

Experiences in the Classroom and Beyond: The Role of Race and Ethnicity

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FOREWORD

Since September 2018, the report, 'Experiences in the Classroom and Beyond: The Role of Race and Ethnicity', has been presented to several committees at Loughborough University including the Equality and Diversity Working Group, the Human Resources Committee, the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Student Experience Team. The Committees have supported and actioned a range of the key recommendations forwarded in the report.

The **Equality and Diversity Working Group** and its Chair Dr Manuel Alonso, together with Dr Line Nyhagen, have led work to promote the report findings and recommendations to relevant University committees.

The **Human Resources Committee** will ensure that the People Strategy currently being developed recognises the importance of increasing BAME representation amongst our academic and senior staffing and includes strategies to help advance this goal.

The **Learning and Teaching Committee** has agreed to look at ways to ensure opportunities for mixing are provided in the classroom experience for all students, with the aim of formulating best practice that should be adopted in the guidance for academic staff currently under development by the Group Work Working Group. The Committee has also asked for work to clarify the role of Personal Academic Tutors. Moreover, the Committee has agreed to run two pilot projects to explore how the issue of white, Euro-centric curricula could be addressed through curriculum review and design. The Committee has also approved the principle of introducing anonymous marking procedures for coursework, where appropriate.

The **Student Experience Team**, which has oversight of those aspects of the student experience which do not relate to the curriculum, has made a number of recommendations including asking **Careers Network** to review its activity in the context of the needs of BAME students, recommending that **LSU (Loughborough Student Union)** should review its offering in terms of societies, social activities and products stocked in its shops in light of the findings of the report and recommending that **Student Services** ensures all Hall Warden teams and Student Services staff have completed Unconscious Bias training by the end of February 2019. The Student Experience Team has also asked the **Sexual Violence Working Group** and

the **Substance Misuse Working Group** to continue to address issues of lad culture and the prevalence of alcohol in hall-related activities; and that **Student Services** should ensure that the appropriate local partners (CBC, Police) are aware of the experience of BAME students in Loughborough town and work with them to improve the environment for our students. Finally, it has recommended that **Campus Services** should reflect on the process for the allocation of hall places to determine whether there are any indirect ways in which allocations are linked to ethnicity.

Loughborough, 18 January 2019

Dr Line Nyhagen and Dr Manuel Alonso

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1. The Degree Attainment Gap

The existence of a degree attainment gap for students in UK higher education institutions by ethnicity is well established. In 2015/16, the *overall* gap between BME students and white English students getting a top degree (first class or 2:1) was 15.6% (ECU website 2018; see also Alexander and Arday 2015; Berry and Loke 2011; Singh 2011; NUS 2011). More detailed figures reveal a gap of 28.3% between white and black students in England, with Chinese, Indian and Pakistani students also having a substantial but relatively smaller gap (ECU website 2018).¹ The attainment gap varies within the BME student population, with the greatest gap for Black students and the second greatest gap for Asian students (Richardson 2015: 280). The gap is smaller for other ethnic minority groups (ibid.). The degree attainment gap persists when differences in entry-level qualifications are accounted for. In other words, the degree outcomes for students with equivalent entry qualifications differ based on whether they are White, Black, Asian, or from mixed or other ethnic minority backgrounds.

It can therefore justifiably be argued that 'ethnic minority students in the UK are being awarded poorer degrees for reasons that have nothing to do with their academic ability' (Richardson 2015: 282). Both institutional and individual factors influence degree outcomes. It is likely that negative factors include structural issues of racism and discrimination (Bhopal 2018; Tate 2016; Kimura 2014; NUS 2011) as well as more everyday microaggressions experienced in various interactional settings. Microaggressions are 'subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously' (Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso 2000, p. 60; see also Grier-Reed 2010, p. 182, for distinctions between 'microinvalidations', 'microinsults' and 'microassaults'). Responding to the identified attainment gap, institutions must take steps to actively secure a sense of belonging and inclusion for all students, regardless of their ethnicity, by providing inclusive teaching practices and a supportive learning environment for all.

¹ The figures for 2015/16 are: 78.8% of white students in England received a first or a 2:1 classification; the figure for Chinese students is 72.2%; Indian students 70.7%; Pakistani students 61/8%, and Black Other students 50.5% (see ECU website, 2018).

A degree attainment gap based on ethnicity also persists at Loughborough University (LU), where the *overall* attainment gap between white and BME UK domiciled first degree undergraduates was 9.7% in 2015/16 (Cornish 2018; see also Planning Office report 2016, and Equality and Diversity Statistical Report 2016/17). The degree attainment gap at LU between black and white students was 19.4% in 2015/16. In more detail, the gap between white and Black African students was 21.8%; the gap between white students and students from 'other black backgrounds' was 27.9%, and the gap between white students and students from 'other Asian backgrounds' was 11.9% (ibid.).² Moreover, there was a 10.8% gap in the chances of BME and white students obtaining a first or upper second-class degree at Loughborough (ibid.; see also Equality and Diversity Statistical Report 2016/17).

Existing case studies of BME students' experiences include Davies and Garrett's research (2012) at a small Northern University in the UK. Based on their small-scale study of seven BME students, Davies and Garrett identified 'feelings of isolation and differentiation' among BME students, and suggested further research was needed regarding academic practices including 'curriculum development and learning and teaching practices' as well as other strategies and practices that relate to students and staff. The need for further research, and for such research to be tailored to the actual experiences of BME students in specific universities, is highlighted in a recent report for the Equality Challenge Unit (Berry and Loke 2011; see also NUS 2011).

Research at Loughborough University

At LU, Abida Akram (Equality and Diversity Adviser) has previously conducted a focus group of sixteen BME students to raise awareness and discuss attainment issues (Akram 2015), and in 2008 the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) delivered a report entitled '*Understanding the Experiences of Ethnic Minority Students at Loughborough University*' (France, Harvey, Legge and Phung 2008). The research by France and colleagues included interviews and focus groups with forty-two students from the School of Art and Design, the Chemistry department, the Aeronautical and Automotive Engineering department, and the School of Sport and Exercise Science. Importantly, all of the participating students were

² 'Other Asian background' excludes 'Asian Indian', 'Asian Pakistani' and 'Asian Bangladeshi'. For these groups, the attainment gap in comparison with white students persists but is smaller than for students from 'Other Asian' backgrounds (Cornish 2018).

from black and other ethnic minority backgrounds, which makes it difficult to assess whether the findings are unique to students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

Our study builds on this previous work on the attainment gap at Loughborough University, particularly the identified need to better understand local and specific factors at Loughborough University that may underpin the existing degree attainment gap between students from different ethnic backgrounds. Crucially, our research includes perspectives and experiences from students of white, black and other ethnic minority backgrounds. This inclusive approach allows us to identify perspectives and experiences that may be unique to the BAME student population at LU as well as those that may be shared by white and BAME students. Our research takes a qualitative, in-depth approach, focusing on the experiences of forty-five undergraduate students in three departments in one School: Geography (GY), Social Sciences (SSci), and Politics, History and International Relations (PHIR), all within the School of Political, Geographical and Social Sciences (now renamed the *School of Social Sciences*). Our research examines experiences both within and outside the classroom, taking into account the specific characteristics of LU, including the ethnic and gendered composition of its undergraduate student body, the campus environment, and the market town that surrounds it.

In addition to the identified attainment gap, the rationale for our research is linked to the UK's *Equality Act 2010*, which specifies the duty that universities have to promote equality of opportunity for people from different racial backgrounds. Moreover, social science subjects, including sociology, social policy, political science, geography and history have a tradition of paying scholarly attention to issues concerning identities, diversity, inclusion and equality. For example, the 2016 benchmarking for teaching Sociology in higher education states that: 'Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds [...]. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in, and a responsibility for, promoting equality' (QAA 2016, p. 3). Our project seeks a better understanding of how such 'ideal statements' do or can work in practice: how are they, or can they be, embedded in the classroom and beyond within our School?

The Equality Act 2010 also informs how universities are expected to deal with equality and diversity issues related to protected characteristics such as age, disability, ethnicity and sex within the recently introduced Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Supporting inclusive teaching practices and an inclusive learning environment is key to successful TEF outcomes for higher education institutions (ECU 2017). As TEF scores are informed by National Student Surveys (NSS), the importance of NSS satisfaction rates across different identity markers (i.e., ethnicity, gender, disability and sexuality) should not be underestimated. Data for Loughborough University seem to suggest differences in how satisfied White and Black students are with 'assessment and feedback' and 'academic support' (Equality and Diversity Statistical Report, 2016/17).

