

Focus group transcripts collated

Learning experiences of BAME Students at a Post-92 university

### **Focus group 1**

Researcher: So right, we'll just jump into it. The first question that I'd like you to answer is what has your experience of studying in high education being like, and how has it different from your expectations?

Benjamin: Um... So at Brookes, It's been really good so far and in terms of being a BAME student, I haven't... I haven't experienced anything from Brookes that would make me think, oh, there's, there's, there's a negative to being a BAME student here for me personally. So... To be honest, I would say my experience personally has been good and in higher education, I guess, therefore, and it's been it's been generally positive. I suppose... reading about and hearing about other people's experiences is the only thing that makes me sort of slightly wary occasionally. But then... I have to say, being Mixed Race I'm sort of in between two worlds, almost. Um, so... Yeah, it's an interesting dynamic, but so far it's been positive.

Researcher: Okay. Um, so, even things like your academic experience. Would you say that that's been positive? And it's met your expectations?

Benjamin: Yeah, definitely. Yeah

Researcher: So around kind of lectures, seminars, assessments, all of those have been fine?

Benjamin: Um, yeah, I found assessments to be absolutely fine. Yeah, the only issues with those have been sort of coronavirus related. Yeah, as a BAME student, I found myself on a completely equal footing with everyone else, especially with sort of online and anonymous assessment because we're all just essentially a number really at that point.

Researcher: Right. Okay. What about your experiences with the widest student experience? So kind of around your friends or any student societies, volunteering that sorts of thing. How would you describe that?

Benjamin: Again, really positive and certainly at Brookes and I think and being in Oxford helps. It's a really multicultural place. So people are used to being around people have lots of different ethnicities and... So most of my friends are white and of course there are the... slight slip ups here and there. People say thing is they didn't quite mean or don't quite understand and... but to be honest... I suppose I'm just used to it. You just take it on the chin don't you? And try not to be offended, certainly by when it's your friend and they're not, they're really not trying to be offensive in any way and... to be honest I found from the whole student population at Brookes that most people are very accepting and certainly biomed which is quite a diverse course already. So yeah, I think generally... generally positive, to be honest.

Researcher: So to what extent, then do you feel like you belong in Oxford Brookes University.

Benjamin: To what extent.... I definitely feel very much like I belong here. And as I said, you know, there are lots and lots of ethnicities represented here and I think generally the student population does a really good job of being inclusive. Actually, that's to an extent... but the uni, I would say, I haven't found discrimination from the Uni. At all. Certainly not yet.

Researcher: Yeah. So you mentioned just now that to an extent the uni population is accepted. Can you tell me why you kind of... clarify that statement?

Benjamin: I... I suppose.... At Brookes there are obviously there are lots and lots of privately educated students and I'm included in that. So I can't stereotype but... certainly there are lots and lots of... How, how would you describe it. There are prejudices everywhere and... and as I said in Oxford, most of those aren't racial, but among the student population at Brookes, there is... there can be. Occasionally, a bit of a bit of a negative vibe almost towards people that aren't from the white sort of upper middle class. And I've only I've only found that very occasionally, but it does exist somewhere within the student population of Brookes, you know,

Researcher: So can you, if you feel comfortable with this, could you kind of give me some examples of what you mean by a negative vibe. What sorts of things?

Benjamin: So, um, let's take an example from last year and just arriving at a party with some friends and all of whom last year, they were all white males who were, you know, well-educated and we turn up at this party and it's just a lot more white males and a few females as well. That that are all you know relatively posh or you know, from I'd say probably middle class, upper middle class and... Yeah, it just didn't. I didn't feel quite comfortable in that particular situation. You know, there are a few looks here and there, few comments here and there that are just not even necessarily directed at myself. Um, but just it starts to make you feel uncomfortable, you start hearing things that you think.... I don't really like that. and yeah, it's just that kind of thing and that that's a bit of an extreme example that party in particular. But, you know, you can find yourself in situations like that quite easily.

Researcher: Okay.

Benjamin: Especially among students

Researcher: Okay. All right. Thank you. Um, so what would you say are your reasons for attending high education and also what are your future expectations?

Benjamin: So my reasons are mixed and first of all it's obviously for myself to get a degree and to be able to move on to something else and then also, my family. Really, really want for myself and my siblings to go to uni and to have a degree and it's just valued, especially on my Indian side... And what am I hoping to get from, so... I'm hoping to apply to graduate med school next summer and maybe I'll move on to med school and hopefully become a doctor of some sort. I'm not sure what yet.

Researcher: Come. Thank you. So let's move on now to what do you think has helped you to be successful academically?

Benjamin: Um, again, various things. Last year, probably and being around people that I saw working really hard, peers on my course, and I'm where you know I'm doing something that I really enjoy. Which, to be honest, moving from Sixth Form to university was a big change in my mindset and I found myself really enjoying the work and therefore wanting to work really hard. And then this year I live with a few people from biomed, from my course and I'm close to lots of people on the course and we all push each other, which is really, really nice, actually. And we're all we all just make sure that we're we're doing well and we help each other out, which I find to be one of the biggest drivers and also, of course, one needs to do well for myself so that I can apply to med school.

Researcher: Right. So you mentioned your relationships with your kind of friends and your peers. What about your relationship with staff. Have you found that they've sort of helped or hindered your success academically?

Benjamin: Um, I think generally so far, they've been positive. And I found what whenever I needed help. So last year... This time last year, actually, um, to the day. Actually, yeah, to the day I was in hospital with appendicitis, and had my appendix removed and emergency surgery over at the jail and, of course, that really massively affected the end of my first semester and I found the staff and the module leaders and everyone at the uni, to be honest to be really helpful and I... Yeah, I can't think of a single person that didn't really step up for me then, and which was really nice. This year we've got slightly different teaching staff and again, really helpful. Occasionally there's miscommunication here and there, but I've certainly never found any kind of discrimination. Yeah, so I think generally it's been really positive.

Researcher: You mentioned that the staff was very helpful when you had your appendicitis, or your appendix removed. Can you give me some examples of how they supported you?

Benjamin: Um, yeah. So obviously I was at home recovering and I needed some extensions on everything and I needed help with the labs that I had missed and stuff like that. So, for example, the bio chem module leader at the time was really helpful in making sure I had everything I needed to finish all of my work for the semester so that I was ready, and then pushing back all of my exams until after Christmas. I mean, all my modules, to make sure that I had plenty of time to recover and then revise and then sit my exams, which was really, really nice, actually. It's really helpful.

Researcher: Cool. Yeah, anything else to say about your initiative, the staff and how they support you.

Benjamin: No, I think, I think that's it. Apart from just, you know, to name individuals that I feel are really good.

Researcher: You have to worry about that. Yeah.

Benjamin: Yeah. OK.

Researcher: Cool, right. Um... Well, what about the the curriculum. Do you think... Kind of... can you comment on the curriculum content or the methods of teaching or the use of learning technologies, if they've either helped or hindered your academic success.

Benjamin: Um, I think in terms of the curriculum, I have been really enjoying it so far. I think, of course, with coronavirus... all of the change to online learning was a little bit strange at first. But we very quickly got used to it. I think... it makes it makes it easier for everyone to be involved at their own pace. Which is good, that's positive but it does make it more difficult to engage fully with all the learning because you're not there in person. So, so far, I found the curriculum to be really good. The teaching methods varies between all of the lectures and modules. But so far, they've generally been pretty good to be honest.

Researcher: That's good. Um, what about can you comment that before coronavirus what your experience of the curriculum and teaching methods were?

Benjamin: Um, yeah. Again, positive. I found in my first year, before coronavirus, the modules that we were that we were learning were actually what made me want to do medicine and made me want to push myself harder in those areas because I really enjoyed them. So yeah.

Researcher: Um, any comments on your understanding of assignment briefs and meeting the requirements expected of your lecturers, things like that?

Benjamin: Um, yeah. Occasionally, it's difficult to put everything together in one place, because there's, you know, there's a module handbook and then there's a different handbook. And then there are different things that we have to do each week. And occasionally, and it will be useful to have everything in one place. A bit more cohesion across the modules. But then again, the staff are certainly helpful and all you need to do is send them an email. Which is, yeah, it's good.

Researcher: This was kind of both before and after coronavirus?

Benjamin: Yeah yeah yeah it's the same for both.

Researcher: Um, any comments on what you think might have hindered your academic success or limited it in any way?

Benjamin: Well, there are, of course, two very obvious ones, the first being appendicitis and the second being coronavirus!

Researcher: Medical issues. Yeah.

Benjamin: I think in terms of being a BAME student at Brookes, I haven't felt discriminated against in terms of the university and... Or at least, not that I've noticed, which has been refreshing to be honest. So, yeah, apart from medical things. And yeah, the occasional miscommunication over you know when an assignments due or something like that. I haven't found much hindrance... and of course the move to online learning is just jumping, isn't it. But no, I found it generally to be quite a positive learning experience for myself. Of course, that's not the same for everyone, but I found that for myself.

Researcher: Right, you mentioned that kind of not facing any sort of... I suppose... ethnic different differential treatment based on your ethnicity to be refreshing. Can you say why that was refreshing?

Benjamin: Yeah, so, um, as I said earlier, Oxford is just quite a multicultural place and coming from Worcester, and over in the West Midlands, which is not really... you can often find that there's a racial bias in most situations and often it's very, very subconscious and you would really have to be looking for it. But it's still there. And whereas here at Brookes, I found generally that there isn't there isn't really much of a bias and but then again that's towards myself and I am, as I said earlier, mixed race. So, I kind of sit on the fence between both really... and I can certainly see why, for some people, they might be getting a different experience because of being part of a minority ethnic group or having a different student life, which then affects your academic work. But as I said, I haven't really had that for myself. Which has been good.

Researcher: Right. Well, yeah. So when you when you read about or you hear about other students; experiences as BAME students, do you think... Or rather, based on what you've read and heard, why do you think BAME students tend to do less well in university?

Benjamin: Good question. I think, as I mentioned before, the crossover from your personal student life into your academic work is massive, especially when you're living in a house with your friends who might be on the same course as you, which is the case for myself. I think if you're experiencing any negative... negative things outside of your university work, outside of your academic work, then it's impossible to say that that won't crossover and that you won't be affected. Certainly if I've had any negative racial experiences, it affects you deeply, as I'm sure you know. That can affect every

part of your life, not just your academic world. So I think being a student and especially in an already stressful time, if you have the added pressure of being discriminated against, that will almost definitely have a massive effects on your word and your ability to see yourself as the best you can be. Because if you're being discriminated against and you don't see yourself as the best, therefore, that doesn't come across in your work, um, yeah. I do think it's a massive crossover.

Researcher: Who would you say is the source of this discrimination?

Benjamin: At Brookes, or in general?

Researcher: Let's do Brookes and then general.

Benjamin: Brookes, I think... To be honest, I would have to say it would be students and not staff. As I described earlier, you know, there is a bit of a culture, if you go and find it, of discrimination amongst the students but amongst the staff, I found all of them so far to be really helpful and really accepting which is which is, you know, really positive. Generally, of course, it's among, it can be among anyone really and people you don't expect it from, people you do expect it from. You know, in my own life it's come from strangers in the streets, but also my best friends. So yeah, it can be really unexpected sometimes or it can be expected in places where sadly, you know that racial discrimination exists, and you might if you're... if you're unlucky become the subject of it.

Researcher: Right. Thank you. Okay. We'll move on now to the next bit. So, what... which is on your kind of ideas about how to address and reduce your team and gab. So the first question is, what could the university do to reduce or remove the attainment gap?

Benjamin: So... I think... So at the moment, we have this online learning system, which, as I said, kind of just the reduces everyone to just a number. And I think having that that kind of equality across the board, even without online learning, would be... would be the first step. Yeah. I think as I said at Brookes. I haven't really found much. Well, any discrimination from the staff from the University. But of course it does exist. And I think the first big step would be to somehow view every single student as exactly the same, coming from exactly the same starting points, you know? Which of course we don't, we're all completely different. But if in person, we were all to be seen as the same... so I suppose it's just... equality, really, um, which is obviously is easy to say. But yeah, I think that would be at Brookes, the first thing for me.

Researcher: I'm thinking it's quite interesting that you mentioned that, because from what you've said previously, there seems to be more focus on, I suppose, differential treatment from students and staff. So it's quite interesting to me that your first suggestion is for staff basically to treat students, the same?

Benjamin: Hmm.

Researcher: Do you want to comment on that or...

Benjamin: Um... I think probably the reason I say that is because, um... Well, I suppose it's not really from personal experience, but it's taking my course as an example. There are lots of BAME students, but you know, it's predominantly white students and I suppose... I suppose, being a white student, you get the treatment of... You're just, you know, the normal white student, whereas I think being a BAME student, and this isn't necessarily a negative thing actually, but you can get the sort of, you're a BAME student, how should I treat you differently treatment. Which, again, isn't necessarily negative, but you do see it. And I suppose that takes away from the equality that I mentioned earlier of everyone being exactly the same. I think. Yeah.

Researcher: What do you mean exactly when you say a staff treats a BAME student differently from how they might treat a white student?

Benjamin: So... Let's take myself, for example. I again positively might see myself as different to the majority of the class and therefore the staff might see myself might see me as different and majority of the class, and might want to give me the benefit of the doubt. Occasionally, or, you know, might not want to argue with me, even if it that's constructive arguments. Not necessarily out of fear, but out of wanting to be inclusive, I think. And again, it takes lots of different forms. Yeah, it can be positive or can occasionally be negative, but I haven't really seen it for myself.

Researcher: Right, right. Okay, thank you for your comments, anything else you think the university could do to remove or reduce the team again.

Benjamin: Let me think... hmm... Not that I can think of immediately.

Researcher: Sort of directions so directions actions directed at students

Benjamin: Such as?

Researcher: Don't know, like... any sort of, I don't know, because the thing you mentioned just now was an action directed at staff, but do you think the university, could you know do targeted student things?

Benjamin: I think... so at Brookes we have lots of societies and we have quite a few BAME societies which is a really great thing, but we have so many different groups of students and I know this isn't necessarily the university's responsibility, it's the unions, but I think integration of all the different student groups which students form as students independently of the university, I think direction from the university to bring a bit of cohesion to all of our different groups... Events inviting two completely different groups as an extreme example. Or let's say an academic event inviting you know two courses both known to have predominantly white or predominantly BAME students, you know? I think, yeah, from the university's point of view, directed at students it would, it would need to be quite a directed thing in a because as students we kind of pick and choose, like to pick and choose who we hang out with, um, so I think it's difficult. It's difficult to influence students to be more inclusive really.

Researcher: Right, right. But going back to the idea that, why would you think that's important?

Benjamin: Um... that is a good question. Certainly for the sake of racial equality, it's massively important that everyone has an equal opportunity completely unbiased and completely unrelated to their race or their ethnic backgrounds. I think that's important, not just for the university but on a much wider scale as well. So that as a country, and as a society in general, we're more inclusive. But yeah, on a university level I think having more representatives of BAME students doing different things across the university is really important. And I think Brookes is quite good at that, at the moment. We have lots of students, lots of foreign students and lots of BAME staff. I know BAME students and staff are well represented across the university. Um, but that doesn't mean that there can't be more representation.

Researcher: So, so when you when you said doing different things. I mean, just kind of being, I suppose, represented in the university in various positions various things that they're doing. OK, I see Yeah. Okay. Okay. Why do you think representation's important then?

Benjamin: Um... I think because it forces people... certainly people with a racial bias to notice that BAME students or staff can be and will be equal to themselves, you know. I think... of course, that's the biggest part of the racial movement, the racial equality movement, sorry, is that people of BAME backgrounds can and will be equally successful to their white peers.

Researcher: Right. Thank you. Anything else that you think the university could do to reduce or remove the attainment gap?

Benjamin: Not that I can think of.

Researcher: Right. Okay. Wow. Maybe anything around the curriculum or teaching methods, things like that. Don't worry if not just, just checking to see

Benjamin: Racking my brain... well I suppose the only thing that I can think of immediately and that will of course be beneficial to the university would be equality and diversity training, which I'm sure they already do to be honest. But... yeah in various part time jobs that I have had in the past or... my Mum is the head of the senior school so she runs all the training... And yeah, it's, it's actually really useful and really beneficial just for awareness sake. And I suppose awareness would be the other thing, to make staff aware of bias and unbiased discrimination that goes on and just so that it's in the conscious mind, you know, so that staff and lectures can be actively thinking about how they might not discriminate, you know?

Researcher: Cool, thank you. Okay, let's move on. Then there is now going to be a quick ranking activity. So what I'll do is I'll send you is going to be a list of kind of interventions that other universities have done to try and trust your team and gap. I'll send it to you on the chat and I'll also share my screen in a moment. And so what I'd like you to do is to have a look at this list and pick out so your top five that you think would be the most important for Brookes to implement and then I'll give you a couple of minutes to do that. And then we can come back and discuss your reasons for selecting this top five.

Benjamin: Is my wifi working alright by the way?

Researcher: Yeah yeah, smooth. Thank you. Let me know if you have any questions on what any of these mean

Benjamin: I've chosen five from the list. Number three, academic writing support, which is not something I personally struggle with. But I know for a fact that some BAME students do and of course that's, I mean, that's obvious. And I think that... well, I'm not aware of much in-depth academic writing support Brookes. But then, I've never really had to use it. So... I'm sure it does exist, but I think it would be useful to have that kind of support on a day to day level for students that know that they struggle or that are learning, you know, to be... learning to be better at the English language and which is quite a fundamental thing really, certainly for a science degree. We have to be quite concise.

I've also chosen number six, anonymous marking, which now that we're online is mostly anonymous anyway. And most of our assignment submissions are anonymous and the same for exams, but occasionally we have a piece of work that's not anonymous. For example, in our labs when we go in and our books are marked down then... I think, although those kind of situations are kind of unavoidable, anonymous marking is really important. Not just to reduce racial bias, but for everyone, really, it's beneficial.

What else have I chosen... Number 10 - monitoring student attendance and performance. At Brookes especially, it's quite easy to not attend. On our course, we're not generally registered and I think certainly for... For example, a student that might be struggling in other aspects of their life. They might be suffering from discrimination or they might just not be used to the idea of attending lectures off your own back something that you have to do yourself. You have to get yourself out of bed and go and for example, if a BAME student is the first in their family to go to university and one of these (which I didn't choose) is the explanation and value of a good degree, that might not be a part of their culture and therefore, Number 10, monitoring student attendance and performance, I think is really important. Just so that support is then available to people that might be struggling. I know that on my course it's not really monitored. All you have to do really is submit your work on time and that's about it, which is nice if you're used to doing the work, you know, um, but again it's understanding. So yeah, I think 13 also as a good one. Understanding the value but have a good degree and therefore the autonomous worker comes with it.

