reparations Pathway' analyses Home PGR (HPGR) considerations of the current pathway. Several HPGRs are confused because of being 'seduced' to undergo the pathway, but they confess self-navigating the path makes them vulnerable and isolated leaving them to survive on their own or with small networks (e.g., peers and supervisors). This vulnerability exhibits a lack of trust and sense of belonging towards the university coinciding with UG and PGT students.

The first two themes reveal negative attitudes towards university procedures of the pathway, while the third theme 'International PGR (IPGR) Pathway' does not. This theme illustrates IPGRs need further support in understanding visa processes, language, and British academic culture to name a few. All participants, do however, trust individuals more so than the institution. Additionally, participants in the first three themes agree mentors and counsellors should be someone with a similar background or an understanding of lived experiences, but themes one and two in particular, suggests race or other characteristics (e.g., gender) matter. Thus, racially minoritised students have heterogeneous needs.

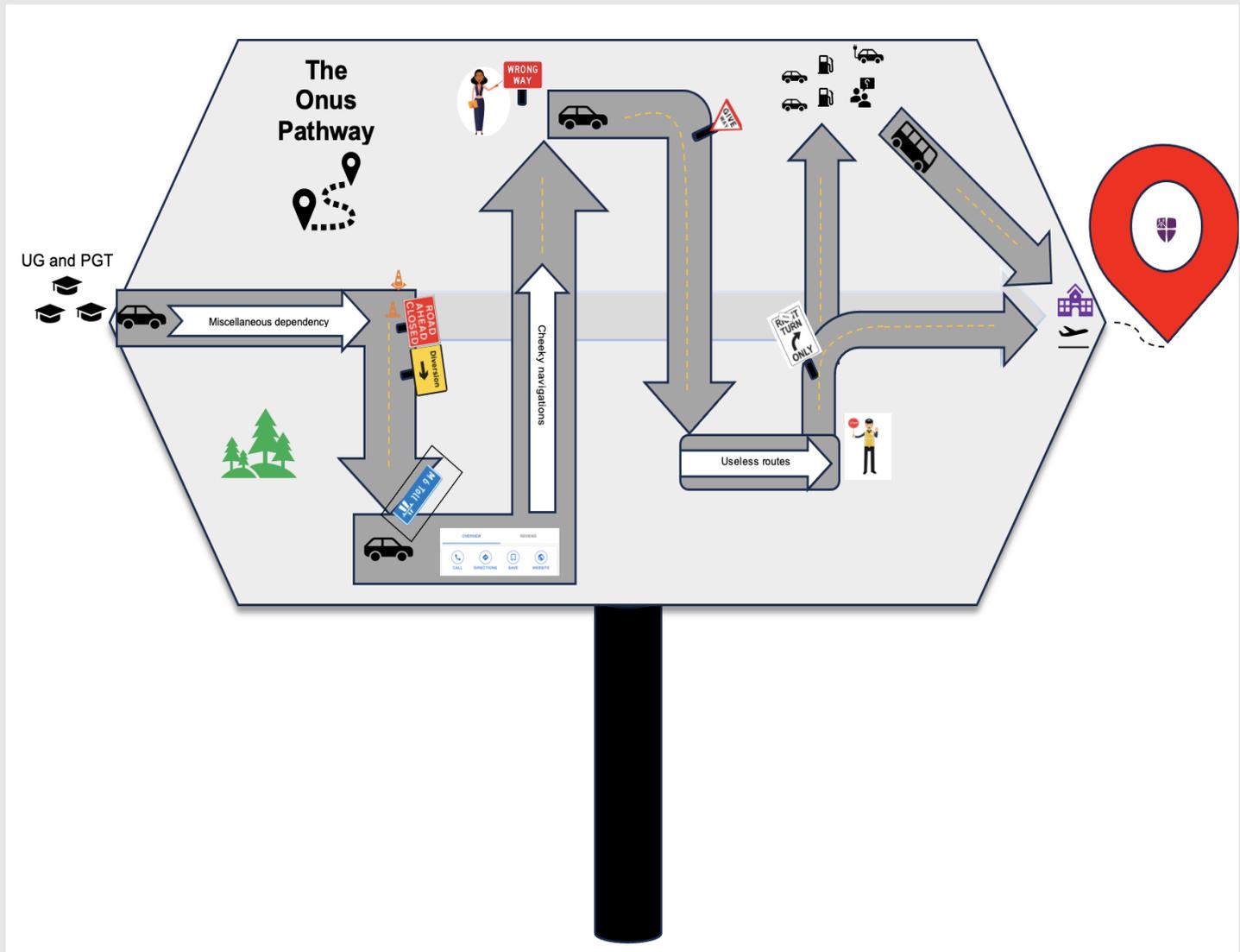
The last theme, 'The Final Destination', amalgamates staff perspectives by introducing a wider picture to enhance the PGR pathway. This theme is a recommendations section, because the final destination equates to completion of a research degree and thus, staff provide answers to what is required for racially minoritised students and staff to thrive in their academic experiences. As of now, the majority of racially minoritised staff participate in extra labour that is rendered invisible. They are currently viewed as supervisors, mentors, counsellors, and friends. Wisdom derives from their experiences and offers holistic solutions, which is why we encourage readers to observe this theme with care and due diligence as with student themes. There are road signs constructed for themes and interpretative codes (see next page), along with illustrative maps created at the start of each theme to assist in conceptualising participants perceptions (apologies for restrictions on all-inclusive imagery).

For clarity, **we ain't here to tick boxes!** So, the analysis is extensive, and this is to offer all participants an opportunity to have their voices heard. In conclusion, the following sections underpin our overall theme of trust and belonging to reveal hidden student and staff stories for practical recommendations that result in a brighter communal future for all stakeholders at Durham and the wider North-East.



**Figure 1**

# THE ONUS PATHWAY



Map 1: The Onus Pathway

## The Onus Pathway

The Onus Pathway amalgamates Home and International UG and PGT students' insights surrounding the PGR pathway, and the necessary tools required to overcome the systemic barriers to enhance their motivations. This theme is underpinned by three interpretative codes: 'Miscellaneous dependency' insinuates the onus is on students to seek the lack of PGR information and transparency presented by the University they are dependent upon; 'Cheeky navigations' are the navigational tools which require the precise navigator (e.g., mentor) to guide students on the pathway; Lastly, 'Useless diversions' suggests the MH services on offer need race/ethnic enhancement since cultural differences prevent students from seeking counselling assistance to re-charge their strenuous uni experience. In sum, the following interpretative and descriptive codes reveal the onus (i.e., sole responsibility) is on students to navigate their pathways.

### Miscellaneous dependency

This interpretative code highlights Home and International UG and PGT students' perceptions of the PGR pathway through three strands: *research- considerations*, *investments*, and *destinations*.

**Table 1: Miscellaneous dependency**

| Descriptive codes              | Pathway road signs/imagery   | Common disruptions/assistance for both Home & International   | Highlights  |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <i>Research considerations</i> |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Lack of information</li> <li>⇒ No transparency about the PGR pathway (e.g., understanding research topics and planning)</li> </ul> | In the HFGs, FG 1 participants don't consider a research degree, while FG 2 and international FG participants do.                     |
| <i>Research investments</i>    |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Research is not promoted.</li> <li>⇒ Financial constraints</li> <li>⇒ Career opportunities</li> </ul>                              | Tuition fees play a significant role for international students   |
| <i>Research destinations</i>   | <br> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Costs</li> <li>⇒ Lack of diversity</li> <li>⇒ Reputation</li> <li>⇒ Travelling abroad</li> </ul>                                   | Fees are cheaper when studying abroad (e.g., outside England) and the culture of the institution matters (e.g., prefer moving South). |

### *Research considerations*

To begin the focus groups, students are asked if they've thought about applying for a research degree. In FG1, no student considered doing a research degree except Participant 2 vaguely stating, 'I've considered it, but haven't really given it much thought.' Yet, in FG2 everyone thought about applying:

'I **wanna go all the way** and eventually become like a researcher.' (Participant 4)

'I do definitely want to do a postgrad at some point.' (Participant 9)

'I've definitely considered it.' (Participant 6)

Similar to FG 2, every participant in the International FG considered a research degree:

'I have thought about it before, but I don't know anything about the process and it feels like personally for me right now, it's like quite far in the future.' (Participant 14)

Despite some FG disparities on research degree considerations, there are similar responses on the 'gaps of knowledge' in the application process. Students are asked, 'what do you know about the application process for these degrees (e.g., knowing enough or gaps in your knowledge)?

'I just have plans to continue starting a PhD...I'm just **waiting and searching for some information.**' (Participant 13)

'Haven't been given much information about it.' (Participant 2)

'The most I know is that you'd have to have some understanding of a research topic.' (Participant 1)

With limited or no information about the application process, Home students express similar thoughts to International students, which is needing 'support' with 'topic and research planning stuff' (see next code). Students insinuate the absence of PGR knowledge/access support is reinforced by 'no transparency' from the university or academic departments. For example, (student) states '(academic department) have taught us nothing', and they receive new information from their friends. Thus, it is perceived the onus is on the university to prevent rather than influence/cause roadblocks (i.e., lack of information and transparency, see figure 2 below) in the descriptive code *research considerations*, since students can only consider a research degree if they become aware of processes. In order to remove roadblocks in the application process, understanding why UG and PGT students would even undergo a postgraduate degree is necessary.



*Figure 2*

### *Research investments*

The previous descriptive code *research considerations*, corroborates with this descriptive code. This is because students who consider a research degree have **career, financial, and research topic** implications i.e., *research investments*. For example, home students studying law and modern languages are:

'Not even considering doing a master's or anything like that because I do a law degree and I feel like they really kind of like the way Durham does. It is really kind of puts you on the path of like the three-year course... So I don't think it's like they kind of shove that down your throat in a good way. It makes it easier for you, but **they don't kind of give you the wider option**. So, I think if you ask anyone on my degree, I can't say they'd know.' (Participant 7)

As departments are missing expansive promotion for 'wider [further study] options', 'postgraduate opportunities aren't thought about as much' (Participant 6). This generates a roadblock for students who would like to pursue a master's degree when 'certain aspects of like legal academia are just really interesting' (Participant 9) to them.

Moreover, financial implications are prevalent in every pathway theme but for Home FG 2 in particular, salary, career progression and economic stability play a role. For instance, interpreting pros and cons of an 'undergrad kind of side salary would be worth all the extra money of paying for like a year to kind of support yourself.' (Participant 5). As with desiring to know if 'we'll be receiving extra support if we're trying to go into higher level' (see staff theme), because Participant 3 and 2 – similar to many others – understand there's a 'sense of economic independence' (Participant 2), but this is coupled with being 'economically stable, have some sort of job to hold me down.' (Participant 10) (similar to PGR and staff themes).

Furthermore, while some international UGs perceive a future career path as an option, 'career is not the most important' (Participant 13). International financial implications remain underpinned by tuition fees,

'Well for me, because **I'm an international student. So, tuition fee is like a huge part.**' (Participant 12)

'I mean, for me, it's like student tuition fee is most crucial because for international students, I think a lot of money to keep on studying for my undergraduate and postgraduate. So like, I don't want to take too much money from my family.' (Participant 13)

Thus, UG and PGT perceptions on enduring a research degree coincide with various *research investments*, where career progression and financial implications are a central focus. Nonetheless, it is interpreted research degree promotion is needed from the university and departments to remove the roadblock in student's pathway and supportive measures to understand the cost of pathway tolls (see figure 3 below and next theme).



**Figure 3**

### *Research destinations*

The last factor UG and PGT students are asked to consider is whether a postgrad research degree at their current university or somewhere else in the North-East would be of interest. Again, there are some discrepancies and similarities between Home and International students. International students express requiring,

'Some scholarship or something that I can support my living or tuition I suppose, would be definitely ok to start a PhD degree'. (Participant 13)

Participant 12 perceives, 'English speaking countries might be a good guitarist' and staying in the UK system or other European countries would be beneficial for their international relations degree.

Home students view on fees resemble the Internationals, but Home students would rather switch pathways and study abroad in Europe,

'Because it is **a lot cheaper**.' (Participant 1)

'My first option when I was starting to look at the master's degree was going to Europe, especially for the lower fee.' (Participant 3)

Almost every home student chose studying Southbound like London for its diversity (away from the North-East) or abroad (see figure 4). Additionally, the reputation of the institution has influential factors such as being (i) high on 'the guardian rankings' at destinations such as 'Oxbridge and Ivy leagues in America', (ii) the research the university specializes in, and (iii) a cultural perspective, for instance needing 'unbiased kind of view of the different universities and like their reputations' (Participant 8).



**Figure 4**

To note, a few participants receive advice from their academic advisors (who play a critical role in PGR pathways) rather than being informed on routes holistically by their department or university. Therefore, geographical locations vary amongst Home and International students, but overall, tuition fees, research experience, and reputation of institutions are perceived as guides for *research destinations*.

In sum, the descriptive codes research- considerations, investments, and destinations are reinforced by the interpretative code ‘Miscellaneous dependency,’ whereby Home and International student perceptions of the PGR pathway are diverse but with this diversity comes a form of dependency. This is because the onus is on them to understand the ‘extremely stressful’ (Participant 2) PGR pathway, but they are dependent on their university and department who disseminate no or minimal information i.e., maps. If North-Eastern universities want higher representation amongst racially minoritised PGRs, an array of approaches need consideration to reroute these UG and PGT diversions (see figure 5). Unfortunately, miscellaneous dependency requires students to seek advice through their own networks independently (see next code, *cheeky advice*).



**Figure 5**

### Cheeky navigations

This interpretative code discusses UG and PGT awareness on PGR preparations (e.g., training and mentors) and is underpinned by three descriptive codes: *cheeky call*, *training workshops*, and *mentoring parallels*.

**Table 2: Cheeky navigations**

| Descriptive codes | Pathway road signs/imagery | Common disruptions/assistance for both Home & International | Highlights |
|-------------------|----------------------------|---|------------|
|                   |                            |   |            |

|                                   |   |  |  |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <p><i>Cheeky call</i></p>         |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ No formal support</li> <li>⇒ Independent sourcing for training (e.g., social media and academic advisors)</li> </ul>  | <p>This again shows the lack of trust within the institution since the onus is on students to source information.</p>                          |
| <p><i>Training workshops</i></p>  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Supervised training and workshops.</li> <li>⇒ Research proposal training.</li> <li>⇒ Consideration for training location.</li> </ul>  | <p>Training would instil confidence and provide them navigation and the onus is on the university to 'give way'.</p>                           |
| <p><i>Mentoring parallels</i></p> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Mentor with similar characteristics (e.g., race, gender, and international background) provides a sense of belonging.</li> <li>⇒ Mentor's willingness establishes PGR trust.</li> </ul> | <p>Parallel backgrounds for participants are central but not homogenous, and therefore, mentors should be assigned based on student needs.</p> |

### *Cheeky call*

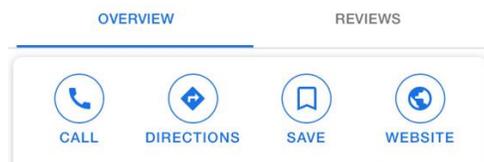
To start, UG and PGT students are asked about their awareness of PGR training and their support options. The majority of students in the FGs knew of no PGR training or any formal support but mentioned asking their academic advisor and utilising social networks/connections (e.g., social media, friends, and family):

'Honestly, I think I'd probably ask my friends like I had a few friends that graduated last year.' (Participant 8)

'I think obviously like everyone else saying I do think the academic advisor and Durham for me personally, I do find a quite useful resource, but I think I'd also look at like YouTube and like social media. I think because those have quite up to date things.' (Participant 5)

Social media is important because Participant 11 doesn't 'find academic advisors useful,' and Participant 5 illustrates even with advisors achieving a postgrad, 'YouTube' or 'LinkedIn' will have more 'up-to-date information.' This was similar for social connections as a few students receive advice from their fathers who received a PhD but would find a 'more refresh kind of outlook about how it all works nowadays'. (FG student)

One Home UG insists speaking to ‘the admissions office at a random university’ and giving them ‘a **cheeky call** won’t ever be like, too bad.’ Thus, Home and International UG and PGT students emphasise the importance of seeking supportive navigational tools from academic advisors and/or social connections through independent means i.e., partaking in a *cheeky call* for directions (see Figure 6). However, UGs are not aware of any training from the university that would support their PGR preparation – again the onus is on them which results in their lack of trust in the university.



**Figure 6**

### *Training workshops*

Students are asked about which type of training and supportive routes they would consider:

‘I think I would like **training or a workshop** or something where we could speak with someone that could show us what are the options, what are the outcomes of doing such, you know, research postgraduate PhD would be great.’ (Participant 3)

Participant 3 illustrates proposal training would instil ‘confidence’ in the researcher’s choices (see staff code *start early* on student confidence). In addition, training must be periodic, ‘I know some universities do like summer courses...and a mentorship program...every month.’ (Participant 1)

Another essential point is location:

‘But I thought of course I’d be you know, so like what’s the city life like, what is the accommodation like, you know, what is the like? Well, cuz I’m not just gonna be there to study. Of course.’ (Participant 9)

Lastly, International students discuss similar training recommendations, but more specifically, extensive training for academic writing, as English is not their first language (see staff code *next path skills* on language). Their recommendations are informative for the university to re-route diverted pathways and give way (see Figure 7) within the early PGR process, and a trustworthy navigator role is vital for directions.