As stated, our research covers student experiences both within and beyond the classroom. The project examines white and BAME students' own learning experiences at the university in relation to the curriculum content and beyond, including their take-up of individual consultations with lecturers, relationships with peers, and take-up of opportunities that can enhance their learning experience (e.g., student rep positions; student ambassador jobs). The immediate aim is that our findings will be of benefit to students in our own School, and we propose a list of key recommendations to that end whilst also identifying current examples of good practice. Our findings are likely to be of interest across the university and, while we are aware of the nuances of disciplinary practices and cultures, our hope is that they will be of benefit to staff and students in other schools at LU as well.

Our project is based on the following two premises:

- 1) That students themselves are uniquely positioned to conduct research on the experiences of students. Therefore, a mixed team of BAME and white student researchers have carried out the research. In doing so, they have received training from and been supported by two experienced academics (Dr Nyhagen and Dr Esson);
- 2) That the research has been 'designed to investigate "the positives" i.e. what factors enable some students (whether BAME or not) to succeed' (Berry and Loke 2011: 43). Our research therefore 'advocate[s] inclusive practice and policy development which is directed at all students and thus does not stigmatise BAME students as being separate' (Davies and Garrett 2012: 9). This has been achieved through the ethnically

mixed team of student researchers and staff lead investigators, and via gaining insights from focus groups with white, black and other ethnic minority students.

The overall ethos of the project is to contribute to securing a high-quality learning experience for ALL students by developing them as individuals in a learning environment that recognises their needs, potential and aspirations.

Structure of the Report

The following section (section two) briefly presents the research management and research design. Sections 3-5 present our findings, with section three focusing on academic experiences within the classroom, section four detailing academic experiences outside the classroom, and section five discussing non-academic experiences outside the classroom. Section six offers a report summary, while section seven presents our key recommendations. These are followed by a list of references and an appendix.

2. Research Design

This project has been led by Dr Line Nyhagen (Principal Investigator, SSci) and Dr James Esson (Co-Investigator, GY).³ Dr Nyhagen is a white woman and Dr Esson is a black man. The research has been funded by Loughborough University and supported by an advisory group consisting of Abida Akram (Equality and Diversity Adviser), Hannah Keating (Student Union), Dr Catherine Armstrong (PHIR), Dr Christina Oelgemoller (PHIR), Dr Richard Hodgkins (GY) and Professor Stephen Case (SS). The advisory group members have provided comments on an initial draft of this report.

With the aim of achieving an in-depth understanding of a cross-section of student views and experiences, a series of ten focus groups were carried out with a total of forty-five (45) undergraduate students from three departments, Social Science (SSci), Geography (GY), and Politics, History, and International Relations (PHIR), in the School of Social, Political, and Geographical Sciences at Loughborough University (now the *School of Social Sciences*), in the period December 2017 to March 2018⁴ (see Table 1 on page 11 for an overview of the focus group participants). A decision was made to conduct focus groups that included single ethnic groups rather than mixed ethnic groups, and to have the groups led by student researchers identifying with the same ethnic group they were investigating. This was done to support an open, free discussion among group participants of equal standing (all were students) and to make each participant feel included in their group (all belonged to the same ethnic group). Mixed ethnic groups could potentially have led to some participants feeling marginalised and poorly understood, while teacher-led groups could have led to power imbalances and potential misunderstandings. Ethical approval was sought and gained

³ We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Ms Nuzhat Fatima, LSU Welfare and Diversity Executive Officer in 2016-17, to the initial stage of the project. See also Fatima's blog-post (2017) about the project at <http://blog.lboro.ac.uk/teaching-learning/2017/06/15/degree-attainment-gaps/> [accessed 27 June 2018]. A special thanks goes to Abida Akram (Equality and Diversity Adviser), for her knowledge sharing and support. We would also like to thank Dr Manuel Alonso (Director of Student Services), Professor Nick Clifford (Dean, School of Social Sciences) and Richard Taylor (Chief Operating Officer), for their support. A further special thanks to Deena Ingham (Centre for Academic Practice) for her vital support in securing financial backing for our research.

⁴ An exception is the pilot focus group with Black students in SSci, which was held in July 2017.

from LU's Ethics Committee via the submission of an ethical clearance list. All participants were given a participant information sheet and a consent form.

Focus group participants were recruited via lecture shout outs, academic tutor contacts, friendship groups and other networks. Although participants were offered incentives (£10 vouchers and a pizza meal), the overall recruitment process was challenging. Students have competing tasks and varying timetables, and organising focus groups that would fit for all who had volunteered to participate proved difficult. Some students who were very interested in participating (including five Black students in GY) were prevented from doing so as they were on work placements and thus unavailable. Three focus groups (one in each department) were carried out with fifteen (15) White students (eight female and seven male). The focus groups with white students were led and conducted by the white student researcher (Alex Sherred, GY). Four focus groups were conducted with eighteen (18) Black students (fourteen female and four male); one focus group in PHIR, one in GY, and two in SSci. Three of the focus groups with black students were led and conducted by the black student researcher (Jennifer Kavanda Ebende, PHIR), and one, a pilot focus group in SSci, was led and conducted by Dr Nyhagen. Three focus groups were led and conducted (one in each department) with twelve other, non-Black Ethnic Minority (EM) students (eight female and four male). These were carried out by the ethnic minority student researcher (Chetanraj Dhillon, GY). A total of ten (10) first-year, sixteen (16) second-year, and nineteen (19) final-year students participated, as well as a total of thirty female and fifteen male students. The gender disparity among participants (30 women and 15 men) reflects the overall gendered composition of degree programmes in the School.

In the report, the focus of our analysis is on race and ethnicity, rather than on year-group and/or gender. Intersecting identities relating to age, disability and sexual orientation were not focused on by the researchers or participants; however, the ways that for example religious identities may impact on inclusion in social contexts was referred to by some of the participants (see section 5). The topic guide and questions that were asked of the focus group participants are included in an appendix to this report.

Table 1. Overview of Focus Group Participants by department, ethnicity, gender and year of study.

	White	Black	Ethnic Minority
Geography	4 women; 2 men (2 first year, 1 second year, 3 final year).	4 women; 2 men (4 first year, 1 second year, 1 final year).	3 women; 1 man (1 first year, 2 second year; 1 final year).
Politics, History & International Relations	5 men (3 second year, 2 final year).	3 women; 1 man (all second year).	2 women; 1 man (2 first year, 1 second year, 2 final year)
Social Sciences	4 women (2 second year, 2 final year).	4 women (2 second year, 2 final year). Pilot group: 3 women; 1 man (all final year)	3 women; 2 men (1 first year, 2 final year).
	(15)	(18)	(12)

Total: 45 students

3. Findings - Experiences in the Classroom (Academic)

Student Mixing

Whether students mix with each other in the classroom across racial, ethnic and gender boundaries can influence the degree to which students feel included and that they belong, or if they instead feel excluded and marginalized in the classroom. In turn, experiences of inclusion/exclusion and feelings of belonging/marginalisation can impact on whether students feel that they have a supportive learning environment. Black and non-Black Ethnic Minority student participants across the three departments generally remarked that the degree to which students mixed in diverse groups within the classroom was substantially limited. White student participants, on the other hand, with the exception of those from SS, contrastingly stated that students did mix freely in diverse groups:

“...you can make friends with anyone [it] doesn’t really matter on race or creed or whatever...” *(Male, PHIR, Final Year, White)*.

Students were said to form rigidly-defined classroom peer groups such that inter-group contact was limited. These groups seemed to most often form along dimensions of ethnicity, gender, and student status (i.e., domestic or international). Yet the groups were also, albeit to a lesser extent, formed along other dimensions such as socioeconomic class, residence, and membership to societies. Moreover, there was indication that some racial groups were mixing less than others:

“...I felt that more noticeably Black students tended to sit together, just from my memory...in seminars you would kind of see that they would kind of present together and... it is more noticeable...” *(Male, PHIR, Final Year, EM)*.

This may suggest that the extent to which students mix in the classroom is influenced by how rigid or malleable their group’s boundaries are, such that students with malleable group boundaries may mix more freely with a diverse range of students than students with rigid group boundaries. The interactions and mixing within and between different racial and ethnic groups seems nuanced, for example; if Black students sit together it may be a result of a need for peer support in a context where there is considerable overlap between academic support networks and social networks, or it may be caused by other groups not

mixing with Black students because they have their own peer groups. If White students perceive mixing as 'easy', this may reflect their ability to engage with different racial groups on their own terms, as it is not perceived to be similarly easy by BAME students. For example, as will be discussed later in the report, Black students mentioned that they often feel under pressure to alter their personalities in order to fit in with their white peers.