And what else have I chosen... 14 staff training about bias, bias and discrimination, which I mentioned earlier. It's just a really obvious and proven to be a good way of reducing those things, bias and discrimination and it's a relatively easy thing to do. There are so many, as I'm sure you know, so many courses and training.

And the final one that I've chosen from the list is number 18 which is financial support and which, again, take a student, for example, that might not have come from a family or a culture where going to university is particularly important and therefore they might not have the financial support of their families which is what the student loan system is based on, is the support your family. So if you don't have that which lots of people surprisingly, lots of people don't. And, and I would say that's mostly among BAME students. So although that's just an assumption. I'm not actually of the figures. Um, but yeah, I think financial support, or at least the ability, the knowledge that financial support is there. Because let's say now take coronavirus, for example, and so many BAME students are far less likely to come to university purely for financial reasons because of the pandemic and so I think, yeah, providing financial support is really, really important thing.

Researcher: Cool, thank you very thorough explanations. I have no further questions. Um, so yeah. That was the last bit. Before we end, I suppose. Other any comments you'd like to make about the attainment gap or experience of university, things like that?

Benjamin: I think for myself, as I've said, I haven't really suffered any discrimination from the university that I'm aware of. But as I've also said, I know exists, which is why it was really important for me to get involved and I'm really glad, actually, that, that, that this has been done and that you guys are doing the work you're doing. Because especially at the moment. It's really important. And it's really relevant. And I think it's really, it's a really positive sign that Brookes are taking steps and are allowing this kind of work to go on. I think those things that we've mentioned just on from that list just there, they're really important and all those something might be quite big things, for the sake of moving forward for Brookes specifically, from my experience of Brookes, at least those things are really important. And I think reducing the attainment gap definitely can be done because, again at Brookes, I don't really find that much racial discrimination. Um, I think the achievement gap is therefore... within reach, you know, closing the gap.

Researcher: Right. Yes. Cool. Thank you. Okay. Well, I think we can end here.

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## Focus group 2

Researcher: So if there are no questions, we can move on to the first section, and I have a question for you now, and that is: What has your experience of studying in higher education been like and how has it differed from your expectations?

Syd: Well, for me, it's probably like doing your own, like, reading outside of the lesson, because it's not like A-level, because it's like a big jump and then you've got to have ownership of your own work.

Researcher: Prior to coming to higher education, were you not expecting to have to do this sort of self-directed work then?

Syd: Well, I was expecting it, but I wasn't expecting such a big gap.

Researcher: Maybe, can you tell me a little bit more about some of the difficulties you have faced in making this jump?

Syd: More... the reading because I'm not a really good reader and, like, there's quite a lot of content to read, like, it's not just one page of like reading, it's like a whole chapter and then it's due by the next lesson we have, so that's quite... Like, a lot to be doing and you've also got other modules as well.

Researcher: Hmm. So, you saying it's quite, it's quite a heavy workload, more than you were expecting? Right. And Ophelia, any sort of comments about what Syd has mentioned?

ophelia: Mmm.... I feel the same, but mine was... how in A-levels, in school, there was a lot of teachers, they would... they would know you personally a lot more, because it's such a small class and.... When you're at university, it's like very independent and you don't have [unclear] if you have any questions, they can't come to you and they like, they... they don't know you like teachers at school would do, it's a lot of very independent work and you have to make sure you're doing your own work in your own time, teachers won't chase you and stuff like that.

Researcher: So, have you found this to be challenging about higher education?

ophelia: Kind of, because like if I want to, like... if I'm not sure on something, you can usually, in school you can just put your hand up and ask the teacher, they're there and they'll answer it, but in university, it's impossible asking questions in such big lecture groups or classes. Like, I'm a bit shy, so then I have to email them and have to wait for like a response or booking like the office hours and then they have certain days so you have to wait until a certain day. Stuff like that, yeah.

Researcher: Right. So, with the support, I suppose, that you receive from your lecturers and things do you find that that's quite difficult to get?

ophelia: I don't know if it's difficult to get, it's just different from school as in you have to wait for a time and you have to like wait for the response, and then say I have an assignment due and I'm really confused in the last minute or something and then I have to email them and obviously wait for an email. I know that lecturers have their own lives they have to obviously do, their own families and they have other modules and stuff and they have loads of emails to get through.... So... Yeah.

Researcher: Right and how, how have you found that this... how has this affected your, I suppose, ability to study?

ophelia: It's just if I don't get a response from my lecturers quickly, promptly, I'll ask my course like mates, my friends that do the same course, like guys do you, can you guys help me and then they're like, oh we don't know either, we're kind of confused too. So, then I'm like, it's OK, I'll wait for my email and then once the email comes in I'll let you guys know what they said, so... yeah.

Researcher: Right. Syd, do you have similar experiences?

Syd: Yeah. With like emailing like lecturers, it is quite time consuming and then, yeah, they do have a lot more to deal with, like they teach different years like first year, second year, third, they have loads of people to teach so it's not always that you're going to get a quick response from them like you do at school and college and all that.

Researcher: And how would you say this has impacted your studies, if it has had an impact, that is?

Syd: I guess sometimes you don't really want to speak up in the actual lecture because... in case people think you're a little bit stupid or dumb or something.

Researcher: And do you find that when you were in secondary school doing A-levels there wasn't the sense of being afraid to speak up.

Syd: No, not really.

Researcher: But what do you think it is about higher education that makes you have this, sort of, you know, fear or anxiety?

Syd: I guess there are loads of people from different backgrounds and like different places and you... you're not really comfortable with them yet. Because with school and college, like, you've known those people for so and so years, and, like, some of them have the same problems as you. Like, in the lessons... what they don't get and stuff in lectures you don't really talk to people as much, and like you can't really communicate if you didn't get it or not, because nobody really wants to say anything.

Researcher: Right okay and Ophelia, do you have the same feeling with your cohort?

Ophelia: Yeah, because obviously in school, we narrowed down for so many years and you're just comfortable, you know each other, you see each other every day, you know them personally, like, you've grown up with them, but then university, you go and there's like 100, 100 people in like one lecture and... you don't really know anyone except one person you might have made friends with on the course and you just, you always sit with them throughout the whole semester, like the whole time you're at university, and then... putting your hand up and asking something and everyone just staring and looking at you, it's just not comfortable.

Researcher: Right okay. I suppose that besides... Well, you mentioned a bit about your academic experience and also your engagement with the widest student experience so around the other people in your cohort. Maybe you could talk a little bit about the experiences of receiving support maybe, if... from any of the student support services?

Syd: Erm... I've talked to like my academic advisor a lot, because I talk to her weekly, so I think that's kind of helped a little bit like with what I don't understand and then I tell her the problem then she probably like kind of encourages me to probably book one to ones with some lecturers and like email them if I don't really want to say in a lecture, so that kind of helps.

Researcher: That's good yeah. What... I suppose, what effect does the support from your academic advisor do you think have on your ability to engage with your studies?

Syd: I guess if I didn't have one I wouldn't really be talking to... like communicating with lecturers on what support that I need like if I need help if I need like... like to understand the question and such.

Researcher: Okay, thank you and Ophelia any experiences with getting support from other alternative routes in the university?

Ophelia: I talked to my academic advisor like three times the whole time I've been at university and... so... Like, I feel if I don't understand something, or if I need help, I'd rather go see my coursemates, because they're my friends. So, we have a group chat, and I'd rather go there and someone in the group chat will have an answer to what I'm asking. [Unclear] I'll message the module leader or the seminar or my academic advisor, but that's very very rarely, because I'd rather go to my peers. [Unclear] my seminar leaders or my academic advisors, but if it's something like vague or about teaching or something [unclear]

Researcher: Right, OK. So how would you characterise your overall experience with getting support from academic staff at Brookes?

Ophelia: I mean, yeah, when I do need help, they do help and they are helpful. Yeah.

Researcher: Right, but it can be difficult to make that first step is what you're saying?

Ophelia: Yeah

Researcher: OK. Thank you. Can you, maybe either, if you can describe maybe your wider experiences? So, you've mentioned now sort of your peer group and some of your friends, but can you elaborate a bit more about your experiences with, yeah, the wider sort of social university experience, maybe Syd can go first?

Syd: I don't know if if this counts but I think it's like the wellbeing team. Yeah, because, I think I needed help on like one of... Like, understanding one of the criteria in my assignments. And I didn't get it and I asked my academic advisor she didn't understand either, but when I went into like... When I got in contact with them, because I didn't really know who they were, so I just gave them a go, so they broke apart the assignment and gave me structure and how to lay it out, so that kind of helped.

Researcher: Right. What about well, I suppose my quick, I mean, thank you, that was that was really useful but I'm also wondering about your, I suppose, to do with your friends and like students societies, volunteering, things like that. Those sort of other parts of the non-academic part of the university experience.

Syd: Well, I guess, I haven't had many really because, like, we're in a pandemic now and like its first year for me, so I never really had that going out to meet people in the uni and like... It's always been on online, at home.

Researcher: What do you think has been the effect of this on your studies?

Syd: I guess you don't get to meet people on your course as much and like, communicate with them, like, face to face. Like, I do have group chats with people in the course but it's not really like you've met them and like, you can actually discuss these assignments and stuff.

Researcher: Right. Ophelia, any comments on the wider non-academic aspects of your university experience?

ophelia: I'm a second year, so obviously nothing really much happened but first year it was a bit.. not... like... I'm in societies, but I don't really go to the events, because again the people are like... Not my kind of people. I'm obviously Asian and everyone else is not, they're a bit more... Most of the students I know and I see are from a white or European background, so they have different values and they have different social aspects and different thinking, so... Yeah. I don't really go to societies, because [unclear] I don't feel like it's me. So, I have my friends I made on the course and [unclear] as well. So, if I want to go somewhere, I'll go with them, go out to eat, go somewhere, go to town, but society-wise, I don't speak to anyone from any societies.

Researcher: Right. Has this... Do you think this has impacted your sense of belonging to the university?

ophelia: Kind of. Like there's not many Asian or... They don't really do much for the Asian side of the university and I just feel like... Obviously we are a small ethnic group, it feels like no-one really bothers.

Researcher: Sorry, could you say that last bit again please?

ophelia: So, obviously, Brookes is quite... I've seen there's a lot more white, European students than Asian students, and it's very, very hard to find someone that's not white. I just find the societies and the universities, they don't really do much for ethnic groups.

Researcher: Okay. Has there been an effect of this, then, on, I suppose, your engagement with your studies or not really?

ophelia: Not really, no. Because I have a friendship group and I feel like I'm quite secure and find in them, so it doesn't really affect my studies. But sometimes like, oh, it would be nice if the university would do something for us, something like that, but it is what it is.

Researcher: Right. And Syd, any sort of similar feelings or comment on what Ophelia has said?

Syd: I guess yeah you've got your different groups of friends, like with societies, I know there are some online societies. I haven't really gone on them, but I'm also like Asian as well and, like, there are some things like... I sometimes I don't get the feeling I belong with some people, and I do get the feeling I do belong with some people. I guess at uni you meet different people and you click with them, otherwise with other people you don't feel you click.

Researcher: So, did you find that this has impacted your sense of belonging, with the university?

Syd: Yeah, kind of. A little bit. Because it's not like with college, because at college I could talk to quite a lot of people without feeling nervous or such. Like, I had one face-to-face seminar last semester and I went I went to the seminar, I was just a bit lonely and isolated. I felt, like, anxious when I went into the seminar. Even coming out of it, I didn't feel like I fitted in.

Researcher: Right at how do you think this has impacted your studies, if there has been any impact?

Syd: I guess sometimes I wonder why I'm at university.

Researcher: Can you elaborate on that a bit?

Syd: Like, the first time I went to a seminar, I felt really nervous, and then when I came out, I just felt like I'm not making any friends, I'm going to be really lonely. Like, it's a pandemic now and there's nobody to talk to and nobody to, like, contact and stuff who's in the uni [unclear]. So, it would be

nice to have some people to talk to about the subjects and such. Even if it's not related to uni, just somebody to, like, be there.

Researcher: Okay, thank you, Syd. I suppose that the next question would be for the both of you. What has helped you to be successful academically and what has hindered you? I know we touched a bit about that earlier on, but if you could elaborate on maybe stuff around your relationships with staff or with other students. Maybe Ophelia can go first.

Ophelia: What has...

Researcher: What do you think has helped you to be successful and what has hindered you academically?

ophelia: What has helped me... Myself, I think. Because I don't really like to depend on, like, other people. So, like, again, as I mentioned, I don't really need to ask for help and if I really do have to... But I just think myself, in my mind [unclear] I need to get to uni, I need to graduate, I need to make sure I get good grades because my future depends on it. Like, my family as well, because they're quite educated, my Dad went to university and my brother is currently, so it's like, I need to make sure I'm not a failure. I need to go and be like them, be successful, because I don't want to be [unclear] and I just don't want to bring the family down, their opinion down around me, in myself, because I want to make myself of myself.

Researcher: Mmmhmm.

Ophelia: What hindered me... Erm... Like, I think, like, because of the pandemic, recently, obviously everything's online and you're just in your house all day, 24/7, in one space, and you can't really... Obviously, I have friends in my hometown, but everyone's parents are very worried so you can't really go for walks or something and then it's lockdown so you don't want to go get fined. It gets a bit tiring and it gets kind of... I think everyone [unclear] because we're just inside 24/7 and [unclear] each other, so I just don't want to do my work, or, like, go to the lessons, because I'm just doing online classes and it doesn't feel the same as a classroom where you have a notepad out and you're... You feel like you're being more productive, but at home, I'm just on my bed looking at a screen, nodding my head and that's it. It's just not very motivating. So... I think the pandemic has done that, but everyone's in the same situation, so...

Researcher: What about before the pandemic, then, what do you think hindered your academic success, if there was anything?

ophelia: Erm... before maybe... Like, during... Because we have multiple modules and multiple assignments due around the same time and I have a lot of essay-based assignments to do, so I feel like trying to stay concentrated and get things done, you feel pressured and, like, erm... Like, you want to do well on one, you kind of forget about the other one, and then you're like, oh god, I need to do the reading for this one, I need to do more research, so it's kind of rushing to get everything done. Yeah, I guess.

Researcher: So, it's mostly around workload and sort of habit to juggle this?

Ophelia: Yeah

Researcher: Right. Anything else? Sorry, yeah, go on.

Ophelia: I was going to say, I want to do well. Obviously, if I feel like I'm doing on good on one essay, that's good, and trying to keep the standard throughout the whole, all of the assignments is hard,

because you might just become so hard and exhausted spending ages writing on your laptop and you just want a rest, but you can't because you have to get these done and get a good grade. I don't want to have to resit and have to do all of them again, I want to get good grades the first time around, and that puts a lot of pressure on myself.

Researcher: Mmm. How do you think this pressure that you put yourself impacts your studies?

ophelia: Hum... Breakdowns. Just, I don't want to do it. Sometimes I'm like, OK, if I fail, I fail, it's over, but then I'm like, I can't fail, I can't afford to fail. So I'm like... days when I have really bad... mental health wise. Yeah.

Researcher: OK, thank you Ophelia. And Syd, what about you? What have you found to help you to be successful academically and what has hindered you?

Syd: I guess the things that hinder me now was like, being at home all the time in the same environment. You don't really want to do work sometimes. Like, sometimes I'm sitting down and I open the laptop and it's just a blank, blank vision I get. Like, I don't really want to do it. And then... Sometimes I have a day when I will really want to do it and then just sit on it all day and then realise I haven't done anything else during the day apart from this work. And then it gets really exhausting and it's just a time cycle that keeps repeating, and I'm just thinking, what am I doing? Some days I'm not doing it and some days I am. It just gets clumped. I really want to do well, even in first year, and I kind of have a goal where I want to be. But then this pandemic's kind of hindered that and it's just painful sometimes, thinking about it.

Researcher: Painful how or why?

Syd: Like, mentally. Like, you're thinking, really when you get the degree, but there's another side to it, that you can't always keep doing work, work, work and keep getting tired and exhausted at the end of it, and you kind of get sick of the work when you're always on it. Like, it's in the same environment as well, you're not in a different place. With being at the uni, there are like libraries and stuff, it's like a completely different environment and you can sit there and get on with your work, and then you kind of know when to stop, but at home, it's not really the same thing. Because you're just sitting at home the whole day anyway, so... Don't really have anywhere else to go.

Researcher: Yeah, so that lack of change, environment then?

Syd: Yeah

Researcher: Right, OK. And what about what has helped you to be successful academically? Or, I suppose, has helped you to stay motivated, stay engaged this in this context?

Syd: Erm... I guess looking at different people who, like, I aspire to be. Like, having that goal in my mind and then I kind of think of that and then think differently towards where I want to go and maybe all positively as well. Because sometimes I think, why am I doing this and then I remember somebody else has done what I want to do, so I want to kind of aspire to be like them but not exactly like them. Maybe like a different... I want to get where they are but in my own way.

Researcher: And can you give me some idea of who these people who inspire you all, how, how are you related to them or how sort of... who they are, in relation to you?

Syd: Like... erm... because I study business management and like, I look at like, in this pandemic, there are small businesses who have struggled, and I then I think they're struggling at the moment but they're still making it work, somehow. And like, they're motivating themselves to keep on doing

what they're doing, despite what's happening, they haven't given up, so I shouldn't give up just because it's a pandemic. Because there's going to be obstacles along the way, but there is an end goal which you're going to get to eventually, if you keep persevering and going towards that goal. Yeah, that's where I want to kind of be.

Researcher: Right. And Ophelia, any comments on what sorts of things have motivated you and helped you to stay engaged with your studies?

ophelia: Um... Just like... er... Well, I'm in second year, so I'm like halfway through, nearly done with university, I'm going to graduate soon so there's no point in backing out or dropping out now. Erm... If you've got this far. Also, like... my friends, I guess. Because we're all in the same, everyone's like, some days they don't want to go to university, some days they just don't want to do the work, so we all like know we've got this, we're going to make it. Just having good friends that are going to support each other, I guess. I don't really speak to my parents about any of this or anything because I just don't like speaking to them about stuff that's very personal, I guess. But my friends, yes.

Researcher: Yeah. So, your friends have this sort of motivating effect on you?

Ophelia: Yeah

Researcher: Right coo, thank you. What about in terms of the curriculum content and the methods that you've encountered in teaching, have you found these to be helpful or hindering in any way, maybe Syd can go first this time?

Syd: What do you mean by that?

Researcher: So, I suppose... Have you found the ways that your teachers have been teaching you to be, you know, helpful or beneficial or, in some way restrictive of your learning?

