Be More Empowered for Success Postgraduate Researchers Programme

Impact evaluation report: 2024/2025

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Advocate = *
Staff = **

Programme overview

The Be More Empowered for Success PGR programme was established in 2021, with the goal of enhancing the experience of home Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic postgraduate researchers at UOB. To date, we have held 32 events.

PGR Advocates
Five paid PGR Advocates with lived and professional experience were responsible for developing ideas, planning and facilitating activities throughout the year.

Bristol Doctoral College (BDC)
BDC staff and an academic from the School of Education support the co-delivery of the programme.

Organisation
After an induction in September 2024, a provisional programme of events was produced by November 2024. Team meetings were held in person monthly to support: planning, team building, analysis of event feedback, and discussion of emerging challenges.

PGR community
In 2024-25, 344 PGRs were eligible to participate, across all three faculties - Science and Engineering (46%), Health and Life Science (32%) and Arts, Law and Social Science (22%). This includes 236 active PGRs (in years 1 - 4), and 108 registered as writing-up.

Timeline of events in 2024/2025

Advertising channels: (1) BDC bulletin/website, (2) Emails to PGR admin, (3) Horizon newsletter, (4) Social Media (5) Digital screens, (6) Mailing list, (7) SU representatives and (8) Physical posters and (9) Staff and PGR Events page

Meet and Greet welcome event

Winter Movie Night and discussion circle

Game On - mini-golf social

Get Crafty - belonging through making

Bristol Old Vic - celebrating diversity in the theatre

Lunch and Paint - creating community

Be Empowered - celebrating success in academia and industry

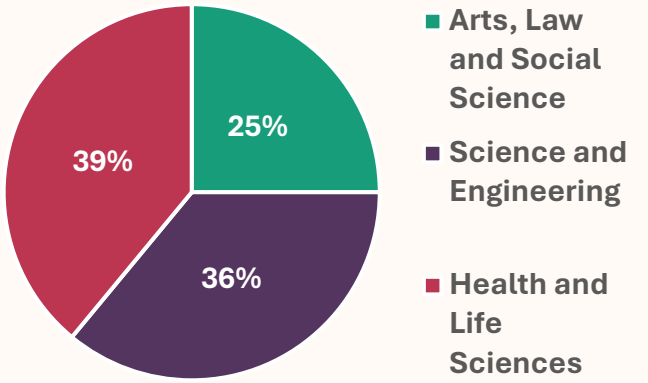
Shuttlecocks and Sandwiches badminton social

September 2024 → **July 2025**

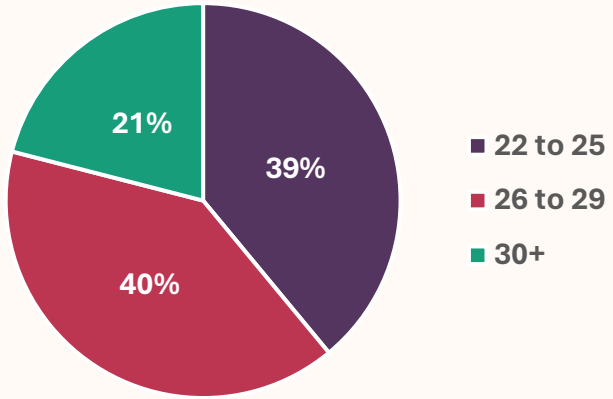
Attendance trends

In 2024/2025, we reached 61 PGRs - 18% of eligible participants (26%, for those only in year 1, year 2, year 3 or year 4). Most event attendees engaged with multiple activities (57%).