Some participants across the three departments and three ethnic groups also remarked that students gravitating towards students with whom they held something in common was normal. This seemed to incline these participants to more likely accept ethnic and/or racial segregation, while considered deplorable in other contexts, as valid within the context of higher education:

"...it is natural to like gravitate towards I mean for lack of a better word, your kind of people, it is normal to do that, you see it everywhere..." (*Male, SSci, Final Year, EM*).

Such a perception may lead some students to engage in segregating activity themselves, further normalising and reproducing practices that reinforce segregation. Moreover, unconscious bias is likely to play a role in constructing and maintaining barriers between students from different ethnic backgrounds (see Engberg 2004; Beattie, Cohen and McGuire 2013). Some participants across the three departments and ethnic groups indicated that ethnically separated classroom groups formed in the first year of one's degree, changed little if at all throughout the remainder of one's programme.

Notably, these classroom group boundaries were subverted, albeit temporarily, when students were assigned by their lecturers to small groups as part of an academic activity, for example a group project or small group tutorials. The degree to which students were assigned such group work varied across departments, with indication that such group work was common in GY but relatively rare in SSci. One participant spoke of how a lack of such group work prevented her from meeting new people:

"...we don't have group work very often at all...so you don't really meet new people after the first week" (*Female, SSci, Final Year, White*).

Informal Peer Support

Participants across the three departments and ethnic groups generally remarked that they had the informal support of their peers, but that this informal support network was largely

limited to the classroom peer groups of which participants were part. It was also remarked that some students might not want to help others because of a sense of competition. One non-Black Ethnic Minority participant explained why she chose to seek informal support from her own ethnic peer group:

“...I just automatically feel more comfortable with them, I don’t do it intentionally... when it comes to talking about for example like racism or something similar...I feel like they are more likely to understand and the majority of the time they probably would have gone through the same situation as me” (*Female, PHIR, First Year, EM*).

It was suggested that Black students who take on the burden of supporting their peers might become overwhelmed by others’ needs, and in turn this might impact negatively on their own studies and well-being. This would suggest a possible need for a broader support network for Black students which may alleviate some of the pressures on Black students who offer significant support to their peers.

When seeking informal support outside her ethnic peer group, one Black participant commented on how she was rejected:

“...we had an assignment and like I reached out to a Chinese guy...and he just didn’t want to help at all, I felt like I was pestering him...He just cut me off...” (*Female, SSci, Final Year, Black*).

Moreover, participants across the three departments and ethnic groups stated that when classroom peer support was insufficient, they might seek support from students outside the classroom, for example in halls of residence or societies. One participant commented on the particular value of Programme Representatives:

“...they are still like really accessible so if I needed to I could definitely go there easily” (*Female, GY, First Year, White*).

Formal Support

Participants across the three departments and ethnic groups were typically aware of formal peer learning, such as Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), but generally did not take up any opportunities, often due to a lack of time and a perceived lack of usefulness of such services. As one participant stated:

“...[PAL] wasn’t structured enough but at the same time I felt like they didn’t know what they were doing” (*Female, SSci, Second Year, Black*).

However, as one Black participant indicated, an aversion to using PAL was sometimes due to perceived discrimination, though it is not necessarily clear that discrimination was actual nor based on the participant’s ethnicity:

“...my group had one peer mentor that we shared together and I was the only like ethnic person in the whole group...every time I was in that group thing I just felt awkward because they weren’t like really nice people, they weren’t approachable... and when they like discussed things they wouldn’t include me in the discussion...” (*Female, PHIR, Second Year, Black*).

In rare cases where participants did use PAL, they would often do so with their peer group, and typically only found PAL useful during the first few weeks at the start of the first academic year:

“I attended like the first three weeks...they were helpful but then when I fitted in I understood how university works, I didn’t really need them...” (*Female, SSci, Final Year, White*).

There was also indication that many students were perhaps unaware of what services PAL is designed to provide. This may have led students to expect too much of PAL, resulting in disappointment when it fell short.

Personal Tutor Meetings

Participants across the three departments and ethnic groups generally only met with personal tutors when it was compulsory, but typically viewed meetings positively and felt that they could speak to their personal tutor if they wanted to. As one participant said:

“...my personal tutor is very nice as well, very approachable, and also very understanding...” (*Male, PHIR, Second Year, EM*).

The lack of take-up of non-compulsory personal tutor meetings was attributed to a number of reasons, including a perceived lack of usefulness, uncertainty over the purpose of a personal tutor, and unresponsiveness of some academics with personal tutor duties:

“...I didn’t know what the use of a personal tutor was, I didn’t actually know what they were supposed to do or what they were supposed to help you with and things like that so...I didn’t really use my personal tutor that much” (*Male, PHIR, Second Year, Black*).

Curriculum Content

Generally, Black and non-Black Ethnic Minority participants across the three departments agreed that few modules sufficiently covered issues related to race, ethnicity and other forms of diversity, and that such modules were often not part of the core curriculum. Black and non-Black Ethnic Minority participants also noted issues within some of the few modules that did cover issues related to race, ethnicity and other forms of diversity, for example an over-focus on a single region or framing issues of diversity negatively rather than positively. Moreover, some of these participants remarked that the curriculum would give too much attention to White, middle-class, Euro-centric perspectives on issues related to race, ethnicity, and other forms of diversity:

“...my first module...it was called Third World Politics...it was very Eurocentric in the same way like, everything came back to Europe, everything came back to US so that was wrong...” (*Female, PHIR, Second Year, Black*).

Commenting on the same module, a White participant contrastingly stated:

“... [Third World Politics] kind of looks at all of that kind of different world view lens as it were, not a Western, White, European kind of history but history from Africa and how they go about things” (*Male, PHIR, Final Year, White*).

These viewpoints and experiences give evidence to the need for Loughborough academics and students to engage in broader debates about the whiteness of curricula in social science, history, international relations and other related subjects. In this regard, the National Union of Students, as well as students and staff at universities such as UCL, Kingston, SOAS, Warwick and others, are campaigning to increase the diversity of authors and topics on class reading lists under banners such as ‘decolonising the curriculum’, ‘why is my curriculum white’ and ‘dismantling the master’s house’ (see, e.g., <http://www.dtmh.ucl.ac.uk>; <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/why-is-my-curriculum-white/>). Kingston University has developed an ‘Inclusive Curriculum Framework’ which promises to

'offer a wide range of curricula that represents the diversity of its students; providing a curriculum in which they can see themselves and, of which, they can feel a part. Students and staff are encouraged to co-create the curriculum by sharing knowledge and experiences' (see <https://www.kingston.ac.uk/aboutkingstonuniversity/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/our-inclusive-curriculum/>).

Initiatives such as those at Kingston could be looked at for possible transferability to or inspiration and learning for Loughborough University.

White participants in our study generally stated that issues related to race, ethnicity, and other forms of diversity were covered in sufficient depth and vocalised no concerns with regards to the way such issues were addressed. Such perceptions are likely to be linked with processes of normalising white privilege, including in higher education (Kendall 2013; Bhopal 2018), and with unconscious bias including own-race bias (Beattie, Cohen and McGuire 2013). This suggests a need for classroom engagement by staff and students with forms of white privilege.

Furthermore, Black participants unanimously agreed that they were not made sufficiently aware of academic work from a diverse range of scholars. They also emphasised a lack of diversity among academic staff in their respective departments. They thus communicated a desire to be taught a more diverse curriculum, as well as a desire to be taught by a more diverse staff. Non-Black Ethnic Minority participants across the three departments voiced more mixed opinions, with around two thirds stating that they were made sufficiently aware of academic work from a diverse range of scholars, and around one third stating they were not. In addition, White participants from GY and SSci generally agreed that they were not made sufficiently aware of academic work from a diverse range of scholars. As one White participant from SSci said of the academic work they were made aware of:

"I think a lot of sociology is based on what old White men wrote 100 odd years ago so there is not necessarily much [diversity]..." (*Female, SSci, Final Year, White*).

In contrast, White participants from PHIR stated that they were aware of academic work from a diverse range of scholars, with key theory drawn from Europe, Asia, and Africa, and

spoke of how modules which focused on regions outside of Europe were sometimes taught by Black and other Ethnic Minority lecturers from those regions.