Syd: I guess because first semester there were loads of lectures, you have to watch the lectures and kind of get an idea of what they're talking about, and then kind of apply it to the seminar, but some of the lectures are really long. So, for example, some of the lectures are like 1h30, so then I'm watching it and trying to take notes at the same time, which can be time consuming, kind of, and then I kind of don't understand what they're trying to say in the lecture. So... Because all of them were lectures, really. The way they were kind of teaching us. And some of them were like... I think one of my modules had like a workshop we went to, to kind of help us, like, with skills that we need on a job and like all that, so I think the workshops were more helpful than the actual lectures, because you're doing something with other people. Like, your learning is like, you do something. I think with lectures it's kind of... Not boring, but just draining watching a 1h30 lecture. If it was a 30 minute lecture with like pointers and gaps in between, I think it would be more engaging.

Researcher: Mmm. Right, OK. So slightly, er, I suppose overwhelming lectures or too much information?

Syd: Yeah.

Researcher: To absorb effectively. OK. Anything else about the teaching methods that you've found to be either helpful or hindering to you?

Syd: Erm... I guess some lecturers do have 1-2-1s as well, sessions before assignments and assessments, so that's kind of helpful that they're going direct and explaining it and giving you some reading sources that would help. So, that was helpful to me.

Researcher: Why in particular one on ones, why were they helpful?

Syd: Because, like, they were going through some example assignments, which wasn't related to what we were doing but the topic was kind of the same, so we then had to do our own reading around what we had to research, and then having that information there and like... Having them giving you that reading which would relate to the topic question is really helpful, because it then gives you a structure for how to do it, how to apply it.

Researcher: Right, and was the one on one element particular helpful because it was an opportunity to do this kind of thinking or was there something about the one on one support that was useful?

Syd: I guess the one on one support's helpful because it's just you and the lecturers and they can give you pointers on your work, tell you how to improve and stuff, because at university I've found you don't really get that a lot.

Researcher: That kind of individualised attention, you mean?

Syd: Yeah.

Researcher: OK, thank you. And Ophelia, any comment on what sorts of teaching methods that you've experienced have either helped you or hindered you?

Ophelia: Mmmm... Not really... erm...

Researcher: What have you... I suppose, have you found that you liked about lecturers, say. If you think about a good lecturer that you had, what did you like about this lecturing style or the way the lecture was structured?

ophelia: Erm... I think one of my lecturers right now, he's quite funny and he likes to teach in like a conversational way. So, he likes everyone to talk and everyone to engage, conversation-wise and he was OK with us taking the lead in seminars. And he's not like the normal, he's teaching and we're just listening and we don't get to say what we think. If we have a question, we just ask the question, he's not like that, he makes jokes, makes everyone laugh and he likes to be... He likes to encourage debates among the seminars so if someone has a different idea or something else, he would like them to open a debate on it and other people can input their ideas and stuff, so I feel like it brings everyone out of their shell and support and he, he's like the only lecture/seminars that I actually like. Yeah.

Researcher: And then what about the other ones that you don't like, why don't you like them?

ophelia: They're just like, boring. They just do the... They just speak and we sit there and listen. They don't really having [unclear] They don't have like a... opening presence. I don't know how to say it, I'm just not as comfortable speaking in those seminars, but I am comfortable speaking in the seminar where he's like joking and stuff. Yeah.

Researcher: Can I just ask, why are you not comfortable speaking in the other seminars?

ophelia: Because no-one's speaking, obviously, because the teacher's doing the teaching and everyone's just taking notes and listening, nodding their head, no-one really speaks, so that's why I don't want to be... I don't want to be in the spotlight and asking questions and speaking, because no-one else is doing it. Yeah.

Researcher: Okay, thank you yeah. Right, so I suppose as a sort of final summary question for this section, reflecting on your own experience and that of others that you know, why do you think black and minority ethnic groups do with less well in Oxford Brookes compared to white students? Maybe Syd can go first?



Syd: Erm... I guess, some of us, English isn't our first language and, like, some of us are international students, so I guess it's kind of scary asking at university and trying to get that support, because it's not an easy task to go ask a lecturer about a question that you had in the seminar and stuff, because you're worried other people will, like, judge you and talk about you and such. Because sometimes I get scared to ask, because I'm wondering, does anybody else have the same question or am I just stupid here?

Researcher: Right. Anything else?

Syd: I think that's it.

Researcher: Yeah, so kind of language proficiency and anxieties about speaking up in class?

Syd: Yeah.

Researcher: OK, thank you Syd. And Ophelia, again, I'll just repeat the question so you remember it. Reflecting on your own experience and others you know, why do you think Black and minority ethnic students do less well in Oxford Brookes compared to white students?

ophelia: Again, the whole they don't, something wrong with their English, some people... Some might be like shy to ask questions or to talk to their peers and like the leaders or support [unclear]. They might... I know, like, I think people, they like to be very independent and like do things on their own, because I know I'm like that, and I know other people are like that, as in they don't really like to ask for help because it's not in their nature, they're not comfortable. Also, they want to get things done on their own, because that's the way they've been brought up, they've been in an environment like that. And then again, in Oxford Brookes there's a lot of white students, so they don't feel like they belong, so they might feel excluded a bit, because you look around and you don't really see many people the same as you, all you see is white people. So... Stuff like that, yeah.

Researcher: So do you personally sort of feel the sense of you being a little bit on the outside then, in university, or do you think this is just experience of others?

ophelia: Sometimes you feel like you're on the outside of the university as well. I know like a few international students that come from other, straight from their country to here, and they find it difficult to say or ask different questions, so I feel like for them it's more difficult for me as well, but I understand where they come from as well.

Researcher: Mmm, OK. And besides, I suppose, the sense of alienation slightly, is there any other factor that you think sort of explains why Black and minority ethnic groups do less well?

ophelia: Maybe because a lot... I feel like a lot of ethnic groups, they have other commitments outside of university. Like, work... I know a lot of people have part-time jobs and they do a lot more than 4-8 hours, they do weekdays as well, they take up extra shifts because they need the money and they have family, I know a lot of people have family issues and family commitments they have to do, or like they probably... Some people are like estranged from their families so they don't get support from their families, even though they have to... Like, Student Finance can only do so much, they need to pay for bursaries, they need to pay for the other part of rent on their houses and stuff like that, so like... White... I feel like a lot of the white people at Brookes, a lot of people I know, they have like wealthy families. Yeah, they have quite wealthy families, and not many... Not many white people that I know at uni have part-time jobs. They just get money off their families and that's how they can afford to party every night or go places, go on holiday, like a Christmas holiday somewhere. They can, you know, go away for a weekend with friends, they can go to like London, have expensive

brunch or something, whereas ethnic people can't be doing stuff like that because they don't have, we don't have wealthy families and we need to survive and make money on our own to put basic food on the table. So, yeah.

Researcher: Mmm, thank you. So, we'll move on to the second section and the final section here. And this will be about your ideas about how to address the attainment gap. So, the first question I'd like to ask you is what do you think Oxford Brookes could do to reduce or remove the attainment gap? This is just a free discussion.

ophelia: Like, events, maybe? Like... say Diwali events there, or Eid and maybe... encourage the white students to go to these events so they can mingle and know other people and other cultures. It would make the ethnic people feel quite welcome and stuff and just not, not be closed off about other people's ideas and cultures and their food maybe. They should encourage big events throughout the whole university. And just like... Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, cool. Syd, anything?

Syd: Maybe have like... more, like, societies including ethnic people and like, maybe white people can also, like, join them, like, to discover different cultures, like with the events and stuff. Like... Yeah, just get to know, like, us for like who we are.

Researcher: So basically more opportunities for everyone to sort of mingle and...

Syd: Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, right. Thank you. Anything else from either of you?

Syd: Maybe like with international students and like coming from, maybe have more help and support with, like, English and all that. Because there's a lot of people that struggling. Like, I struggle with reading quite a lot, so... Maybe just give them, like, an opportunity where they can... With the assignments all that, not have them penalise them for getting something wrong in their assignment... I don't know how to explain it, but some people struggle with English, so maybe give them sessions and like... They can, like, kind of like a Blue Card, but like... Not really, like... I don't know.

Researcher: You mean sort of to make some more exemptions, I suppose, for-

Syd: -Yeah

Researcher: Maybe for incorrect English use, is that what you mean?

Syd: Yeah.

Researcher: And you mentioned training and workshops, what do you think they should entail?

Syd: Maybe like the teachers can be like from, kind of like the same background as the student, where they're from and stuff, so then it can be more supportive towards them.

Researcher: In terms of the content being taught, then what do you imagine the sorts of things that would be taught in these sort of training sessions?

Syd: Maybe... Like... Not like writing and like reading, maybe like make it more fun and interactive for them, like more engaging, having games kind of like involved in the sessions?

Researcher: And the goal would be to teach students how to do what exactly?

Syd: How to kind of like... probably like basic reading and writing skills.

Researcher: So academic reading and writing?

Syd: Yeah. But in an interactive way, because, like, some people aren't necessarily, like, going to, like, understand just sitting there and looking at the work. Some people are like visual learners and like integrative learners, have different ways of teaching. Yeah.

Researcher: Mmm. OK. Thank you. And Ophelia, anything else you'd like to add, what could Oxford Brookes do to reduce the attainment gap?

Ophelia: I don't really know what else to add.

Researcher: That's OK, if there's nothing more that's alright. OK, we'll move on next, to the next thing, then we've got another thing left to do and we'll be done. This will be an activity, OK, it will be a ranking activity and so I'm going to give you a list of the interventions that other universities have done to try and reduce the attainment gap. I'd like you to go through the list and pick up the top five that you think are most important from this list and then we can come back together and discuss it. So, I will, I will share my screen in a minute but I'll also put it on the chat. So, here's a list of the interventions and just let me know if you want me to explain any of them, and I'll share it on the screen as well. Let's take maybe about five minutes now just to look through these and think which ones are the top 5 most important to you in terms of helping to reduce the attainment gap.

[Break to review]

Researcher: Wondering. Maybe we can start with Ophelia, which were the top five you identified as being the most important?

Ophelia: Erm... Number 1, 14 and 17... erm... 11 and... I don't know what else to put for the last one, but maybe, erm... erm... What's peer mentoring?

Researcher: Peer mentoring, hang on, I'm just recording, 1, 14... Peer mentoring is like, for example, if like maybe if a first year student is paired with a final year student, the final year student acts as a mentor to-

Ophelia: -Ah!

Researcher: To guide the first year student, that sort of thing.

Ophelia: Then maybe like peer mentoring as well.

Researcher: Could we go through each of those in turn. So, the first one you mentioned was number 1, can you mention why you think this is most important?

Ophelia: When you're starting at university, you don't know anyone there, you're maybe in a new country, a new city, you're going to have to obviously make friends to get around university and you don't want to be lonely, you're still going to want to go out and have friends in general, the support. So, I think support to have a good introduction and activities where everyone can integrate and be open to making friends. Because maybe again, the white students [...] start having to make friends with ethnic people [unclear] a better introduction and stuff would mean everyone's technically the same but a different colour and maybe different cultures, but everyone should be able to like, be friends with everyone [...] having everyone with different friendship groups, you learn more as well. Yeah. Number 1.

Researcher: And the second thing, was it 14 or 17 you said?

Ophelia: So 1, 9, 14, 17 and... [unclear] and then I said 14, 17, and one more...

Researcher: Was it 11?

Ophelia: yeah, 11.

Researcher: Yeah, right. I suppose the next, what was the next most important thing after improving induction to make friends?

Ophelia: The next... 17? Maybe?

Researcher: Can you tell me why you think this was the second or why this was important?

Ophelia: Because obviously when people, like when people go higher education wise and stuff, you like, people have higher qualifications, you'll probably think oh, white people or white men basically, because you see them as CEOs and you see them as hierarchical managers and business owners and stuff like that, and like, when you see lecturers and professors, they usually are white men, so if we had like, Black and minority ethnic teachers and staff, it will show students of colour and white people that ethnic people and Black people can be CEOs, can be that educated, can be wealthy business owners, can be corporate people and it will be like an inspiration, like, I want to be like so-and-so because they can do and I'm similar to them, they have a similar home life, they have similar experience when they were younger, so it's just like motivating for students to be like them as well. Like, you can do it as well, just because you're a different ethnic group or colour, doesn't mean anything. If you can do it, you can do it.

Researcher: Lovely. And the next most important one? What would you say would be? Actually, I suppose it doesn't really matter, don't worry about ranking them. You picked 9 as well, can you say a little about why that was important, peer mentoring.

Ophelia: Like... because I know that Oxford University, they have tutors. Well they have parents, like the students in the third year are the parents of the students in first year.

Researcher: Oh, yeah?

Ophelia: If other universities could adapt that as well, because a first year student coming to university and having no clue what to do with assignments or social life and the third years already have the experience because they've been there, and again if you don't want to ask the lecturers for support, you can go to your peers to ask that was in a similar position, so they can give you their experience and how to do that, because they can relate to you but maybe the professors couldn't relate to you. So, I feel that peer mentoring is important because they know what you're going through and you can ask them questions or be like, informal and more friendly, you can have banter with them as well and feel comfortable.

Researcher: And the next one you mentioned was 11, one to one support, can you say a bit more about why you think that's important?

Ophelia: Erm... I think that's important because maybe students have issues, like mental health wise or health wise in general, as in they probably are dyslexic or are probably colour blind etc., stuff like that, so if they have a lot of one-to-one, one-to-one suppose or even in generally. Normally, if you have anxiety and depress, if you're getting support then you might feel like you... like... er... like you're not being abandoned in university, because it is a very... You do your own work and some people might need a little bit of extra help, like I did, so having a bit of one-to-one support like

weekly or once a fortnight or once a month. Like the nurses or something, it can be helpful, because university is quite like a... it's a bit scary place, an adult world, and a lot of people aren't comfortable in the big world, so it's that part... It would like help you education wise and stuff, yeah.

Researcher: Okay, and then 14, staff training about bias and discrimination, can you explain about why you thought that was important?

ophelia: Um... People might not see bias unless it's [unclear] So... It's like, other students might not be included by someone, in like the group or something, and if they staff were aware of this and they see it, they can probably do a bit more to make sure that other students understand that you should include them or ask for their opinion, always ask for them to join in and speak up. And obviously the staff are the authoritative people there, so the students will listen to the person in charge, so them being able to spot discrimination or people being biased to other people, maybe that [unclear] can help the student feel they belong to the seminar or the class or the university, so they don't feel they're alone and have to figure everything out on their own.

Researcher: Lovely, thank you. Syd, on to you. Could you tell me about what you thought were the most important items on this list and why?

Syd: So, I put number 1, 14, 18, 7, and 11.

Researcher: 1, 14, 18, 7 and 11. And is it in that order that you mean or not really?

Syd: not really.

Researcher: Okay cool that's fine. Yeah, maybe we just work our way down the list. So, why did you think 1 was important?

Syd: Well, so with the introduction like, make people from everywhere feel welcome, because there are international students, there are students from all over the UK coming to this uni, so maybe having a proper introduction to uni would help people feel more welcome and secure in the environment they're in and know what they have to do before starting uni, instead of just jumping into uni quickly, because it can get really overwhelming for some people, being in a new environment.

Researcher: So, um... do you think... Because this is about making friends, so do you think having that sort of friendship base first would help you settle in better, is that what you mean?

Syd: Yeah.

Researcher: And the next thing, 14, so staff training about bias and discrimination, can you say a bit about why that would be important?

Syd: yeah, because sometimes, some of the students, like international students and us ethnic students, sometimes people don't see it, but some staff don't really have... not like the knowledge, but sometimes, like, things can happen in my lectures and seminars which can make us feel uncomfortable, like what other people say us and talk about us sometimes, so maybe having staff there to, like, engage us into different groups of people and like make us feel more welcome. Because sometimes it can get really awkward and we're not mixing with different people, like. Like with, like, white people, it's kind of difficult for us to approach different people and try to make friends with them, so staff helping us get engaged more in the conversation and more involved in seminars and lectures.

Researcher: You mentioned just now that some people can say things during classes that might make you uncomfortable, do you mean other students or do you mean staff are saying these things?

Syd: It can be more students and stuff, like some people just can be mean. Like, I haven't really, like, experienced it as much now, because we're in a pandemic, but sometimes people can just say mean things, hurtful things, and they don't know it, but it does kind of affect us and such, so maybe staff could be more aware that situations like this can happen.

Researcher: Can you give an example, if that's OK, something that I'm assuming a white student has said that has made people feel uncomfortable?

Syd: Like, maybe, because... people come from different backgrounds, we speak different languages, if we see somebody and we don't really know how to communicate in English and such, yeah, then we speak in a different language, and some people make the odd comment, saying speak in your own language or... yeah.

Researcher: I see. OK. Cool. Thank you yeah. Moving on, to number 18, financial support, could you say why you thought this would be important?

Syd: Because again we all come from different backgrounds, like, some of us are lower class, middle class and upper class and we have different financial issues around, so maybe having more support with, like, money and stuff would, like, make us more engaged with our studies instead of just, like, finding part-time jobs. Because part-time jobs can really be draining and affect studies and that, so having more financial support would be helpful, and it would probably help us in the long run with our education and stuff.

Researcher: Can you elaborate a bit more on what you mean by it could help you avoid the long run?

Syd: Like, some of us want to do placements and all that, like, we don't really... It can be really expensive, going abroad, so maybe having that little extra funding would help us get to where we want to go.

[overtalking]

Researcher: So these sorts of... almost employability opportunities.

Syd: Yeah.

Researcher: OK, lovely, thank you. So, next would be 7, so choice of type of assessment, could you say a bit about why you thought that was important.

Syd: Because we all learn and express ourselves different and some people find it easier doing, like... because I know we do Zoom, like, group discussion in some assessments and some people like writing essays. So, maybe having a variety of different assessments on our modules would help us find what we fit best and like, give us, like, different opportunities to gain marks elsewhere and, like, yeah.

Researcher: Right, so are you referring more to... erm... within one assignment, you have a choice of the format, or across a module you have multiple assignments each have... with their own format.

Syd: yeah.

Researcher: Which one, for more the latter so kind of, a choice of assessment within the one assessment or across the module you have a range?

Syd: Across the module, you have like a range.

Researcher: Okay lovely Thank you. And finally, 11, one to one support. Can you say a bit about why you thought this was important?

Syd: Because in our modules, like, for example, like, difficult modules like maths modules and all that, we don't really have that one-to-one opportunity to ask the lecturer what they're talking about, because we're kind of afraid to, like, afraid that other people will judge that we don't understand it, like why are we doing the course if we don't understand it. So, maybe having, like, one-to-one opportunities, not just lecturers but maybe third year students or people that have done the module themselves to help with trying to understand what the module's about and picking apart different things and stuff.

