LSSI PGR Placement at JUST West Yorkshire

Placement Organization: JUST West Yorkshire
Placement Supervisor: Ratna Lachman (Director)
Placement completed by: Fatima Malik (3rd Year Doctoral Researcher, Leeds University Business School, Centre for Employment Relations Innovation & Change)

Placement Information
The placement was with JUST West Yorkshire, a third sector organization that focuses on promoting human rights, racial justice and civil liberties. It involved working directly with the director Ratna Lachman who, at the time, was assessing the top down impact of the public sector cuts on decision-making of local authorities in implementing budgetary cuts across the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCA). In effect policy evidence suggested that the cuts were having a disproportionate and discriminatory impact on the capabilities of the third sector in delivering services to especially vulnerable communities and out of reach groups from across the inner city wards of West Yorkshire.

My role therefore was to develop a project plan which enabled the adoption of a bottom up approach to explore the manner in which and the extent to which local authority decision-making regarding the cuts were impacting on the front-line service capabilities of VCS organizations. Particular emphasis was devoted to assessing the impact of the cuts in budgets on VCS organizations that delivered vital and often life-line services to especially vulnerable BME communities who were the majority populous inhabiting the deprived inner city wards from across the West Yorkshire Region. Owing to the limited time scale of the placement, (2 days per week for eight weeks), the scope of the project was limited to collating evidence from as many VCS organizations from a number of inner city wards (Bradford, Leeds, Kirklees, Wakefield). Organizations were chosen in accordance to services that aimed at delivering values similar to those outlined in Government policy relating to for example Community Cohesion, Integration and Prevent.

Placement Roles & Tasks undertaken

I adopted a researcher’s role and undertook related duties and tasks. As the research strategy adopted a case study approach, this involved the development of a semi-structured questionnaire to interview directors and senior management from VCS organizations. I also liaised with VCS organizations to facilitate these interviews and conducted, recorded, transcribed and analyzed the interviews. Where required, I also performed other tasks for
Ratna that were either related to the project or that were related to other organizational projects that she was involved in. These duties included accompanying her to meetings with local authorities to gain insights of the manner in which they were being propositioned by the cuts, or to facilitate the translation of focus group interviews held with community groups (e.g: Asian women). During the placement, I also had the opportunity in getting involved with campaign work (e.g regarding the closure of a local swimming pool) and had the opportunity in attending a Master Class that was delivered by Ratna and which was hosted by the School of Social Sciences at the University of Leeds. This provided an excellent opportunity to meet colleagues from the university and individuals from the public, private and third sector with interests relating to the cuts and of their effects on the procurement and delivery of services aimed at the third sector.

Outcomes of the placement
In total, during the course of the latter four weeks of the placement, twenty-three interviews were conducted with the directors and senior management from VCS organizations as part of the research. I am currently in the process of finalizing a report which will be available on the JUST West Yorkshire website by September and hope to present the findings at a conference hosted by JUST in September. I also intend to submit a scholarly article in collaboration with Ratna to a relevant journal for publication in due course.

Final Comments
Although the placement involved an area of research that was quite different from my PhD, I found that this did not matter, as I was able to apply many of the concepts that I was using as part of my PhD research to develop the research plan used as part of the placement. Further, I would recommend this and similar placements to fellow PhD students as such placements provide useful opportunities to gain first hand insight into experiencing and understanding how academic research can be useful within a practical context. My experience at JUST West Yorkshire has been invaluable as I received excellent support and encouragement in all aspects of the placement from Ratna and other colleagues from the organization. All in all I found it an enjoyable and fun working experience as I was given autonomy to plan and conduct the research in a manner that suited my other working commitments.