Some participants across all three ethnic groups and departments, however, noted that most diversity characteristics of academics referred to in literature were very difficult to observe solely from an academic's name, and that only rarely, for example through the efforts of a lecturer, were students explicitly made aware of the diversity characteristics of academics:

"...[I] never really see the persons ethnicity or race because sometimes it is a bit hard, you could be named in the very British way but be somewhat [ethnic]..." (*Male, PHIR, Second Year, EM*).

This may suggest that students were at times informed of work from a diverse range of scholars but were merely unaware. Some participants across the three ethnic groups and departments also indicated that a photo of a scholar was effective in communicating the diversity characteristics of scholars.

Departmental Discrimination

White and non-Black Ethnic Minority participants generally stated that they were treated fairly and equally by staff in their respective departments, and that they had not witnessed explicit student-on-student discrimination in their respective departments. However, many of the non-Black Ethnic Minority participants, and to a lesser yet still significant extent White participants, acknowledged the possibility that student-on-student discrimination might occur without their knowledge. One White participant commented on how a lack of Black friends might lead them to be ignorant about ethnic and/or racial discrimination:

"...I don't necessarily have Black friends...if I did I am sure I would hear more about things that have gone on..." (*Female, SSci, Final Year, White*).

In contrast, many of the Black participants, with the exception of those from GY, asserted that they may not have been treated fairly and equally by all staff in their respective departments, particularly in SSci and PHIR, and that this perception was generally formed due to a lack of useful and detailed feedback from academic staff. Moreover, Black students

noted that even when efforts were made to act on the feedback and advice provided, their grades did not improve, thus leading some to conclude that their grades were not being determined by the content but rather academic staff's perceptions of a student's ability. There were concerns that these perceptions may be influenced by unconscious biases. A Black participant provided a description of how such perceived discrimination made her feel:

"...I just don't feel like it is a fair playing field...I feel like I am playing on a sloped playing field...and you would be winning all of the time" (*Female, SSci, Final Year, Black*).

These findings resonate with a report by the National Union of Students which found that Black students perceived marking and feedback practices to be influenced by racial and cultural bias (NUS 2011, p. 24). Suggested strategies to combat such experiences included the introduction of anonymous marking (NUS 2011, p. 60).

The majority of Black participants in our study, across the three departments, asserted that they had not witnessed explicit student-on-student discrimination, but a significant minority – around one third – of Black participants asserted that they had witnessed implicit student-on-student discrimination and micro aggressions on the basis of race and/or ethnicity. One participant described student-on-student discrimination as:

"...covert, like people not dealing with you, not talking to you, not having eye contact with you" (*Female, SSci, Final Year, Black*).

At LU, a low number of formal complaints have been raised about racist behaviour by and against students or against staff in recent years (Equality and Diversity Statistical Report, 2016/17), but the figure is expected to rise with the introduction of an online Hate Incidents Reporting Tool.

Role Models

Participants across the three departments and ethnic groups, with the exception of Black participants from GY, generally did not feel that the university offered any specific staff as role models, in part due to a lack of personal exchange between staff and students as well as a lack of relatability in terms of interests:

“...My lecturer doesn’t really, like, explicitly tell us [...] what they are trying to research...so it is like really difficult to have somebody as a role model when you don’t really get to know much about them” (*Male, GY, Second Year, EM*).

However, some participants did acknowledge that they somewhat admired passionate staff:

“I am always very impressed by people that are just genuinely enthusiastic about what they are teaching...” (*Male, PHIR, Second Year, White*).

Black participants from GY all found a role model in the same male Black academic member of staff within their department, citing his activity in tackling racial issues and his academic success as a Black person as key sources of inspiration:

“I think it was a challenge for me to really think about my own goals and I have always been like oh I will go to Uni and get a job afterwards, but like what kind of job?...seeing other Black people in those positions it really does help to motivate you...just to see one person and be like oh well it is possible, it is something I could reach for” (*Female, GY, Second Year, Black*).

The lack of BAME staff in senior management positions at LU was mentioned as being a problematic yet ‘normalised’ aspect of the university.

In addition, some participants did find partial role models outside the classroom while at Loughborough University, such as successful older students and members of the Students’ Union executive team. In general, positive personal exchange, the provision of support, and relatability seemed to be the key factors driving the determination of role models.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Experiences in the Classroom (Academic)

Student Mixing

White participants from PHIR and GY agreed students mixed freely in diverse groups in the classroom - a differing perception to those from the minority ethnic groups, who agreed student mixing in diverse groups within the classroom were substantially limited.

Racialised/ethnic segregation is normalised by students on the premise of such segregation

being 'natural' or normalised and expected. However, student mixing occurred mostly when the lecturer assigned students to group work and during tutorials.

Recommendation: Encourage student mixing in classes, seminars and other pedagogical contexts, by, e.g., setting assignments with group components particularly in Part A (Action: lecturers)

Informal Peer Support

An informal support network is largely limited to the classroom peer groups a participant is a part of. Sometimes students seek help from outside the classroom, for example in halls of residence or societies, and from programme reps. But given the above-mentioned lack of student mixing, the help received from outside the classroom tends to remain within race/ethnicity-based friendship groups. This results in some BAME students taking on considerable informal pastoral roles for their peers that can leave them feeling overwhelmed.

Recommendation: Consider whether a formal network of support for Black students would be helpful to alleviate the pressures felt by some Black students to offer support to their own peers. Efforts should be made to ensure that this does not reproduce the issues it was designed to address (Action: LSU)

Formal Support

Although aware of the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) system, many participants are unsure of what services PAL is designed to provide. Students generally did not use PAL, due to a lack of time and perceiving it as lacking usefulness.

Recommendation: ensure students are well informed about the usefulness of PAL - Peer Assisted Learning (Action: LSU and Student Voice). Encourage LSU and Student Voice to examine the diversity of PAL mentors to ensure it reflects the student body.

Personal Tutors

Participants across the three departments and ethnic groups only attend compulsory meetings with their personal tutors but felt that they could speak to their personal tutor outside of those compulsory meetings. Participants typically viewed the meetings positively. Students did not set up additional voluntary meetings with their personal tutors because

they did not perceive such meetings to be useful. Moreover, they were unsure of the purpose of a personal tutor, and at times personal tutors were unresponsive.

Recommendation: Clarify and communicate to students the role of personal tutor, with a view to making mentoring a central aspect and to increase the take-up of personal tutor meetings (Action: CAP, academic units and lecturers)

Curriculum Content

BAME participants noted that issues regarding race, ethnicity, and other forms of diversity, are often not part of the core curriculum. Some participants remarked that the curriculum gave too much attention to White, middle-class, Euro-centric perspectives on issues regarding race, ethnicity, and other forms of diversity. All Black student participants, and one third of non-Black Ethnic Minority participants, stated that they were not made sufficiently aware of academic work from a diverse range of scholars. White students from the SSci and GY departments generally stated they were not exposed to a diverse range of scholars, contrasting with White PHIR participants who mostly agree that they are made sufficiently aware of this, and that there is diversity among academic staff in PHIR.

Recommendations:

- encourage lecturers to critically reflect on questions about who is shaping knowledge production in their subject area and discipline and how that influences content on the core and optional curriculum (Action: lecturers).
- encourage lecturers, where possible, to make the diversity in knowledge production visible by, e.g., including photos of scholars on lecture slides to effectively communicate diversity characteristics (Action: lecturers; Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team; Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team)
- encourage lecturers to introduce classroom learning opportunities and reflections around white privilege (Action: lecturers). Encourage students, via formative and/or summative assessments, to reflect on different forms of privilege and disadvantage (Action: lecturers).

Departmental Discrimination

White and non-Black Ethnic Minority participants generally stated that they did not experiences, and they had not witnessed explicit student-on-student discrimination in their respective departments. Around one third of Black participants asserted that they had witnessed implicit student-on-student discrimination and micro-aggressions based on race and/or ethnicity. Furthermore, many of the Black participants, except those from GY, asserted that they were not treated fairly and equally by all staff in their respective departments, due to concerns around marking and feedback on their assignments. Students also mentioned a lack of recognition for work that had taken on board lecturers' previous feedback.

Recommendations:

- support fair and equal treatment via the introduction of blind marking practices (Action: Associate Dean for Teaching)

Role Models

Participants across all three departments and ethnic groups, with the exception of Black participants from GY, generally did not feel as though the university offered any specific staff as role models due to a lack of positive personal exchange, provision of support, and relatability. Some participants had found partial role models while at Loughborough University, in the form of successful older students and members of the Student Union executive team.