Researcher: Yeah, OK, thank you Syd. So we'll move on now to the final set of questions and then we can go for lunch! So, this next kind of bit relates to one of the items on this list, and that is number 15, fit to submit checklists. Okay. So I like to ask both of you do you recall, either seeing or receiving a fit to submit checklist in any of your modules?

Syd: No.

Ophelia: No.

Researcher: Do you do you know what this is by any chance?

Syd: No.

Ophelia: No.

Researcher: OK! It's basically a sort of checklist that students do themselves before they hand in an assignment. So, for example, it will be things like, it can be... For example, so you handing in an essay so it could be anything like you know. Oh, have you included your student number have you included, you know these sorts of little details that we wanted to include and it could also go into things like. You know, have you made sure that you structured your essay in a logical way have made sure that you know you've referenced all the sources that you've cited and those sorts of things. So, listening then to that description of a fit to submit checklist, do you think, or... Yeah, do you think you would this to be a helpful tool to have when you submit your work?

Ophelia: Yeah.

Syd: Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah? Why? Maybe Syd can go first.

Syd: Yeah, probably because I'm really forgetful and having a list visually in front of me to go through the assignment and tick the criteria and all that would really help me look at my assignment properly and make sure I haven't missed anything before the deadline day and when you actually have to submit it. I'm always, like... it dwells in my head, have I forgotten anything.

Researcher: Right, yeah. And Ophelia, what about you, why do you think this would be useful?

Ophelia: So you, like, have, so you like have all the things. So, basically you've done everything so you get your marks and it will go on the, like, the software or when they need to mark it so there's no problems on the layout or the font, because maybe, if we don't do it right, we don't mark it, I don't know...

Researcher: I guess it depends on the lecturer but yeah right so, but it will help you to make sure that there are no sorts of these errors.

ophelia: Yeah, no errors and like, oh you didn't, the layout didn't work so I didn't mark it so you got a zero or failing because you didn't read the checklist properly. And it's just like, it's there because, it's there because it makes it easier for everyone. Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. Right, so if there was such a thing, how do you think this would be... this should be shared with and explained to students? Go on Syd, yeah.

Syd: I guess you could probably email, like, the students or you could... it could be in, like, the module handbook or the lecturer could have, like, one session where they explain it to you and like hand it out to everybody.

Researcher: and Ophelia? Oh, sorry, sorry, Syd. Apologies.

Syd: Or [unclear] on Moodle, leave it on Moodle.

Researcher: Mmm. Yeah. So, email and Moodle and possibly explaining it class.

Syd: Yeah.

Researcher: And Ophelia, what about you, how do you think this should be shared to students and explained to students?

ophelia: Like, maybe in the first, like, day. Like in the seminars they might. You know, in the pandemic they can share their screen and like, this is the checklist, make sure you get it done and the students can take a screenshot of it on their laptop or print it out, they can check it off when they have to hand it in, or when they first [unclear] maybe have copies, bits of paper.

Researcher: Okay, thank you. What are either of your views about needing to complete this yourself as a checklist as opposed to being provided with a ready-to-go list of things to check? Maybe Syd can go first?

Syd: Erm... I'm not really sure.

Researcher: Would they be both, do you think they'd be like equally useful basically or would you prefer one format over the other.

Syd: I mean you could have different formats to like, see other people, because not everybody's going to agree with, like, one format. And like maybe a format that doesn't work for one person would work for another person.

Researcher: Well, what about yourself, do you would you prefer having to sort of take off a checklist or would you prefer having a list of things to check?

Syd: Probably tick off a checklist.

Researcher: OK, and Ophelia, what about you, any thought on this?

Ophelia: Hmmm. [unclear].

Researcher: Do you mean both formats would be roughly the same in your eyes?

Ophelia: Yeah.



Researcher: OK. Neither one would be more useful than the other?

Ophelia: No.

Researcher: OK. Finally, are there any other approaches that you think would be more useful in terms of helping students to understand assessment requirements and the academic standards, or to help them avoid common mistakes.

Ophelia: What do you mean, like...

Researcher: So, I suppose, because the function of a fit to submit checklist is basically to help students to make sure they've met all the assessment requirements and the academic standards, but do you think, is there any other useful way that the university could support students to accomplish this, besides a fit to submit checklist?

Ophelia: Not really. Well I know, all modules, there's like 12 weeks in a semester or term, and then sometimes always due in Week 12 and in Week 10, 11, 10, 11, 12, there's no seminars, no lectures, there's workshops in the time, so you can just go to the workshop and ask any questions you have about the assignments in the workshop, so not really. You can always email them, I guess, and stuff.

Researcher: OK, thank you. And Syd?

Syd: Erm... I don't really know.

Researcher: Yeah? That's OK. So, no other useful methods you would like to see the university, in terms of trying to help students understand these academic conventions and academic standards?

Syd: Maybe at the beginning of introduction, like, they should have, like, an introduction week where they do, like, maybe how to reference your work, how to avoid plagiarism, have, like, mini sessions for some people to attend.

Researcher: Mmm. And these mini sessions, you mean throughout the seminar or towards the start of the school year?

Syd: I think probably putting them throughout seminars will probably help. Some people can easily forget after just having one, like, at the beginning.

Researcher: cool yeah any other comments or anything else. cool okay um, I suppose, then i'll wrap this session up and just before I do that does anybody have anything to add about anything that's considered today or any further comments you'd like to make before we close our. end of the day, no okay cool well Okay, so it was very good to get your perspectives today and and on behalf of the research team, again, I would like to thank you very much for your time today. I believe Rogers said he would be in touch with you immediately after this at 1230 about the 10 pound vouchers so look out for his email, and if you have any other questions you can you can feel free to email me I think I'm not sure my email is provided to you, but. Just for you, you can also email Roger at the learning experience email address Okay, so if any questions it's all just feel free to email either one of us. So yeah Thank you again and Have a nice lunch, I suppose. yep bye.

- END -

Researcher: The first question that I like to ask all three of you is what has your experience of studying in higher education been like and how has it different from your expectations? So, you can speak around kind of your experience with lectures seminars, maybe you know your friends or kind of student societies and things like that. Silver, would you like to go first, or say anything?

Silver: I'm happy to go first.

Researcher: Yeah, thank you.

Silver: I mean, I'm in my final year now and I don't think there's anything that's like distinctively different to the rest of my peers who aren't part of the BAME community, but I do feel like there is this kind of invisible gap between us and non BAME people. Like, all of my friends are not white. And I don't think I chose that by choice, but it's just the people I tend to get on with more... I think it could be because of... I hate to say it, but their political stance, sometimes. Obviously, not all white people. But, like, a lot of them are very like... you know, like raging Tories who don't think immigrants should even be here and it's like, I don't want to risk making a friend and then realizing they don't even like me because of the way I look. I mean, I have had incidents where like, they will dismiss my feelings on things because frankly they just don't care if something has offended me. I don't know if that's anything to do with the attainment gap, but there is a gap between us like socially as well.

Researcher: Right, so, you mentioned that you can feel possibly sort of alienated, I suppose, by some of the students in Brookes, how... do you think this sort of impacts the way you feel like you belong in Brookes?

Silver: Oh yeah, definitely, like, you know, because of the subject, I do, there is a lot of debate over politics and it's... it's not that anyone wants to hurt anyone, but I think sometimes my ethnicity will be used against me and I think that's really unfair. It has nothing to do with the conversation... I don't know if you know, but Brookes is the biggest Tory majority University in the whole of the UK and you know, when I express my views I will be hit with racial slurs because they think it's a totally acceptable come back if they don't agree with you. Um, obviously like because the rest of the people, they might not necessarily agree with what they've said, but it's more that like... they don't really care because it doesn't affect them and they just tolerate this kind of behavior going on. Yeah.

Researcher: Right, yeah. thank you. Gold and Chen, do you have anything you want to say. Maybe something about... similarly with what Silver has said, like about your experiences with the people in Brookes, other students...

Gold: I wouldn't say... Well, I'll just bounce off what Silver's went on.... Basically, there was a massive difference in terms of like ethnicity, because in secondary school and college, there was a lot more people from my ethnic group and different ethnic groups, it was quite a mix but I felt like when once I started Uni there was quite... a very, very different... some differences in amounts of people with my ethnic group in my course and I felt like it was quite a big difference for me, because I was coming with the expectation that there was going to be diversity in my course, but there wasn't as much as I was hoping for there to be. Even though you can see the hints of it, you can see like there's many people from different ethnic

groups, but people from my ethnic group wasn't as much as I would have expected it to be, which is quite a big difference for me, because I felt like... I felt a bit out of place because it's like... I don't have anyone to be able to talk to, share, share opinions and express my culture and things I've learned from my culture, things I've learned from other people, things I've learned from before when I was a young, I can't express that with other people in my course. So, I felt like the ethnic minorities and ethnic groups were quite a big difference in the amount of people that... in... lectures and stuff. But when it comes to societies as well, I feel like it is quite diverse, as well... it's quite different, because my expectation was societies and unis should be, like, everyone from every minority, every group should be in one society. But then when I did go some fairs, it was like, oh, the Japanese society, the this society, the that society. I was like, why isn't there a society where everyone all comes together and everyone does some things and it's like one massive group where it's like everyone's able to share whatever they've learned from their culture, express whatever they've learned from their culture to each other and actually be able to all do something as one instead of in different groups

Researcher: Hmm. Chen, do you have anything to add?

Chen: Well, because I'm... like, where I live, is very like it's really is the countryside says or quite full of like... I'm literally the only ethnic minority in my village. So I when I come here, it's quite diverse. So I've kind of experienced it a little bit different but... I've... It's been quite different for me so I can't really say the same. But then like this uni quite a... like, the majority is white. So sometimes it does get a bit intimidating when you're going into a big group and it's just you there. But, yeah, I think I've experienced a little bit different.

Researcher. Right Perfect. Thank you for that. What about like things around lectures and seminars, have they've been sorts of what you have expected, roughly, from when you came to HE?

Chen: I'm not really sure.

Researcher: Right, yeah, that's okay. What's about Gold and Silver?

Silver: I think I really enjoy the seminars, to be honest, I think they gave me the support that I always felt like I needed when I was at school. Not necessarily because I want to be supported all the time, but just having it there was quite...reassuring. But there have been times in seminars, because you're so... you're in like close proximity of like other people, where you can overhear the conversations and like... It probably doesn't even concern me, but it makes me uncomfortable, the way they talk about... Sometimes their humour is literally based on making fun of other minority groups.

Researcher: And Gold. What's about what has your experience been done about stuff around lectures or seminars, and how has it differed from expectations?

Gold: I think lectures are quite different, because I feel like... as a person, myself, I just sit at the back in my lectures and stuff. I don't tend to just sit at the front where, for, like, I'll be in the main focus of attention with lecturers and I tend to just move myself to the back, in a way, but in seminars, I do feel like... there's a chance for me to talk, there's a chance for me

to give my point, there's a chance for me to... contribute in a seminar. But when it comes to being different... There is... there's still always going to be that, because in most of my... many of my seminars, I am the only person of an ethnic minority, in many of my seminars and sometimes it makes me feel quite different, because it's like, I have to, it's not a bad thing, but I have to make friends with those people for me to be able to voice my opinion, for me not to feel different in any way, but... many of them are my friends I speak to many of them, many of them I know, but it's there still that difference that oh, I'm the only person that's from this ethnic minority and it's like... It makes me feel a certain type of way because it's like, there could be other people in here but I'm the only person and I feel like many of the times the attention is focused on me and it feels like I have so much standards and such a very high... I don't know. What's the word for it? Like such a very high challenge for me is that I have to represent people from my ethnic minority in a very good way, and for them to say, oh, she's from this, but they're very good and I have to be representative, be the representative of a person for my ethnic minority in a way and I feel like that's such a lot of pressure, sometimes, but...

Researcher: So how do you think these expectations have impacted, I suppose, how you approach your studies or you know, your academic success? Has there been any impact that you've noticed?

Gold: I mean, it does... It has a good impact because in a way it makes me work more, put it pushes me a bit more to be more [...] like to challenge myself, in terms of answering questions, knowing what the seminar is about, knowing what I need to say, what, what my modules or modules are about and everything. But in a way, it's like there's a lot of pressure and my course already puts a certain amount of pressure on me. But I feel like the expectations in the seminar as well builds up under pressure because it's like, I have to make the standards under normal seminar, but then I have that additional like pressure of being... I'm the only person from this ethnic minority, I have to represent them in a way so it just builds this additional pressure. It's good, but it has its disadvantages as well.

Researcher: Thank you. What about Silver and Chen. Can you speak towards how maybe your experiences so far as you've mentioned with sometimes feeling like... feeling almost separate from white students in the university. How do you think that has impacted your academic success or your experiences with your studies?

Chen: Um, I think, you know, is that the stereotype of, like, you know, Asians are always clever. They always know what they're doing. So, as I'm... sometimes you normally struggle and they expect you to like know everything. And sometimes when we ask for help, they already... like some lecturers already said, I'm not going to help you, you should already know this, or something like that.

Researcher: Right. Yeah, well, maybe Silver, anything to comment about that?

Silver: My lecturers, I think they've been fine. They pretty treat everyone the same. They always expect us to know everything. I don't know if they're necessarily giving me a hard time... But there was this one time. When I just like, I just had a laughing fit in the lecture, and... and the lecturer kept me behind, even though there were quite a few people having laughing fits and was like, you should take this more seriously, you know, like, I don't know

why you're... What's so funny... If you're going to be like this the whole of next year then don't take my modules. It was like, well, you know, like, people just have laughing fits sometimes, I don't do it every time. But this one time that I did it, he like picked me out and sort of like, I don't know what this is about. But I'm just gonna do what I want to do anyway. Like not gonna let you stop me.

And and there was this other lecturer. I always thought she just got my name right but turns out she calls me and girls who are from my ethnic... ethnic group, but look nothing like me, my name. And I know she's bad with names, but it's just a little bit ridiculous when, you know, I'm like almost six foot and they're like four foot five - like we're not the same person. I don't know how you got us confused. It was just kind of annoying, but I mean, she [unclear] So I guess a I can't say much about that.

Researcher: Right, right. I'm supposed to open question to anyone now. Because some people who have mentioned kind of their relationship with staff. So how do you think, generally, your relationships with staff... have they sort of helped you to be successful academically, or have they hindered you or do you have experiences of both and what might they be?

Silver: Shall I go first? Um, when I was the first year I tried to go on exchange and the... I can't remember what his role is, but some sort of academic advisor. So, I went to him and I was like, I want to go on exchange and please can you help me. Like, what should I do. And he looks at my grades and it was.. I think they were all around 2(i)s, and he was like, this is fine, but you need to work extra hard to make sure that you're going to be fine. Like, he really just... actively doubted my ability. He wasn't like, oh, you know, like what you're doing is fine, just make sure you push harder next year. He was very much like, you'd better make sure you get this grade otherwise you're going to ruin your degree. And it's like, you know, for a first year, I have no idea what he's on about. Like this, this year doesn't even count. And it wasn't just me. He did it to another one of my friends who is of a different ethnic minority and... it was just very patronising and it wasn't a way that I was like, I'm going on exchange to, you know, broaden my perspective and like learn more about other cultures, whatever, but he was just very, like, you should probably focus on your grades first, even though they weren't even that bad. And I was just like, Well, I didn't go in the end because of other reasons, but I think that was a big part where I was like, oh, maybe I'm not good enough for this and I just don't really know why he did it in the way he did it. It was quite disheartening.

Researcher: Right. Yeah. Thank you. Silver, Gold and Chen, any comments about how relationships and stuff might have affected your studies or your academic success.

Gold: I don't think it's effected me in a way, with academic advisor or lecturers. Personally, I don't know about anyone else.

Researcher: Okay, thank you. Chen, anything to add? Feel free not to say anything that's fine.

Chen: Not really just, there's been a few times where I needed help, and they've just said you'll be able to figure it out on your own. Yeah.

Researcher: Right. So have you found that there has been sort of a general lack of academic support there?

Chen: Yeah, I think there has been

Researcher: Yeah, and has this been, sort of, the general experience that you've had or just, you know, a couple of lecturers.

Chen: I think quite a majority of them. There's been a few that have been really helpful but the majority of them have not been very helpful.

Researcher: Right. Okay. So actually, this might be quite interesting to explore. Silver and Gold, I wonder if you had... What's your general impression been of the kind of academic support you've been able to receive? Maybe Silver can go first?

Silver: Sorry, what was the question again?

Researcher: I suppose. What is your general experience been of the academic support that you've received

Silver: Um, I mean, I'm in my final year now and I think I've only had maybe two meetings, my academic advisor because they're the same person that just couldn't get my name right and it's like... and I didn't feel like I needed help, like I'd just go to my friends, but I feel like if I had a better relationship with them, my grades will be a lot higher because I'd talk to them about like my career prospects and like what modules I should choose

Researcher: Right. Gold. Anything to add before we can move on?

Gold: I think sometimes when it comes to face to face meetings and stuff, they tend to lose quite a bit of interest in helping you because they see you and it's like, sometimes your name already says a lot to them. And it's like, Oh, she doesn't, she's from this culture, she's probably from this country, she's probably from that country and whenever I do email, it's like they're so happy to help the very, very responsive their emails, but when it comes to me being there, face to face, it's like, it pushes them back a bit in helping me because it's like, oh, she's from this country, she should be able to have this level smartness in her, she's supposed to have this level of knowledge already, she needs to put extra effort in. But when it comes to other people being there face to face and it's like... they're so happy to help. And it pushes me back because it's like, do I need to change my name for you to be able to help me even more? and receive as much help as I need? but... that's just how I feel.

Researcher: Right, yeah, I was wondering though. Has anybody had had any experience with the other support services at the University? Maybe, for example, Upgrade or it's called the center of academic development now.

Gold: I did have to go in because for exams, I had to ask for computer, the use of a computer because of my hand, but when I went in they were quite happy to help. I emailed one of them and they were very responsive in helping and I didn't feel like there was any

restrictions or anything that stopped me from getting the help I needed when it comes to that and I did receive it, because I did apply for quite a few more stuff with the university and they were happy to help me. So...

Researcher: Right, thank you. What about Silver and Chen, any experiences with the other support services of the university?

Silver: And I think the careers services have been very good. I did a short course with them. And they were like, oh, if you have any like coaching or anything like they've been keeping up to date with me, like checking up on me and everything. So I think that's generally like nice of them because they didn't have to do that at all. So yeah. I rate them.

Researcher: And Chen?

Chen: Um, no, not really had any problems. I think it's like I feel like it's like the lecturers. They feel like they're on a different level or sometimes they just look down you, but like, the help desk. I think they're quite helpful and they've never... I've never had any problems with them.

