

Case Study 2:



Yvette¹
International PGR Network

Event participation:
*Writing retreat

Research participation:
*Video diary

Highlight experiences:

- **Active member** of the international PGR network.
- **Benefits:** reduced isolation; increased sense of belonging; normalisation of doctoral challenges; reassurance of capability; resilience-building
- **Challenges:** doctoral isolation; unstable peer community; caring-related constraints

Yvette has been an engaged member of the international PGR network. Although she was only able to attend one network event, the Writing Retreat, due to time constraints and other commitments, her reflections offer valuable insight into the importance of such spaces for international PGRs. Drawing on her video diary reflections, Yvette generously shared her experience as an international PGR and considered how PGR networks can better support doctoral researchers from diverse backgrounds.

As an international PGR, Yvette describes the PhD journey as highly isolated, especially when it is difficult to find a “proper and safe place” to express ideas, struggles, and small achievements. Although she goes to the office every day and prefers not to work from home, her use of hot desks means that she does not have stable desk mates or a consistent peer community. She meets different people, but they “come and go”, making it hard to form the kind of colleague relationship that other PGRs may have in shared office spaces. From this perspective, the international PGR network offered something important: a group of “stable members” whom she felt she could rely on.

One key aspect of Yvette’s participation in the network was the reassurance that came from being with other PGRs across institutions. The Writing Retreat gave her the opportunity to step onto another university campus, meet peers from different backgrounds, and recognise that the challenges she experienced were not signs of personal inadequacy. She reflected that even native English speakers and younger PGRs encountered similar difficulties. This helped her feel that she was “not the worst one”, but rather “a normal PGR student” facing common doctoral challenges. Such recognition appeared to strengthen her confidence, resilience, and sense of belonging, allowing her to remind herself to “calm down and keep moving on”.

At the same time, Yvette’s case also highlights the importance of recognising caring responsibilities within doctoral network provision. As a mother, she was unable to stay overnight at the Writing Retreat and had to travel back and forth. She raised the question of whether a parents’ or carers’ PGR network might also be useful, especially for female PGRs who are navigating the combined demands of motherhood and doctoral study. Her reflection suggests that EDI networks can be further strengthened by attending not only to international status, but also to the intersecting responsibilities that shape PGRs’ access to community-building opportunities.

From Yvette’s case, the international PGR network emerges as more than a space for attending events. It becomes a source of stability, recognition, and normalisation within an otherwise fragmented doctoral environment. Her experience shows how cross-institutional networks can help international PGRs feel less alone, more capable, and more connected to others who share similar challenges. It also demonstrates why inclusive doctoral communities need to remain attentive to intersecting identities and responsibilities, including language, mobility, parenting, and caring. Yvette’s case, therefore, illustrates the wider value of EDI PGR networks in fostering belonging, resilience, and a more supportive research culture.

1. Yvette is a pseudonym chosen to protect the network member’s anonymity.