Recommendations:

- recruit, support and promote staff who can function as inspiring role models for black and ethnic minority students (Action: Dean and head of units)

4. Findings - Experiences outside the Classroom (Academic)

Placements

While all students could partake in a work placement sandwiched between their penultimate and final year of study, few of the focus group participants undertook one. In the white focus groups only one participant (within PHIR) had undertaken one. This student found the overall experience enjoyable as they were able to work with a diverse range of people enabling the student to appreciate different work ethics and

“socially it was good, everyone got on... everyone was very harmonious” (*Male, PHIR, Final Year, White*).

This was somewhat echoed by black student participants within the pilot group in SSci, of which all bar one student carried out a work placement. Although few student participants in our research undertook a work placement, there were some students across all focus groups of all ethnicities that were considering one, exemplified by the following quote:

“for the experience mostly, I want to experience what is it like to work in a company and have like responsibility and learn new skills as well, as well as get more orientation in to what I want to do” (*Female, SSci, Second Year, White*).

In contrast, while students believed they had ample support from various University sources to secure a work placement, non-EU international students within the Ethnic Minority focus groups feared they had additional issues when applying for work-based placements. One barrier that arose related to Visa issues and eligibility to work in the UK, of which students voiced that they would like more guidance from the University. The second issue revolved around inadvertent discrimination by potential employers. A PHIR student voiced that

“because of the stigma behind wearing a head scarf, and especially with the times coming now... I think it can make you less employable” (*Female, PHIR, First Year, EM*).

Other students within the same focus group also suggested that having a more ‘English’ name would have made it easier to secure a placement opportunity, as surmised by one student who said:

“you need as much experience as you can get, and you need things that make you stand out because your name kind of... maybe puts you down some steps sometimes” (*Female, PHIR, Final Year, EM*).

Evidence of implicit bias in shortlisting practices for jobs due to specific names being associated with people from ethnic minority origins has been documented by a plethora of research (see, e.g., Wood et al. 2009; King et al. 2006).

On the other hand, despite all students having the opportunity to undertake a work-based placement, some students stated that a placement was not necessarily an option for them. Two students from racially different backgrounds showed interest in pursuing a year-long study abroad option whereas other students, particularly in the GY and SS white focus groups, felt that placement opportunities did not cater enough to their degree for them to undertake one. White students in the SSci focus group agreed that they did not actively pursue placements as, while some did not interest the individual, students also didn't “necessarily think there is that many that are targeted specifically towards sociologists as such” (*Female, SSci, Final Year, White*).

Participants from GY made a similar point when they suggested that more “specifically geography related employers” or “interactive fayres” (*Female, GY, Final Year, White*) would increase uptake of placement students.

Student Representative and Ambassador Roles

Overall, most black and ethnic minority participants had not applied for a position as a Programme Representative for their course. This was mainly associated with little knowledge about what the role involved, time constraints with other obligations and no interest in the role. However, some participants voiced that they did not wish to compete with other students and that students might not vote for them to be in the role. Only within the SS department had black or ethnic minority students applied to be a programme representative, of which they said it was a positive experience as they

“have always been listened to whenever I have said something to say...” (*Female, SSci1, Third Year, Black*).

In contrast, at least one Programme Representative was present within the white focus groups, with two Programme Presidents (SS and PHIR) also present. Although one GY student had enjoyed being a representative due to the ability to interact with students in different years as well as being exposed to the structure of the department, other representatives in different groups said that while the role was beneficial for CV building, they didn't get anything from the experience. The Programme Presidents on the other hand, found their role more enjoyable as it entailed

“much more responsibility and you actually get to make a positive change” (*Female, SSci, Second Year, White*).

Out of all participants, only two students, both within PHIR, one black and one ethnic minority, had undertaken an Ambassador Role. Both said it was a positive experience as they were able inform potential black and ethnic minority students with insightful perspectives of being a black or ethnic minority student at Loughborough:

“...when I was an ambassador for the SS kind of open day I had like two or three parents and young people come up to me and be like, there is not much diversity here like, how would I cope” (*Female, PHIR, Final Year, EM*)

“... to have somebody that is from London and ethnic minority as a student ambassador because they (potential black students) always ask me about the different questions, are there any other like... how is like the black/white ratio? You know like, erm, do you have a lot of like, black lectures, like, how has it been coming from London and coming to Loughborough and stuff like that, so it is quite... I think it is quite reassuring...” (*Female, PHIR, Second Year, Black*).

In contrast, other focus group participants had not participated in Ambassador Roles due to time constraints. Moreover, most participants stated that they did not know how to get one as they were unaware of the opportunity, of which one student highlighted that

“I haven’t really seen any applications for Geography” (*Female, GY, Second Year, Black*).

Moreover, within the two black SSci focus groups, participants in one group were aware of the opportunities while participants in the other (the pilot group) were not. Lack of awareness was also cited by participants in other focus groups. This indicates that there are shortcomings in how information regarding ambassador role opportunities is communicated to students, and that efforts should be made to examine how, where and when information about these student roles are disseminated to ensure all those who would be interested in participating are able to express an interest.

Support Services

Across all focus groups, it was agreed that the support services at Loughborough were of high quality, with positive comments imparted. The Pilkington Library was praised for its services, although most students did not necessarily use those services. Black students within PHIR suggested that although Pilkington is open until 2am, they would prefer if the service was 24/7 as having a 2am closing time is limiting to students. White students on the other hand, suggested having more study spaces around campus as the library is often overpacked with students.

The Careers Network team were praised for their professionalism and helpfulness, but some issues were raised. The most dominant concern across all focus groups regarded appointment accessibility. Most students voiced that although Careers offered drop-in sessions, appointments were limited yet highly sought after particularly in November/December, which meant applying for placements was more difficult. Moreover, Black students expressed apprehensiveness towards using the Careers service and approaching the Careers team for advice. This apprehension was due to a perception that a lack of diversity among staff negatively impacts on the ability of Black students to receive adequate guidance on career paths and opportunities for BAME applicants. For one student in SSci2, who wanted to apply for a competitive programme tailored specifically to BAME

students, these concerns came to the fore when they managed to get an appointment with the Careers team:

“I wanted someone that wanted to help me with my application whole heartedly and I could see that when she was reading it she didn’t want to help” (Female, SSci2, Second Year, Black).

The student perceived this lack of interest and attentiveness from the Careers advisor as having almost jeopardized her chances of securing a place on the programme, and these experiences are in turn communicated to other students thus reinforcing negative perceptions about the Careers Team and compounding the apprehension about using the service. Another Black student in PHIR discussed how an LU careers advisor had said that, while they tried to relate to black and ethnic minority students, the lack of diversity of staff meant that they could understand why BAME students

“wouldn’t feel comfortable coming to the careers network to ask for help” (Female, PHIR, Second Year, Black).

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Experiences outside the Classroom (Academic)

Placements

While students believed they had ample support from various University sources to secure a work placement, students within the Ethnic Minority focus groups feared they had additional issues when applying for work-based placements. In regard to work experience, Ethnic Minority students faced issues regarding Visa requirements and eligibility to work in the UK, as well as inadvertent discrimination by potential employers due to not having an English sounding name or wearing religious clothing. Some students, especially in Geography and Social Sciences, did not pursue placement opportunities because they felt they did not cater enough to their degree to undertake one.

Recommendations:

- Provide guidance for international students wishing to undertake work placements (e.g., visa issues; eligibility to work) (Action: Career Centre and Placement Director).

- ensure advice and guidance is provided to students who have or may face discrimination by potential work placement employers (Action: Career Centre and Placement Director).
- offer degree-tailored work placement opportunities and/or help students to understand the transferability of the skills gained on their degree program (Action: Career Centre and Placement Director).

Student Representative and Ambassador Roles

In general, Black and Ethnic Minority participants did not apply to be a Programme Representative for their course because of a lack of knowledge as to what the role entails, time constraints with other obligations, little interest in the role, or a belief that they would not gain a single vote. However, one Black participant was successful in her campaign and spoke positively about being a Programme Rep. Participants mentioned that the role of Programme Rep is regarded as beneficial for CV building but does very little to enhance the student's experience. However, the role of Programme President was considered more enjoyable and rewarding.

Out of all the participants only two students, both within PHIR, one Black and one Ethnic Minority, had undertaken an Ambassador Role and spoke of the role giving prospective Black and Ethnic Minority students a sense of diversity existing at Loughborough. Information regarding ambassador role opportunities was not distributed equally to all students as some participants were aware of the role whilst others did not know they could apply.