**Figure 7**

### *Mentoring parallels*

A predominate theme in every pathway is establishing what a mentor is and how they should be allocated, since participants are asked 'what would mentoring ideally look like, to help you prepare for PGR studies?' In the UG and PGT FGs, many refer to their academic supervisor as mentors (we will call these supervisors academic navigators), but these navigators' appearance and purpose comes with diverse perceptions from the participants. Home students illustrate needing a mentor with a similar background as their own:

'My academic advisor from the first couple of years. She is a woman and I've just, I don't know in law. I mean, I could be mentored by anybody, but I tend to be more comfortable. So, but yeah, I don't necessarily find that in terms of background, that race is too important in a mentor, but **I do tend to gravitate towards having a female mentor honestly**. I think that it might be subconsciously the former. (Participant 1)

While race may not be imperative for the above, it is for others:

'Like having someone who like as who is black and who understands how to move around black, how to move around as a black person within the corporate sphere is so important...understanding how to **manoeuvre around** and combat...microaggressions.' (Participant 4)

A way of manoeuvring is synonymous to staff using adaptation skills on their PGR pathway (see code *white allies*). One student expresses the intersections between race and gender:

'You want a woman who's gone through a woman of colour as well, because unfortunately, obviously like if you're a straight white man and telling a woman of colour what to do, you're gonna have a completely different experience.' (Participant 11)

White males are less desired from many female participants throughout the themes of this report. Ultimately, a mentor with a 'similar background' whether it be gender, 'ethnicity, class, and life experience' on a frequent basis (e.g., 'every two weeks') is crucial for Home students.

International students offer different mentor options:

'I'm an international student and I feel like I better choose a mentor with an international background who's, you know, first language is not English as well.' (Participant 12)

'International background is quite important.' (Participant 13)

An international student also expresses 'the most important thing is like to send that message...they are willing to help' (Participant 12) (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8**

Therefore, the descriptive code *mentoring parallels* suggests a mentor for UG and PGT students is an actively comprehensive navigator with (i) comparable personal characteristics and shared-lived experiences, (ii) a navigator they feel most comfortable with i.e., trust, and (iii) cares about supporting their needs. Moreover, while students prefer similarities on one hand, they all convey equivalent similarities (e.g., same race/ethnicity) aren't needed on the other, and thus, Durham should prioritise each student based on their own needs. In sum, recognising and/or institutionalising students 'cheeky navigations' (*cheeky call, training workshop, mentoring parallels*) are imperative navigational tools for the PGR mentoring process, because the onus is perceived to be on UG and PGT students from racially minoritised backgrounds. This is equal to their mental health when navigating a racialised university terrain.

### Useless diversions

This interpretative code illustrates the student's awareness of mental health (MH) services on offer at the university and how they navigate this through three descriptive codes: *useless cycle*, *cultural barriers*, and *racially charged commonalities*.

**Table 3: Useless diversions**

| Descriptive codes        | Pathway road signs/imagery  | Common disruptions/assistance for both Home & International   | Highlights   |
|--------------------------|---|---|--|
| <i>Useless cycle</i>     |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ MH services are performative.</li> <li>⇒ Outsourcing is problematic</li> </ul>   | The participants see MH support as a superficial service with too much signposting.                                      |
| <i>Cultural barriers</i> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Ethnic differences</li> <li>⇒ Learning language as an international.</li> <li>⇒ Family culture creates a barrier.</li> </ul> | The ethnic background of a practitioner is quite significant, as the potential MH resources available are untrustworthy. |

|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p><i>Racially charged commonalities</i></p> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Cultural differences with White counsellors.</li> <li>⇒ Peer-to-peer MH support.</li> <li>⇒ White students have it easier.</li> <li>⇒ Fuel depleting</li> </ul> | <p>Counsellor assistance must share similar traits as mentors for UG and PGT students.</p> |
|--|---|--|--|

*Useless cycle (Mental health awareness)*

Students are asked about their awareness of MH (e.g., What people or services are you aware of that offer mental health support?). The International FG as with FG1 has little awareness of MH support at Durham. Only one FG1 student reveals ‘Durham seems to do quite well’ (Participant 1) on MH support at the Palatine Centre and in college. However, they themselves only went to friends for MH support, which reemphasises the larger part of mistrust underpinning this report (see next codes).

FG2 has contrasting opinions as they are aware of MH support, but illustrate its performativity:

‘Its not very helpful...**it’s very performative and very like superficial**. I think it’s for, the sake of saying they have it rather than saying that they are doing something about it.’ (Participant 4)

‘I completely agree what everyone saying very performative very surface level.’ (Participant 7)

This performativity articulated by students is exacerbated with unhelpful access options. For instance:

‘There is, like, you know, six, like free counselling sessions. And it’s kind of a thing of how bad do I have to be before I should go and get those sessions done?’ (Participant 9)

‘I think they have all these titles (e.g., councillors and welfare officers) and they have all these kind of things on offer and actually going through the process, it takes really long.’ (Participant 11)

The above comments are followed by ‘Durham loves a bit of outsourcing and pushing you down the chain’ (Participant 11) and this outsourcing or ‘signposting isn’t really enough’ (Participant 4) (see staff code *MH repairs* for correlating perceptions). Therefore, student’s awareness on MH support is perceived as a **‘useless cycle’** (see Figure 9) that is ‘patronising’ not providing ‘a very welcome environment’, leaving students in a ‘very vulnerable and very fragile state’ (similar to PGRs in the next theme).



**Figure 9**

### *Cultural barriers*

The *useless cycle* extends to race/ethnic cultural backgrounds. Students are asked whether MH is discussed with peers, what type of practitioners are on offer, and how does this differ based on race/ethnicity? Home students mention ethnic differences:

'Sometimes I feel like the counselling service. I don't know if they'll be able to, like, fully understand...based on experiences that I am a person from [African country]...I think **cultural things are barriers** for me.' (Participant 2)

'From an African background it can be daunting, like sharing something because you don't know how it's going to be perceived.' (Participant 1)

The comments above suggest sharing cultural backgrounds produces comfortability, but the lack of trust is interwoven for students, which as mentioned is the underlying emotional response that will assist or become a roadblock on their pathways.

International students illustrate MH support is needed for learning skills:

'So, another thing is stress of learning because we have to solve both problems because the language is first problem, because we usually for the first two months we don't understand what teaching, what teachers are saying. We may feel like when we are comparing with other international students. Chinese students have troubles a lot in you know just listening, and writing and have no one to talk to.' (Participant 13)

The consequences of 'speaking English is like another stress' (Participant 12) where certain International students 'get nervous when talking to native speakers' (Participant 12) and this contributes to their MH challenges. Therefore, 'if the university could provide some more support for those international students whose language is not English, that could be very helpful.'

For all students, cultural barriers are highlighted from a family basis:

'So I'm Asian and it is kind of like vey frowned upon to talk about problems with your mental health.' (Participant 9)

'I feel like I can't turn to my parents about things like that only because I feel like I don't want to feel guilty about it.' (Participant 5)

The family culture plus the long MH support system being on 'waiting lists' - i.e., road traffic (see Figure 10) - contributes to a 'dreadful time' (Angel). Consequently, cultural ethnic barriers block the road to trust, and this is extended to their race.



**Figure 10**

### *Racially charged commonalities*

'I come from a very very white area of England and even coming to Durham, I was surprised at the lack of people of color. Like there's lots of Asians, students and there's lots of white students. There's not many black students. And like, I remember being really shocked by that. And I think I think personally, I'm quite lucky in the sense I haven't really experienced too many like **racially charged** (see Figure 11) like instances either in or out of Durham, but I can also see how in Durham that might be more of an issue because it's really, really White.' (Participant 8)

The relationship between race and MH is prominent to most home students:

'I'm just scared that I won't be understood because of the cultural differences...I think me as a person of colour. The experience I endured, it's difficult to understand.' (Participant 3)

Participant 3's comment extends to race, but they also suggest not wanting to 'feel like a victim' in relation to a White counsellor not understanding. Again, a lack of trust and sense of belonging regarding race are permeating for UG and PGT racially minoritised students. MH support contrasts to their white counterparts:

'A white student might be able to talk and maybe the person listening might be able to relate or understand a bit easier.' (Participant 2)

The above comments could be why MH challenges are less discussed amongst their White friends (a few home students mentioned having 'mainly white friendship groups'):

'My like white friends or people from like more majority groups. It doesn't seem. I don't know. Everybody has ins and outs of course, but it doesn't necessarily seem like it's something big that they bring up as much.' (Participant 1)

Therefore, the onus is on racially minoritised students to seek MH support amongst one another:

'So I don't know whether the **onus** is on me to then go out and seek people of color who can kind of relate to that experience.' (Participant 5)

'Looking back now, a lot of my friends would talk about struggling or needing mental health support were also black, and even this is back in 2019.' (Participant 1)

Because there are 'no proper, solid, good, decent support' (Participant 9) for them and learning from their own and other Black students' experiences, it is 'useless speaking to a White person [counsellor or friends] about your struggles' (Participant 4) (see Figure 12).



**Figure 11**

*Racially charged commonalities* are implicit MH consequences for UG and PGT racially minoritised students that reinforce the lack of trust towards White (counsellors) assistance at the university and a sign of White peer privilege concerning MH (see Figure 13). To conclude, the three descriptive codes are interpreted as 'Useless diversions', where the onus is on UG and PGT students to navigate MH pathways, since the university's diversions are fuel depleting leaving them to re-charge themselves. The best way to keep students on the right path is for counsellor assistance to resemble mentor navigators, so they can 'speak to someone who may have been raised in a similar way so they can kind of understand where things may have come from or how you deal with certain things' (Participant 6). To note, confiding to someone with shared lived experiences are expressed from participants of every theme.



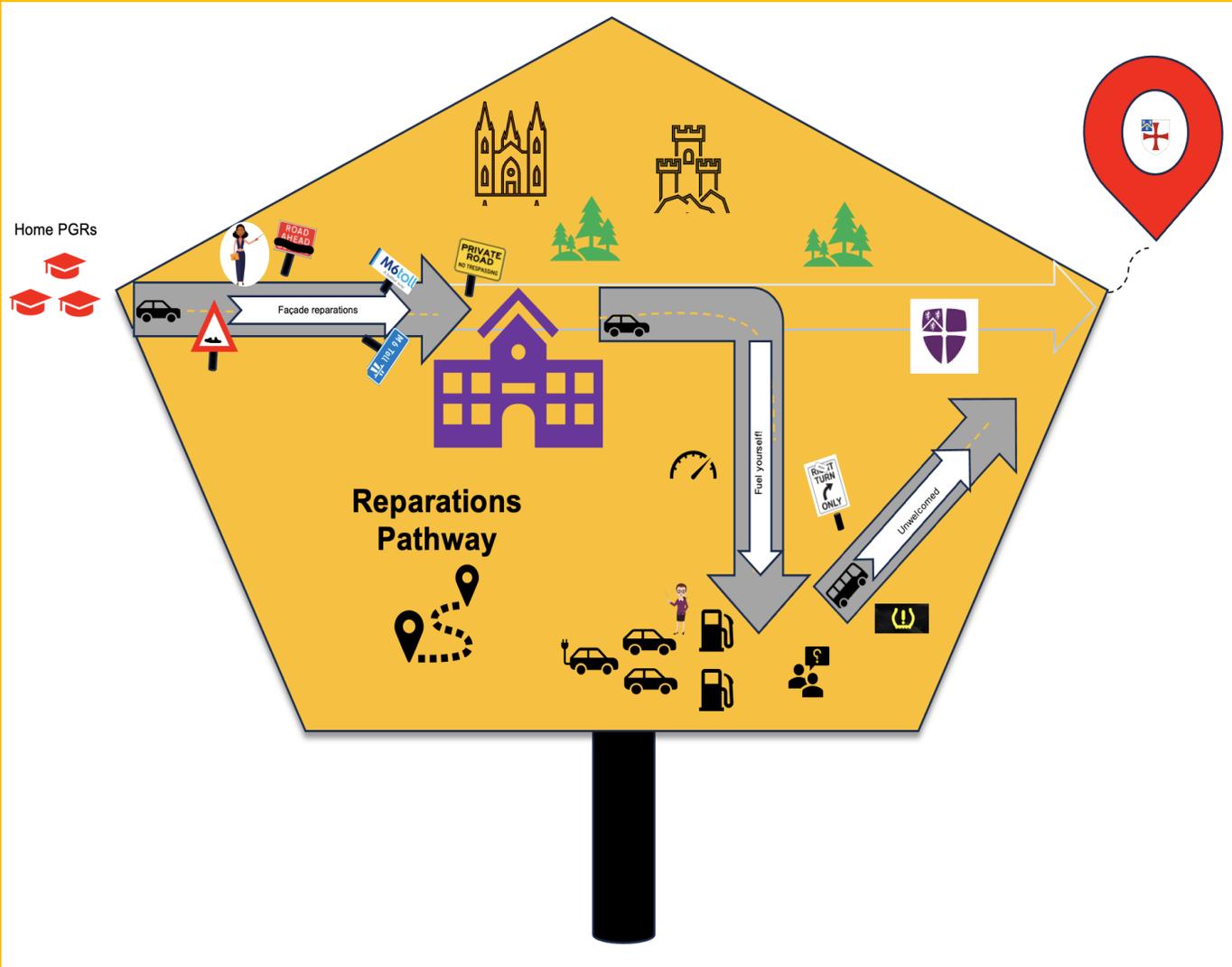
**Figure 12**



**Figure 13**

In conclusion, Onus Pathways reinforces (i) 'miscellaneous dependency', where students perceptions of the PGR pathway are diverse and they must self-navigate through roadblocks and diversions with minimal guidance from the university who should provide them a PGR map; (ii) 'cheeky navigations', insisting the onus is on students to use navigational tools for PGR training and advice, but they would like a mentor guide from a similar background that they trust to guide their pathway; and (iii) 'useless diversions, implying the MH support on offer are deemed useless and seen to predominately accommodate White students and they must self-navigate with peers. The best way to overcome this is employing counsellors with backgrounds comparable to mentors.

# THE REPARATIONS PATHWAY



Map 2: Reparations Pathway

# The Reparations Pathway

This theme consists of Home Postgraduate Researchers (HPGRs) perceptions regarding the PGR pathway. There are two Focus Groups (FGs) that are interpreted. Similar to UGs and PGTs, the attitudes of the HPGRs from racially minoritised backgrounds deliver a critical message towards the university and the pathway. The three interpretative codes are (i) Façade reparations, (ii) Fuel yourself!, (iii) Unwelcomed.

## Façade reparations

This interpretative code addresses home PGRs (HPGR) perceptions to undergo a research degree and their experience of the application process. Four descriptive codes support 'Façade reparations': *PGR seductions*, *suited lifestyle*, *straightforward myth*, and *structural toll*.

**Table 4: Façade reparations**

| Descriptive codes           | Road signs  | Common disruptions/assistance for Home PGRs  | Highlights  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>PGR seductions</i>       |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Research interest supports underrepresented groups.</li> <li>⇒ Bumpy road is PGRs choosing activist research.</li> <li>⇒ Seduced into a research degree with funding.</li> </ul>    | Some HPGRs had no intention of doing a research degree in Durham, which correlates to UG and PGT perceptions.         |
| <i>Suited lifestyle</i>     |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Two Mature mother's insights.</li> <li>⇒ Salary progression</li> <li>⇒ Visible representation sparked interest.</li> <li>⇒ Durham is perceived as a private White space.</li> </ul> | Visible representation sparks a sense of belonging and thus, staff from racially minoritised background is essential. |
| <i>Straightforward myth</i> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Roadblock to a research degree is a myth.</li> <li>⇒ Straightforward</li> </ul>   | Masters by research (1+3 program) was a 'white gatekeep' and researchers knew very                                    |

|                        |   |   |   |
|------------------------|---|---|---|
|                        |   | application process.<br>⇒ Academics are prominent navigators. | little about it before applying for it.             |
| <i>Structural toll</i> |  | ⇒ Privileged over entitlement.<br>⇒ Hidden tolls for HPGRs.   | A funded PhD is considered a structural reparation. |

*PGR seductions*

This descriptive code *PGR seductions* focuses on why racially minoritised HPGRs chose to partake in a research degree. FG1 illustrate their research interests are in support of their race/ethnic background and underrepresented groups:

‘I think Durham was the only university in the NE that had my kind of specific interest in...African history and politics which is the Black conscious movement.’ (Participant 21)

‘It’s because **I saw like how underrepresented our group was in PhD side, especially in higher education**. So, I wanted to do it like for all of us especially who you know, don’t usually get a chance to do this and aren’t usually chosen.’ (Participant 40)

‘Basically, the absence of the good teacher training around issues of race and racism, especially within the context of history. So, I’m hoping that my research will help develop understanding on how we might better support teachers.’ (Participant 19)

‘Always been quite interested in higher education and in the black community and **bettering a black community...hopefully my research benefits a few people**.’ (Participant 24)

It is interpreted a level of unselfishness and courage underpin their decisions, because their research interests are placed in ‘bettering’ marginalised and ‘underrepresented’ communities in education and society.<sup>1</sup> They decide activist approaches despite an awareness of negative MH consequences such as macroaggressions, racism, and fatigue encountering scholars from racially minoritised backgrounds in research and their daily lives. With this realisation, their courageousness benefits the university, the wider NE, and globe. Unfortunately, they are not assisted on this bumpy road (see Figure 14) during their pathway (see interpretative code unwelcomed).