Researcher: Great. Um, right. So, so far we've sort of talked a lot about sort of these interpersonal quite small interactions or on a small scale, rather. I was wondering what, what was your opinion or your perspective of the curriculum that you have in your studies. For example, you know, do you think it's, I don't know, focused on a particular culture or maybe does it exclude I suppose other cultures, that sort of thing or has that just been okay?

Silver: There was this one incident which I thought was quite strange. I mean, it had nothing to do with me but, there was, we were learning something about Greece and I think it was something to do with their economy and the lecturer, you know, automatically, pointed at a person and said you should know what I'm talking about, even though they they haven't been in Greece, since there were like two. And it was just a little bit like... what are you doing you know like what purpose did that serve? But the fact I think it's appropriate to do that that I thought was quite... I don't know, it just made me feel uncomfortable for them.

Researcher: Right, yeah. What about Gold and Chen, your experiences with a curriculum or even teaching methods.

Chen: Sorry, could you repeat that.

Researcher: Yeah, just wondering about your experiences or a perspective of the your curriculum in your studies or kind of methods of teaching. And that's it, those sorts of things. Whether you feel that they've been I suppose if they've you know included a culture that's excluded you or your experiences or excluded other cultures and that sort of thing.

Chen: I don't think so... Cause ours is very much... You do laws, so you kind of... you stick to the law and stuff. There's been times where like we've had, like, obviously international students and they've not been... like.. we had... the first week of zoom and there was an international girl asked the lecturer to repeat and they were being quite rude and they were

like, you should understand this and they were like, could you maybe talk a bit louder. So I can understand. Or a bit slower. She just ignored the thing and just said, carry on.

Researcher: Right, yeah. Gold, what about in your experience.

Gold: In my experience, because one of the, one of my modules, we started talking about Black Lives Matter and many of the riots and stuff that happened and I felt like, it was that moment where I felt included in a way, because many of the other modules and course things that we've done, I didn't feel included as an ethnic minority and I felt a bit out of place in terms of like, many of them are just... not what I would sympathize with, not what I would, in a way, feel closer to, but when we did start talking about that, it felt that in a way that was like oh do we're talking something related to me in a way that's the, that's the first time I've actually felt related when it comes to my course.

Researcher: Right, okay. Thank you. That was a very interesting discussion. So, I suppose, as a bit of a summary reflecting on your experience and that of others you know, why do you think black and minority ethnic groups do less well in higher education at Oxford Brookes compared to white students?

Silver: That's a really good question... I feel like there's a lot of factors. Because I do feel like our student union is is very focused on diversity and inclusion, but not necessarily our university. Like we do present ourselves as quite a like, accepting place. And that's why I thought when I first got here, because that's what sold this university to me. But I think after you experience the culture, you do get a little bit taken aback because, I mean, I can't change the way that I look. But there's other things about me that I rather hide then tell people straight up... I do feel like there needs to be a focus on educating people out of that ignorance, because of things that don't concern them. And I have to say. By that I mean white people because they're only ones that don't know... they're non BAME so a lot of times they don't realize what they're doing. And it's not necessarily their fault. It's just the way that they were brought up or the way they were conditioned throughout life to behave, because that was acceptable thing to do, to belittle other people that aren't like them. I don't know how we're gonna achieve that. But that's just my thoughts.

Researcher: You you mentioned that there were several factors. Can you maybe discuss another factor that you think might be why BAME students do less well compared to white students?

Silver: I think definitely the lecturers as well. Not all of them. A lot of them really take the time to get to know you, but some of them are just like... you can tell they're just here to do that job and then leave. Like, they don't really care. They might just be having a bad day, or whatever. But then, like, it shows us as students that we're really in this alone. And... you know, most of our lecturers are non-BAME, and it's harder to connect with them when you don't have that factor in common, I suppose. You know, I have met lecturers, where they've open openly been like, I don't support, you know, what the government's doing or... they have openly shared their personal views on how they don't think ethnic minority should be targeted, whereas others... like there is this fear that they just automatically are the worst that we can expect them to be. And I think maybe... sometimes... they don't have to tell us about their personal lives, but more just to make us feel more comfortable sharing our



thoughts with them because at least they'll understand, even if they're not from the same ethnic group.

Researcher: Right, thank you Silver. What about Gold and Chen, what do you think are the reasons why black and minority ethnic groups do less well in HE compared to white students based on your experiences and those of those who know the those of those you know?

Chen: I'm, I'm not really sure. But, you know, like the model minority myth. Where like Asians have that stereotype of being really clever, they don't really need any help, so then we don't really get that much help because they assume we already know everything. But yeah... I'm not really sure.

Researcher: Thank you. Gold, what about you?

Gold: Um, I don't really have anything to say in a way, but it's just sometimes we don't get as much help as we should be getting in comparison to everyone else, but... I don't know how to put it... I .. yeah, I don't really know.

Researcher: Okay, thank you very much. We'll move on now to the second section, where we're going to be exploring your ideas, but how to address and reduce the attainment gap. So the first question I'd like to ask you is, what do you think the university could do to reduce or remove the attainment gap. I know Silver's already mentioned some things. But if we could. I don't know if there's anything else you'd like to add, or if you'd like to explore the ideas that you gave earlier.

Gold: I'm not really sure what else, because i mean, a lot of our lecturers are not... there isn't any diversity between them in a way. And I feel like if there was more of a difference in diversity, I feel like more people have different from different ethnic minorities, that might help a bit more, in a way, but I think that's pretty much it, because I don't really think there's anything else that you could do to change it.

Researcher: Right, and with regards to having a more diverse staff, why do you think that's important?

Gold: I feel it's important in a way because they are able to... understand you much more differently than many of the other lecturers would... would, and I also feel like It's much more like under, under way... they will sympathize more with you. They'll be able to understand that these are the challenges that comes with being... coming from this type of ethnic minority and they will be able to to be more understanding away and they'll be able to help you more because I feel like if I had someone that was from this ethnic minority I would be much more leaning towards them and actually ask them for help because I've had this experience with this certain lecturer and he didn't help these much as I needed to help and I would lean towards them a bit more. I think that's right.

Researcher: Thank you. Chen, anything you'd like to say about what you think the university could do to reduce or remove the achievement gap.

Chen: I'm not sure. I just think there should be more like diversity in the lecturers, but I'm not really sure. Maybe in the students as well. Because it's very, it's a very white university.

Researcher: And again, I suppose. Why do you think that's important?

Chen: I just feel like it's important because they're more easy to relate to and then you have a more of an understanding. I feel like... like ethnic minorities normally get along better than obviously white people because they... some like white people don't understand like the situations you've been through. And they sometimes like, they question it for like, different cultural differences like they'll question and be like, that's strange and that's weird.

Researcher: Right. Thank you. Okay, um. Before we move on, which will be a quick ranking activity, does anybody else have anything to add about how they think the university can address the attainment gap.

Silver: For the student issue, I think Brookes is known for accepting a lot of students through clearing. I think sometimes we do just take in all sorts of people. I mean, that includes me, I also came through clearing, nothing wrong with clearing, but I do feel it just opens the door to people who think there'll be accepted, no matter what they do. Not in terms of like academic success or anything, but I mean, this whole racial insensitivity issue isn't just at Brookes, it's everywhere, but I think perhaps in a recruitment process, you could ask! You know, what do you feel about these issues? Not necessarily ask, you know, are you racist, but more like, do you have a... see if they have a racial bias towards people that aren't of their race. And maybe that will make the culture of Brookes better, at least, because we can say anything we want. But if the students are still carrying on with their antics then it doesn't change anything.

Researcher: Okay. Thank you. We'll move on now to a ranking activity and I'm going to be sharing my screen again. And also, I'll put this list in the chat. So, basically these are a list of 18 things that other universities have do, And could you kind of think of which ones you think would be most important and so maybe you could select about your top five options and think about why as well you think these would be the best ones. So I'm going to share my screen now. Just so you have another list to look at. I'll give you maybe like five minutes or so to think about it. And then we can come together again and discuss your, your top options. Okay, you should be on the screen now the list. If you have any questions about any of these items, just let me know.

Okay, I guess if anybody is ready to share, feel free.

Gold: Do we ask to speak about it or do we just type it out?

Researcher: Could you speak about it actually? Yeah.

Gold: Could you reframe the question again, sorry.

Researcher: Oh, yeah. So, so I've shared with you and you can see on the chat as well. A list of some things that universities have done in the UK to try and address the achievement gap. And so what I'd like you to do is to look at the list and pick out like your top five or three or something that that the ones that you think are the most important with regards to having

to request, reducing the attainment gap and also why you think they are the most important ones.

Chen: Can you just explain the unpacking the assignment briefs.

Researcher: Yeah, that's to do with sort of explaining the assignment brief a bit more because in lots of assignment briefs in university there are almost a sort of unspoken, you know, things that you need to be able to understand in order to do the assignment. So, you know, for example, something like, you know, evaluate X model or whatever, the word evaluate it, you sort of need to understand what that means. And so unpacking the assignment for us is just I supposed to do with better explaining what the assignment asking for more clearly.

Silver: Shall I go first?

Researcher: Yeah, thank you. Silver, yeah.

Silver: Yeah, so I've put five in the chat. But I'll start with number two. I think there needs to be better explanation of academic standards because sometimes I'm just not getting the grade that I want. And I asked them, and they're like... just read it through again. And I'm like, if I don't know what it looks like then I don't know how to get there. And sometimes I mean they will give us examples of like a first class piece of coursework or something but it doesn't like... They're not explaining to me properly how... like, what I can do to get there. It's just kind of annoying sometimes because they just expect me to know and I don't know. I want to ask them them but they make me feel really silly for not knowing.... the number five more specific or guided independent learning tasks. When we did independent learning last year, we did get a lot of support, but not in a way that I could understand... they just threw a lot of information at us and were like, yeah, now get on with it because you should know what you're doing. Different people learn differently. And I think I could have done with a better explanation, like I mentioned number two.

Peer Mentoring is something that I feel like works quite well. Because before I came to Brookes they I think they assigned a student ambassador for me, who was also of another ethnic minority, and I think speaking to her made me feel like, oh this is like a really friendly place. I feel quite accepted. And she did the same courses me, so... I think in first year I spoke to her quite a lot about my assignments, which was really helpful.

And number 14 staff training, which is like I mentioned before. Be good to have that and representation is pretty self explanatory. When you see someone doing well, that looks like you, you think you can do it as well. It just adds that bit of confidence. Yeah, so that's my top 5.

Researcher: Thank you. Yeah. Actually if we could go to number 14. Could you tell me a bit but what sort of training you think would be useful for staff?

Silver: So I know there's this organization that actually trains junior police officers, just to educate them out of their racial bias because there's a lot of, you know, stops and searches happening. I can't remember what this organization is called anymore because there's quite

a few. But legal lifelines has like all of the organizations that help do that on their website. And they basically... they literally just show PowerPoints and show examples of what racial bias looks like and tell them how to avoid that. Because sometimes you know our lecturers and our fellow students, they've been in places where there might not [unclear] sorry, might not have been many ethnic minorities, so they will have their own conclusions about people because they don't know anyone from that race... I think sometimes just telling them this is wrong might be enough for them to be like, Oh, I don't want to be wrong, I don't want to be offensive, and they might just stop thinking like that. Because you know a lot of people they grow up thinking everything is fine and they don't see the issue, but once they see the issue it should be fine.

Researcher: Thank you Silver. Gold or Chen, which of you would like to go next?

Gold: I would start with financial support. There are some... 18 I'll start with that because, I mean, with Brookes, when I did need as much help as I needed in terms of student finance and stuff, because I had a bit of a clash with student finance, I did get as much help as I needed in terms of my tuition fees and stuff. I felt like the financial support with Brookes was actually quite good, because when I did apply for it, they were very, very responsive and very supportive with everything that I needed and they did help move my application and stuff and... The one thing I would say is, though, one to one support because some lecturers, when you do go to them, they're not as helpful as I would like them to be. Because there is one certain lecture where, like, you do go to him and he's very, very happy to help you. He is always responsive with his email, even when you book some meetings with him, he's very, very responsive, very helpful, but there are certain lecturers, where you go to them and it's like, you should know this, I can't help you as much as I should. But it's like, you just need that one thing is like, can you just explain this just a tad bit further for me. And it's like, no, we can't do this. We can't give you this help, you can't... you need to help yourself. We can't help you. And it's like, I know I can't... I know I can help myself. But it's just I need that extra help. So it's like, that's the reason why I came to university in the first place so why can't you help me? To a certain extent, without you telling me and pushing me and saying, No, I couldn't help you. You can leave now, in a way, because that's what I get from whatever she said, but it's like, if you can't help me to a certain degree, but help me as much as you can, and not just push me back and be like, no, you can leave now, it's fine, I can't do anything. And you say sometimes is that it does hurt a bit because when other people do come to them, it's like they're so happy to help. She's very, very happy to help but when it comes to me going to her it's like, Oh, you need to notice already need to have this knowledge and it's like, even in some seminars as well. She pushes you in a way and it's like... She expects so much from you and whenever you do tell her, I don't know this, she's like, well, you should know it, you should know it and it's like there's a reason why I'm telling you that don't know this certain thing, and then it's like... Why can't you just help me or just move on from it. Why do you have to focus so much attention on me and make me feel very, very stupid but when someone else that's white, sorry, says sorry, I don't understand it, you're very, very happy to help. And it's like, Why put... Why push the attention on me for not knowing something but yet when someone else sees it, you move on very, very quickly. And it's like, there's always that and therefore it's always going to be there because they can't be anything to change it with but it's just... I think it just depends on each individual lecturer sometimes as well, so...

Researcher: Thank you and... so, just the top two then. Anything else you want to highlight that you think it's important?

Gold: Sorry what did you say...

Researcher: Oh, so you've just talked to, because you gave financial support and one to one support. But anything else you'd like to highlight as something that you think would be important. Don't worry if no.

Gold: I think the anonymous market does help in a way as well. But when it comes to the.. Where is it... I think it's the feedback... formative assessments and feedback. When they see you there and then when they actually do see your name. It's like they don't want to give give as much feedback as they gave when they actually did mark your assessment. And it's like, why is there such a difference? Why does it have to be that when I'm an anonymous to you, you're very, very happy to help because you don't you have the expectation that you don't know who it is that you'll helping, but you still help them because there's a chance that it might be this person, there's a chance that might be that when I do go to you for feedback, you're very, very constructive feedback you did give back to me and it's like, why is there such a difference. It should be the same amount same effort, you should be putting in, and not a difference in as much help as she should be given me.

Researcher: Thank you Gold. Chen?

Chen: I think mine are just pretty much the same. But I think the the one to one support I need... unpacking of the assignment briefs are quite important as well, because I remember... I booked a session with a like a seminar leader to just, I didn't really understand the question. I just wanted it to be explained in a different way and I was, I was the one who booked session, but my friend also did the same subject, and we both went together. And when I asked her, just to explain. She was like, no, and the way she started talking is quite downgrading and just it just made me feel like I was stupid and like I should know this and just just didn't I just didn't feel right after. And I don't really want to go to her again. Then, even though I was the one who booked a session, my friend, just quickly ask her to explain the coursework to her and she's happy to explain to her. I think they're quite like... they should just unpack it more, and the one to one support should be better.

Researcher: Yeah. Oh, great. That is the last thing, actually. I suppose I'll just open the session in case anybody else has anything else to add?

Silver: Yeah, I'm just gonna add the feedback that during lockdown we got some of our... it was meant to be our exams, but we had it in the form of coursework and I mean, they did say we won't have individual feedback but this one particular module where I did quite badly. I was like, I don't know what happened. Can you just tell me, you know, just roughly my grade. I know you can't give me feedback and he refused to tell me my grade for that course work. And I was like, it's literally just a number. You're not giving me any feedback why are you being so difficult and he got my name wrong every email. My name is literally, when I sign off. That's my name. It's on my email like titles. I'm pretty sure it's next to my student number when I send the email and it would just [...] Sorry. It seemed really lazy that he couldn't be bothered to spell my name right. And on top of that wouldn't give me the figure of

my grade. And I know it's COVID, but we still have to get on with it and do our exam, why can they give us feedback to make us better, it's not an excuse to let us keep doing what we're doing it. It's not good enough.

Researcher: Right. Thank you. Anybody else have anything to add before we can end off.

Chen: Not really

Researcher: Thank you. Gold, I'm assuming no from you as well.

Gold: I don't really have much to... it's just certain times when you do go to them for help. They're not as responsive. But sometimes when it they prefer where you're anonymous because there's a chance that... They don't know who it is, they're talking to. So they're very, very happy to help you. But when they see you, when they actually know it's you and see your name and it's like, oh, I can't help in a way, but when it comes to other people's names and if your name was very, very such a very basic name, they still give that help, but it's that when it's completely different to what they expect it's like it just changes something in them and it's very sad to see, but there's really nothing you could do, because you can't change your name because you need help from a lecturer.

Researcher: Right. Thank you. [end material from DG]

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#### Focus group 4

AJOKE: Good morning my name is Ajoke as you can see. I'm a third year student. My experience was like - at the beginning - not very good in the sense that - my first assignment I got a.... I'm going to be open so I'm not going to keep anything inside me. So I got 43%. Fortunately for me I passed it. And my seminar leader advised me to seek for, for student support. So I booked an appointment with them at the main campus. I went there. And that topic was about diabetes. And the lady I met there was telling me, 'Oh, I've not even had anything like this before. Err... What was he or she expecting you to write?' I said, 'I was advised to attend the student support; that's why I'm here. And if you know you cannot help me can you please direct me to another person or something like that?' Er, she said, 'Oh you need to re-book again.' And to this I said, 'Oh, as somebody who is sitting here as a student supporter officer or whatever, you should know... even if you don't know anything, a little bit about what is going on around the University about the courses, even if not all.' And diabetes is something that is very very popular. Even if that person does not have diabetes, she must have heard about it before. At the end of the day she said I need to re-book so I booked another appointment. So I went again. And the lady I met said, 'Oh, you need to, you need to seek the help of, er, health librarians - those are the people that are, those are the people that know much about the Adult Nursing or something in nursing generally.' So I was a bit disappointed because I booked the first appointment and nothing was really concrete done. The second one, the second time, said, 'Oh you need to go and book an appointment with the health librarians.' Why can't they let me know at the initial time? When I first booked the appointment? What course are you doing? Er... Which area do you want to... Which area do you need help on? Something like that. So I was highly, highly, highly disappointed.

So I went back to my seminar leader then and my seminar leader advised me that, er, anytime I write my essay I should give it to somebody, maybe a nurse on the ward or somebody who's been to university before to help me with my academic writing. So my first experience was not very good at all.

