

BSODR conference Early Career Researcher Reflections, September 2026

1) From Jessie Tebbutt:

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I was grateful to be supported by the Oral Health Research Incubator to attend the BSODR Annual Meeting and present part of my PhD co-design project in the poster competition. It was valuable to share my work with the wider dental research community and share with interested colleagues how I had planned and delivered the co-design process.

I particularly enjoyed the session focusing on behavioural science and its application to oral health research and behaviour change, which was highly relevant to my own research. It was great to discuss some of my ideas and observations with the presenters and think about how these approaches could inform my work.

The conference brought together a diverse range of research topics and methods, and also highlighted opportunities to further develop research involving potentially underserved or marginalised groups. I came away encouraged by the potential to bring more inclusive and participatory approaches into oral health research.

Overall, the conference gave me new ideas to take back into my own research and clinical practice, as well as a greater sense of the wider oral health research community and where my own work might contribute.



2) From Aisling Power:

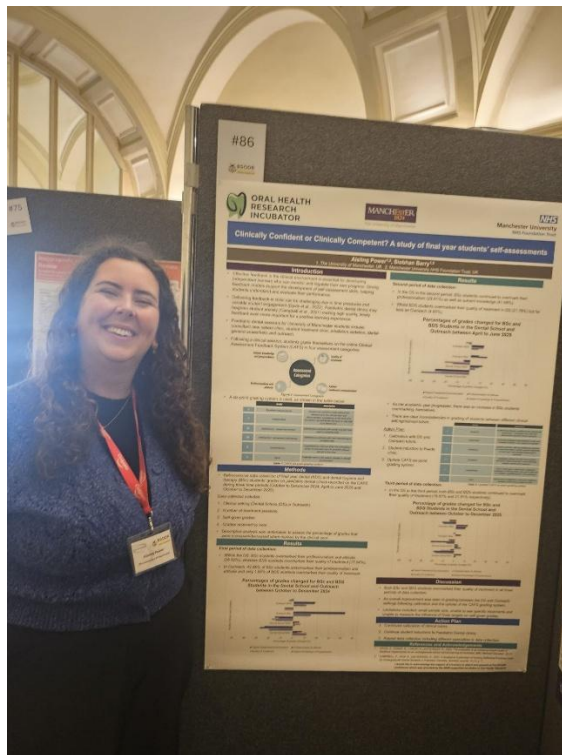
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The BSODR conference in Manchester was an excellent opportunity to meet colleagues and hear about the breadth of research taking place across the UK and beyond.

I would like to thank the Oral Health Incubator for the bursary that enabled me to attend the conference. This support allowed me to present my poster titled, 'Clinically Confident or Clinically Competent? A study of final year students' self-assessments?' which explores the differences between students' self-given grades and those awarded by their clinical tutors. The poster sparked insightful conversation with colleagues, particularly around the importance of embedding structured reflection within the dental curriculum to support the development of independent clinicians who can accurately evaluate and regulate their own learning.

As a budding academic paediatric dental trainee, I particularly enjoyed the President's Prize lectures delivered by Dr Laura Timms and Dr Greig Taylor. Their presentations underscored the importance of meaningfully involving children and their families in research design and demonstrated what can be achieved through a clinical academic training pathway.

It was also inspiring to hear about school-based oral health promotion initiatives happening closer to home in Manchester, particularly the Bee Smiley Study presented by Dr Michaela Goodwin. And, as an Irish woman, my personal highlight was Dr Dymrna Kavanagh's closing keynote—especially the memorable fun fact that 12% of Irish toddlers are already drinking tea!



3) From Becki Van Der Land:

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I presented a research poster from my MSc Clinical Research dissertation project, Unspoken Needs. The qualitative-led study used story completion method and reflexive thematic analysis to explore how patients' support needs become recognised, understood and acted upon within dental care, bringing together lived experience, public involvement and perspectives from patients, parents, carers and dental professionals.

A generous NIHR Oral Health Research Incubator BSODR bursary made my attendance possible. The bursary covered the costs of registration, accommodation and travel, while the Oral Health Research Incubator also provided advice and guidance on my abstract and poster submissions. Having the financial costs of attending covered made securing time away from my NHS role less complicated, as I was able to request development time without also needing to seek financial support or study leave.

It was a conference of firsts: my first abstract submission, first research poster, first time presenting my own (or any!) research, and my first conference outside the NHS. Coming into research through a less traditional route, even being there and presenting my work felt like a significant step.

My freshly completed MSc project had been a huge personal achievement, but having the first opportunity to share it and see others genuinely interested in the work was incredibly meaningful and helped make all the hard work feel worthwhile. I was incredibly surprised (and, once some of the adrenaline had worn off, proud) to be named joint winner of the BSODR Poster Prize for the best poster presentation by a dental researcher. The conversations prompted by the poster, together with the recognition it received, helped validate the relevance of the project and strengthened my understanding of how the findings could be used to inform future research and practice.

One of the biggest benefits of the BSODR experience was simply being there in person. As I am not currently embedded within a university or established research team, the research process during my MSc had felt very isolating, especially coming from a non-clinical NHS role. Being able to put faces to names and have conversations that would never happen in quite the same way via email made the wider research community suddenly feel much more accessible.

The ECR breakfast and gala dinner were particular highlights, but the biggest impact came from the people I met. Meeting other early career researchers alongside established academics, scientists and clinicians was incredibly valuable, as was the support and encouragement I received throughout the meeting from the Incubator team. Finding everyone so welcoming, generous with their time and genuinely interested in supporting people new to research was one of the most valuable parts of the whole experience.

I arrived feeling like an outsider and wondering what had possessed me to present a novel, qualitative-led project at a traditionally scientific research meeting, but left feeling that both I and my research were accepted and had a place within the oral and dental research

community. Professor Stefan Listl's keynote discussion of the wider oral health research 'ecosystem' felt particularly relevant. The inclusive environment and breadth of professions represented reinforced that different perspectives and routes into research all have a valuable place within that ecosystem.

Since BSODR, I have accepted an invitation to speak about my research at a research showcase event. I am not sure I would have had the confidence to say yes before attending, and I certainly would not have had the same visibility or opportunity to make those connections. Being invited to speak about my research feels surreal, but saying yes feels like a tangible example of the difference the Incubator bursary has made.

Personally, this also reinforces the wider value of making research spaces accessible to people from a broad range of professional backgrounds, including those who are not already part of established academic or research networks. Before BSODR, I was finding it difficult to imagine where I might fit within the research landscape. Financial support can remove a practical barrier, but the visibility, connections and sense of belonging gained through experiences like this can have a much longer lasting impact on whether early career researchers feel able to remain engaged in research once a programme, funding or academic opportunity comes to an end. I hope my experience may help demonstrate the value of targeted support, particularly for those pursuing an interest in research alongside an established career.

The bursary did more than enable me to attend a single meeting: it gave me greater confidence in myself and my research, and more ambition and belief for where it might go next. I hope the experience, connections and encouragement I came away with will continue to extend beyond the meeting itself, it gave me a real momentum to pursue further research opportunities.

I am incredibly grateful to the NIHR Oral Health Research Incubator and to everyone at BSODR who was so generous with their time, interest and encouragement. For a first scientific research meeting, I could not have hoped for a more positive experience.