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<sup>1</sup> To note, many HPGRs participating in the FGs are in the social sciences.



**Figure 14**

In FG2, many didn't know such opportunities (PGR) existed, and are made aware by academic supervisors, who in the previous theme play a significant navigator role in the application process:

'I'm not gonna say I was gaslit by [academic] and my supervisor do this [jokes].'  
(Participant 17)

'Undergrad **academic supervisor** told me about the M res [see code straightforward myth].'  
(Participant 16)

While similarities and differences are in their PGR decisions, one toll is funding:

'I wouldn't of fund it myself... I don't actually live in Durham, but yeah, **I couldn't turn away the funded education**, but initially I was apprehensive of accepting it when I got it because I didn't want to stay in Durham any longer.'  
(Participant 15)

'That you're essentially paid to do in front of you. It's like you're almost **seduced** by the fact that you never get opportunity ever again.'  
(Participant 17)

While choosing to be 'seduced' by funding opportunities, an implicit roadblock is study continuation at Durham. Participant 17, also mentions:

'I had no intention on doing a postgraduate degree. I had no intention on being in Durham ever again.'

The previous comments on study continuation in Durham aligns with the descriptive code *research destinations*, where UGs and PGTs rather partake in a research degree abroad (see Onus pathway). However, funding tolls are a navigational tool 'seducing' racially minoritised UG students into research degrees at Durham (see Figure 15).



**Figure 15**

### Suited lifestyle

I'd like to interject with two HPGR mothers. Mature participants 18 and 19 discuss how a research degree suits their lifestyle. Participant 18 a first-generation scholar states not getting paid enough:

'My time is more value now and it's worth more money. So, if I know if I'm not gonna be paid much, I'd rather be getting a qualification while I'm in this early stage of parent parenting so **suited my lifestyle.**' (Participant 18)

While participant 18 found funding participant 19 is self-funded and insinuates Durham is a structural barrier, but found an academic navigator presenting a path and a sense of belonging by sheer visible representation:

'That representation that [Black academic navigator] is a person of color and had for me that made me think, OK, maybe Durham is somewhere that someone like myself could study. And so, **I think there was a barrier for me initially was the perception of Durham as a very white space.** I know lots of HE like that. But despite it being a university on the doorstep of where I live, I was looking down South to universities where there was more diversity.' (Participant 19)

Coming from a city in the North-East, and the perception of Durham University being a 'white space' align with her explanations of Durham being 'way beyond something someone like me would ever have considered', as it was perceived 'way out' of her 'league'. Thus, an observation is white, and prestige are linked to PGR attainability. In relation to this report, I will equate this white league at Durham to a specific destination on the HPGR pathway for racially minoritised researchers, which is perceived as an unreachable or private destination (see Figure 16 & 17 below) but is more straightforward with navigational tools (e.g., social media, academic navigators, and Mrs).



Figure 16



Figure 17

### *Straightforward myth*

HPGRs are asked about their experiences during the application process and if they had any advice or training. The perception of fear and lack of trust is interpreted as two roadblocks for racially minoritised HPGRs: (i) considering a PhD, and (ii) a PGR commitment at Durham. Participant 20 explains her experience:

'I wasn't sure like because I went on academic Twitter and a PhD was kinda scary but I found this program that Imperial was running that is increasing Black and minorities to apply to do PhD's...it was kind of daunting to say I want to do a PhD cause in terms of who is in the department it just **feels very other place.**'

Participant 20 continues to say an 'amazing professor' (academic navigator) encouraged them to apply but she wasn't sure if a PhD 'was the right way or even doing it at Durham':

'So, those kind of programs was really helpful in terms of what the things are like this **myth** or you have to know what your PhD is to actually apply. And do you have to know the skills.' (Participant 20)

Thus, to remove the 'myths' or roadblocks, race/ethnic centered PGR promoting is one navigational tool to support students on route to a PGR destination they fear is not for them (staff caution a race/ethnic centre approach see code *similar pathways*). This also connects to the previous theme, where UG and PGT students had no or minimal information to even consider a PhD (see codes *research- considerations and destinations*).

An academic navigator also encouraged Participant 17 and 24 to overcome this roadblock:

'[Academic navigator] was like, you should think about doing a postgraduate study. And only about 5 days before the deadline...then I called supervisor and they created and filled out the document in literally 24 hours. So, it's not that it was support, I think a lot of it is **luck.**' (Participant 17)

'I wouldn't say it was straightforward, but it felt **straightforward** based off of the people that I had around me helping me. So, I had of course [academic navigator] and another colleague of theirs before, which is [academic navigator]. But they kind of first encouraged me to apply anyway. I think they both saw my potential based off my undergraduate and kind of like talked me through the process of how everything works with the application because **I did the 1+3.** So, I did the application the masters and the PhD applications together.' (Participant 24)

The 1 + 3 program or master's by research became a topic amongst both focus groups (5 students were in it). This program has been shown to be a 'white gatekeep' (pathway) since its existence and only recently been a path opened for students from racially minoritised backgrounds [according to interviewer], which explains why HPGR's such as Participant 16 'didn't believe that existed' when her academic navigator revealed the program to her. Therefore, the descriptive

code *straightforward myth* is to overcome the fear of PGR attainability and lack of trust from the University through a bit of 'luck', the promotion of proper navigational tools (e.g., 1+3), as with assisting in the extra labour for academic navigators. However, the navigational tools must be present once residing at the PGR destination for holistic inclusiveness.

### *Structural toll*

FG2 express the privileges of undergoing a fully or self-funded PGR pathway:

'I definitely feel privileged to be in this position.' (Participant 18)

'I would add is that yes, it is a privilege, but it's I would like to see like what the skew is in terms of most of our research is based on oppression anyway or some sort of marginalisation. So, we're using a privilege to readdress lack of provision in society.' (Participant 17)

While the HPGR's show gratitude, some realise the work they do on oppression comes with 'opportunity costs that are hidden' (see Figure 18), where they are privileged on the one hand, but to what extent do they need 'to be over apologetic' or 'uncomfortable' about being rewarded for their potential', and not seen as 'complaining' on the other. For example, the 'emotional labour and our own mental well-being in this space and doing research' at an institution like Durham,' where 'white guys are on the 1 + 3 saying do you wanna go on champagne night?', and thus, 'feeling entitled is different than being in a privileged situation.'



**Figure 18**

One HPGR sums up their 'privilege' as a 'structural reparation', because of the comments above and the ways in which they must overcome 'institutional barriers or systemic powers' underplaying their own research. Therefore, the descriptive code *structural tolls* are the hidden costs for racially minoritised HPGRs committing to a pathway 'they have chosen' at the detriment of their own MH, but to the benefit of the institution they feel 'alienated' from. To summarise, the interpretative code 'Façade reparations' insists HPGRs overcome bumpy roads and mythical roadblocks with supportive navigators and navigational tools for their courageous research interests that are predominately underpinned by supporting marginalised and underrepresented communities at the expense of their MH. This is in relation to arriving at a white destination where they don't feel a sense of belonging, and their trust is at the individual rather than the institutional level to navigate their pathways. Therefore, the HPGR process encounter various tolls instead of perceived roadblocks, as described within the previous theme, and while majority of HPGRs in the FGs are recruited to fund the initial toll - i.e., reparations – they are not supported at the academic training or emotional tolls and must seek fuel themselves (see next code).

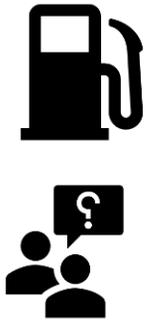
## Fuel yourself!

'I think we need to know like what the pathways are out of this. Like. I still don't know what to do with this research...I need someone to articulate a lineage or some sort of like trajectory. That's what I'm looking for because **I'm very confused on what to do next.**'  
(Participant 17)

This interpretative code highlights the ways in which students receive research training and who they use as formal/informal support to provide them fuel on their pathway. Three key elements describe 'Fuel yourself!': *a resounding crumb*, *PGR mentoring parallels*, and *peer-to-peer support*.

**Table 5: Fuel yourself!**

| Descriptive codes          | Road signs  | Common disruptions/assistance for Home PGRs   | Highlights  |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|
| <i>A resounding crumb</i>  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ No formal support for research training.</li> <li>⇒ 1+3 programme provides homogenous research skills.</li> <li>⇒ A crumb of information received.</li> </ul>  | Research skills training must understand the heterogeneity of needs, as paths require different navigational tools.   |
| <i>Mentoring parallels</i> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Predominately White departments become a barrier for HPGRs.</li> <li>⇒ Academic supervisors with similar backgrounds bring comfort, belonging, and trust.</li> <li>⇒ Racially minoritised academics are prominent navigators.</li> </ul> | Building HPGRs trust and sense of belonging is through representation of staff from racially minoritised backgrounds. The lack of staff representation creates more labour for current staff. |

|                      |   |   |   |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| Peer-to-peer support |  | <p>⇒ Lack of formal support.</p> <p>⇒ Peer networks provide fuel.</p> | While peer-to-peer networks provide fuel, they also lack research experience, and need tangible support to keep them going. |
|----------------------|---|---|---|

### A resounding crumb

Running on empty and not knowing where to go, PGRs must stop at the petrol station for fuel and directions (see Figure 19). In both focus groups, HPGRs are asked whether they've had any training relating to research skills and due to an extended period of silence, a 'resounding no' is pointed out by the interviewer. A HPGR at the start of their 1+3 programme expresses:

'The skills I think you're making me into a sociologist. But I'm not here to do sociology. I'm here to do something else. I know somebody else is doing biomedical like anthropology...even though it's supposed to be interdisciplinary, **it does feel like all roads lead to sociology.**' (Participant 17)

Thus, the 1+3 programme may need to teach alternative research skills for students as every discipline has its own navigational tools and path.

HPGRs in the FGs are also asked if they have any support and/or advice in regard to training during their PGR pathway, only one student mentions:

'It's a **crumb of yes**...I'm from industry, so I've got quite a lot of links, companies, whatever people chat to, I would say, yeah.' (Participant 18)

As mentioned, Participant 18 is a mature PGR who has experience in her career forming networks and is undergoing a PhD for career and salary progression (see code *suited lifestyle*). No HPGR outside of Participant 18 discuss receiving formal training support, but they do emphasise the informal support from specific navigators.



Figure 19

### *PGR Mentoring parallels (mentor navigators)*

PGRs are asked if they've had any professional/informal mentors other than their supervisors. Mentorship for HPGRs came in different forms. For example, Participant 22 explains her department provides PGR students with '2 reviewers' who are 'like mentors if students want to discuss anything', as with her college offering mentors (Participant 22 does not use these mentors but is conscious of their existence, similar to UG and PGT students). Moreover, the few PGRs who have some form of mentorship express the importance of background. According to Participant 23's pathway:

'My dissertation supervisor...he became my mentor, not just for my studies...but he's still a great person to talk to for any type of advice... he also worked his way from the ground up in terms of where he came from in Pakistan and now where he's at now. (Participant 23)

Participant 23 continues to state how her supervisor is her 'idol' and is 'always available' despite him receiving 'no gain' in helping her. Gender awareness is also articulated:

'He understands the pressure of a young woman, a person of colour and a young woman in a kind of STEM environment and how important that is. And he's always said like, the same way I would want my daughter to succeed. I want every girl in academia to succeed. Yeah, so I've actually been really lucky.' (Participant 23)

In Participant 23's experience we see understanding of lived experience results in a sense of belonging and trust, which is how all participants of the report view a mentor.

Additionally, academic supervisors from racially minoritised backgrounds are perceived as a 'privilege' too:

'I also have my own supervisor who is also a person of color and also **understands those kind of struggles** that come with that. He's great to talk to also. But yeah, I have been very, very privileged in that way.' (Participant 23)

Participant 20 shares a comparable response where the British Neuroscience Association ran a program to allow POCs to choose their mentor with a similar research background, but her selection was through an intersectional lens where research topic and race were mentor criteria. Participant 20 then highlights the importance of similar backgrounds for a formal mentor,

'Things I wouldn't feel maybe like, even though I had the best like relationship with my supervisor currently, but **there's certain questions I would be more like feel comfortable asking another POC** in terms of like what is a PhD in terms of the culture and going to see like conferences.' (Participant 20)

Therefore, HPGRs from racially minoritised backgrounds must have mentor navigators who share similar race/ethnic backgrounds, and/or a lived experience of understanding the HPGR pathway

(see Figure 20). An interpretation is a mentor navigator must be trustworthy for HPGRs to be comfortable asking questions to receive the right directions. It is apparent PGR perceptions correlate to UG and PGT students, hence a similar descriptive code *PGR mentoring parallels*.



**Figure 20**

Consequently, gaining PGR trust may be difficult when disciplines like Participant 16's have no mentor navigators from racially minoritised backgrounds:

'I don't think I've ever been mentored by like, academic, who is also like a person of color and like that would truly be the most useful sort of thing, I think. There's no nonwhite [discipline] in the department, so it's a bit of a moot point. Looking inside my department.'  
(Participant 16)

Participant 16 currently receives formal mentoring from a 'white women and she's in America so she doesn't really get it', leading her to a racially minoritised peer mentor who is 'just a friend', which resembles the mentoring a majority of HPGRs highlight.

### *Peer-to-peer support*

While PGRs above mention formal/informal mentor navigators that provide them fuel, others illustrate not receiving any formal support:

'Struggling to think of anyone to be honest.' (Participant 40)

'For me it's the same like I don't have any sort of formal mentors and I've sort of relied on kind of friends and family. And because I'm self-funding, I'm still working part time and the civil service and my line manager has been quite useful. But most from the non-academic point of view.' (Participant 21)

'I wouldn't say I have professional mentoring, but **we do have like a little group where we do support each other and I guess we check up each other here and there share like successes and progress and things like that and people are quite comfortable to ask for help when they need it...**But I guess everyone's also still in the same predicament as well, so you can't really be professional at the same time. So, it's cool it's more like a support group rather than a mentor.' (Participant 24)

PGR peers, friends, and family are what several HPGRs rely upon to navigate their pathway. More specifically, Participant 24 mentions a peer-to-peer support group for PGRs, which is

common during the PGR pathway (see staff code PGR safe spaces). Despite this, everyone is in the ‘same predicament’ and understanding their pathway becomes a ‘scramble’. However, these peer-to-peer networks are seen as crucial and widespread tangible support. For instance, Participant 24’s departmental support group includes a Black researcher who survived and thrived the Durham PGR experience and is ‘approachable’ for support. Additionally, Participant 18 is ‘quite open with most people’, but as a mature student, age becomes a factor, where she seeks support from post doctorates from racially minoritised backgrounds in her department. Therefore, the onus is on HPGRs to find fuel for themselves to continue their pathway by seeking comfortable guides such as academic/mentor navigators and peer-to-peer support networks.

Unfortunately, PGRs not receiving tangible support systems as argued by Participant 17 in SGIA suffering ‘isolation’, must ‘forge a path’ by herself because ‘there’s not enough mentors.’ For these reasons, structural tolls and self-navigated pathways become fuel depleting as they’re detriments to PGR research skills and mental health (see Figure 21 & 22). This fuel depletion exacerbates in an unwelcomed White destination.



Figure 21



Figure 22

### Unwelcomed

In this interpretative code, HPGRs are questioned about MH services and support from the university and their peers. They express MH support is a *space for whiteness* that is a *Uni problem*.