Q: Right. So, compared to what you experienced then, how would you have expected it to happen instead?

AJOKE: What I was expecting them to do was, when I was booking the appointment, ask me the area where I want help from. Are you, are you an economics student? Are you a Law student? Are you a science student? Are you a, what is it called? a Nursing student or maybe health related student? They need to ask me so that OK, I'm an Adult Nursing student - whenever I come for an appointment - somebody who knows something about nursing or about health generally should be there to help because now we are paying nine thousand two fifty for the course. So they should, they should like eh... and, er, people who, people learn differently, people learn differently. We might be visual. Another person might be listening. And another person might be like, maybe two or three times, something more. So I was expecting them to give me the actual person who is, who knows what is really going on with what I'm studying. But not what happened. Two appointments. By the third one I was fed up so I didn't even book the third one at all.

Q. OK. Does anybody else have any experience to share with regard to student support?

AGRIS: Um. I mean for me. Because I think we both did the same course. The same degree - I did Adult Nursing too. And we had to do, we had to do... I chose to do diabetes. Um, and first I.. I mean it might just be me. But I don't feel like.. For me at least there's no difference. Like I mean, when I did.. Cos like there was English... So when they did that module, there was a different module for English for us minority ethnic group. Um, people that would help English. And they basically explained what, what we have to do in the essay... and what we have to do to pass the grade and stuff. So um... So that's where I had the support that I needed to do that essay. And for a lot of people there they weren't just like black ethnic groups or like Asians like there were actually some white people there too and you know even they needed help so um personally I felt like during that time when I did that module.. actually that was probably the most help that I had compared to the other modules that I did um throughout the entire year so ah, that's my experience.

Q And would you say that it was in line with your expectations?

AGRIS: Ah yeah, I was really happy with it actually. Compared- It's because like, the only reason why that was the best was because I think Covid struck around January and around February so that was where it kind of slowed down but but during that September to December time I had a lot of help like I kept on going to English- I kept on going to my English teacher to ask for help. Obviously it was kind of weird because er I was rather going to my English teacher to ask for essay tips rather than

going to my nursing teachers and asking them for help. But erm, essentially I was really happy with how that first semester went and how much help that I received. Erm, and yeah.

Q. Right. Anybody else have anything to say about their experiences of maybe attending classes or student support or anything like that?

MAYA: Erm, I feel like it was different from my expectations because when I started I thought there'd be more support academically, erm, so like when I started last year I felt like I was turning in student assignments and I wasn't very supported, even when I asked for support I was told to go to the Upgrade centre. But I did think like, at first for the first assignment we should have more support than what we was given.

Q. Right. Anybody else?

KATH: I can go now if... Yeah, I think I had the most difficult time at Brookes at my initial start. And the biggest disappointment. Both to the admin teams and the lecturers. Yeah. Because, erm, I already had the offer at Aylesbury, is it Buckinghamshire University? I even did my DBS with them and also Northampton but later I thought let me just apply to Brookes through clearance. And I applied through clearance so someone called me but the message wasn't clear. Erm. The voice message the person left was not clear. So I tried to listen to it on several occasions. It wasn't clear so I said let me go there to find out who left the message and expect from me. So I went there. I played the voice message to the [inaudible] in reception PAC [Programme Administration Centre] office so I went there listening to it they said, 'Oh, it's this person let's call him.' So he came down. Then he explained some things to me. Erm. And he said to me, 'If you want I can book an appointment to interview you or if you want I can interview you today.' I said although I wasn't prepared for any interview but I don't mind, I rather have it today than to come back. So he said, 'OK'. He went and came back with a lady. Then we went to the room then we did the interview and they told me that 'you been offered a place.' That very day. And they said they would send everything to me but I've never received any pack in my home address. I've never received any pack. So a week before the 17th of September which we start, on the 10th of September, I did call them and I explained to them that during my interview they said that I will have a pack but I've never received anything and next Monday the University is opening and I'm supposed to come there. And they said to me, 'Um, you can come around nine o'clock, before nine if you can come, that's fine and go to the theatre hall.' So I came; I was there before nine o'clock. And they came; they did the talk and I was the very first one in the queue to have my pack and other information - welcome pack and so on. But my name was not on any list. Oh, they said, 'Oh this is surprise - the first person's name was not on any list.' So I'm... After the lectures, the introduction of the lecturers, they asked me - if you want I can name them but if you don't I can just go on... Yeah the Course Leader said to me, erm, in the afternoon, that I should go to Seminar One, erm, Group One for my seminar. I said OK. I went there. They wrote the names. I put my name down. Then, the second Week Two, every week or day that I am at university I talked to them, asked them where I should go and every week I'm in a different seminar group. Seminar One, Seminar Two, Three, Four, Five, up to six. Different different lecturers. And surprisingly the whole of that Semester One my name was not on any list, not on Nursing



Fundamentals one, not on Education and Nursing Practices so I just go to university so that nine o' clock I know that if we have seminars or anything I will be there but that sometimes, that they go to Brookes and I'm not even having any information, nothing at all. So I just go and ask friends, those that I know. 'Where are you going?' - then I will talk to the lecturers and they say, 'Oh - go this group; go to that group.' The whole of semester I was like that. And after, it confused me and distressed me a lot and still now I do feel distress of it; sometimes I can have flashback of what happened. So after, I went to the Student Support Coordinators; I explained the things to them - those ladies are so nice. And they are so helpful. Those in Marston. They did help me a lot but there is a limit that they can go. They sent emails and when I go to the PAC office to ask the Course Administrator, she was saying to me, 'XX is your Academic Advisor' but no, not even an introduction or any email from XX as my Academic Advisor. Nothing at all.

I went to the PAC office on several occasions. And I went to student office, Student Support Coordinators, E and M, they been helping me, sending emails. Because I was not having any information there's a lot of things that I've missed. I've missed a lot. And after, when we did the, when we did the, erm, assignment, I have not even had the assignment information until Week 6. All the lectures has stopped. Then after, when I did the assignment, I don't even know where to go or where to start from. So after, I went to them, erm, some of the emails that were sent were sent in groups; some of them I sent the emails by myself; some of them were sent by the Student Support Coordinators, and some of them are even in group messages to the lecturers and those administrators and those in lead. So when, erm, after I said... The week we started placement I've been emailing my Academic Advisor on several occasions - she never replied. When I was told she was the one, on several occasions she never replied. So the first day we start our placement I said, 'Today I have to go there to see her in person - why she's not replying to my emails.' So when I went there erm, I saw even that teacher, one of the lecturers she said, 'Why are you here?' I said, ern, 'I came to see this person because this is what has been happening.' And then after, I think that person might have talked to her. Then a Student Coordinator - she did email me that she has never received my emails which I believe is not truth. Because some of the emails, if others can - group emails - if others can reply why can she not see it? So after - those girls are the Student Support Coordinators, E and M call her, then after we share some ideas, she said to me, 'OK, I will book you an appointment.' Then she book me an appointment and we just introduce ourselves and so on. Then after she said to me, 'Maybe we can have this every month' - well, that never happened. It just stopped at that day.

Q. Sorry can I stop you there? So it sounds to me - and it's quite common to what a lot of people have been saying so far - is that there isn't enough support with assessment and things like that. Could we think, what has helped you to be successful academically?

KATH: Yeah, even the girls. Because later I asked, because when I did the assignment, they said I had 48% similarities of the original one. I said I don't mind, the 52% is my own work. I don't... I'm not agreeing with that because we all have the same scenario and Part One and Two and Three are from that scenario and obviously scientific words - I could not change those words. So I didn't believe that I have 48% similarity. So later I wasn't happy with it then after I wrote to the Student Central in the main campus to tell them what has happened. So when I lodged a complaint they wrote to me that

this is more than a complaint. So after they said they're going to do a review of the conduct officer's report. They're going to do a review. So when they did that review I went for that meeting with one of the Student Support Coordinators. We explained everything and even the Academic Conduct Officer said some things that I should be eligible but wasn't happening. And after they asked me to retake that module again. And that year we don't have a January start. And I have to... When I did my other... It even affect my other assignments. Because ENP1 I had 57 but the other ones, because of that stress and having to do all those things and it was all too much then I failed the other two; I have to retake them. But luckily I passed them after retaking them. And I am dyslexic. I been following the thing; I went for an.. Before I have even my [first/fourth?] assessment, it was even in the middle of January, on the eighteenth of January which should not be happened from September to January. And she said I have disability as well because I'm dyslexic and I have fibromyalgia, arthritis and diabetes. So I have... Later, they did the first, initial assessment in January and before it takes it's almost like the end of semester, around March before I settle down. So... which is almost at the end of, middle of Semester 2. So, even the girls - the Student Support coordinators, they told me that 'You are so brave because if all this happened to some other student, they would have left the course long time.' But I know why I want to do that nursing course. Because I am a campaigner of FGM and I want to follow my.. I have every experience but I don't have the medical background. That's why I want to do this course in order to defend myself and in order to give more support to the women and so on. So but after...

Q. Sorry Kath, can I stop you for a second?

So I can end it there that, erm, I been failed by the administrators and I have to repeat that year which was last year. When I repeat that semester I have to sit... still, I'm sitting down to wait for those in Year One because I've done all my placement and so on, to wait for them to start Year Two in September so I wasted one whole year and I'm going to pay a fee for that; they're not even refunding me. To me, because of my colour or because of my nature of disability, they're trying to get the advantage. But I challenge it because no I'm not happy and I have flashback. I have PTSD, something else before this thing. I have post-natal depression for several years. So when these things happen, sometimes I have my down days when they all come as sort of like a video in front of me. So for that being the case, still I'm not happy but I just want to continue my course and I'm here today to avoid what has happened to me could happen to other students that cannot... that doesn't have the capacity or the courage to defend themselves the way I do it because I've been working with Amnesty International since 1995. And I've been conducting a charity; I'm a charity director so I say no to discrimination and racism. So because of that I have to continue to show them that I'm something else.

Q. Yeah, yeah. We can go on to later - there's a question in there about motivations for coming into higher education. Sorry, Elle - you raised your hand.

EL: Yes, I just wanted to say... Basically give an account of my experience if that's OK? I'll try and be as concise as I can. Erm, so in terms of academic support, so initially in my first year, erm, my Academic Advisor was not English and I felt that because she was a foreigner, erm, I dunno, I felt like

there was more of a rapport - that she understood me. I think maybe she had like three others and we were both, all of us, we weren't English, so she basically mentored us and I felt like she would check up on us, like we would have regular meetings and stuff like that to see how we were going on. But then she left the course and then now we have someone who's English. And she, she hasn't even introduced herself until maybe like six months down the line. Erm, so in terms of that, I mean like personally I wasn't really too bothered because I just got on with it, erm, so maybe that can be a factor. Like, maybe they don't know how to speak to someone who's not English, is you know what I mean, whereas even my old Academic Advisor was white but because she wasn't English, I felt like she was able to understand us a bit more. In terms of academically, I mean I want to say that they're fair but then I had one experience where I had to challenge one of my assignments and that was not - To me I felt like I just didn't want to use 'oh, because I'm black' and I felt like that was the only reason why I was treated unfairly but I didn't want to say it because obviously you can't go assuming things and making statements if there's no evidence. But deep down inside I knew that was the case because for some reason, like, me and this lecturer, we would never get on, like, everything I say, if I didn't understand anything she'd be like, 'Well, why do you not get it like everyone else?' I'm like, 'Well, I don't get it. I'm telling you I don't get it.' And she would just basically, just oh, like, I don't know, 'Ask someone else.' Like 'Ask the girl from your cohort because they understood so...'

Erm. Student support - I've had numerous experiences with them, numerous encounters with them and they've been really lovely, like E and M - not just with my student life but with my personal life and stuff like that, they've been, they've been excellent so... I mean that's all that I have to say in terms of like academic support.

Q. Can anybody comment on your experiences with the wider student experience - with your friends, with clubs and societies, and things like that?

MAYA: Erm, I feel like I haven't really had any issues like that with any students. Erm, no.

AGRIS: Not me either; I've joined. I've joined, I think just one group; just one society and they're all really nice. Well a lot of them are Asian so I can... It's, it's pretty easy to just like know... Especially when they're Phillipinos as well so I can like, so we all have the same culture and everything. So for me it's not a problem either.

Q. Anyone else? Ajoke? Kath?

AJOKE: Yeah, yeah. For me it's the same thing because you know, from Africa we live with our sisters and brothers so we see each other, we support each other in the very little way that we can. So - and er, what I want a little bit to emphasize is that when we're in class sometimes the English people, because of the accent and because it's their country, it seems they grab things quickly than us. But the teachers, sometimes they don't understand that. They believe that when those people can get it straight away that we too should be able to get it straight away. So some of the lecturers are very

good, I must be honest. Some of them are very good in teaching or at teaching. But some of them, if you don't get it one time, that's it. So they believe that the way those people, the English girls or boys, the way they grab it, they expect us to grab it straight away like that. They forget about our background, they forget about age, they forget about why we are there or why we want to do that course. They forget about the passion. But they just want us to get it straight away like that. So, so, with us black people - we are family, we are one - outside our country - either from East, West, South or North. We are same thing. But, but the lecturers - they don't understand us. If they can just understand us a little bit more that we give us the, the encouragement and the confidence to work harder. But when you are asking questions and they are 'hmmmm' - or maybe the lecturer is pretending not to hear what you are asking. Or maybe the [inaudible] 'oooh' you know? Your self-esteem will just go down straight away. It just goes down straight away. So if they can just understand us a little bit more and encourage us and take us as we are. I think that would really help us. That is my, that is my candid opinion. If they can take us as we are we do much better. We got potentials. But because of er.. Because we don't have the confidence or maybe because we are afraid that if we say this, they gonna do this; if we say this, they gonna do that. Some of these English students, they don't fail. I must be honest with you - they don't fail. If they fail their course they will go and meet their seminar leader or whoever is the lead. They, they don't fail at all. And they don't even carry over. Only when they don't want to do the course. But for them to carry over and stay one year - I've never seen any students in my course - no. It is either they're not happy with their course and they left or maybe they just want to relax. So if they can understand us a little more and give us a chance to prove our potentials I think that confidence will help us to work more harder.

Q. Does anyone have any feelings on how relationships with staff have either helped or hindered your academic success?

KATH: Yeah, it do affect because somebody mentoring you - if that person is not listening to you - as my sister [indicating Ajoke] said, it has an impact because you will feel like you been isolated or been betrayed because they are there to guide you. But if they are not doing that erm, you don't know where to go because us three, we did our education back home. And the education system there are here are quite different - there's a big gap between the two. So for that being the case they should have, listening to us and to help us when we can but some of them, when you ask them they tend to pretend that they didn't even hear what you are saying so that gap I don't know how you people can bring it not even equal but at least a bit closer will help us and will improve our performance. Like as my sister said most of these, of them even in the classroom, they tend to do things and they're gone. Even if you're in the group with them, they won't be associated with you. I've witnessed that on several occasions. And just to give an example, quick example that like, even when I was at City College Oxford this, the one that was taking us, one on psychology and so on, that one. She will give all the white people As: A, A, A, A. But all the black people no matter what, no matter how hard you work - you only have a pass, no matter what work you do, you only have a pass. I do challenge her and I took her to the office one time. And she tried to change my grade to Merit but all of them will have Distinction and she will mark all of them, their papers and we will be the last person. Because that was the time I even said, 'I'm not going...' At that time I have to take an extension. Extension. But one of my friends there said, she said she heard her saying to... She heard the white people discussing about their grade. She went to her - she said, 'Oh, I didn't mark any of the papers at the moment' which isn't true. And after, the other day, the other one asked, she said to them, 'Oh, I've

marked all the papers except for the four that is left to me' and I said to them, 'Maybe that's your papers because me, I've not submitted mine yet. So that's four of you. Your papers have not been marked but all the other ones have been marked and they been having distinctions and so on' - which is not fair at all to be honest.

Q. Just to be clear, that wasn't at Brookes, that was at City University wasn't it? [City College Oxford?]

KATH: Yeah.

Q. How about your relations to staff in Brookes? Anything you'd like to talk about there?

Like my sister said, erm, one time I do attend the seminar group, when I was roaming about everywhere - the tutor was OK though. She was an English - I can't remember where she was from now but erm, she was helpful though. But I found out when I was in the other class as well we have some white English lecturers that quite a big gap between them and the way they teach as well. And when I was retaking the last module my seminar leader was black like me. And he did very well though. He, he help us so much. And some of them, sometimes he even has to provide some other notes like a crib notes for all the class which I feel was so kind of him to do that because some of them, they would just come like a paragraph because for me, I'm dyslexic: I have to read some of the things like two, three times or four times to understand it. But if you come like you want to read a pamphlet in our one hour, I won't get anything from it. This time, when we are doing the therapeutic relationship, they have videos. So mostly I tend to watch the videos which is helpful. They've been prepared and they do like, notes and videos so I tried to check, watch the videos at least that way I will capture it nicely then to read the texts.

Q. Mmm. That's just like what Ajoke said isn't it about different learners and different ways of learning. Does anyone else have anything to say about how their relationships with staff have affected them - either in a good or bad way?

EL: Erm yes. So I had one lecturer - like I said, we butted heads from Day One. She made some comments about - I mean is it OK to say what course I'm doing?

Q. Yes all the information will be edited out.

So I'm doing Midwifery and erm, she basically one day she was talking about her experience of travelling to Africa and the stuff that she was saying, I was offended. I mean, I'm not from Africa, I'm from South America but the stuff that she was saying, I felt offended by it and I told her and I think that's maybe why she didn't really take to me. And then she had her picture on the University page; she had just a picture of herself and she had some black kids in the background. And I'm like - out of

all of the pictures that you can put as your profile picture, why would you do that? I mean the kids are not a part of the picture. They're just in the background - what are you trying to... I don't know I just felt offended by it. Anyway, she knew that I felt that because I spoke to the Head of Midwifery about it and for some reason in my second year - because I'm in the third year now - in the second year, she marked two of my assignments - I did the worst ever. I got, I think, 49% and 50-something. And for all of my assignments I had been getting like 70%, 80% so anyway, right away I just went to challenge it and, erm, so I went to the Head of Midwifery and she basically said she's going to talk to her but because it was double-marked by someone else - so she was the first marker, this lecturer, and one of her colleagues double marked it, she said that they can't really challenge it. But luckily it was only like 50% of the final grade - 50% was practice, so my practice grade, I got like 90-something which made up my, erm, overall grade. And for some reason she would just like avoid me; she wouldn't say anything to me and, like I said, I didn't know if I challenged her on the first day and it was in front of everyone. So I mean, that was the only person I didn't have a good relationship with and she's left now like last month, she left. So I'm, I'm so happy because, like, with all of my other lecturers, they were all white; they've been very supportive, if I needed anything they would give me feedback, so it's just this one who I felt she wanted to portray that she was well travelled she would visit Africa and look at these pregnant women and then they would give birth under trees and I'm like, 'That's not Africa - maybe it's one specific area but you can't generalise' and I told her that and she, she wasn't really happy with me but yeah. So like I said, everyone else has been fine; they've given me great feedback in my assignments. I try and submit everything on time and stuff like that so I don't really have any concerns. And in terms of practice as well, like, I mean, maybe I'm just lucky but I had just one bad experience with one lecturer and she's left now so...