Recommendations:

- investigate how the process for determining ambassadors is currently set up to ensure that opportunities to take up these roles are open and transparent, and encourage a diverse range of students to take up such roles (Action: head of units; marketing directors, programme directors).
- encourage students from diverse backgrounds to take up roles as student representatives and Programme Presidents (Action: programme directors).

Support Services

Across all the focus groups, it was agreed that the support services at Loughborough are of high quality and they are positively spoken of, e.g., the Pilkington Library. Black students within PHIR suggested that although Pilkington is open until 2am, they would prefer if the service was 24/7. White students advocated having more study spaces around campus as the library is often overpacked with students. Although the Careers Network team were praised for their professionalism and helpfulness, appointment accessibility was an issue raised across all the focus groups. Most students voiced that although the Careers Network Team offered drop-in sessions, appointments themselves are limited particularly in November/December, making applying for placements more difficult. Black students expressed apprehensiveness towards using the Careers team, especially when applying for programmes tailored specifically to BAME students.

Recommendations:

- the Library to be open 24/7 (Action: Library)
- additional study spaces distributed across campus (Action: Facilities Management)
- increased availability of and access to Career Centre appointments, particularly during November and December (when students apply for placements) (Action: Career Centre)
- ensure that Career Centre staff are sensitive to black and ethnic minority student concerns (Action: Career Centre)

5. Findings - Experiences Outside the Classroom (Non-Academic)

Clubs and Societies

Students across all focus groups appeared to be heavily integrated into various clubs and societies ranging from Department Committees, Loughborough Student Union Committees, Athletic Union Sports Clubs and Loughborough University Societies. On the whole, students tended to be vocally positive about the clubs and societies they were part of due to the experience they gained. Most students also expressed that one of the best things about Loughborough was that there was something for everyone, with a vast array of clubs and societies based on faith and religion, sexuality, skills, sports and culture, stressing that “there is a great effort in place to make sure that it is inclusive” (*Female, GY, Final Year, White*).

However, while inclusivity was a key theme raised between all focus groups, the main societies that both Black and Ethnic Minority students joined tended to be ethnically based such as the Brunei Society, the African Caribbean Society (ACS) and the Ghanaian Society. Ethnically-based student clubs are a positive feature of university life and can offer ‘counterspaces’ for coping with racial microaggressions in higher education (Grier-Reed 2010; Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso 2000). The white student participants in our study tended to be part of a wider scope of societies including Debating or Clay Pidgeon Shooting. Ethnic Minority and Black students tended to be positive regarding their involvement of ethnic-based societies such as the Ethnic Minority Network which

“... was... about working with not necessarily ACS but... all of the cultural diverse groups and just making sure that their voice is heard, any issue they were having was dealt with and just encouraging diversity in general...” (*Female, SSci1, Final Year, Black*).

However, one ethnic minority student from PHIR, a British born Chinese, said that a division between international and domestic students may make students feel unwelcome:

“.. in the Chinese society there is international, mainland Chinese people, international Hong Kong people and then there is the British Chinese people and I feel like... I don’t know if it is maybe a difference in cultures or maybe accents, erm, I didn’t feel welcome, so I just stopped showing up and that was the same for all my other British born Chinese people as well” (*Female, PHIR, First Year, EM*).

While students within the Black and Ethnic Minority focus groups tended to agree that, generally, societies are perceived to be welcoming regardless of race, ethnicity or other diversity characteristics, and that the make-up of some societies is a just reflection of the University demographic, this was not necessarily the case for all societies of which some were perceived to make students uncomfortable or unwelcome. Moreover, most non-white students expressed that joining a society outside of their own ethnicity was very difficult. One ethnic minority participant acknowledged how her uncertainty over how she might be perceived by certain societies had prevented her from joining as

“...I also have that thought, what if I go to this place? I won’t fit in... it is just like me blaming myself so that I don’t end up doing these things, there are some regrets...” (*Female, GY, Final Year, EM*).

Black participants expressed that, although there is nothing stopping them from joining societies, they sometimes felt unwelcomed, excluded and uncomfortable as they may be the only Black person in the room, and feel as though they had to ‘represent’ other Black students and ‘act in a certain way’ to fit in. For one student interested in Anime, they discussed how they were greeted with blank stares and

“... just the way they make you feel, especially if you go alone, I like to... I went to these things alone, without a friend, because none of my friends are interested in what I am interested in, so I am just sitting there in the back of the room twiddling my thumbs, going through my phone feeling awkward...” (*Female, PHIR, Second Year, Black*).

Across all focus groups, participants were part of different sport clubs including Rowing, Jujitsu, Netball and Boxing. Sporting clubs appeared to be more inclusive of racially different individuals when discussed, exemplified by one student who stated that within Jujitsu

“there are some measures you can take to incorporate everyone like some women can’t fight men because of their faith so we make sure that they like, in gradings and everything, they just fight women” (*Female, GY, Final Year, White*).

Although some participants highlighted issues with joining different societies, some students had also noted that although they may have been the only ethnic minority student in non-ethnicity-based student societies, this factor did not bother them.

An issue was also raised concerning the allocation of space for different student clubs. A black student mentioned how she struggled to book rooms for Ghanaian Society events. She discussed feeling discriminated against because other societies were perceived as able to book rooms with more ease. She said:

" I am also a part of the Ghana Society and in terms of hosting events we always have issues in terms of securing room bookings and wanting to be in certain locations, and I do feel that sometimes they do discriminate and yes that has been an issue for being black because we wanted to use for example the EHP like the main entrance area but they let the Christian Union use it" (*Female, SSci, Second Year, Black*).

Another black participant (Female, SSci, Third Year, Black) suggested that her society receives less funding than other, comparable societies, and that they have to rely on outside sponsors. It was perceived as unfair that some societies could be allocated very little funding whilst others were allegedly receiving more.

Department Socials

Black student participants within PHIR were positive about Department Socials, describing them as diverse and accepting as

"the socials that we run are like for everyone in the department to actually socialize like there is no underlying tones or anything like that" (*Female, PHIR, Second Year, Black*).

Nevertheless, Department Socials did not appear to be well attended by participants across the other focus groups although this was for various reasons. For White students, most attended socials only within their first year of study. Participants said that their lack of involvement was normally due to time constraints as socials clashed with coursework deadlines and that students had already made friendship groups making them less inclined to go.

In contrast, Ethnic Minority students did not partake in department socials for different reasons. The most dominant viewpoint for not attending socials revolved around alcohol consumption at events, as one participant highlighted that because of their religion they “don’t really go for any socials that involve drinking or anything and then I also am uncomfortable because I am not used to that... because mainly the department socials they do actually just go to clubs and pubs and drink, so I don’t attend those things” (*Female, GY, Final Year, EM*).

This reasoning was also echoed by black student participants within GY. Another reason raised by participants in the ethnic minority SSci focus group somewhat echoed what the White students said, that they

“would rather meet my course friends... and not like go there and meet everybody else from my course who I barely know” (*Female, SSci, Final Year, EM*).

Generally, participants tended to comment on the need for sober departmental social events for inclusivity and meeting people. Moreover, black participants within SSci also suggested that departmental events should not just be recreational, but could be educational also.

Campus Jobs and the Students Union

There was a consensus across all focus groups that opportunities to get involved with and participate in events held within the Students Union were plentiful, whether this was through the Welfare and Diversity Committee, RAG, Action or Student Voice. In most cases, “it is whether or not you can be bothered to go, that stops you. They (SU) put all of these events on, so it is up to you to turn up” (*Male, GY, Final Year, White*).

Similarly, participants across all focus groups also discussed that they were aware of various job opportunities such as Bartending, Security, working in the Union Shops, or other opportunities within departments. For example, within PHIR, one white student discussed the opportunity to look through newspapers from the 1870s for a staff member of which

they were paid well. Most participants suggested that although there were job opportunities available, they tended to be limited in number.

Overall, participants were unable to provide insights on issues of discrimination encountered by students applying for or working in the union. This is because the majority of participants were not currently in employment at the university. International students in the Minority Ethnic focus groups noted that they often did not consider applying for jobs due to uncertainty about the terms of their visa status. One participant from the Geography Black focus group, who was working at the union at the time the project was being conducted did raise concerns about institutional racism, specifically around recruitment.

“I said they had to actually change their recruitment process because I said this is getting ridiculous now because all you had to do before was put in a paragraph of why you want the job and like everyone they hired was white and I said clearly you’re hiring the same type of person if this is all you are looking at, I said you have no system to ensure that there is a diverse workforce, do you know what I mean? *(Female, GY, Final Year, Black)*

Students were confident that the University would not tolerate or allow discrimination to go unchallenged if someone reported the issue, and

“I think the uni would not be allowed to get away with being discriminative like I think it would be like uproar...” *(Female, GY, First Year, EM)*.