Table 6: Unwelcomed!

| Descriptive codes          | Pathway symbols   | Common disruptions/assistance for Home PGRs  | Highlights  |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>Space for whiteness</i> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ MH services is a space for whiteness</li> <li>⇒ HPGR self/group care</li> <li>⇒ Research</li> </ul> | Research skills training must understand the heterogeneity of needs, as paths |

|                    |   |   |   |
|--------------------|---|---|---|
|                    |  | experience is perceived as harder for racially minoritised HPGRs  | require different navigational tools.   |
| <i>Uni problem</i> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Undergraduates are supported more than postgraduates.</li> <li>⇒ The University assists in the disruptions.</li> </ul> | Building HPGRs trust and sense of belonging is through representation of staff from racially minoritised backgrounds. The lack of staff representation creates more labour for current staff. |

*Space for Whiteness*

HPGR’s awareness of MH vary:

‘I only started like, a month ago or something like that. And obviously, I’m not too sure what mental health sort of stuff is available at university, so I couldn’t really say that I know much about it.’ (Participant 40)

‘I’ve been here a year. Part time at Durham, but **it had not even occurred to me about mental health sort of what support is available** to turn to the university for support. (Participant 19)

As a consequence to Participant 19’s statement of not realising to seek MH support, she suggests it is the ‘whiteness of the space’ shifting racially minoritised PGRs focus to ‘support ourselves because that’s what we always do’. Therefore, in the same way considering a research degree at a white destination is a concern, so is receiving MH support.

Participant 17 echoes this by suggesting MH support is a ‘prism for whiteness’:

‘If I’m to be honest, I think it’s not that mental health support is not there. I just think that the way that they perceive mental health is still very like in the prism of whiteness just because when we talk about mental and everything I’ve heard about is like when you feel sad, when you feel withdrawn, all that stuff. But I think that’s just so like White femininity like, oh, I have to cry for you to feel like I’m upset. But like I’ve, I’ve **crashed this wheel**, like today was my crashing week. Like 2 days I’ve crashed.’

Thus, race and MH support intersect in nuanced ways by advantaging white people on the one hand but disadvantaging racially minoritised PGRs on the other. This leads HPGRs to ‘crash this

wheel' or experiencing tire pressure enroute to their destination and need proper support (see Figure 23 and previous Figure 13).

While on the side of the road, they need roadside assistance, but the assistance on offer is not trustworthy to repair their mental state:

'And **for students of colour it's a bit harder** to kind of like. I guess in my position is a bit harder to kind of open up with exactly everything you're going through or things that you're thinking about because obviously the people that are offering this, of course, they're obviously doing their best, but **they are white** and you obviously have that thing in the back of your mind thinking that ohh, it's you're **kind of uncomfortable sharing everything with them.**' (Participant 24)

Again, it is interpreted trust is an underpinning factor HPGRs rely upon to feel comfortable continuing their pathway. The outcome is this MH space for whiteness is 'just harder' for racially minoritised PGRs because in Participant 18's perceptions 'the stuff that we deal with, I don't know, it's just a lot tougher.' They 'deal with' being 'overwhelmed' (Participant 17), but also 'fear being vulnerable' (Participant 18), which some female HPGRs argue is 'gendered and racialised' resulting in a 'black woman mentality' where they must 'power through' - i.e., fix their own flat tires - to continue their pathway.



Figure 23



### *Uni Problem*

The main challenges are not just the type of roadside assistance on offer, but the university not employing race/ethnic conscious assistance. Participant 24 illustrates better assistance from her department (Sociology) than the Uni:

'But when it comes to the actual university in itself, I think it is a different story in my opinion. I think a lot the **help comes from the department rather than the university**, which I think is a whole different issue in itself as well, because when I feel like, oh, that I'm getting a little like, I guess, help from people might department. And then I talked to my friends and different parts like ohh, I've never got this before and it's like It's a bit sad to see as well, so **it's clearly a university problem** which I didn't know.' (Participant 24)

According to Participant 24, MH assistance is a university wide problem (see Figure 24), and this extends to the type of graduates prioritised:

'I would say that there is definitely a difference between like my undergraduate and postgraduate kind of experience when it comes to the signposting in the mental health support like I feel like there's not as much when it comes to postgraduates compared to how it was for undergraduates, especially with colleges as well.' (Participant 24)

However, Participant 21 insists college MH assistance is there for PGRs,

'Not only being a person of color, but also like a mature student like me and also living about 15 minutes outside of Durham as well kind of creates that sort of distance as well. In terms of if you need to access those kind of services from the college.' (Participant 21)

They must rely on one another once more to repair each other's mental state to proceed onward to their final destination hence the code 'Unwelcomed'.

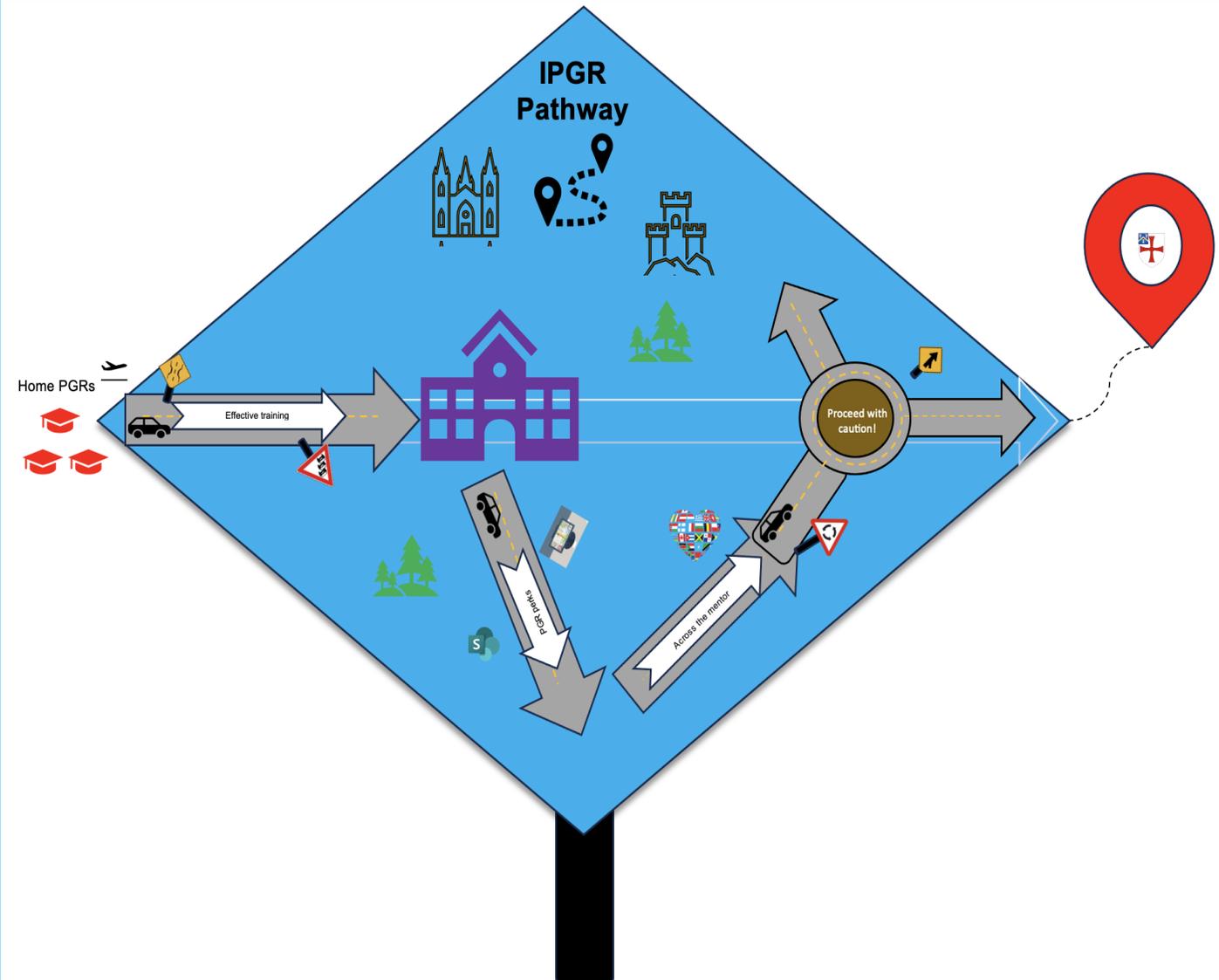


**Figure 24**

The Reparations Pathway is understanding HPGRs complex and controversial journeys prior to and during their research degree. Façade reparations highlights the bumpy roads, mythical roadblocks, and tolls PGRs experience while considering a research degree. This is underpinned with being seduced in various ways by academic navigators, such as suiting their lifestyle, research interests, and receiving funding. However, the reparations are a façade because they must support themselves while undergoing activist research that is in juxtaposition to how they perceive Durham i.e., a white destination not accepting them. The former code is proven when HPGRs must 'fuel themselves' on their research pathway, since the majority receive (i) minimal research training, (ii) are absent mentor navigators from racially minoritised backgrounds, and (iii) must rely on one another with peer-to-peer support.

Lastly, the lack of MH support constructs an unwelcoming environment for HPGRs because the whiteness of the space hasn't been solved by the university. Reparations cannot only be diversifying racially minoritised HPGRs but formulating inclusivity and justice, so they can trust the institution rather than just individuals. In sum, HPGRs need tangible support, i.e., a map, with the right navigators, toll funding, and roadside assistance guiding them towards the end of their PGR destination. One recommendation being academic training on 'publishing skills' (Participant 15) and 'reasons to continue their pathway' to avoid 'confusion' i.e., diversions and misdirection's. Distinct from a smooth pathway, their journey lingers, and they need trustworthy people navigating them in the right (research progression) and healthy (MH) direction.

# THE IPGR PATHWAY



Map 3: The IPGR Pathway

# The IPGR Pathway

This theme consists of International PGR (IPGR) perceptions of the PGR pathway. There are two FGs and one 1-1 semi-structured interview. The tone of the IPGR recordings display fewer negative perceptions towards the university compared to their Home counterparts. The three interpretative codes are (i) International traffic, which illustrates career progression and scholarship funding are primary motivations for a research degree, but the time consuming visa application process is a challenge; (ii) PGR perks, focuses on relevant training on offer (e.g., DCAD) and *international essentials* (e.g., basic IT training) they need to support their pathway; (iii) Across the mentor, where IPGRs express a formal mentor should be a willing support system to their pathway, which is how they perceive themselves in their loving peer group spaces; and (iv) Proceed with caution!, is IPGRs believe the MH process is time consuming, not confidential, and a practitioner should speak a similar language to their own.

## International traffic

International traffic illustrates the start of the IPGR pathway and is shown in two strands: (i) *international motivations*, where IPGRs share what motivated them to consider a research degree, and (ii) *smooth traffic*, signifying the start and duration of the application process being smooth, but time consuming because the lack of noticeable support and visa process.

**Table 7: International traffic**

| Descriptive codes                | Pathway road signs/imagery  | Common disruptions/assistance for International PGRs  | Highlights   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <i>International motivations</i> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Motivations include career progression in academia and independence.</li> <li>⇒ Hard to find suitable supervisors and funding.</li> </ul>    | As many IPGRs do not do their undergrad at Durham, building a bridge of support (e.g., promoting supervisor list and scholarships) |
| <i>Smooth traffic</i>            |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Smooth application process with academic navigator assistance.</li> <li>⇒ Visa process is time consuming (i.e., creates traffic).</li> </ul> | Understanding the visa process and allowing recovery from travel (e.g., delaying welcome meetings)                                 |

## *International motivations*

IPGRs reveal diverse motivations when considering a PhD. Motivations include, (i) the PhD time length being shorter than other countries (Participant 30), (ii) the 'independence and autonomy of British academia' (Participant 26), and the two key motivations that will be discussed are (iii) to pursue an academic career and (iv) receiving scholarship funding.

IPGRs Participants 25 and 30 want to further their academic careers:

'I work as a lecturer in the University of [African country]...and a PhD for an academic is a must and really helps to get promoted...so for me it was about working in an academic institution. I had decided that I was going to pursue a long-term career in academia.' (Participant 25)

'It's one of the paths from where I can go into academics.' (Participant 30)

Participant 29 highlights the intersections of pursuing an academic career and scholarship funding:

'I also won a scholarship from Chinese Government and Durham University, but the major reason why I start a PhD is because my career plan. I want to be a lecturer in a university, but it's a prerequisite in China to be a lecturer. You first need to get a PhD degree. And also I'm very passionate about my project.'

The majority of IPGRs share this intersection and are funded through scholarships. Furthermore, a way to enhance motivations are expressed by Participant 26:

'So, the first one is again **finding a suitable supervisor and funding**, let's say a directory of available supervisors who are, for example, specialized in this area.'

With several IPGRs not receiving an undergraduate or master's degree at Durham, constructing noticeable pathways such as potential academic navigators and funding become a bridge (see Figure 25) to *international motivations*.



Figure 25

Moreover, there are motivational similarities and differences for HPGRs and IPGRs. For example, a similarity includes receiving scholarship funding, but a difference is research topics: Most HPGRs highlight choosing research degrees to support the marginalisation of underrepresented groups, whereas IPGRs intend to progress in academia (Only 1 HPGR mentioned this). This is

crucial to consider since researchers doing activist research do so from their own lived experiences which requires adequate mentoring and MH support. In addition, HPGRs also felt 'seduced' to start the research degree pathway (e.g., academic supervisors and 1+3 programme), while IPGRs navigated the application process on their own will, which could explain why HPGRs are 'confused' when navigating to their final destination (see code fuel yourself!), and why IPGRs require support in 'finding a suitable supervisor'.

### *Smooth (ride) traffic*

This code illustrates the second phase of the IPGR pathway, which is navigating the application process (e.g., 'What did you know about the application process before going through it?' and 'What was your experience of the application process like?'). They view this process as 'smooth', similar to HPGRs realisation of the process being a *straightforward myth*. However, they also view this process challenging because of less IPGR advertising and the extensive timeframe to start the pathway (e.g., visa process) i.e., 'traffic' (see Figure 26).

IPGRs suggest the PhD process was quite 'smooth' with academic navigator's support:

'So during my whole process, it was practically just me and the supervisor always. I didn't have that much communication with any other person.' (Participant 28)

'I went to the English department and in the third year I decided to apply for a master's degree, and at that time I told my teachers and professors. In my school, that I would also do my PhD. So, it' a **natural process for me.**' (Participant 27)

After contacting four supervisors from several institutions, Participant 27 received an offer from Durham after support from an academic navigator.

Participant 26 was concerned about funding but was happy 'nineDTP opened doors for international students and learn University agreed to **bridge** the funding deficit.' Participant 26 also mentions support from the Education Department such as receiving 'sample proposals' from previous students and:

'The relevant staff member at the School of Education, who worked us through the whole application process and who made sure that we could have any questions answered so that made my life really much easier through the application process. And that's exactly why I applied only to Durham university.' (Participant 26)

While some express the application process to be smooth, others perceive it as challenging, because the lack of information and waiting time. Participant 25 was in [African country]:

'I was sort of **fishing in the dark**, not sure about whether my proposal is good enough, whether they would accept it and issues of funding as well. So, I think having support at that stage would have been good. And I had also, I had heard about other universities, but Durham was also new for me. Of course, when I went through the **rankings** and then,

yeah, bingo. But there was a lot that was **trial and error** for me and having support through the application process, I think it could have helped here.’ (Participant 25)

Participant 25 emphasises the reputation of the University influenced her decision to do research with Durham, which are the same reasons UG and PGT students would consider Durham (see code, *research destinations*). Participant 28 received majority support from her supervisor, but the ‘only downsides’ are,

‘The whole process and how I was practically, I feel like completely dependent on him...and when I got to university, I got to meet so many great people and I started to be aware of the services that they have. I wish I knew beforehand that I had all those tools.’ (Participant 28)

According to Participant 25 and 28’s perceptions, there are navigational tools for support which need greater degrees of advertising. Despite less publicization from Durham, rankings become an influential factor for participant 25 as with students in other themes.

The second challenge for IPGR is time utilisation:

‘I think for me the application procedure is a bit **smoother** cause I actually didn't have any interview...but I think the **waiting time** is more exhausting for me because I’m not so patient.’ (Participant 29)

‘So I would say like the application process was not that difficult, but it was **time consuming**.’ (Participant 30)

Participant 28 adds insights on the interview and visa process:

‘So, the process was so tiring because of the scholarship. At the end I think I had like four or five interviews. Then the whole visa process was also, quite a challenge. Quite expensive as well. (Participant 28)

Participant 28 then suggests recovery time is needed upon arrival. For instance, Participant 28 requested to delay the first supervision meeting for ‘5 days to recover from the process’. Therefore, it is apparent much information is available, but generates little awareness. IPGRs need navigational tools that are underpinned by funding support, supervisor awareness, and assistance for the time consumed (e.g., interviews and visa) when considering the IPGR pathway. These navigational tools could be considered an ‘introductory training process for people who are certain or uncertain’ on the IPGR pathway.



Figure 26

In sum, it is interpreted a primary difference between HPGRs and IPGRs start of the pathway is the visa process. We view IPGRs needing to know funding, the reputation of the university, and time accessing a visa creates earlier motivations to navigate the pathway. Thus, the university must place higher priority on advertising international navigational tools with straightforward visibility and access (browsing SharePoint becomes a roadblock, see next code). To note, this interpretative code ‘International traffic’, suggests IPGR perceptions are less about belonging and trusting the university – like previous themes - and more about fully comprehending the international pathway.