Q. Mmm, mmmm. So when this lecturer was doing the things that she was doing, did that make you feel like maybe it impacted your sense of belonging with the University because she was othering you and making assumption?

EL: Yes, I just thought surely she's not doing this because I'm black. I just didn't want to associate because like I said, I didn't experience it with anyone else. And I'm like, obviously we have another black girl on our course so its, you know, we're definitely a minority but like I said, I didn't really notice it because of all the support that we got but for some reason whenever she would explain something and I didn't get it she would just basically be like, 'Well ask someone else' - because everyone else got it the you should get - she knows she wasn't really giving me a chance and I don't know what - and like I said, I didn't want to assume because I'm black. You know you can't get on with everyone but for some reason... And, saying that one student who - she is a registered midwife now - I told her my experience because I'm like, maybe let me just find out from someone else who's black if they encountered the same thing and she was saying that she basically failed her in her third year. And she's like, 'She's just like that. She's this type of person.' So... I don't know, it's hard to just say you're treated differently if there's no concrete evidence, that's what I'm trying to say.

Q. Ajoke.

AJOKE: Yes, I just want to say a little about what she talked about. During our Research Methods, there were these ladies lady in our seminar group. The English ladies. When the teacher is like 'We need focus group' er, we have to do like a form to ask questions; we have to do this, the statistics. And they say, 'Oh yeah yeah' Because I'm an outspoken person, I don't hide my feelings. I told the seminar leader, 'Excuse me: we are not the same. They might not have done it before; they are not English. They know the statistics of people dying or people not dying or all the statistics and things like that.' For us minority, we need to learn all these things from the beginning. Because they were like, 'Oh yes' - and the lecturer would just continue like that but we are not getting it. We are not getting it at all. What do you want us to do? Which one do you want us to understand? Do you want us to look at the statistics or what is research methods? So that was the time when the lecturer just 'Ah, OK - shall we, shall we, shall we go back to it then?' And we said yes. Because you cannot be saying 'Oh, because those people understood what you are saying...' So you expect us at the same time to understand the same as they are. So I challenged that and they said, Oh sorry shall we go back again now? She did anyway - she did. If not - my knowledge; I will fail that research methods because it's a very complicated topic. Because we have to learn about so many things within that short period of time. And we have to do the exam. So, so if not because I was like... And later on, when I said to the lecturer can they please organise for us like a, like a follow-up - maybe after the seminar when the students who are interested can wait behind if there's something they want to clarify with the lecturers and things like that. Which they did. Which they did. But supposing I was like quiet, following them the same, nodding my head, 'Oh that's OK, that's OK.' We wouldn't have got through the exam.

Q. Yeah, yeah. So to build on that, what do you think the University could do to reduce or remove the attainment differential?

KATH: I think it would be difficult to totally remove it because of human nature. Some of them if you don't challenge, those on top they won't know what's going on in the classrooms. So like I believe erm if they can just erm explain things and also listening to us.

Q. When you say explain things, what do you mean specifically?

KATH: Like for example, like erm certain things that because people can understand things in a different way. At least you try to know the person that you are teaching better - that will help her. Or by asking questions where they do understand or not rather than just talking to the whole seminar. Because some of the people are shy and they are shy to ask questions like others who are extrovert that will view out their opinions but not everybody can do that. Some people can be shy. And at the end of the day, if they continue like that they might even misinterpret the exam questions or the essay questions and they may end up failing.

Q. OK so besides the assessment support and the teaching in a more inclusive way, anyone else got any ideas of how the University could address the attainment gap?

AGRIS: I thought like what they did in the first semester. So for us they gave everyone an option of applying, getting into this English course if you're able to join in. And like, it only lasted for one semester and it only lasted for like one assignment. So I thought maybe it would have been even more beneficial for everyone if it continued throughout the entire year until everyone was like completely comfortable with the second year. Because I would understand like second year not being, not having that support because we were all getting marked by second year. But first year I thought it would be even more beneficial if they continued doing that for the entire year.

Q. Could you explain a bit more why you think this is important that it continues?

AGRIS: Erm, because primarily this one English lesson in general helped me with like building my essays and with like doing really well in work and just answering to what the University wanted me to do basically and like erm I was really really happy with that English course; I really did wish that it continued throughout the entire year and erm I thought, I mean for me like nearly everything, like them explaining erm so references and like stuff to use on databases so earlier I heard someone talking about like databases and stuff and like references so I thought maybe that would have been really helpful if everyone was doing that throughout the entire year until everyone was really comfortable but in general it was so so helpful because they really did explain everything like essay structure, references, erm, what the Uni's asking you to do and how you should answer and really important fundamentals. I think for everyone, even for starting university. I'm pretty sure that some people here haven't had, like is like the first time going to Uni and stuff. And first time going, like a big milestone doing from work to uni, compared to me - I went to college and then to uni. It might have been a big thing for other people.

Q: El, you had your hand up.

EL: Erm, yes in terms of what I think the University could do differently, erm, so the lecturers they teach us these modules and we have the assignments and we submit drafts so I feel like they already know that it's your work. So if they have some system where it's anonymised but I mean how can that be? Say for instance you know like GCSEs A levels where you have an outside marker so that there's no inside influence if that makes any sense? So I feel like, if you go for help and you submit a draft - they already know that is your work because we have such a small cohort. Like they know everyone so I feel maybe if there's an outside marker then there'll be no influence I feel.

Q. OK thank you anybody else?

KATH: To add onto Agris - what he's saying about the English language course - before that wasn't happening but it was just last year that they introduce which was so helpful and useful. So that English so help us because there's some things that I don't know before like how to start, like those that are general words for the essay like the openings, signposting that everybody use. Before I don't know that because when I saw those things I thought before I will, especially having that experience,



I thought if I do that I will be like copying someone's work but because of that English classes I happen to know all those things that you can do those things, signposting, the same language which is happen every essay. And because of that one, since Semester Two of last academic year I wasn't doing anything, it gave me the courage to do academic english learning. I talked to the teacher, I said I'm not doing anything this semester, so is there any chance that you are doing the English classes that I can attend. She said, 'Oh, we're having a class erm that is supposedly for academic english writing.' I said, 'Oh I have to enrol then.' I learn a lot - those English courses are so useful if they can continue that will help so many of us that are lagging behind.

Q. Thank you. Yes Ajoke.

AJOKE: I just want to talk about the Academic Advisors. They are not doing anything at all. Because since we started 2018, we had just one meeting. Just one meeting for the whole year. They are not, they are not, they are not helping, they are not advising anything academically. Because I, to me, I expect them to like communicate with us. How are you doing? How are you going? How are you finding your course? Have you got any difficulties? Is there any way we can help you? There was nothing like that for the whole year. Just one meeting with two of them. With two of them. Nothing. No communication. I think they need to do more job about the advising. They need to communicate because communication is very important. If they don't communicate with us and we don't communicate with them, they don't know where we need help. They don't know what we need. So if they can just try as much as possible because that is why they are there. That is why they appointed them as our Academic Advisors. They need to be checking on us even if it's just maybe four times in a year or maybe two or three times. Check on us - how are you finding it and if we have any difficulty then they can assist us: you do this; you do that; contact this, contact that. Then from there we can improve ourselves.

Q. So kind of a more proactive support rather than waiting for somebody to say something.

AJOKE: Exactly, exactly because they know us. They know where we are lacking so then they can direct us to relevant channels. OK you are having problems with academic writing - OK I'll give you this email to contact these people. If you're having difficulty with one of the lecturers I say the way you can help us. Do you want to be recording the lectures? Jotting things down? Do you want to video [?] work? Little things.

Q. Thank you. Anybody else?

KATH: I just want to - not everybody's bad though - but I just want to turn to my link lecturers - both my first placement and my last placement. Because I had A when I was at my renal ward he was so useful because I had some issues there. People there, they just nightmares but he was able to. Like constantly putting me on nights which is not good for my health like three nights in a row in a week. I complained they don't... but A was able to offer a support and he even have to send me. The

Academic Advisor was good when she was in and she sent me to Occupational Health and I did more than 200 hours at night in one placement. More than 200 hours - they just put me on nights for no reason. And when I finished nights I can't even, one night even I get sick and ill. And I complain they didn't bother. When A send me to the Occupational Health erm and that was the starting of the night of January when we went back, the day after the night I went for the appointment - she couldn't even hear what I was saying because my voice was like completely gone. And so and so that helps a lot and also my other link lecturer on my second placement with the district nurses there too they were good but there were some just like a slight issue. But C was also helpful, CB, and most of the time like even two to three months in she will come and look at us, check on us, ask us whether we need any support or anything else - it was so good as well though. Yeah - those are the two link lecturers I had but they were all so good and helpful to the students.

Q. So I've noticed that our discussion today has mostly been around very - at the really person-to-person level. But I just wondered if any of you had thoughts around curriculum or aspects of assessment maybe? For example, is the curriculum - does it feel like it's only presenting one perspective - it's not inclusive?

EL: Yes, I can add to that in terms of Midwifery. Most of the stuff that we learn is just based on the white body, a white baby, a white pelvis and I think that they would just mention that, 'Oh erm like Asian women have a different pelvis type; Black women have a different pelvis type'; but in terms of actual labour, everything is based on a white pelvis, or a typically white woman pelvis - how long labour should be and stuff like that so I think they need to incorporate different erm cultures into it. And in terms of assessing the newborn baby, you know you look for stuff like pinkness and redness and even like pregnant women, like, you know, going flushed. Like one night I was looking after this pregnant woman and she had sepsis and one of the main signs is that they go pale like - a Black person, how can you see if they go pale? You need to incorporate ways in which we can assess someone who is not white.

Q. Thank you. Does anybody else have any similar experiences of the curriculum not being inclusive.

MAYA: I feel like sometimes when we are learning about Black, Asian or ethnic minority groups it's - it does seem like it's mostly negative views. Erm, I'm doing Adult Nursing as well so er one of the first modules, Fundamentals 1, I did with how the Afro-Caribbean diet affected a case-study I had. It just felt really negative like we had to like describe how the diet caused her diabetes to rise and made her vision lose. It was just like when we do learn about how health affects different races and people of colour it's usually quite negative if that makes sense.

Q. Thank you Maya - Agris.

AGRIS: Erm I'm not really sure - I'll be honest like I think. I have nothing to say.

Q. Sorry - Ajoke.

AJOKE: Let's be realistic with ourselves. This is a research. And we want to move forward from here. These people, when they were talking about Black and Asians, they prefer to move more closer to the Asians than the Blacks - let's be sincere with ourselves. When we have like maybe like a display on the whiteboard about Africa, English and things like that. If it's like the worst part - you will see the Black pictures there. There will never be anything about diabetes in China or maybe diabetes in Korea. Or maybe diabetes in Malaysia. There's never put that. It's always black black black. So that is why my fellow student cannot say much about it because when it comes to Asian they discriminate Africa more than Asians. Let us be sincere with ourselves - I've had a lot of experience. I've done a care job for fifteen years so I know what I'm talking about. When it comes to discrimination they discriminate us more than the Asians. So that is why most times when they are talking and showing examples they show examples from Africa. But they forgot that Africa we don't live on the top of the trees. There is no country where you don't have the slums. Even in Asia you have the slums where the poor people live. In Africa the same thing - even in UK, even in America. But they will never mention those areas. When we go to Africa where flies are covering these children's faces and where flies are flying about on top of foods. So they need to change that; they need to change that because of the coming generation. They need to say that. They don't discriminate about Asians. They don't discriminate about them. After Africa they come to India. They measure India - diabetes is high, they are falling off, population is outrage, population is that. But when it comes to the lighter-skinned Asians they don't say anything. They don't. This is a research. Let us be sincere please. Because we need to move on for the people coming behind us. Because I'm in the third year now, by the grace of God very soon I'll finish but I think about other people coming behind me. Let us help them; let us be open please. Let us be open so that we can help those people coming behind us. Because at 56 now I'm doing Adult Nursing - I need all the support; it's because of the passion. And I've done a care job for fifteen years I want to upgrade myself. So that is it. Let us be sincere please - don't say 'Oh you don't have nothing to say about that'. Let us be sincere with ourselves. This is a research and a research must be like experience research. So this is a research with our own experience. Yes please.

Q. Mmm. Mmm. Thank you. OK we are getting close to the ending time. I will now give you a list of things which other universities have done and evaluated to address the attainment gap. And I'll just share with you on the chat here. If you could look through this list here individually and I'll give you time to consider your top three most important things. So I'll give you a few minutes to consider what would be the top three or five most important ones.

KATH: My most important one will be like the initial support. Erm. Like giving. Like. Initial support like giving information at the right time. In terms of like the curriculum because you have to write an exam on it or an assignment so give informations, the informations, or the writing support should be at the initial stage to improve someone's speech and improving to make friends because I think Ajoke, when I started with them, we tried to form a group like a mature students' group where sometimes we do share ideas between ourselves and so on. So.. Because when you ask people to join a group, for example in a seminar, the white ones will go in one group while the Black ones will

go in one group. Like choosing by numbers - 1,2,3 - will make everybody mix together and have that rapport. So that's very important to me.

Q. OK thank you. Anyone else? Ajoke.

AJOKE: Mine is Number 11: like giving 1-1 support because most of us students when they have resit maybe if they can do 1-1 check with them. Where they getting it wrong? What do they need to improve? I think 1-1 we help them. Because failing one module and staying at home for one good year doing nothing - I think that is not really good. If people have got resit - if we can help them 1-1 OK - not like spoonfeeding them but just to show them what to do. Not just typing it on the paper and that is it. They need to ask them questions. They need to ask questions 'What do you want to improve?' This is what you need to do. This is how you need to write it. We need your ideology. We need your experience. Things like that. I think the 1-1 would help people with resits. Because then for one module - staying home for one year is so depressing. But the 1-1 might help them. Not to spoonfeed them - not to write it for them or put it on the paper - but just to give them a little bit guide like because, like I said earlier on, we learn in different ways. We learn in different ways. So maybe they need more explanation on that very topic which they don't catch up when they were in the class. Maybe something like that might help.

Q. Any others from the list that you think are important?

AJOKE: Maybe having the multi-national lecturers. Because like when we were Year Two, just last year, one of our lecturers, one of our seminar leaders is from Ghana. So when we were in the group the way he explains, you know, he brings me back to like OK I'm within my people. You know what I mean? Because he explains, er, we ask questions, we ask general questions - he doesn't mind. He answers us - even when we were preparing for our essays. He told us that we need to write essays like what we experienced on the ward because the essay was based on the medication calculation - what we give; what we don't give; how we give it; what we have to look out for - the ABCD. The white people were there and we were there as well. And he told us, 'No question is a silly question.' That's what he told us. He said, 'No question is a silly question. Ask the question as it comes to your head or to your mouth.' He was so... He came to our level. He came to our level of understanding. And I did very well in the essay; I did very well. So people like that- if you can make it like a multinational not like English and English and English because I remember Year One when I did my video assignment, oh my God, I did for... I don't even want to remember that experience. I did it and 'Oh what did you say?' 'Can you say that again?' I said 'Excuse me: I'm speaking English. I'm not speaking Spanish; I'm not speaking Lithuanian; I'm speaking English.' 'Oh, can you say that again?' I was upset. And she say, 'Oh OK OK. Just finish it and submit it as you were told to submit it.' But every time she said 'Oh, what did you say? Can you repeat that?' I said Excuse me I'm speaking English. My accent might be different. My voice can be a little bit high but at the same time I'm speaking English. So it's not like I was 'Ooh ah' - she might fail me. But because I said, Excuse me I'm speaking English I was even glad that I passed the recording essay. So if you can have like a multinational lecturers that would be very lovely.

Q. Great thank you - anybody else?

MAYA: I feel like the first definitely because a lot of us feel like we're not getting the support from the Academic Advisors and the lecturers and seminar leaders. We feel like we need more support and if we have an improved induction to help us make friends it would make that part a lot easier as well. I also think the fifth one - the more specific or guided independent learning tasks - the anonymous marking as well because someone mentioned how she felt one of the lecturers marked her work down. So I think in the examples that would help. Erm, definitely fourteen as well and seventeen.

Q. Thank you - El would you like to go.

EL: I was just going to add to what Maya says about number six because I do believe if something is anonymised then it's a more true representation of your ability than someone's perception or someone's opinion because I feel like when you do an assignment and you submit it for feedback they already have an opinion and sometimes the feedback is not as much as it can be. Like they just give you a generic feedback - 'Oh yeah maybe it's... Yeah it's fine; you're doing well.' And then when it comes to the actual final grade it's not but the feedback is like, 'Everything is fine.' So maybe if it's anonymised then everyone can have - I don't know how to explain it but I guess it's similar to GCSEs and A-levels. You know, there's not one specific person who always gets A because the teacher likes them. And I think number fourteen in terms of staff training on racial bias and discrimination because maybe they do it but subconsciously so maybe a bit more understanding of minority students and how they feel and the sorts of things that they would like in terms of support and stuff like that so.

Q. Right thank you. Agris I suppose? What are your thoughts on what are the most important of these in this list?

AGRIS: Erm, for me I thought number three - the academic writing. Of the entire year I thought that was the most beneficial thing I received because, I mean we don't really get that much lessons and after Covid, so I really just relied on the English that I learnt at the start of the year. And I thought it went really well. And the next one would be that 1-1 support. Erm, someone said earlier about how important it was and I would agree with everything they said. It would be really beneficial if they did that. That one on one support during the Covid time when we didn't really have any support during some of our assignments - I think it was like three; it was like three assignments where we literally did it on our own 'cos we didn't really get as much support as we needed during those assignments. Er and seventeen that seventeen I think someone said I like, I also feel the same like if it was a different ethnicity, if it was like a fellow Asian I don't know, a fellow Asian teacher, I kind of feel it's because of the culture thing like because you're in the same culture you kind of know, you're going to be able to be comfortable with them a lot more better and like everything so I would agree with that. And number one - the - like I've made a lot of friends in university and it was all really really beneficial for me like erm doing my assignments this, doing like three or four assignments without

help from the teachers, I really relied on my friends and because I had all those really helpful friends that I'd made during university it made the assignments that I've done without help of lecturers a lot more easier because we were all just helping each other and stuff. Erm. So those are what I thought.