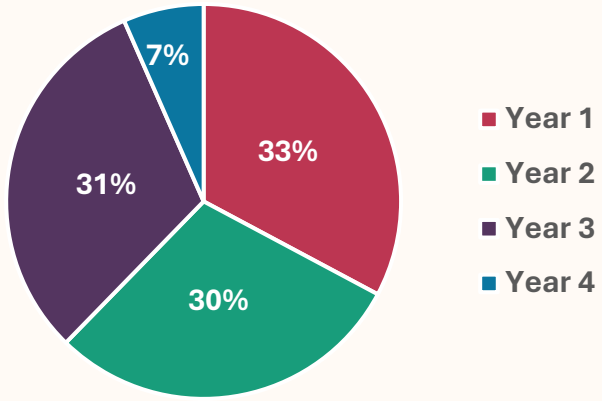
Faculty



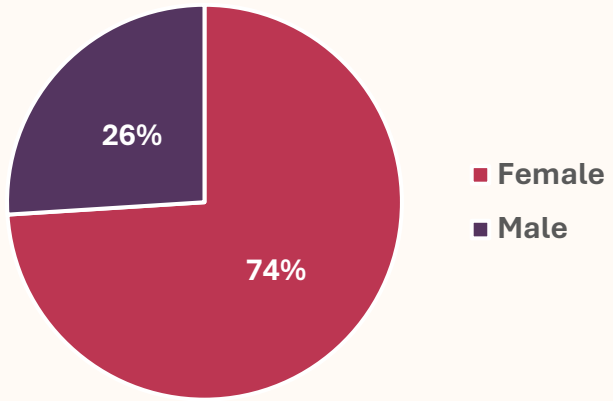
Age

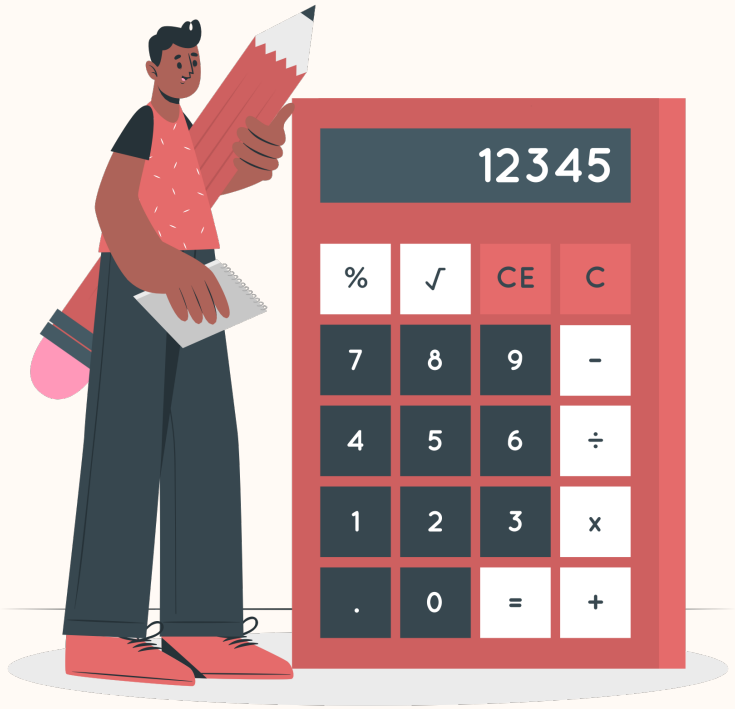


Year of study



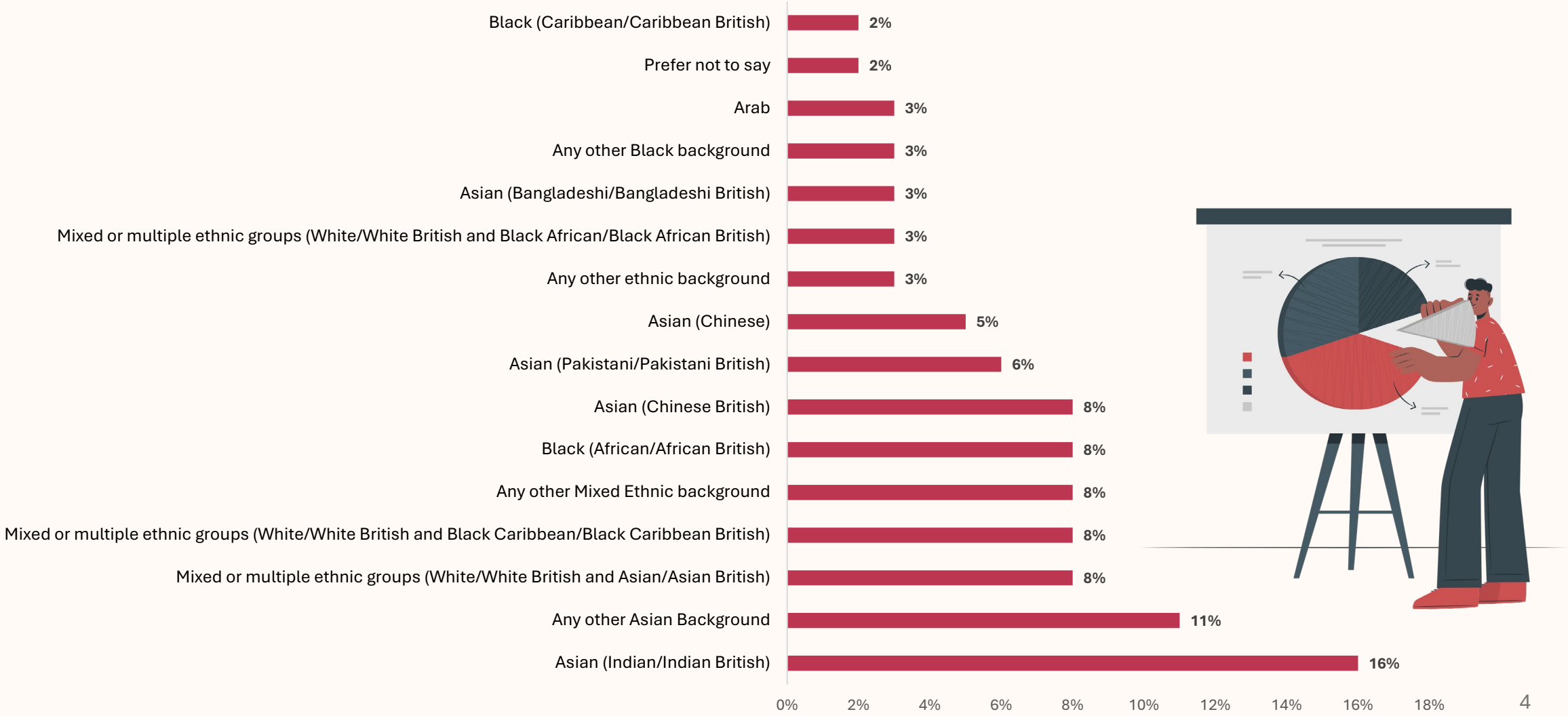
Sex





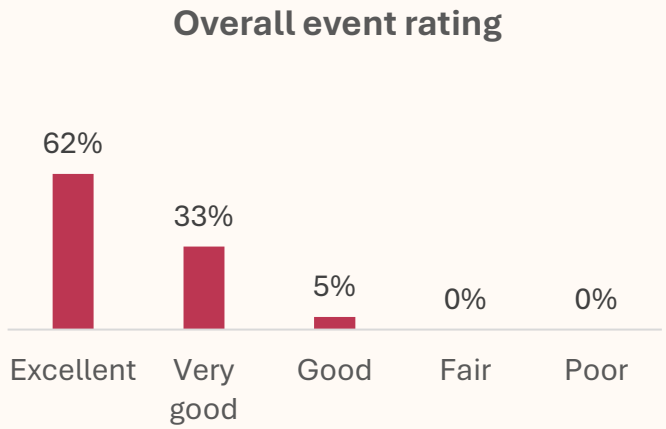
Ethnicity data

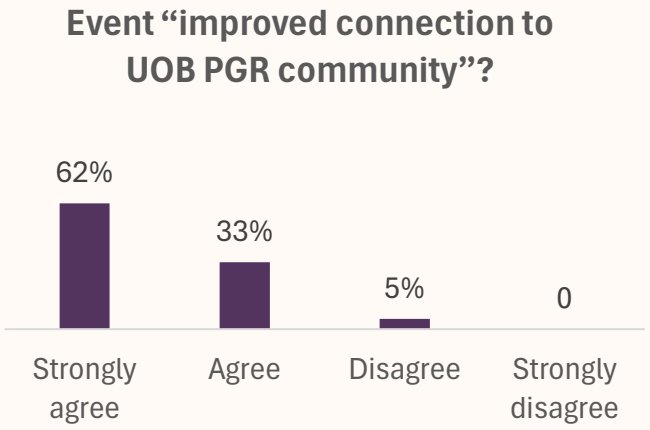
We present ethnicity data for event attendees below. We recognise there is little consensus on how to discuss and report data around ethnicity and race, and that both terms have a complex history; therefore, we have presented data as people have chosen to self-identify, without any further categorisation.



Lessons learned from:

Event feedback forms completed by 28 event attendees





"The committee did an incredible job at actively making everyone feel welcome and engaged in good conversation. Very glad I came!" **Meet and Greet**

"I gained an insight into how they achieved success in an environment where they are underrepresented. The event celebrated diversity in academia and industry, to inspire and empower postgraduates and those considering their next steps. The food was a delightful highlight—fried plantains at a University of Bristol event was a first for me, and a welcome one!" **Be Empowered career panel**

"Playing badminton was really fun, and everyone was nice and had a great chat over picnic (which was delicious)" **Shuttlecocks and Sandwiches**

"I thought it was a super fun break to the day and I got to chat to other PhD people in a calming environment" **Lunch and Paint**

Lessons learned from:

In-depth focus group with 3 event attendees

"I haven't actually met anyone with the same exact ethnic background as me, but it still feels really relaxing here. **It's totally just the atmosphere, nothing concrete**"