### PGR perks

In this interpretative code, IPGRs speak on the relevant training and researching skills they use or would need to support their pathway. They highlight (i) the *effective training* that is navigated within their department, DCAD, and/or independently, and (ii) the *international essentials* such as learning SharePoint and adapting to the British teaching culture they feel are necessary to support their pathway enroute to their final destination.

Table 8: PGR perks

| Descriptive codes               | Pathway road signs/imagery  | Common disruptions/assistance for International PGRs   | Highlights  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>Effective training</i>       |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ DCAD is an effective Durham source for training IPGRs.</li> <li>⇒ Independent training with their own navigational tools (e.g., GPS).</li> <li>⇒ Close research networks instil confidence</li> </ul> | IPGRs who display higher confidence in responses to work independently had close research networks. |
| <i>International essentials</i> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Emails and SharePoint become diversions.</li> <li>⇒ Lack of knowledge</li> </ul>  | Understanding the visa process and allowing recovery from travel                                    |

|  |  |                                 |                                   |
|--|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|  |  | around British academic culture | (e.g., delaying welcome meetings) |
|--|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|

### Effective training

IPGRs are asked about any relevant training they have engaged in. Participant 25 highlights two:

**'Gateway to legal research**, which is about 7 to 8 seminars on various topics that they feel will be of relevance to new PhD students and then other than that there's been the trainings from the **DCAD**.'

Participant 25 continues to suggest DCAD training is a relevant resource she has attended for a second straight year. Participant 30 echoes Participant 25's sentiments by stating 'I have completed only the DCAD demonstrating teacher training,' but 'otherwise, whenever I feel like I just Google it and do the things.' (see next code for improvements on teacher training). Participant 27 expresses participating in training around how to write an efficient proposal and a language course during masters. According to IPGRs, language is a key resource for training.

IPGRs who have family members or friends doing a PhD are the ones who express independent pathways (and were confident in this rather than seeing it as a burden):

'Youtube videos were my best option.' (Participant 30)

'There is just so much autonomy and independence for the learner and for the student really. And when I came back for my PhD, my assumption was if I realised that I need certain training in whatever subject I will try to go for it on my own.' (Participant 26)

An independent path of self-development for Participant 26 is more useful because of occupying unnecessary time 'attending workshops, especially if it involves physical movement.' However, we suggest the independent path becomes an easier route when PGRs have close research networks (e.g., family or friends in academia), and when the training available needs further development for PGR engagement. The active engagement in training/workshops supports MH and IPGRs with less research networks. This is reflective of IPGRs response to questions regarding training engagement, because IPGRs with close research networks become more confident in their responses about the pathway. Thus, close research networks are a useful tool for navigation (see Figure 27).



Figure 27

### *International training essentials*

IPGRs provide several training options to support the IPGR pathway. For example, basic introductory skills, a publishing program, and induction teaching for British academic culture. Firstly, they insinuate guidance on basic skills (e.g., IT services and networking) are needed to access the available training. Participant 29 is the only one to state most training options are on offer via email:

'The university has offered an adequate amount of services for us. As long as we can keep an eye on our emails so we can get enough help.

Even though support is available via emails, Participant 29 is the only student who finds emails beneficial. This is because emails lead to unfamiliar 'forums' for relevant training:

'Oh trainings to do with IT, just the basic skills because when you come to Durham, you realise that Durham has **100 forums**, **SharePoint**, **Duo** and **Ultra**. That's what I think about six or seven. You know, I didn't even know banner. I didn't even know what to do and where. I think that should be the first training.' (Participant 25)

SharePoint has become the forefront to access several networks across the university. (see Figure 28). Thus, basic instructions around forum applications are needed because this process has too many diversions (see staff theme).



**Figure 28**

Secondly, networking becomes an important navigational tool:

'In my case **networking** comes a lot after conferences...you listen to a paper, and you may go and ask questions to the presenter.' (Participant 28)

Participant 26 suggests 'networking has to be done by the student on their own rather than by a supportive structure.' He then adds a third training option:

'The very early stage of PhD is the supervisors or respective schools develop a specific structure for helping students **co-author or publish research**...something built in would go a long way when preparing students for the job market.' (This is similar to HPGRs)

Lastly, induction teacher training for the British academic culture. Unlike other training offers, teacher training for Home and International researchers compares in some respect:

'You attend induction, but it's two hours, so I think if we had two hours of how to be a tutor, how to manage small groups and another two hours on assessment which I think is not adequate. But of course, you learn on the job if you are open and you're talking to your module leader, they're always there to support you here.' (Participant 25)

Participant 25 explains an experience Home and International researchers may share. However, Participant 26 and Participant 28 explain differences:

'What I also figured out during my master is that the UK, I'm not aware that there is a **teaching culture**... nothing in my background has prepared me for these, especially as international students. (Participant 26)

'For people that don't really know that much of first UK lifestyle and the academic system, because I come from a different academia like I did all my studies in Spanish and all in French. So, I was both in a **sense of language, culture**, how the work is done in the UK, how the research is done. I needed to adapt completely.' (Participant 28)

Therefore, building a teacher training program that prioritises the specific needs of IPGRs will assist their pathway.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, it appears the 'University provides services but need to check emails' (Participant 29), however, this way of navigating the PGR process is perceived as insufficient and other visible routes must be established. As with the ways in which training program's function. One way is to use training as perks:

'They can have some PGR programs or some things like that or even they can give some **perks** like oh, participate in this competition. You will get this or the certifications and anything. So, in that case students would be motivated to get that reward.' (Participant 30)

In sum, PGR perks are reinforced by the *effective training* (e.g., DCAD and Independency) IPGRs participate in and the *international essentials* (e.g., basic IT training) they need to support their pathway.

### Across the mentor

This interpretative code illustrates IPGRs perceptions of the mentoring process, which reveals the ways in which mentoring support could be addressed 'across the board' for their pathway. The three descriptive codes include: *informal assistance*, *willing consciousness*, and *peer group love*.

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<sup>2</sup>Student's also mention training courses around, increased awareness on funding and scholarships; seminars on writing a research proposal; and realising PhD potential during their undergraduate.

**Table 9: Across the mentor**

| Descriptive codes            | Pathway road signs/imagery  | Common disruptions/assistance for International PGRs   | Highlights  |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>Informal assistance</i>   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ College assists in offering IPGRs mentors.</li> <li>⇒ White male representation</li> <li>⇒ No formal mentoring</li> <li>⇒ Community-centred peer support</li> </ul> | <p>The most important trait of a mentor is their willingness to enhance their PGR experience.</p> |
| <i>Willing consciousness</i> |   |  |   |
| <i>Peer group love</i>       |   |  |   |

*Informal assistance*

The majority of IPGRs have an informal mentor and express the benefits. Two IPGRs speak on their college mentors:

'I think having a mentor be a great idea...I belong to Ustinov, and Ustinov assigns you to a man to show you around Durham to help you to settle in. Uh, and my mind has been quite helpful...having that kind of mentor in the PhD program would be quite helpful.'  
(Participant 25)

**'I received an e-mail from my college** asking if I was interested in having a mentor, and I answered yes and I did meet quite a few times with this mentor, which is great.'  
(Participant 28)

HPGRs don't express the impact of college mentors, and this could be because International students rely more on the college system. College mentors offer IPGRs a sense of belonging and community when adjusting to the UK lifestyle. For example, being 'invited to house for Christmas' (Participant 25), and speaking the same language:

'His first language is also Spanish, so I ended up also going to activities with him and also even visiting someone's house and be like part of a family and have a dinner. **Yes, I think it's a great option for international students.**' (Participant 28)

Participant 28 continues to emphasise the importance of a mentor as she is a first-generation scholar:

'I'm first generation in the sense that I'm the first member in my family to actually go to university and pursue a PhD. If there was, for example, the option of having a mentor during the whole process I would have actually opted for that option.'

As mentioned, while some IPGRs have PhD holders in their family networks and a 'partner, he's in academia and he acts as a mentor for me and I can rely on him for both the personal and professional advice', others don't, and it is important to understand the diverse needs of specific IPGRs.

Lastly, IPGRs perceive their secondary supervisors as mentors. One IPGR switched their secondary supervisor to primary because of language. English was not the secondary supervisor's first language and they felt more comfortable speaking with them about their academic writing. These similarities are significant because some IPGRs express comfort and trust in mentors from a similar language background (see next code). Therefore, this code *informal assistance* provides IPGRs experience with the various roles informal mentors embrace. However, this does pose the question to one IPGR, 'Can this be called mentors?' (Participant 27).

#### *Willing consciousness*

IPGRs offer advice on what they need in a mentor. Their interpretations of a formal mentor vary across the board. For example, some IPGR's highlight a mentor should carry a similar consciousness and background:

'I've made friends, but my closest friends are still people from [African countries] I think because we have a lot in common. So, if you have a mentor like that or someone from Africa, someone who is still studying for their PhD, or they just completed it. I think it would be quite helpful.' (Participant 25)

'I would agree 100% with that. Sometimes you know the **mostly white, mostly male culture of British academia makes it a little bit difficult for people from the periphery**...I may not be as mentally available sometimes due to certain events back home. And a person with at least an understanding, not necessarily the actual experience will be able to support me.' (Participant 26)

The mentor's consciousness and background are also pivotal for Participant 28:

'No single member in my family can identify with me. So, if I had that option of a mentor like the **conscious of first generation**, that would have been the big help.' (Participant 28)

IPGRs perceptions are very similar to the HPGRs code *mentoring parallels* where understanding lived experiences are primary connections. Another comparison are the cultural barriers where IPGRs express 'we can't talk to our parents or the family, so a mentor should be there.'

A main difference between Home and most International PGRs is similar backgrounds are 'not necessary', but a mentor's motivational support is:

'So, he or she should be considerate enough to **guide us** because if you're stuck in a project we have a supervisor that, but a mentor is like if we are demotivated...So the **gender or the ethnic background is not that important**. It should be we just want someone to hear a thing and to listen peacefully and can suggest anything that we can do.' (Participant 25)

Therefore, a formal mentor should be someone who suits the needs of the PGR, whether it be understanding a PGRs background, but most importantly *a willing consciousness* for navigational support. To note, Participant 27, insinuates the relationship cannot be 'fixed', because it must be 'natural' without a 'specific name' to create more 'flexibility', correlating to staff (see code *similar pathways*). This may prove difficult to some:

'In terms of having a mentor it really depends on the mentor themselves and because this is not a role institutionalized in UK higher education institutions. I have to admit that I'm a little bit sceptical about the potential of that role.' (Participant 26)

The lack of institutionalisation on mentoring generates IPGRs to also navigate their pathways together.

### *Peer group love*

IPGRs are asked to share their perceptions and experiences with peer mentoring. Similar to HPGRs (see code peer-to-peer support), IPGRs rely on each other for formal mentoring:

'In my department there is a PGR mentor I have. I believe it's a formal thing. I'm not sure if he's paid for this.' (Participant 28)

'I'm not sure of a PGR mentor in my department but one of my senior classmates, he is an [international ethnicity] and works as the representative of our department for international students, but I have never tried to do that.' (Participant 29)

'In our department there are **PGR reps**, so the representatives like I haven't even approached him. But yes, it's good if we have some PGR Mentors like maybe our seniors so that we can see their help so they can even guide us how should we start.' (Participant 30)

From their perceptions, departments have established a support system of PGR mentors, but while IPGRs view them as necessary, they do not utilise them. This partially stems from IPGRs suggesting they don't want to become a barrier to the PGR mentor's progression. According to Participant 29 illustrates:

'Normally I will ask help from my senior classmates, but they have their project to work on so they have a tight schedule, so sometimes they cannot offer you detailed answers or sometimes they even forget to answer your questions. It's not good for me to always ask for their help, so if there will be a mentor for me to depend on, it would be very great.'  
(Participant 29)

In a way to reduce workload and stress there are PGR communal spaces available:

'So there are like dozens of PhD students from different departments, but we are all outside humanities. So sometimes we would gather together to have some talking and share some food with each other. Like just like a small party, so they can speak.'  
(Participant 27)

PGR communal spaces become apparent and necessary for most of the IPGRs to support one another. This correlates to the WhatsApp group highlighted by HPGRs (see code *peer-to-peer support*).

Lastly, the support for each other underpins the values of a community-centred approach, which coincides with their perceptions when asked 'if they would like to be a peer mentor one day.'

**'I would love to offer the same** support to someone just studying their PhD. It's something that I would consider doing.'  
(Participant 25)

'In my case, because **I love helping people**. So I think if there is a chance for me to get changed and I can be a mentor for the genius students, it would be great.'  
(Participant 29)

'I will be interested in receiving any training to become a PGR mentor.'  
(Participant 26)

'I'm ready to help them. So that's definitely great.'  
(Participant 26)

This love they express to support future PGRs reinforces the communal aspect of their values and willingness to participate in other PGRs sense of belonging (see Figure 29), which is what they perceive a formal mentor to be (staff have similar insights see code *network capital*).



Figure 29

## Proceed with caution!

This interpretative code demonstrates IPGRs descriptions towards mental health services at Durham. They suggest it displays (i) *mechanical services*, where counselling services create no support connections and takes too much time (majority of them do not use the counselling services); and (ii) *mother tongue*, is their idea of what a practitioner navigator should be, i.e., more about someone who speaks their language and less about someone from similar race/ethnic background.

**Table 10: Proceed with caution!**

| Descriptive codes                          | Pathway road signs/imagery   | Common disruptions/assistance for International PGRs  | Highlights  |
|--|--|---|---|
| <i>Mechanical (mental health) services</i> |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ MH services are conventional providing no meaningful connection.</li> <li>⇒ The MH process is time-consuming.</li> </ul> | Majority of IPGRs self-cope with their MH, and the time differences become a barrier to communicate with peers back home. |
| <i>Mother tongue</i>                       |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Practitioners should speak the language of an IPGR.</li> <li>⇒ Cautious of confidentiality</li> </ul>                    | The race/ethnic background of a counsellor/practitioner are less prominent for IPGRs                                      |

### *Mechanical (MH) services*

IPGRs are asked about their experiences with MH support and whether their peers share any opinions. Participant 28, the only IPGR who uses Durham counselling services elaborates:

‘So, in my case I have done counselling with Durham, the counselling services has been OK. I mean, I feel like I have someone that I can basically...let it all out too.’ (Participant 28)

Participant 28’s ‘ok’ experience comes from ‘Nihari’, where ‘the goal of this association is to pair students with counsellors from minority backgrounds.’ Consequently, no other IPGR has heard of this counselling service offered by Durham. Thus, proper promotion and signposting is crucial.

Religion underpins Participant 25’s psychological counselling:

‘Normally the chaplains office is linked to the counselling services...I feel that the chaplaincy and counselling are a bit **disjointed**, but I found a church within Durham, so

when I have issues I have my church family for prayer, but I know that the counselling services are there.'

Seeking other avenues may be why their peers say it's a mechanical process:

'She [friend] said it's **mechanical**. Like someone has a form and they're just going through the process. So, there is **no connection**. You're **not really comfortable**, although you still get the burden off your chest because you've spoken to someone about it.'

Again, being comfortable relies on an emotional connection for IPGRs, and this comes with trust, similar to HPGRs suggesting the MH services is an unwelcoming environment (see previous theme).

Participant 29 extends on the mechanical process by stating, 'I found that I need to fill out much information...but then I maybe figure out solutions on my own.' Participant 29 continues:

'I also receive an e-mail which informs me you can apply for a professional mental consultation organized by our university for free. But before that you need to get the confirmation from your supervisor and I think my supervisor is too busy to deal with those trivial things. So, **I give up**.'

Consequently, even when there's an awareness of counselling services IPGRs resemble HPGRs, UG and PGTs decisions to 'cope' on their 'own' or with peers. However, differing from the previous two groups, IPGRs don't mention racialisation as a factor. They instead illustrate further differences:

'As an international student, like when we come here, there are various things we have to **deal with alone**.' (Participant 30)

One challenge to deal with is time difference:

'I have few friends here to connect with and there are **huge time length** between China and the UK. So and sometimes I want to chat with my former friends but in China it's sleep time. I do not want to disrupt their sleep,' (Participant 29)

Thus, communication with friends from home becomes an added barrier for IPGRs to navigate on their own. Ultimately, the *mechanical MH services* creates never-ending roundabouts (see Figure 30), disjointed connections and IPGRs must self-cope or rely on peers to navigate their pathway. The delay in services and discrepancies such as time difference and culture are important to recognise between student groups to support their MH and wellbeing.



**Figure 30**

### *Mother tongue*

IPGRs are asked to consider the opportunities and benefits for practitioners from racially minoritised backgrounds. IPGRs responses vary but share common ideas. They are more concerned about being comfortable with the person rather than ethnic background (e.g., race/gender corresponding to HPGRs). Participant 25 expresses the importance of choice:

‘Give the person a choice to see whoever they want to see regardless of culture or background.’ (Participant 25)

To Participant 25, this is due to sameness causing problems:

‘Fellow African students who wouldn’t be comfortable sharing their intimate, sensitive issues with fellow Africans, because they will judge you and say no no no, that’s not our way of doing things.’