Hall Accommodation Experience and Student Mixing

Most participants across the focus groups said that living in hall accommodation was generally an enjoyable experience as they were able to form friendship groups, mix and socialize with others and learn about different cultures. For White students particularly, living in student accommodation was enjoyable as students were able to experience new cultures and cuisines courtesy of international or racially different housemates. In addition, one participant highlighted that they had enjoyed the catered halls experience, as students would eat

“altogether in the dining hall, so like it was really sociable, like everyone knew each other in the hall pretty much, like I would know your face or... maybe not your name but I would know your face, so it was really nice” (*Female, GY, First Year, White*).

On the other hand, one student with a background from the Middle East mentioned that although living in halls was enjoyable, the drinking culture at the University was strange and suggested that other students may feel isolated associated with nights out. This thought was also echoed by participants within the ethnic minority PHIR focus group.

While ethnic minority students tended to speak positively about their halls experiences, responses to student living were somewhat mixed. Although the lack of halal food for students across campus was raised within a focus group, diversity within hall accommodation was a considerable talking point within all focus groups. On the whole, students stated that some accommodation blocks tended to be quite diverse whereas others tended to be homogenous, orchestrated by the University. Some participants within the second SS focus groups stated that they would like to have lived with more ethnic minority students who would potentially be more aware of religious requirements and because they had experienced cultural conflicts primarily with white students. In contrast, another participant spoke highly of their experience in a diverse accommodation block:

“I love how diverse our block is... if anything I feel like it has made it easier to become closer to erm my flat mates because it is just so interesting to talk about different cultures and we have never had a moment where cultures clash...” (*Female, PHIR, First Year, EM*).

Black student participants on the other hand, highlighted more negative aspects to orchestrated student living. Although black participants in the pilot social sciences focus group said that they had enjoyed living off campus in ‘the black hall’, Black participants in the second social sciences focus group expressed their discontent at having to turn the microwave off as

“... it is like when I’m microwaving, he’ll be like oh turn it off, the smell is going all the way through the corridor, or what is that? Oh, why are you eating that?...” (Female, SSci2, Third Year, Black).

Another Black student within GY also highlighted that although they enjoyed living in student accommodation, their hairstyle and food choices were often commented upon which was annoying. Within the Black PHIR focus group further negative experiences were expressed. The first issue revolved around non-black students who tended to say the wrong things, comment upon ethnic minority food choices or failing to try to talk to the black students and thereby making them uncomfortable. These incidents are typical of the microaggressions that Black students face in higher education settings (Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso 2000; Grier-Reed 2010). The second disgruntlement for Black students was that on multiple occasions, the police had been called

“24/7, if the smallest noise we make like they will get the feds around and they will just, it is like a whole thing so any time we want to invite like one-person round, we have to email the warden...” (Female, PHIR, Second Year, Black).

LU statistics show that BAME students are over-represented in disciplinary offences (Equality and Diversity Statistical Report, 2016/17). In light of the concerns raised above, further investigation is needed to examine whether this related to the existence of unconscious bias among those who report and/or respond to complaints..

The topic of student mixing also had differing responses. Ethnic Minority participants said that although they were able to mix with other students, they either preferred to mix with their own ethnic group or found it difficult to interact with others attributed to different nationalities and issues with conversing. Black SS participants highlighted that although it was healthy to mix with students, they often felt that non-black students did not reciprocate efforts in getting to know each other. Moreover, Black students within GY discussed how they would prefer not to go out with non-black students as they found it burdensome, as the black students felt as though they had to change to make non-black students more comfortable. One student said

“... when I am around like my flat-mates for example I have to change who I am most of the time to you know fit... and I don’t want to have to change and laugh at things that I don’t

find funny and them laugh at things that they don't find funny either, I just... the effort is just too much..." (*Female, GY, First Year, Black*).

This was somewhat echoed by students within the Black PHIR focus group who said that they didn't mix with other students. They also highlighted that the Union has 3 nightclubs where students apparently segregate themselves, or that they instead travelled to either Leicester or Nottingham for a better night out. Groping within the Union and the 'lad culture' at Loughborough was also addressed as issues within the black focus group. The existence of a lad culture in British universities that promotes sexist and misogynist behavior has been evidenced by research commissioned by the National Union of Students (Phipps and Young 2012, p. 7). Research within a more local context has also shown the existence of lad culture at Loughborough University (Saddler 2017; Hughes 2017; Stanton 2016).

In our research we also found that the white participants believed that all students were able to mix with a diverse range of students. Moreover, they thought that racially different students tended to segregate themselves:

"not to stereotype, but everyone in the quiet room is Asian" (*Male, GY, Final Year, White*).

Participants suggested that this segregation could be attributed to the assumption that racially similar individuals may "like to stay within themselves" (*Female, SS, Second Year, White*). There were no reflections on the possible unconscious contributions by white students to racial segregation.

Loughborough Market Town

Ethnic Minority students generally perceived Loughborough market town as a positive place, and attributed this to its slow pace, small size and convenience, although one participant said that the town was boring. This sentiment was slightly echoed by white students although this depended on where the student had hailed from. White students from bigger cities such as London stated that Loughborough was quiet and slightly boring, compared to students that had come from smaller towns or villages who preferred Loughborough as a town. There were also differing opinions based on gender for white students when considering Loughborough as a town. Male participants discussed how they

had little trouble in the town whereas females said that although they were comfortable in the town, when night fell they were more conscious of their surroundings and stuck to well-lit areas. Most participants within the white focus groups also believed that the student population has bettered Loughborough as

“I think the uni has brought the town a lot of investment like two cinemas for a small town is just... a complex, I think that wouldn't have been built without students I think” (*Male, PHIR, Second Year, White*).

In contrast, Black participants across all focus groups did not think very highly of Loughborough. Participants relayed that the local community was not very friendly, as

“... you walk past and get shifty looks, you get the odd N-word... I am desensitized to all that sort of thing...” (*Male, SS1, Final Year, Black*).

Black students had thus experienced explicit racism and microaggressions which made them feel marginalized within the town context. Participants also stated that there is a lack of things to do in Loughborough, particularly for Black students who come from more ethnically diverse places. Furthermore, all Black participants demonstrated how Loughborough did not cater for ethnic minorities and needed to make more of an effort as

“... for like a good year, I was going to like Nottingham or Leicester to buy hair products like all of that, I didn't even know there was a shop in Loughborough...” (*Male, PHIR, Second Year, Black*).

On the whole, many students did not perceive the town itself in positive terms, due to its small size, lack of activities for students to do, apart from clubbing or eating, and lack of effort to cater for black and other ethnic minority students.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Experiences Outside the Classroom (Non-Academic)

Clubs and Societies

Students across all focus groups appeared to be heavily integrated into various clubs and societies ranging from Department Committees, Loughborough Student Union Committees, Athletic Union Sports Clubs and Loughborough University Societies. Most students expressed that one of the best things about Loughborough is that there is something for everyone, with a vast array of clubs and societies based on faith and religion, sexuality, skills, sports, and culture. The main societies that both Ethnic Minority and Black students joined tended to be ethnic based such as the Brunei Society, the African Caribbean Society (ACS) and the Ghanaian Society. In contrast, White student participants tended to be part of a wider scope of societies including Debating or Clay Pidgeon Shooting.

Although Ethnic Minority and Black students tend to be positive regarding their involvement of ethnic-based societies such as the Ethnic Minority Network, it was mentioned that a division between international and domestic students makes some Ethnic Minority students feel unwelcomed. Most non-white students expressed that joining a society outside of their own ethnicity was very difficult. Black participants observed that although there is nothing stopping them from joining societies, they sometimes felt unwelcomed, excluded and uncomfortable as they would be the only Black person in the room, and felt as though they had to 'represent' other Black students and 'act in a certain way' to fit in. Some students had also noted that although they may have been the only Ethnic Minority student in non-ethnicity-based student societies, this factor did not bother them.