"**I feel really welcome here...** I think it's really important in events like these to give people space, because introverts really need that"

"It's a nice opportunity to just do something relaxing and **unwind**, try something new... you kind of have a similar background and you feel you belong"

"Because our backgrounds are kind of similar, **there was a sense of community.** You feel like someone is feeling the same thing as you"

"Even though it's people I don't necessarily know, **there was so much in common between us**. It feels like a support group of some sort"

"I'm Arab. I don't know whether I actually fit in the word 'ethnic minority'... **Maybe in the UK we are a minority, but in the world, there are lots of Arabs"**

"I attended a careers event... it was brilliant because it really focussed on inclusion and diversity which is never really the case in these events... **Very inspiring actually"**

"They gave us a lot of tips and basically told us nothing was impossible... It was quite **uplifting**, which is what we probably need."

"I've lived in Bristol for 10 years now... I feel like I don't necessarily always belong to the university... I feel like I already have a network outside of the university... I also feel like I don't fit anywhere... I don't consider myself British. **I have so many mixed origins"**

Lessons learned from:

End-of-year reflective workshop with 4 Advocates and 2 staff members working on the programme

1. Grounding exercise:

The group took part in a guided meditation to create space for relaxation and reflection.

2. Letter writing :

We then spent some time writing a letter to a friend about our work on the programme this year.

3. Timelining:

As a group we mapped out the events, hurdles and highlights of the year, month-by-month along a piece of string stretching from one side of the room to the other

4. Capturing highlights of the year

Social connectedness:
This year involved more collaborative teamwork than ever and continued contact with the PGR community.

Professional development:
Opportunities to strengthen skills around event planning and facilitating panel discussions.

Range of events:
A diverse offer of cultural, creative, social and sport-related activities.

Critical questions raised this year

We identified key questions about how this programme should be understood and evaluated. Each question is part of an ongoing collaborative conversation.

1. What does impact mean / who gets to define it?

We want to create a holistic definition of success for the programme.

This definition should encompass the opportunities we create, the number of people engaged, but most importantly, the impact we have at an individual and institutional level.

We are interested in learning more about alternative evaluation models and methods used inside and outside of the sector.

2. How should work be distributed among Advocates and Staff?

Collaboration is our key strength.

Some aspects of the work rely on PGR insights, and other aspects rely on staff expertise.

We are especially interested in learning more about how Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives approach co-delivery and shared decision-making.

3. What makes food such an important aspect of our events?

It plays a central role in our catered events because it creates space for belonging.

As part of our ongoing work, we want to enhance our understanding of catering options and suppliers available through the university.

4. How do we discuss and navigate challenges?

Connected to the discussion of success, we are interested in the conditions and tools that enable us to discuss things that are not working well, with honesty and bravery.

5. How do we build community beyond individual events?

We are interested in the role of asynchronous content, social media and other forms of engagement to foster ongoing connection and a sense of community.

6. How do we encourage attendee feedback?

For people to understand the importance of our data collection, we need to be clear about how we use data and commit to communicating our findings.

Programme priorities for 25/26

Priorities informed by feedback from event attendees, Advocate workshop, and focus group data

1. Review the regularity of events to ensure there is an appropriate frequency of opportunities

2. Continue to prioritise cultural experiences and quality cultural food provisions where feasible

3. Ensure any panel events organised reflect a wider breadth of academic disciplines

4. Explore opportunities for digital engagement to widen our approach and connect with more PGRs

5. To reflect on how we can reach new attendees who have not previously engaged with the programme

6. To make decisions about which events are programmed and when, informed by four years of attendance data

10 institutional actions for fostering belonging

Beyond programme priorities, we recognise that meaningful action is essential at an institutional level.

1. Opportunities to meet PGRs from a diversity of backgrounds, including some who **reflect their own demographic identities**
2. Access to the **City of Bristol's broader cultural spaces**, activities and gatherings
3. Ample **networking** opportunities to strengthen internal and external academic links
4. Interaction with a diverse range of **role models**, at various levels of institutional leadership
5. Senior **leadership** committed to utilising their institutional power to identify and improve the processes impacting the experiences of racially marginalised PGRs
6. Clear policies outlining how the university will respond to **incidents of discrimination**
7. A breadth of staff who are **visibly and actively engaged in systemic change**, to ensure improvement does not solely rely on the efforts of those most impacted by these difficulties
8. Opportunities for those with access to less structural power to share perspectives, lived experience, needs, feedback on institutional progress and **inform decision-making**
9. Sustained and **joined-up action** in line with UOBs 2030 vision
10. Exploring some of the critical questions outlined on slide seven within **wider institutional conversations**