The judging is perceived to have ethnic and religious connotations, ‘if an African person is Christian, that also makes it worse’, and while Participant 25 perceives negative judgement from her own ethnic background, she insinuates a ‘white person...would be considered more liberal.’ Participant 26, supports Participant 25’s take on the complications of similar cultural backgrounds, ‘I would reiterate 100% of what Participant 25 has just shared.’

Additionally, the makeup of the practitioner resides in language:

‘I think if not the ethnic but from the same language background where we can express ourselves more in our **mother tongue**. So, it’s good if someone can understand our language, so they can **guide** us whether we can share our feelings, emotions with them, then move it away.’ (Participant 30)

Comfort is established when communication is of the same ‘mother tongue’. This becomes paramount for IPGRs, since ‘international students have language barriers to overcome, so it’s good to match counsellor with same language background’ (Participant 29). Therefore, it is important to allow researchers autonomy in the selection process. To note, being conscious of

MH ethnic and cultural barriers between IPGRs and the UGs and PGTs are crucial for removing roadblocks (see code *useless diversions*).<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, IPGRs concerns rest within the mechanical process of a practitioner. They don't agree with 'filling out forms' and 'all information should stay with one person',

'For example, to access the sessions with this association I needed first to basically do a like a short interview. And the interview was with a different person. It was not with the counsellor.' (Participant 28)

Establishing minimum contacts becomes apparent to IPGRs since it's 'better', 'more comfortable', 'builds trust' and they won't 'review fragile moments and sad stories again and again.' To even undertake MH support to IPGRs is 'courageous' as they are 'consulting service with another stranger' (Participant 27). Therefore, building IPGRs trust correlates to practitioners understanding their culture and *mother tongue* (see Figure 31), with the help of Durham creating a privacy efficient service. Ultimately, they want to decide who supports them navigating the MH pathway (staff share this sentiment, see code *informal matchmaking*).



**Figure 31**

In conclusion, the theme IPGR Pathway gives the university an opportunity to learn the needs and built-in processes for IPGRs to support their PGR experience. One of the main differences amongst the previous student groups to highlight are race/ethnic background seems less prominent when considering mentors and practitioners, as with IPGRs holding negative perceptions towards the university and their processes.

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note a difference between the student groups. IPGR perceptions illustrate what they need rather than constructively criticizing what the Uni has on offer.



## The Final Destination

This theme conceptualises the perceptions of home and international staff at the university. The crucial element of this theme discovers the wisdom of staff creates a wider picture of the PGR pathway. Since staff have survived and thrived in their journeys, they illustrate comparable experiences to students and provide recommendations (e.g., navigational tools) for current and future racially minoritised researchers. Their wider roadmap reveals (i) the challenges of how the leaky pipeline disrupts students' motivations when considering and/or attempting the PGR pathway, and (ii) the ways in which they overcome this disruption i.e., completing their research degree and navigating their new pathway as academics. As we are using road maps for illustrational metaphors, we will associate this in replace of the 'leaky pipeline' metaphor. For example, leak metaphors extend to road signs and other imagery that are barriers we have presented in this project (e.g., roadblocks and diversions). The four interpretative codes, 'Avoiding early disruptions', 'Array of pathways', 'Reciprocal onus', and 'Hidden reserves' will assist students in reaching their final destination i.e., a research degree (see below Figure 32).



Figure 32

### Avoiding early disruptions

Staff are asked about 'the so-called leaky pipeline for UK-based people of colour in academia' and what could be some barriers for racially minoritised students to gain PGR access. 'Avoiding early disruptions' offers insights and recommendations for UG and PGTs and underpins three codes: *costly affair*, *cultural drifters*, and *start early*.

Table 11: Avoiding early disruptions

| Descriptive codes     | Pathway road signs/imagery  | Common disruptions/assistance according to Staff                            | Highlights  |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| <i>Costly affairs</i> |  | ⇒ Lack of funding, scholarships, and representation create early roadblocks | Students cannot be what they do not see and what they predominately see is an |

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
|   |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>diversions, and tolls.</li> <li>⇒ Built-in bias for doctoral candidates</li> <li>⇒ Representation decreases motivations.</li> </ul> | overrepresentation of White academics.   |
| <i>Cultural drifters</i>                  | <br> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Cultural differences create drifters.</li> <li>⇒ Hierarchy needs to be flattened.</li> <li>⇒ Requires cultural capital</li> </ul> | The culture of the institution influences students to drift away from the PGR pathway or to another destination (e.g., research destinations in theme 1) |
| <i>Start early!<br/>(recommendations)</i> |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Build students confidence.</li> <li>⇒ Remove systemic barriers.</li> <li>⇒ Start early to avoid disruptions.</li> </ul>           | A substantial way to motivate racially minoritised students is to start during their first degree.   |

*Costly affair*

Staff insist barriers such as **funding and limited scholarships (which is funding the toll), bias selections, and lack of representation** become *costly affairs* affecting student motivations:

‘In our community except for the **very motivated ones** nobody is looking to do a PhD.’ (Participant 33)

First off, Participant 41 comments, ‘there’s a really easy answer to that which is funding’ because to Participant 38:

‘**Funding is a key thing**, but also knowing there is funding, you know the information needs to be clearer’ (Ari).

The above correlates to PGRs who aren’t aware of funding opportunities or programs such as the 1 + 3 even existing (see code *straightforward myth*), and wider promoting of the relevant funding opportunities creates awareness plus motivations. However, to support an applicant’s funding requires scholarships, and unfortunately, one of the ‘biggest barriers are the lack of scholarships’ and:

‘Very less home applicants irrespective of colour apply...ESRC is looking for more international more domestic students, even more international students. But **if domestic**

**students do not apply the international ones also do not qualify because there has to be a 50/50 match.'**

One staff member emphasises few apply due to a 'lack of knowledge of what is required' and a Master's being a 'costly affair'. The tolls are avoided when 'few people doing an undergraduate from Russell Group universities are happy to go into a job'. UG and PGT students also emphasise their Durham degree causes them to reconsider pursuing a research degree, because of career and financial progression (see code *research investments*).

Additionally, Participant 44 suggests two 'material barriers' are the awarding gap:

'If you're not getting a first-class degree, you're not gonna be able to move forward with funding, and 'coming from a BME background you might be economically disadvantaged, because there's a lot of **pressure to go down that route**'.

Even when students apply, the 'minimal scholarships' available are 'competitive' and selectors impact representation. It is difficult to motivate students to apply when there is a 'built-in bias' within doctoral programs:

'I help run the doctoral training programs in the [department] in Durham and one year when we looked, they redacted CV's the year before the recruitment of ethnic minorities was 2% and we did a redacted CV was 20%. So, it's fairly obvious, right? There's a **built-in bias**.' (Participant 38)

The funding and bias impacts representation:

'So funding is an issue, but in a specific discipline as an [profession] you have a **serious issue of representation**, but also bias, and that applies equally to any other represented groups, whether it's white, female, for that matter.' (Participant 39)

Many academic staff speak on the ways in which their discipline is 'very white':

'I think as a kind of a discipline in [department] it's just **very white, very male** and very white. And so I think students don't have a lot of access unless they go to particular kinds of schools.'

'It's pretty much a place unless **you're white male, you don't see yourself** and so it's very difficult to imagine for anybody to want to be in that environment.' (Participant 39)

Therefore, 'imagination' sparks motivations, but this is difficult 'when you cannot be what you don't see' (Participant 38) and 'people who are running PGR programs' don't look for students which diminishes the chance of 'role models at the other end.'

Representation in the curriculum also impacts students from racially minoritised backgrounds motivation. A report for a Durham Department reveals:

‘The curriculum doesn’t include the histories that their communities were connected to and when it did there were very negative histories by issues of oppression and enslavement.’  
(Participant 44)

The negative portrayals and lack of representation of their identities becomes apparent for them during their undergraduate degree, and ‘to become a postgraduate, you need to have a good undergraduate experience’ (Participant 43). Thus, staff illustrate early in the leaky pipeline, which we have converted to a pathway, has roadblocks, diversions, and tolls that are a *costly affair* (see previous used Figures 2, 3, and 5 below). Staff views prior to the PGR pathway correlate to students in previous themes, and the barriers force students to drift away.



### *Cultural drifters*

‘You can drift away basically.’ (Participant 35)

There are a specific set of disruptions that render the PGR pathway as culturally different, so students who feel they don't have the specific set of cultural capital drift away. The *costly affairs* exacerbate when the PGR path is ‘culturally different’. According to Participant 36, the ‘indigenous’ (British) culture ‘weighs heavily’ on immigrants and in order to access certain privileges someone has to hold your hand, or you must be ‘bold’ to succeed. However, to Participant 34 and others, some groups are:

**‘Culturally, very different in some communities.** The big problem is we don't give postgrads enough support, especially the academic support in areas like [Department] where there is actually a want by industry.’

The cultural differences must be prioritised by the institution to support Home and International students from racially minoritised backgrounds choosing the PGR pathway. This support could create clarity for PGRs who need navigational tools to understand British academic culture, enhance language barriers, and developing networks etc. (see code *international training essentials*).

Moreover, the indigenous culture is not homogenous:

‘People from other regions of Britain, so accents that I heard that were not, you know, I was in London SE, which there's a certain amount of privilege to attached to that, but something about that kind of **hierarchy being flattened** and those people encouraging me was a big deal.’

As known, the perceptions of Durham being a prestigious and traditional institution creates barriers for those who have not applied those set of capitals in their lifetime, but unfairly advantage those who do (e.g., White middle and upper class). However, these set of capitals are perceived to be hierarchical and this extends to racially minoritised Home and International students:

'There are very much sort of overseas students. I've had a few interactions with South Asian students or also British nationals, and in those conversations, I think what emerged was sort of the culture at the university...there was concern about what it means to be academic and it is harder if you are a person of colour.' (Participant 40)

Therefore, the PGR pathway requires a cultural capital that is unfamiliar to many Home and International racially minoritised students, which is why staff assimilation is a custom for stability and progression (see below code *White allies*). The university must flatten the hierarchy to encourage undergraduate students rather than construct *cultural drifters* (see Figure 33 and previous Figure 13), which is why their *research destinations* are southbound (e.g., London) or going abroad in the PGR pathway (see code research destinations).



Figure 33



### *Start early! (recommendations)*

This code raises the recommendations from staff to remove the *costly affairs* producing *cultural drifters*. Academic staff believe it is imperative to start recruiting early for racially minoritised students to commit to the PGR pathway. This is important because when asked if they supervise any HPGR students there was a resounding no, except for two people (one a primary and the other a secondary to a HPGR). In specific disciplines such as STEM, they mainly supervise or see international PGRs from racially minoritised backgrounds. The above applies to Participant 39's impression on why:

'The only students of color I've seen are overseas. **I've not laid my eyes yet on a [STEM discipline] black female.** I'll be glad to do it too.'

There are various reasons, with two being home students don't apply as mentioned and the 'problematic pipeline':

'I have heard in many meetings in computer science for example not of color but to encourage sort of female students to apply. There is a big initiative going on in computer science and mathematics to encourage female students to apply for PGR roles and so on.' (Participant 33)

When specific underrepresented groups – in this case gender - are targeted outside of race/ethnicity, selectors at predominately White universities unconsciously/consciously choose White candidates. Partly due to bias as mentioned and the smaller number of racially minoritised applicants applying constructs unfair competition. Thus, the pathway continues to have potholes and diversions for students and encouragement must be prioritised.

Furthermore, encouragement becomes very difficult when the traditional and hierarchical culture discourages undergraduates to apply:

'It's quite hard for me to encourage brilliant students of colour at undergraduate level to go on to do postgraduate research. Partly because it's, I mean, it's bloody hard already and then it is really hard for a person of color, and because I care about their safety, **I can't speak positively about lots of departments where it's a great place they could thrive.**' (Participant 42)

Surviving and thriving become two different ways of navigating the PGR pathway. In order for a higher number of applicants, overcoming the 'lack of confidence' stemming from the hierarchical culture is suggested to be a common practice for encouragement:

'I think saying I've identified in that early process once here and there's been lots of **confidence coaching** that we've had to do and around building networks and in spaces that sometimes feel exclusionary and overcoming a sense of not deserving or belonging.'

(Participant 44)

Instilling confidence and overcoming the *costly affairs* (see above) must start early in the PGR process to keep them from leaving since:

'Quite a few of them very easily get admissions into US universities, right? So that is another. I do a lot of work with the students helping them write the proposal and guide them and they could not get through the UK system. They do not get through Durham but if they apply to a reasonably good US university, they're able to get a full scholarship very easily.'

The previous two quotes suggest the best way for encouragement is from the extra labour of racially minoritised academics 'to act as a mentor', but the university:

'Must help them appreciate the benefits that comes with their education. And that should probably **start from when they are doing their first degrees**. I think we should actually have a system where we constantly engage with our students to get them to appreciate the benefits of further education.' (Participant 32)

In sum, the early *costly affairs* create unaffordable tolls, potholes, and *cultural drifters* away from the PGR pathway and the best way to repair and overcome this is to *start early* i.e., 'Avoiding early disruptions" (see Figure 34).



Figure 34

### Array of pathways

Once, we understand how to avoid early disruptions, all routes on the pathway aren't homogenous, and thus the institution is required to build an array of paths for researchers to have a smooth journey. We will briefly highlight the gaps staff experienced during their PhD and the different PGR training methods they've participated in. Codes constructed are *inadequate support*, *next path skills*, and *network capital*.

Table 12: Array of pathways

| Descriptive codes                         | Pathway road signs/imagery  | Common disruptions/assistance according to Staff  | Highlights  |
|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Inadequate support</i>                 |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Useless research training</li> <li>⇒ Lack of consistency.</li> <li>⇒ UGs are prioritised over PGRs.</li> <li>⇒ Homogenous teacher training.</li> </ul> | Training skills implemented to navigate the PGR pathway are present and well-intentioned but deemed insufficient. |
| <i>Next path skills (recommendations)</i> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Relevant training skills (e.g., grant writing and teaching).</li> <li>⇒ Directs PGRs to the final destination.</li> </ul>                              | PGRs should value their existing language skills as linguistic capital.   |

|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| <p><i>Network capital (recommendations)</i></p> |  | <p>⇒ Networking is essential (e.g., networking training course).</p> <p>⇒ Cultural differences are barriers.</p> | <p>The <i>next path skills</i> offered are only valuable when PGRs have access to the right networks or social capital.</p> |
|---|---|--|---|

*Inadequate support (Useless)*

Staff emotions are underpinned by frustration when answering questions around training skills:

‘I was at [University], there were things during my PhD the faculty put on at the university for postgrads and they were all **very useless**.’

They continue to illustrate during the PGR pathway some universities ‘actually don’t give you the skills’, which resonates with the students in previous themes. A few Durham initiatives pursuing inclusive PGR skills such as inclusion matters, teacher training, and career progression require enhancement:

‘Inclusion matters for underrepresented groups not minority students... **it comes then it dies**.’ (Participant 39 on inclusion matters)

‘You invite us to these sessions, but you only think about what is already the kind of norm experience for the students that you’re inviting and **not everywhere is Oxbridge**.’ (Participant 41 on teaching)

‘So the careers team, for instance, I mean, if you ask what exactly do the careers team do for PGR students it’s nothing compared to what we get with the UG students. I think they need to do more. (Participant 32).

Participant 39 suggests PGR training must be consistent in enhancing the needs of PGR students. The second comment conflicts with IPGRs enjoying the DCAD courses but gives insight to the array of British academic cultures: as Participant 41’s first stop was not Durham; they understand the need for diverse teaching styles. Thus, an answer for the university to flatten the hierarchy (see previous code) stems from decolonising teacher training, since ‘not everywhere is Oxbridge’, which gives IPGRs and HPGRs an array of navigational tools. Participant 32’s comments correlates to HPGRs who suspect undergraduate needs are prioritised over their needs (see code *Uni problem*). Therefore, at the university many training courses are rendered ‘useless’ with *inadequate support*, and the PGR training skills implemented to navigate the PGR pathway are present and well-intentioned but deemed insufficient, sparking what we perceive as frustration from many staff members in the FGs (see previous Figures 9 and 30 below).



### *Next path skills (navigational tools)*

This code describes the navigational training tools to prepare PGRs for their next path i.e., after reaching their final destination. To start, job assistance for interview panels and holding CV workshops for CV feedback is essential. Participant 39 shares her thoughts:

'Looking back and looking at kind of students now, what I think is lacking, at least in engineering and science, computer science...How can I prepare for a job in industry where I'm going to be in front of a panel of probably 10 white males?'

She goes on to insist training if any needs to 'prepare' PGRs for this. Participant 38 believes one solution to be '**transferable skills presentation**' courses that he participated in that should support 'people of colour or from different ethnic backgrounds' because 'language' is important and you 'almost have to sound like them to get accepted and for them to forget your colour'. Consequently, this reflects the institution.