Recommendations:

- encourage all clubs and societies at LSU to welcome students from diverse backgrounds whilst also supporting ethnically based clubs and societies for students from black and other ethnic minority backgrounds (Action: LSU)
- ensure fair access to spaces, finance and other resources for all student clubs and societies (Action: LSU)
- examine whether and how night club activities at the Student Union might be reinforcing student segregation (Action: LSU)
- offer more high-profile alcohol-free nights out at the Student Union (Action: LSU)

Department Socials

Department Socials did not appear to be well attended by participants across all the focus groups mainly due to time constraints, as socials clashed with coursework deadlines. Moreover, students had already made friendship groups making them less inclined to go. In contrast, Ethnic Minority students did not partake in department socials because of the alcohol consumption at events, which goes against religious beliefs. Participants tended to comment on the need for sober departmental social events for inclusivity and meeting people. Black participants within SSci also suggested that they did not attend social events because in their view events should be educational as well as fun.

Recommendations:

- encourage departments/academic units to organise educational social events for students; social events should not be based around alcohol consumption (Action: head of units; programme directors; programme presidents)

Campus Jobs and the Students Union

There was a consensus across all focus groups that opportunities to get involved and participate with events held within the Students Union were plentiful, whether this was through the Welfare and Diversity Committee, RAG, Action or Student Voice. Participants across all focus groups mentioned that they are aware of various job opportunities such as bartending, security, working in the Union shops, or other opportunities within departments. International students noted while they were aware of these opportunities, uncertainty around their visa status limited their ability to participate in campus labour market. Concerns about institutional racism were raised in a Black focus group by a student working in the Union.

Recommendations:

- ensure all staff with recruitment responsibilities have completed unconscious bias and recruitment and selection training (Action: LSU; LU Equality and Diversity Adviser).

Hall Accommodation Experience and Student Mixing

For White students particularly, living in student accommodation was enjoyable as students were able to experience new cultures and cuisines courtesy of international or racially different flatmates. Some participants within the SSci focus group stated that they would like to have lived with more Ethnic Minority students who would potentially be more aware of religious requirements, because they had experienced cultural conflicts primarily with White students. Black student participants on the other hand, highlighted more negative aspects to student living such as non-Black students saying the wrong things, commenting upon Ethnic Minority food choices, or failing to try to talk to the Black students and thereby making them uncomfortable. Black students found having their hairstyle and food choices commented upon annoying. Black students experienced the police being called on them on multiple occasions while living in rented accommodation.

Recommendations:

- hall wardens and welfare officers to undertake equality and diversity training and disseminate best practice to hall residents (Action: hall wardens; welfare officers; hall reps)

Student Mixing (Outside the Classroom)

Ethnic Minority participants said that although they were able to mix with other students, they either preferred to mix with their own ethnic group or found it difficult to interact with others due to different nationalities and issues with conversing. Groping within the Union and the 'lad culture' at Loughborough was an issue many females experience, especially Black females. Although white students believed that all students are able to mix with a diverse range of students, they also thought that racially different students tended to segregate themselves.

- create awareness of exclusionary aspects of 'drinking culture' and 'lad culture' in halls (Action: hall committees; hall reps)
- improve the provision of halal food (Action: Catering)

Loughborough Market Town

Ethnic Minority students generally perceived Loughborough market town as a positive place, and attributed this to its slow pace, small size and convenience. White students from

bigger cities such as London stated that Loughborough was quiet and slightly boring, compared to students that had come from smaller towns or villages who preferred Loughborough as a town. Male participants discussed how they had little trouble in the town whereas females said that although they were comfortable in the town during the day, when night fell they were more conscious of their surroundings and stuck to well-lit areas.

Black participants across all focus groups did not think very highly of Loughborough. Participants relayed that the local community was not very friendly, and often hear the N-Word used. All Black participants confirmed Loughborough did not cater for Ethnic Minorities in terms of hair care products and food items. Halal meats for Muslim students is also not readily accessible. Many Black students travel to Nottingham or Leicester as they find them more accommodating and culturally diverse. On the whole, many students did not view Loughborough town positively due to its small size, lack of diverse activities for students to partake in other activities than clubbing or eating, and the lack of effort to cater to Ethnic Minority students.

Recommendations:

- student union should assess the products it currently stocks to see if it can better cater for BAME students (Action: LSU)
- increase the university's awareness of BAME students' experiences of discrimination and harassment in Loughborough town (Action: Director of Student Services)
- work with the local council to help foster a safer environment for BAME students in Loughborough Town (Action: Director of Student Services; LSU)
- work with anti-racist organisations in the local community to help offer support and guidance to BAME students and academic staff (Action: Director of Student Services; LU Equality and Diversity Adviser; LSU)

Existing good practice

- the general level of support given by lecturers to students
- GY group assignments in Year 1 supporting student mixing
- GY staff role model for BAME students (Dr Esson)

- Personal tutors are friendly and supportive when students take up the opportunity to meet with them
- Career Centre support
- work placement support
- support services, in particular the Library and the Career Centre, are viewed as helpful and supportive
- variety of opportunities to get involved in student clubs and societies as well as opportunities to work on campus
- availability of mixed hall accommodation (diversity within halls as positive)

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7. Appendix: Focus Group Topic Guide

Experiences in the Classroom and Beyond: The Role of Race and Ethnicity

Main objectives:

- Experiences in the classroom: academic (lectures, seminars, meetings with personal tutor, informal peer support and formal peer-to-peer learning, curriculum content, feedback from teachers, role models among teachers)
- Experiences outside the classroom, academic: take up of placements; take up of student rep and student ambassador roles; library, career centre, administration in departments and school)
- Experiences outside the classroom, non-academic: Student clubs and societies; student socials in department/school, Student Union; campus jobs; student living (halls; other); Loughborough market town)
- What would you change, and why? (e.g., if you can feedback directly to the Dean of our School and to the Vice Chancellor, what would you say?)

Section 1

Introduction: Black and ethnic minority student attainment gap in HE sector and at LU. Issues are context-dependent; important to research experiences at particular universities as these are located in very different places and with different student and degree compositions. Funding from LU to look at experiences of BME students in our School, with aim to identify barriers to achievement and to establish a model of 'best practice' that can be applied in our School and possibly across the university as a whole. Study led by Line, James and Nuzhat. Student researchers are conducting the focus groups.

Aim for today's focus group: to have a discussion, for me to listen to you, for you to feedback your views and experiences. No right or wrong answers; all experiences are important. Please take turns when speaking, to facilitate the recording and transcription.

Section 2

Opening probes:

Can you tell me about your experiences of being [white] or [black] or [other ethnic minority] student at Loughborough?

Was coming to LU the right decision for you? Why/why not?

Section 3

Experiences in the classroom (academic)

Do you feel that students mix freely in diverse groups in the classroom?

Do you have informal support from your peers?

Have you taken up the offer of formal peer-to-peer learning?

Do you take advantage of offers of individual appointments with your personal tutor? How have you experienced such meetings?

In your experience, is there suitable coverage in the curriculum of issues related to race and ethnicity? And to gender and other forms of diversity as well?

Do you feel you have been made aware of academic work from a diverse range of scholars in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, and other forms of diversity?

Do you feel you are treated equally and fairly by staff in the department/school (in terms of the feedback you receive? In terms of marking?)

In your experience, would you say there is any student- on-student discrimination in the department/school on grounds of race and ethnicity, and/or other diversity characteristics?

Section 4

Experiences outside the classroom (academic):

Are you taking advantage of any work placement or professional work experience opportunities during your studies here? If not, why? [challenges, barriers?]

If you have taken a placement/professional work experience, what was your experience?

What initiatives or activities would encourage or support you to uptake a placement year or professional work experience? What about support before and during your placement, if you have already had one?

Have you taken the opportunity to be a student rep for your course?

Have you taken the opportunity to be a student ambassador for your course?

Do you have any comments on support services such as the university library, the career centre, or the admin in our department/school?

Section 5

Experiences outside the classroom (non-academic):

Do you participate in any student clubs or societies? Which ones?

Do you feel that students are welcomed and included in student societies regardless of race and ethnicity and other diversity characteristics?

Have you participated in any student socials in the department?

Do you feel that you have the opportunity to participate in the Student Union, should you wish to?

Do you feel that you have the opportunity to take on paid jobs on campus, should you wish to?

Do you feel that students are treated equally and fairly in employment opportunities on campus? (e.g., the Union, campus living)

What has been your experience of student living and accommodation here at LU?

Do you feel you have been able to mix with a diverse range of students during your leisure time here at LU?

How have you experienced Loughborough as a town?

Section 6

Ending:

Do you feel that the university offers any role models for you as an individual? If so, who? If not, why?

Is there anything else you would like to say about the issues we have been discussing today?

Thank you for your participation.

Let me know if you would like to have a copy of our report next year; if so, please send me your non-university e-mail address.