Participant 44 comments on CV workshops:

'My experiences of colleagues in history is running a workshop for earlier career historians of colour who were applying for jobs for the first time. And the thing which is most useful in that is the **one-to-one CV workshops** we do where someone looks at someone's CV and puts it in the right shape.' (Participant 44)

Furthermore, staff borrow an idea from American courses to support racially minoritised students. For example, 'a black woman ran an online course specifically for students or postgraduates of colour' (Participant 43). Also, a foundation course ran in Bristol at the Malcolm X centre:

'There was an essay that they had to submit to get into the course and which gave us a sense of that students commitment to learning, but also that sends it to the level which they're at and whether they're able to cope with it and it was truly an amazing experience.' (Participant 44)

The last comment resonates with another academic in this FG,

'I'd love to see more of those kinds of programs where you **meet students where they are rather than trying to say this is where we want you.**' (Participant 43)

The two comments above correlates to the code *PGR perks*, where PGRs insist a competition could be held for realising potential. Thus, bearing in mind student potential requires an equitable approach to organising courses and workshops.

Pursuing a career as a researcher and academic requires access to grants. According to Participant 33, grant writing skills 'should be available to PGR students of colour, but also for everybody.' Deploying writing skills for grants is in unison with International and Home PGRs who prefer to work on their writing or further their academic careers, which creates more opportunities for a postdoc:

'I studied in India. So, I had no access to these kind of courses at all. But I worked in Europe in my second job and the kind of course I got as an early career researcher...were **grant writing skills**, which is very important for I guess any discipline now and PGR students should also develop these at least on part of the team where the supervisor may be writing a grant.' (Participant 33)

Moreover, teaching certificate completion is also an important process for staff, but could be detrimental because of workload:

'PGR students where they could **work towards the certificate** that would train them to be in an academic institution in terms of like teaching and learning in higher education, but also many saw it as an important skill when it comes to job searching...My PhD institution didn't offer anything like this.' (Participant 31)

'They tend to engage a lot more PGR students for teaching purposes, which I don't think is the case at Durham.' (Participant 32)

While teacher training is important as mentioned by PGRs, it is also perceived as 'detrimental' and should be optional due to 'preparing and teaching, meaning less research'.

'So that could be **detrimental**. But if it's **optional**, if it is a limited amount and if it is tailored to the students needs and where they are in their PGR career, that could be very helpful.' (Participant 31)

Lastly, getting HPGRS to 'value their own linguistic skills' is imperative, rather than viewing these skills as a barrier,

'Students from Asian and African communities, who are British, often have a second language, but they've never had it academically endorsed or had the credentials around that and oftentimes don't see it as an advantage.' (Participant 44)

Therefore, HPGRs who do speak multiple languages must see their 'existing linguistic' skills as an advantage. This too is true for IPGRs who view language as a barrier, and thus, training to use

existing linguistic skills for networking should be prioritised as a navigational tool for racially minoritised PGRs.

In sum, skills on interview panels, CVs, commitment to learning competitions, grant writing, teaching, and linguistics are seen as *next path skills* leading PGRs in the right direction during and after they reach their final destination (see Figure 35). This code answers HPGRs 'confusion' to understanding what the final destination is and why they are navigating to it (see code *fuel yourself!*), which means courses and training must deliver frameworks outlining the significance of *next path skills*. This brings us to the importance of the next code.



Figure 35

### *Network capital (recommendations)*

The *next path skills* offered are only valuable when PGRs have access to the right networks or social capital. Thus, while training is required, the most important aspects of PGR training is efficient networking:

'Programs need to do what they actually say they are doing and not **check a box**. We'll never be enough because it's about network development. It's about people like, there's just an inherent amount of time that it takes to do these things well.' (Participant 34)

'For example, networking, which I think is really really valuable and is what I really encourage all my, you know, **I consider my PGR's to be my colleagues** because in the end if they succeeded, they will be my colleagues. (Participant 35)

Participant 35 expresses academic navigators and students must guide each other on the pathway, which could lead to a reciprocal onus – i.e., where responsibility and action are required by both students and staff (see next code). Additionally, values that are centred around academics who are racially minoritised are similar to HPGRs, which is a community centred approach (see code *peer group love*). Unfortunately, this communal culture and ethos are seen as culturally different to many UK universities and could be why PGRs have more faith and trust in individuals (e.g., academic navigators) than the institution itself.

Staff insist it's about network development and mention a few programmes they are aware of taking place however, they are seen as 'problematic':

'The program in leadership running, but who is encouraging whom? There aren't that many people who are encouraging you or holding your hand. It's almost like **I've shown you the way. Rest of you figure out and it becomes exhausting.**' (Participant 37)

The importance of consistent support on the pathway is perceived as a gateway to prevent 'exhaustion'. However, Participant 36 also mentions PGRs need to be encouraged to 'create your new networks, build your own strengths, and think about your own self. And that's something which ethnic minority people are not encouraged to do.' Again, if racially minoritised groups cultural values are centred around community, we interpret that even if encouraged the current culture makes *cultural drifters*, which is why many racially minoritised British academics choose to teach abroad or at culturally different universities. This could also be one of many reasons why more than half of academics representing the project sample are international and not UK domicile (including the academics on this report).

Moreover, the lack of 'role models' of colour is why specific 'network training courses' are needed from the university. According to Participant 33:

'Maybe I am a very bright student, but what are the opportunities for me after PhD is it only academics or if I'm in science or engineering? I cannot talk to anybody. So, university should provide this kind of guidance, maybe general, but some if you can also bring in some **PhD alumnus of color** who have done this and take them through this journey of sort of job market readiness after PhD... **networking training course**, something like this. It can be done within the faculty and then possibly also across if there is a bigger cohort.'

(Participant 33)

Participant 33, as well differentiates networks based on race:

'So, if for example, Durham undergrad who is not of color from London, lived in Hatfield College, they already have a network, this student might have studied in Leeds or Sheffield or Bradford and made his way through Durham for a PGR. He will not have that kind of network on connections.'

(Participant 33)

We interpret that this academic suggests being White holds some form of *network capital*.<sup>4</sup> This is shown in the majority of staffs perceptions, because they needed to 'adapt' with *White allies* to progress in academia (see next code). Therefore, enhancing networking skills correlates to social capital which becomes necessary for racially minoritised PGRs to access academic and wider opportunities once they reach their final destinations, i.e., *network capital* (see Figures 36).



Figure 36

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<sup>4</sup> We do understand White ethnic groups are underrepresented at Durham, and the intersections of their identity (e.g., working class or first generation) does enhance or limit their chances as well.

In conclusion, the ‘Array of paths’ addresses the cultural and social capital needed for PGRs navigating their pathway, and while training and networking skills are essential, they are not homogenous and ‘meeting researchers where they are at’ with the right programs constructs multiple paths to their final destination. The best way for PGRs to navigate these paths is to have someone in place for guidance, which leads us to the next code.

## Reciprocal onus

‘Somebody once said to me again, networks matter here. **Mentors matter.**’ (Participant 36)

This code highlights staff perceptions of mentoring during their academic careers. Specifically, how they were mentored outside of supervisors and the mentoring programmes they participated in, as with their involvement in academic mentoring schemes as a mentor. Staff indicate the best provision for mentoring is through 4 strands: (i) *informal matchmaking*; (ii) *Mentor defined*; (iii) *white allies*; and (iv) *similar pathways*. The following provides mentor recommendations and should be promoted by the university via informal matchmaking events.

**Table 13: Reciprocal onus**

| Descriptive codes           | Pathway road signs/imagery  | Common disruptions/assistance according to Staff   | Highlights   |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
| <i>Informal matchmaking</i> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Useless mentoring</li> <li>⇒ Supervisors shouldn't be mentors.</li> <li>⇒ Informality is best.</li> </ul> | A mentoring relationship should be developed informally by giving PGRs a voluntary space to choose or be chosen by a mentor. |
| <i>Mentor navigators</i>    |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Mentor brings awareness.</li> <li>⇒ Knows how to narrow the gap.</li> </ul>                               | A mentor is a sponsor and a critical friend enhancing PGRs.  |
| <i>White allies</i>         |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Must adapt to succeed.</li> <li>⇒ White refusal</li> <li>⇒ Who to trust?</li> </ul>                       | Receiving support from mentor guides who practice White allyship.  |
| <i>Similar pathways</i>     |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Role models</li> <li>⇒ Race/ethnic mix</li> <li>⇒ Embarked on similar journeys.</li> </ul>                | A mentor's identity can't be fixed but should understand lived experiences of PGRs.  |

### *Informal matchmaking*

Academics are first asked if they had a formal mentor during their PGR studies:

'I never had any mentorship as a postgraduate and I found what's been offered here **useless** and in some cases actively bad. And so I just ignore the whole thing now.'

'No. as a PGR student, I didn't have any official mentor.' (Participant 33)

The word 'useless' is a reoccurring expression towards various processes throughout all the FGs and is something for the university to consider. Since 'formal' mentors are less apparent amongst staff, the majority had informal mentors, whether it be supervisors during their PhD or as an academic:

'But my supervisor, my principal supervisor, actually took it upon himself to sort of act as a as my mentor.' (Participant 32)

'As an early career researcher as an assistant professor, I did have a mentor and that has a lot of impact. I think first to navigate the university system.' (Participant 33)

Their comments resonate with PGRs in the previous two themes, where supervisors become primary navigators on their pathway. However, they illustrate a 'supervisor slash mentor' should be 'separate':

'My supervisors were very nice and kind, but perhaps they weren't trained to be a mentor...So, I think **separating the role from supervisor and mentorship** is likely to have a positive effect.' (Participant 31)

Moreover, academic navigators continue to describe the importance of informality in mentoring when asked 'how do you find a mentor?':

'**Accidental, informal.**' (Participant 41)

'I've never had a mentor, but I do a lot of mentoring, but **very informally**. I find that whenever I've been assigned to be as somebody's mentor, it's never worked out.' (Participant 39)

Academics emphasise the relationship needs to be 'organic', 'voluntary', and not 'mandatory or forced' with efficient and 'clear signposting', which is how the above comments sparks ideas around the significance of targeting PGRs for 'informal interaction events' with 'informal networks of people to talk to'. These events can extend to race/ethnicity because many academics share Participant 42' experience:

'**All of my supervisors were white. All white men.**' (Participant 42)

Durham has predominately White staff in senior positions and thus, academics rely on ‘really helpful peer-to-peer support’ which correlates to PGRs and UGs experiences. Nevertheless, despite several mentors or supervisors being white, they agree ‘you also have to include people who are white’ (Participant 38), ‘it can’t only be people of colour doing the mentoring, otherwise it will be closed club’ (Participant 41).

Their idea of avoiding a ‘closed club’ creates space for racial inclusivity, which goes against the ‘private roads’ articulated in the UG and PGT theme. This becomes prominent when understanding Participant 39’s experience in ‘inclusion matters’ where people are paired with someone formally who has similar characteristics: For instance, ‘not trying to match in any other way than simply two women of color’ did not work for her. Consequently, these types of mentoring schemes become a ‘ticking the box’ where organic matchmaking becomes a barrier.<sup>5</sup> In sum, when constructing a mentoring scheme for the PGR pathway it must be in the form of *informal matchmaking*, which is creating a voluntary space where PGRs can develop informal relationships and choosing a mentor becomes reciprocal overtime i.e., a ‘two-way street’ (see Figure 37). As illustrated by Participant 39 and 38:

‘Creating settings where you come together and, in a sense, you select each other.’  
(Participant 39)

‘Where you know you **can’t just do a one off** and say that’s it.’ (Participant 38)



Figure 37

### *Mentor navigators*

Now that academic navigators insist *informal matchmaking* is a navigational tool for PGRs to find a mentor, they also reflect on what a mentor actually is or should be:

‘I think if the mentor is someone different from your supervisor, obviously you are not discussing the technical aspects of your PhD. So, one part of the mentor’s role is to **help the student through the process and any challenges** the student is facing.’ (Participant 33)

Processes include, ‘navigating different systems, future career development, teaching excellence and citizenship’. Citizenship conversations are important for internationals to have with mentors

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<sup>5</sup> A few academics emphasise they prefer not to use the word ‘organic’ but continue to vocalise it for the discussion.

to 'clarify what needs to be done' for progression. A mentor should be someone with a 'source of information' and 'know how' for PGRs to navigate their pathway. This is essential because 'everything you need to know is on SharePoint', which is perceived to be a problem (see code PGR perks).

Therefore, a mentor should:

**'Know how to navigate this whole huge system.** I mean there's so much to know for me as a new joiner to this university there is a huge amount of information. I can't internalize everything so mentor can help prioritize internalize and then navigate this whether it's the specific university life or whether it's academic life.' (Participant 31)

Participant 37 and 36 helps us define a mentor:

'I call often say it's not about mentoring, it's **sponsoring**.' (Participant 37)

**'A critical friend** who actively looks for opening doors for you.' (Participant 36)

Thus, amalgamating the many perceptions of staff we interpret a **mentor navigator to be a sponsor who is a critical friend that utilises academic and personal navigational tools to enhance the PGR pathway experience** (see Figures 38 and 39).



**Figure 38**



**Figure 39**

### *White allies (guides)*

Adapting becomes an apparent navigational tool discussed in Group 4 to develop a sense of belonging (predominately by international staff):

'All I ever understood in my life is being a minority. I've never been in a place where I was a majority. See as **you learn to adapt**.' (Participant 38)

'If you're a minority, you are stuck on your own. **You're made to feel on your own** and It's clear that something must be done. But I think the key word you said here is adapting.'  
(Participant 37)

'**Adapting** is essentially how I found the mentors that I needed.'  
(Participant 41)

They continue by mentioning White allies are essential when adapting:

'A British colleague helped me understand the British system.'  
(Participant 40)

'I had a lot of white allies...without allyship, it's really difficult.'  
(Ari)

White allies become prominent guides on the PGR and staff pathway and could support IPGRs wishing to understand British academic culture (see code PGR perks). However, when adapting it's important to know the right allies to trust:

'Navigating predominantly male white spaces for me, I've got a pretty good neck for who I got and kind of count to as my allies, even if they're not a person of colour. And so, you kind of go to them and then it kind of works out.'  
(Participant 42)

In order to build trust from White men, Participant 43 believes 'white men need to buy into' the allocation of resources targeting racially minoritised people at the university. Buying in is not the case since many staff imply their senior white male colleagues claim 'we don't have any issues', and in this case, Participant 44 mentions needing to be the 'loudmouth in meetings' to support racially minoritised students.

Therefore, most staff insist they must navigate their pathway by trusting *white allies* in support of their adaptation and skills to develop a sense of belonging and progress (see Figure 40). Adapting could be a challenge when it is only accepted with white approval and adopting the cultural values of an institution the Home students do not trust. The Home students lack of trust but willingness to transform the institution could explain differences between many IPGRs and International staff who – at the start of their PGR pathway - are less concerned about transforming the hierarchical culture and more concerned with adapting. Consequently, over time staff and students alike trust individuals over the institution, and this builds tension and frustration where racially minoritised groups rely on each other. One International staff member mentioned it took almost a decade to confront a colleague for previous racial macroaggressions.



**Figure 40**

### *Similar pathways*

In the past decade, there has been an increase of racially minoritised staff at the university, and as mentioned representation supports PGRs on their pathway. To overcome the many potholes, diversions, roadblocks, and drifting, mentoring schemes must be present and transparent. Staff are asked about supportive mentoring schemes they have participated in as mentors and how this could be translated towards students from racially minoritised backgrounds. They mention the need for role models like themselves:

'No, I have not mentored. I don't think there is enough system for mentoring PGR students, so this is still informal...As I said, they do not have these **role models**. So, it is important that we create such a system of mentors. (Participant 33)

'Role model is a big thing. You are talking to someone from PGR angle. You're talking to someone who more or less has **gone through the same journey**, understands the concerns or anxieties.' (Participant 36)

Staff awareness relies upon creating systems which make role models and representation visible for PGRs from racially minoritised backgrounds and one way is through matchmaking. Participant 36 provides similar suggestions as PGRs about the advantages of matchmaking with mentors based on similar experiences (see code *mentoring parallels*):

'People that you can identify background with likely to have **lived the life like yourself**, so that helps in developing a rapport.' (Participant 36)

Understanding the journey helps mentors enhance PGR confidence. In Participant 38's case, this was by supporting a PhD student who feared applying for a lectureship, and he instilled confidence in her with interview and CV prep. The student soon after was offered an academic role. Therefore, *similar pathways* are when mentors and students lived experiences and identity converge (see Figure 41 below).

Additionally, staff and PGRs illustrate comparisons about being mentored by people of the same race/ethnic background:

'You know a clear policy that says, look, PGR of color should be mentored by academic of color. I don't think that helps you know in the long run. However, my suggestion would always be look because I do know that some PGR of color would actually prefer to be mentored by an academic of color.' (Participant 32)

Participant 32, as with others, suggest 'sharing a list' with a 'pool of academics' of colour is helpful, and Participant 33 highlights the colleges mentoring schemes could do a 'video of color alumni'. The spread of information provides PGR the autonomy to select their preferred mentors if the university has the above ideas in unison with informal networking events (see code *informal matchmaking*). However, a few staff insinuate a 'defined agenda' can be a 'problem' or

'disadvantage', so how schemes are promoted to PGRs is something to consider.<sup>6</sup> For example, political terminology nearly prevented one member of staff to join the FG because of their minoritised ethnicity not falling under the Black and Asian umbrella:

'There is 2 very clear groups, Blacks and Asians. And then there's minority. So, one barrier there might be scholars like me and not sure whether they identify with this right.'  
(Participant 31)

To conclude, the interpretative code 'reciprocal onus' claims there must be a reciprocal relationship between students, staff, and the institution. To construct mentoring schemes outlining the aims of a mentor being a sponsor that PGRs can access with informal matchmaking spaces consisting of a racial mix of scholars.



Figure 41

### Hidden reserves

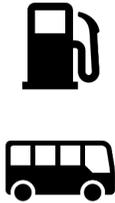
'You mentioned **mental health**. I think it's one that's not regarded enough, especially space like to student... **That's part of the leaky pipeline** and you see somebody who is depressed and then doesn't come back after a period, and they go for short period but then never come back.' (Participant 30)

The staff FGs shift to the mental health (MH) services at Durham. They are asked to share their perceptions on the MH services, are they suited for PGRs, and what specific needs do they require. The constructed codes are (i) *MH repairs*, (ii) *PGR safe spaces*, and (iii) *visible recognition*.

Table 14: Hidden reserves

| Descriptive codes | Pathway road signs/imagery | Common disruptions/assistance according to Staff               | Highlights   |
|-------------------|----------------------------|--|--|
| <i>MH repairs</i> |                            | ⇒ MH training, representation, and signposting need repairing. | The qualitatively different experience between White counsellors and PGRs create barriers. |

<sup>6</sup> Again, we see a racially inclusive communal approach underpinning their recommendations for the pathway.

|                                   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <p><i>PGR safe spaces</i></p>     |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Self-coping becomes extra labour.</li> <li>⇒ Peer-to-peer support</li> <li>⇒ Rest and recovery spaces</li> </ul>   | <p>Trust comes with providing safe spaces for PGRs.</p>   |
| <p><i>Visible recognition</i></p> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ No trust or sense of belonging</li> <li>⇒ Not prioritising existing labour</li> <li>⇒ Invisible recognition</li> <li>⇒ Fuel depleting for academics</li> </ul> | <p>Racially minoritised academic navigators are mentors, supervisors, role models, and teachers without proper around their invisible labour.</p> |

*MH repairs*

To start, staff speak on MH services for student at Durham:

'I think it's getting better. I think it's getting better because I referred a couple of my students to that. She's getting better. I don't know what the experience is like for people of color.' (Ari)

The last statement about not knowing students of colour experience, we interpret the student 'getting better' is White, which speaks to UG codes where MH services are understood as a *space for Whiteness* (see Reparations theme). Moreover, staff knew very little about how racially minoritised PGRs are currently impacted by the MH services at Durham. They did, however, share their views on repairing the structure of the services, suggesting **proper training, representation, and signposting** needs substantial repairs. Participant 42, is researching MH and racism at Durham and found counsellors had little awareness of the 'obstacles and barriers' for students of colour:

'They seem happy to be getting some kind of training or some kind of sessions to think about these kinds of issues, but I don't think that there are kind of adequately resourced.' (Participant 42)

With all - if not majority of - counsellors being white at Durham, it is important to understand the significance of representation:

'I think one thing is really clear that the problems we're talking about having lack of senior staff of colour and mental health practitioners in County Durham with like British Asian, Black British backgrounds are few and far between, so the form of mental health support that is available to students of color is a **qualitatively different** type for them.' (Participant 44)

The 'qualitative difference' becomes apparent to another member of staff's experience in this FG (5):

'There was something qualitatively different about that experience, and nothing that was being discussed was about culture, racism. But 100% I like had completely forgotten that until you mentioned. Just think it was qualitatively different.' (Participant 43)

Participant 43's sentiments correspond to the previous student themes, where they believe the cultural understanding is relevant for counselling. However, it may prove difficult when one's culture consistently extends to one's race and ethnicity, and representation amongst counsellors and practitioners from racially minoritised backgrounds are limited at Durham.

The last repair to consider is signposting:

'**Onboarding** for staff and students is particularly **war** in this university, and so even if it was the best mental health...this is a big problem.' (Participant 34)

Participant 34 continues to confess he had struggles with MH in his postgrad experience and had no support from his department or university. He highlights the difficulties for students 'deciphering SharePoint' despite 'working in IT before academia':

'Because someone who's struggling with mental health issues tends not to be in a good headspace to decipher SharePoint or where things you poke all the time because they're struggling.'

This **SharePoint war** to access MH at Durham resonated with students who view signposting as 'mechanical' demonstrating 'no transparency' (see code useless diversions). The 'big problem' with the SharePoint war, is 'time wasted' and to Participant 40 'there can be quite a long gap, sometimes a few hours, sometimes it's a few days, which can be quite worrying.' Thus, proper services around training, representation, and SharePoint need repairing to provide fuel along the PGR pathway (see Figure 42 for illustration). These hidden reserves for PGRs require attention since the onus is on them to create safe spaces.



Figure 42

### *PGR safe spaces*

From the staff perspectives, the importance of 'safe spaces' are considered prominent for the PGR pathway. The idea of peer-to-peer support is illustrated:

'The people I know who have done really well or survive struggles postgrad have had groups of people who are also postgrads and something about supporting the idea that if you want your own space that's fine and we don't care what you do in that. **We trust you as an adult.**' (Participant 34)

Trust is what we believe assists in students and staff sense of belonging. Some staff provide examples of how PGRs conduct peer-to-peer support for imposter syndrome and MH challenges:

'Our group funds a pizza club and the ostensible idea of a pizza club is that PGR get together with food, uh, and discuss a paper. But what really happens is PGR's get together and discuss what they want to discuss...the idea is it's a **safe space.**' (Participant 35)

'At Bristol, we had the postgraduate work in progress talk for [department] **and it was weekly**, but it was entirely run by students and **staff weren't invited** specifically. It was a safe space, so you could do your presentation. You could **feel comfortable asking a dumb question**, you could get used to even chairing things, doing all the roles that we do and talks where you would just be surrounded by your peers.' (Participant 34)

These ideas of 'weekly' peer-to-peer support and safe spaces are what Participant 34 views as navigational tools to 'survive struggles' in the PGR pathway, which compares to previous themes, where students create peer networks (e.g., WhatsApp group) to navigate the PGR pathway and removing insecurities of PGRs fear of asking 'dumb questions'. However, the challenge then becomes allowing students to create their own safe space, and while this provides student autonomy and trust, this again puts onus on the students to rest and recover (see Figure 43). Therefore, reciprocity becomes the 'university creating a space where PGR students of color come together and socialize and support each other' (Participant 31). Part of reciprocity is to recognise who is already doing MH work in support of the PGR pathway.



Figure 43

### *Visible recognition*

'And some **long-haul idea** of what I do at this institution. I'd really like to see kind of more contributions being made by those of us who work on race to that the way that kind of training develops, you know, where it's on offer.' (Participant 41)

The above comments would support Participant 40's experience of 'anxiety' and 'sleepless nights' as an international coordinator when international students confess MH challenges:

'So, students who are abroad, reaching out, talking about a potential mental health issue and then disappearing, I found I've spent sleepless nights worrying about them.'  
(Participant 40)

Participant 40 then emphasises this level of care requires 'institutional support for staff' who must deal with issues they are not 'trained to do or be able to handle'. Thus, the idea of a 'long-haul' (see figure 44 and 21 below) requires Durham to collaborate with academics who share an understanding of the impact of race and MH. Participant 43 suggests this same level of care should be considered to academics when it comes to teaching 'formalised support system' for scholars who teach on aspects of race and prejudice. Participant 42 provides one example, where she was tired of teaching a 'huge class on prejudice' and her colleagues didn't understand. This lack of understanding is why Participant 42 felt more 'comfortable' saying it in the FG. Again, we see a lack of trust and sense of belonging.

Furthermore, researching the intersections of MH and racially minoritised students is already manifesting in Durham spaces:

'I guess one thing that would be good to recognize is that there is already **a lot of labour** that's being done, but it's completely **invisible** and **unrecognized** and or **unacknowledged** and lots of expertise actually.' (Participant 42)

Participant 42 continues to suggest the 'expertise and invisible labour' from racially minoritised scholars requires 'not money, but time and support.' Even when labour is visible, they are not recognised. According to Participant 37, as a Black female professor, 'it is impossible to get recognition as an [career discipline].' Participant 44 expresses, 'I've experienced the sort of the opposite side of the coin', where he conducted a report on race and received subpar feedback besides the fact leaders of the institution weren't 'motivated to do it' because they 'didn't see it [race] as a priority.' Consequently:

'There is a gap of understanding and failure to listen to people with expertise about these issues, who are kind of on the ground dealing with these issues day-to-day and an acknowledgement of that I guess.' (Participant 42)

Therefore, the descriptive code *visible recognition* provides awareness towards the MH support needed for racially minoritised academics who are impacted as mentors, supervisors, researchers, and teachers without proper care around their invisible labour. We perceive this code as a huge pothole requiring urgent covering, since racially minoritised academics become important navigators who influence the PGR pathway. Staff are role models, counsellors, mentors, and researchers for the institution, despite their labour being unrecognised. If staff are low on fuel (MH) it then becomes harder for them to be mentors, and this in turn impacts racially minoritised PGRs.



Figure 44



In sum, 'Hidden reserves' describes the (i) *MH repairs*, where counselling services need to repair MH training, representation, and signposting at the university; (ii) *PGR safe spaces*, demonstrating PGR MH is enhanced with collective, creative, and consistent peer-to-peer support; and (iii) *visible recognition*, where academics encompass the role of every navigator on this report despite being unrecognised.

## FINAL REFLECTION

The previous chapters of this report illustrate the need for North-East communities and universities to repair and enhance the PGR pathway for people from racially minoritised backgrounds. When we amalgamate the four themes and search for our innovative approach the four key pillars of admissions, development, mentoring, and mental health are addressed as follows.

### **Admissions, reflect on...**

- ⇒ Known built-in biases impacting representation.
- ⇒ EDI training for all staff needs re-enhancement.
- ⇒ Students lacking motivation because of visible barriers (e.g., underrepresentation across all networks).
- ⇒ Visible and invisible barriers make students consider a postgraduate away from the North-East.
- ⇒ Role models with similar backgrounds being prevalent.
- ⇒ Funding and community-led approaches sparking motivations.
- ⇒ Policies should be underpinned with 'positive action' methods.

### **Development, reflect on...**

- ⇒ Intensive collaboration across academic departments for PGR development is crucial and the university should build a platform for this.
- ⇒ Research training being widespread and promoted for students to access.
- ⇒ Further developing research training on offer to suit PGR needs.
- ⇒ Meet students where they are rather than where the university want them to be.
- ⇒ Student skills being heterogenous (Home and International students have diverse needs)
- ⇒ Networking being a primary navigational tool (e.g., networking training courses, open conferences).
- ⇒ Essential skills for students (e.g., CV workshops, co-authoring, grant writing, SharePoint navigation, transferable skills, and appreciating their linguistic skills).
- ⇒ Creating competitions for PGRs to enhance their skills and receive perks. As racially minoritised students are also at different levels amongst each other, it is pertinent to use these 'competitions' as enhancing the student rather than creating further hierarchies.
- ⇒ Flattening the hierarchical culture (e.g., teacher methods).

### **Mentoring, reflect on...**

- ⇒ Mentors mattering and 'You cannot be what you do not see'.
- ⇒ Mentors being sponsors and critical friends.
- ⇒ Matchmaking with mentors informally.
- ⇒ A communal element to mentoring being considered (e.g., more than one).
- ⇒ College and academic department collaboration to create mentoring schemes.
- ⇒ Supervisors working with mentors. (Formal roles must be separate)
- ⇒ Mentors sharing and/or being conscious of the designated student's experiences.

**Mental health, reflect on...**

- ⇒ Similarities with mentoring, it's important to bear in mind shared backgrounds and experiences.
- ⇒ Students needing counsellors and practitioners who speak their native tongue or dialect.
- ⇒ Transforming the space for whiteness as a space for everyone.
- ⇒ PGR safe spaces being university- and department-led (as with cross-collaboration)
- ⇒ Paths where MH access is less time consuming.

The combination of the four pillars in connection with the analysis suggests a sense of belonging only comes with trust. We will re-emphasise many of the programs listed and expressed in previous chapters are already developed. However, cross-collaboration and enhancing current initiatives must be the priority. Ultimately, the PGR pathway is a collaborative effort between students, staff, and the institution to enhance the academic experience, and that is what this project set out and will continue to do. One recommendation of further research could be the missed PSS staff for a wider framing, as with learning White PGRs pathway. To conclude, we thank Durham University stakeholders championing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Love for resilient people in the North-East navigating towards belonging and trust.

## Appendices (participant data)

### UG and PGT students (Home & International)

|                  |                |               |                           |
|------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Focus Group<br>1 | <b>British</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Participant number</b> |
|                  | Home           | Woman         | Participant 1             |
|                  | Home           | Woman         | Participant 2             |
|                  | Home           | Woman         | Participant 3             |
| Focus Group<br>2 | <b>British</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Participant number</b> |
|                  | Home           | Non-binary    | Participant 4             |
|                  | Home           | Woman         | Participant 5             |
|                  | Home           | Woman         | Participant 6             |
|                  | Home           | Woman         | Participant 7             |
|                  | Home           | Woman         | Participant 8             |
|                  | Home           | Non-binary    | Participant 9             |
|                  | Home           | Woman         | Participant 10            |
|                  | Home           | Woman         | Participant 11            |

|  |                      |                   |                           |
|--|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| UG and PGT<br>International<br>Focus Group | <b>International</b> | <b>Gender</b>     | <b>Participant number</b> |
|  | International        | Woman             | Participant 12            |
|  | International        | Man               | Participant 13            |
|  | International        | Prefer not to say | Participant 14            |

## PGRs (Home & International)

|                  | <b>HPGRs</b> | <b>Gender</b>  | <b>Participant Number</b> |
|------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Focus Group<br>1 | Home         | Woman          | Participant 15            |
|                  | Home         | Woman          | Participant 16            |
|                  | Home         | Woman          | Participant 17            |
|                  | Home         | Woman          | Participant 18            |
| Focus Group<br>2 | <b>HPGRs</b> | <b>Gender</b>  | <b>Participant Number</b> |
|                  | N/A          | N/A            | Participant 19            |
|                  | Home         | Woman          | Participant 20            |
|                  | Home         | Man            | Participant 21            |
|                  | Home         | Woman          | Participant 22            |
|                  | Home         | Woman          | Participant 23            |
| N/A              | N/A          | Participant 24 |                           |

|                                |                      |               |                           |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Focus Group<br>1               | <b>International</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Participant number</b> |
|                                | International        | Woman         | Participant 25            |
| 1-1 Interview<br>(intended FG) | International        | Man           | Participant 26            |
|                                | <b>International</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Participant number</b> |
| Focus Group<br>3               | International        | Man           | Participant 27            |
|                                | International        | Woman         | Participant 28            |
|                                | International        | Woman         | Participant 29            |
|                                | International        | Woman         | Participant 30            |

## Staff

|                             |                              |               |                |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Focus Group 1               | <b>British/International</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Number</b>  |
|                             | Both                         | Man           | Participant 31 |
|                             | Both                         | Man           | Participant 32 |
|                             | N/A                          | Man           | Participant 33 |
| Focus Group 2               | <b>British/International</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Number</b>  |
|                             | Both                         | Man           | Participant 34 |
|                             | UK                           | Man           | Participant 35 |
|                             | Both                         | Woman         | Participant 36 |
|                             | Both                         | Woman         | Participant 37 |
| Focus Group 3<br>(not used) | <b>British/International</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Number</b>  |
|                             | Both                         | Woman         | N/A            |
|                             | Both                         | Woman         | N/A            |
|                             | UK                           | Woman         | N/A            |
|                             | Both                         | Woman         | N/A            |
|                             | Elsewhere                    | Woman         | N/A            |
| Focus Group 4               | <b>British/International</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Number</b>  |
|                             | Both                         | Man           | Participant 38 |
|                             | UK                           | Woman         | Participant 39 |
|                             | Elsewhere                    | Woman         | Participant 40 |
|                             | UK                           | Non-binary    | Participant 41 |
| Focus Group 5               | <b>British/International</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Number</b>  |
|                             | Elsewhere                    | Woman         | Participant 42 |
|                             | UK                           | Woman         | Participant 43 |
|                             | N/A                          | N/A           | Participant 44 |