Q. Cool. Thank you very much. [Closing words as per FG schedule]

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Focus group 5

[Removed preamble]

Researcher: OK, so moving on to the first question then. What has your experience of studying in higher education been like and how has it different from your expectations?

Markus: So far it has met my expectations because during high school, during A-levels, teachers made it very clear that uni would be very independent as in teachers would be that help you but primarily your grade is solely depend on how much work you do as an individual... teachers won't be there like in high school to necessarily, walk, walk you through everything. They won't be there to give back to back feedback on essays you may give to them and whatnot.

Researcher: What about in terms of, you know, like the student experience like your friends and joining societies and things like that.

Markus: Joining societies... er... Brookes has a mixture of people. Some are quite accepting and some are not, I'd say... There's a range... It's been a mixed bag of inclusion and exclusion, obviously, because as a black person in a primarily white neighbourhood sometimes people can feel awkward around me because I am the odd one out in that sense. I mean, obviously there are obviously other minorities in Oxford but they're very, from my experience, spread apart.

Researcher: Right. So, I mean, it sounds like, how would you characterize your engagement with your peers in university then, are your friends, mostly sort of black and minority ethnic or are they white or is it a mixture?

Markus: My friends, uh, one of them is Indian, I think. Another one is Pakistani and the other ones, they're from a different country outside England. A lot of my friends are from countries outside England. Yeah. I think it's partially. I think it's also because um... It's because I've been raised different to the many people in Oxford, from my experience in Oxford. Anyway, all the people are very middle class and thus not all of them have experienced this but from what I've seen any way. [unclear]. Everything they had, given to them on a silver platter, like silver spoon analogy, and for me coming from a very working class family... we take... our lifestyles are very different. So the things they may complain about, I wouldn't necessarily complain about. The views they may have on the world is going to be completely parallel to how I see things. So you know that's I think that's also affected thinking when it comes to interacting with people from Oxford and stuff like that.

Researcher: Right. So do you feel that this has impacted your sense of belonging, with the university, then?

Markus: Yes, I would say it has affected my sense of belonging, because there are many people who have lived the same life as I have and lived in the same neighbourhood and experiences and things as I have. So it does sometimes... you feel like you're the only one that exists in Oxford. That thinks like you and acts like you and behaves like you.

Researcher: Right, okay. Let's go back to your kind of you mentioned just now that your teachers in high school told you about, you know, being having to be more independent in university. Besides this kind of approach to studying your own study and things, any other where there any other differences that you... differences to your expectations for example around, I suppose, things like assessments or the content of your curriculum, teaching approaches, things like that?

Markus: I was expecting.... I know, I know, teachers in University have to be quite distant especially when it comes to certain subjects like psychology. They can't hold your hand for the whole experience. But I was quite surprised as to how distant they were, because comparing to other universities like UCL, which one of my friends go to, if she was to write an essay and give it to her teacher, even if it was just like a draft or like a practice essay, the teacher would take in and read it and send it back, but I've asked a few teachers whether I could do this and they have said that they are unable to because... reasons. And it confuses me as to why because if other universities are doing it, then why is Brookes unable to do so as well?

Researcher: Right. Okay. Do you think this has impacted your success academically?

Markus: Um, I would say somewhat because obviously if I'm... because they are psychology teachers I would like an insight into what they necessarily want in an essay structure because while they can give us a UG marking criteria and explain to us what they necessarily want, giving us the chance to actually write a practice essay and for them to say, Okay, this is what I like, this is what I don't like, would make it a lot clearer. It would give us a model or a demonstration of what to expect and what they want from us. They do give examples, but sometimes they fail to fully explain in complete detail how to structure the paragraphs and specifically what they want from us, because there's been times where they say I write too much or too little... i don't balance it enough. And then when I do balances other reason. It's very confusing sometimes.

Researcher: Right yeah so clear expectations would help. Yeah. Alright. What's then... Have there been any key differences that because I know you mentioned as you said, kind of expecting some elements of university study but have... What are the, what would you say are the key differences between your expectations and what you've experienced in uni, if any?

Markus: The teachers aren't as engaging with the students as I thought they'd be. Some are, for example, [tutor name]. If you were to go to him and ask him about statistics and the mathematical question he would be quite engaging and explain it in quite full detail, but some... a lot of the teachers on really as engaging as I expected them to be. I understand that it's uni and more independent, the work that needs to be done. But even with small things like a small draft, they're not really engaging and... What else... I would say... I think that's all I can think of right now.

Researcher: So I'm... Right, yeah. What are your reasons for attending higher education, then what's your future expectations?

Markus: If I'm being honest, personally, I did not really plan to go to university but my mother convinced me to push forward and go through it. So I'd say my mother is the main reason why I decided to go to university.

Researcher: Okay. All right. Any comments on your future expect future expectations.

Markus: For myself, Oh... I'm.. hope to God I do well! But I'm more of a... I'm trying my hardest and even if I failed, I guess that's what it is. Because sometimes you can try your hardest and you still you still won't get it. So whatever happens, happens, I'll just go with it.

Researcher: Right, okay. So let's move on to what you believe has helped you be successful academically and what has hindered you. Can you comment generally on some of these factors that you think helped and hindered you?

Markus: I think some of the things that have hindered me and a lot of minorities, if this is the aim of the study interview .... and this is why I wanted other people to join in, because they have some stories as well... is teachers from my past telling me that I won't amount to anything in particular, or teaches discouraging me from education as a whole. From... by being racist and/or prejudiced towards me. For example, I once had an English teacher who would who would stand by while another white student would call me Blackie or blick, or make fun of my second name which is black and essentially just be racist in numerous ways in front of me and that experience stopped me from seeing education or something I wanted to do. While I could overcome the bullying whatnot, I still saw education as I associated the experience in class with something bad. And the teacher not doing anything as something bad when it comes to came to school and education as a whole and thus I didn't really care as much for education.

Researcher: Would you say those sorts of attitudes are similar or different now that you're at university?

Markus: I'd say now the attitudes, because of the different teachers and it's a different environment it's... it's different. It's, it's finished. It's sorry it's ended for me as an experience. But the fact that it's still happened it lingers within your head, you can try and push out but at the end of the day it still happened and it stay a part of you for a very long time.

Researcher: Hmm.

Markus: Even in A-levels he was my teacher again and there was still a bit of tension between us, which put me off doing English and going to school as a whole because I felt if teachers don't care why should I?

Researcher: Right. So I'm in university, then how would you characterize your relationships with staff?

Markus: I would characterise my relationships with staff as... quite good actually. I'd say the relationship with staff is quite good. I wouldn't necessarily say buddy-buddy. But it's very respectable level.

Researcher: What... Any kind of specific reasons why you would characterize it as good?

Markus: For me personally, I would characterize it as good because the teachers at Brookes so far, just get straight to the point. There's no link ... me as a person. I just prefer if I'm going to speak to someone in an environment which we're not going to be friends, I prefer them to just stick to the task at hand, which is what the teachers generally do. If I go to them, it's for psychology or something like that and they just give me what I want and we go our separate ways, there's no further interaction that.



Researcher: So when you say what you want, you mean in terms of like academic support and things like that?

Markus: I wouldn't say there's much... very good relationships when it comes to academic support, but otherwise... yeah that's fine, everything else is fine.

Researcher: What about your relationships with other students, your peers. How would you characterize that?

Markus: Students when they first go to university, everyone is quite scared to meet other people so they put on a mask and for the most part, the first few years anyway, they fake who they are. So... the the relationship between students is quiet... Sorry, I'm just trying to think of the word for it. I was going to say... nonexistent, because I don't really know what they're actually like, for the most part, students... the illusion is it's good because students want to be liked and students don't want to be an outcast within you know there's within their education, with the topic group, their society, essentially, so they don't want to be an outcase. So the illusion is it's good, but I wouldn't really say that. I would say it's for the most part, for the first few years of meeting people and trying to be friends, it's non-existent.

Researcher: But then are these kind of issues then overcome in the later years. So would you say you have, you know, sort of...

Markus: The later years. Yeah. Now, I would say there's... It's been, it's been done, but even today, I'll say something, because I am in a psychology group and nobody really talks to each other and nobody really tries to engage with each other. At one point I decided I was, I decided to speak to everyone and say let's do a revision group together and not many people were quite interested, everyone, for the most part is in the earlier bubble, especially now since COVID-19 but for the most part, even when COVID wasn't around people were in their own little bubble, doing their own little thing.

Researcher: Right. But would you say that the do this kind of experience with quite distant peers, do you think that's impacted your studies or has it not really?

Markus: I would say that has impacted my studies because different students have different ideas on how to complete a task and that can enlighten you to different options and different ways of completing your tasks which could mean either getting high grade or low grade because someone might point that you never would have thought and that will increase your grade. So I think that does in some way affects my studies.

Researcher: Right okay um... What about your curriculum. Can you tell me anything about, you know, for example, do you find the the curriculum content engaging, interesting or relevant to you?

Markus: Particularly because this is psychology, I think it will always be relevant, because anything to do with psychology has to do with human beings, but it also has to do with me. So I would say yes, the curriculum that they've given us is quite engaging, the topics themselves might not be interesting for some people, but they are quite engaging if you take the time to read them and listen to them.

Researcher: And so I suppose to do you think that being relevant to you or has helped you when your studies?

Markus: Yes, that has helped me with my studies because if you if you find something that can relate to your own personal life in general, most people would try to understand it more and thus by

understanding it more you become proficient in explaining and evaluating that topic, which then leads into your essay writing so... I think, yeah, it does improve or affect my attainment.

Researcher: At what's about how kind of the, the, how you've been assessed, methods of assessment?

Markus: Is it good or bad, are you asking?

Researcher: Would you say any particular... yeah essentially is it good or bad.

Markus: I think the method assessment is quite good, the feedback is quite useful. We can go into the teachers' lounge and ask them for further information or further explanation and whatnot. So yeah, I think the method of assessment is great. I wish there were more exams, because most of all, most of it's been coursework, but that's not the fault of the teachers. So, yeah.

Researcher: Right, okay. And why, why, why do you wish that it was more exams?

Markus: Because while coursework is very good in the sense of it gives you free time to work on it and it's less stressful because it's just writing an essay question you can do like a paragraph a day, I think exams are a lot better because... with course work, you kind of have to hope to God every small part of your coursework is perfect otherwise, that's your... that's a half of your grade gone. Whereas with exams, because it's split into sections such as the multiple choice question and then the essay, you at least have a chance to get a good grade or an OK grade before the essays begin, so if you flunk the essays, at least you're backed up by the multiple choice questions.

Researcher: Right. Okay, so, um, can you speak to kind of your academic skills and confidence. Would you characterize yourself as being somebody who's quite confident in academic skills.

Markus: Okay. OK. OK. I would say, I'm OK, borderline OK. I wouldn't say I'm quite confident... depending on the question... if it's just explaining I'd say I'm confident but for the most part I'd say just borderline OK. Yeah.

Researcher: How do you... has the university supported you then in developing your academic skills.

Markus: Not necessarily, I'd use tutors for that... again because I wanted to present them with essay questions because they do do a essay structure and essay question and an essay group outside of the psychology department, I think it's called... I can't remember what it's called but they help you with writing your and stuff like that. And that's fine. But with something like psychology, you can't apply it to something like English because there's different terminologies and the different ways in which you have to structure it and you can't elaborate as much as you would in English with something like psychology, because they prefer to be concise and straight to the point. So this is quite hard to do so, which is why I particularly wanted teachers to look at my essays, but they were incapable of doing so. So... Yeah.

Researcher: So you mean the academic support for you, essay skills, they were not really in your discipline. OK. I see. And can you comment on any other. If you have any other commitments outside University. How has any commitments kind of impacted your studies.

Markus: I think using the tutors I've found outside of uni has really helped. This year anyway because a lot of them are psychology teachers or lecturers from other schools and they will tell you specifically what to expect, because they themselves [unclear] and will mark essays. So, I think tutors primarily have been quite useful and reading books and stuff like that.

Researcher: I think the question was, relating to other commitments, like for example employment or... responsibilities, things like that. Yeah.

Markus: Oh, sorry. Um... I guess, taking care of my mother has somewhat helped my academic studies in the sense of, I want to do good in the future so that if anything happens to her, I can provide. So I'd say something like that. Anything related to family has motivated me to work better. Apart from that I can't really think of anything.

Researcher: Right, okay. So you mentioned just now seeking support from the university for your essay skills. Has there been any other... have you tried to access university support for any other thing.

Markus: I've accessed university support for... English, the essay writing... apart from that... no.

Researcher: Okay, cool. Yeah, right. So, reflecting on your own experience, and also others that you know, why do you think black and minority ethnic students do less well at Oxford Brookes compared to white students

Markus: I think it's I think it's more on where they went to school. A lot of the black minorities that I see within school, within Oxford Brookes, are from working class high schools and a lot of the white students are from private schools or really good schools, for example, my girlfriend went to a private school and the level of education there has set her up to the point where she doesn't really need to revise or practice for her coursework and she can still get 68, 67 because they've ingrained the idea of how to properly structure and how to properly write essays and whatnot and exams into her while in working-class class schools that necessarily isn't really there, that type of education isn't there. Just for me, I would say... Again, this is why I wanted to bring other students into this. I would say sometimes for minorities anyway, when it comes to school, they're described as loud or rowdy, or just a disturbance within the class. But this isn't the case because everyone's a disturbance in class, there's minorities who are disturbances and then there's also white children who are also disturbances, but particularly in schools, from what I've seen, from my experience they have been mostly picked on, which then again correlates to what I said before, where I was talking about how this deters them from school because they associate education with being a problem and being told, you're bad and that deters them from just succeeding and trying hard in school because they just don't feel like going or caring anymore.

Researcher: Right. What about any factors during university. Would you...

Markus: Oh, did you did you solely mean university?

Researcher: Oh no I mean, you know, just generally but it's quite interesting that you are kind of talking a lot about the things that happened before University.

Markus: Because the past affects the future. I mean, a bully who bullies you from, you know, even in primary school was still affect how you act and behave when you're 19 to 18 to 20 even subconsciously, you won't realize it, but it was still affect how you interact with people and how you act.

Researcher: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, sorry. I mean, I don't disagree with. Yes, I mean it's interesting to see that. I mean, I'm just trying to get your perspective on sort of current University factors as well. If there are any that you can identify.

Markus: I think, I think... Now people are more aware of the problem. So it happens less so I don't think there are many problems currently, no... I mean, obviously, there's still a few odd eggs, but for the most part, from my experience anyway. University has been quite good. I have. I have. I have been told by one university student that, um, there are a few times where students themselves have made her feel uncomfortable. I think one of them said that, let's be thankful slavery happened. Otherwise, you know, she wouldn't be here. And that has deterred her from Oxford Brook because she didn't like her uni experience, after that she felt quite down and it was hard to work.

Researcher: So your experience you have you sort of felt that uni has just been kind of okay and

Markus: Yeah, that's me. But other people have felt different towards it. Yeah, okay.

Researcher: Alright. Cool. Thanks. So we'll move on now to the second section where I will ask you about your ideas and how to address and reduce the attainment gap. So basically, what do you think the university could do to reduce or remove the attainment gap?

Markus: I think if they were more engaging with the students. Specifically, as I pointed out before, with the practice essays. Practice essays are amazingly useful in helping students to understand specifically what the teachers want from them. Apart from that, I think during detailed seminars or detailed after uni groups on the marking criteria and fully explaining what each section of the marking criteria means would also heavily help and aid the students in understanding what to expect and what to write in the exams and etc because everything else... Apart from that, for psychology anyway, is just memory, which is something you can personally improve by yourself, but essay writing is something that teachers, they know... essay writing is something teachers can help students to fully understand or comprehend.

Researcher: What's about anything that university can do in terms of the more social aspects of university?

Markus: Like students and students [unclear] and stuff. Right?

Researcher: Yeah. Or, you know, anything that's not academic basically the other side of university experiences.

Markus: I think... Societies, but that's all dependent on the students themselves and at Oxford Brookes we have many societies so that students aren't really willing to [unclear]... I guess events would help students to interact more and socialize. Such as Christmas ball or something like that, but... um... I think addressing... Actually, sorry, I think a video of a lecturer or a seminar addressing certain problems that students may face in dorms or in general in university would be good, even, even if the students understand, I think even just talking about it would help the students to feel more at home and deter any bad behaviour within dorms and within the uni.

Researcher: What sorts of problems do you mean then?

Markus: I'm generally talk about bullying or a general talk about... Well here's the thing. I've heard a few little stories about people doing really dumb stuff in Brookes so... For example, someone I think annoyed a girl so she peed in her drink or something like that. Or there's another story of someone putting the condom in someone's ice cream. Stuff like that. I think addressing different forms of bullying in different forms of hurting people would be bad behaviour in the first place if even if it was just, you know, a simple conversation about why you shouldn't be doing this and you're reminding them that it's bad. I think that would help a lot [unclear] and also encouraging students to talk to

people would also be good because I think a lot of students are quiet shy and quiet scared to, you know, meet somebody new and talk to them in case they feel they would... embarrass themselves. Oh, sorry. Sorry, I just want to focus on the great. I think something great would be a social event where people come to me new people. It's like a quick dating... is that the thing? Speed dating but instead of speed dating, something like speed friendships. I'd like that.

Researcher: Do you mean because you're mentioning these sorts of initiatives now, but do you mean that the because these issues disproportionately affect black and minority ethnic students or do you think this is generally for the kind of... for the good of students.

Markus: I think it's for the good of students and also for black and minority students because I have heard some stories of white students being inappropriate and saying things that are quite troubling.

Researcher: Yeah. And then in terms of the students social speed friendship-making them do you mean so because do you think just generally to help students make more friends or what you think because the issues with making friends are disproportionately experienced by black and minority ethnic students

Markus: I think it's also to help black and minority students make friends as well to integrate them into Oxford society and Oxford culture when it comes to primarily... because it's primarily white students in Oxford, I think they need to learn how they have been brought up and the differences between them so they can get used to it, instead of throwing them under the bus, easing them into it, you know. I think that would be... because when I first came to Oxford Brookes I was surprised by many things that students find the problem and whatnot and how they act. And it was quite confusing to me like hearing a hearing a student say "Fuck you, Mum" - Sorry, sorry about the panel - But saying something like that to the parent was quite surprising. Sounds like if I said that my mom, I wouldn't be here right now so... different... integrating them into the different lifestyles, the different students in different working classes I think would be great, which I think the friendship speed dating would help to fix

Researcher: I see. Yeah. So it sounds like a big issue that you're noticing is this sort of... even cultural differences between, you know, normally middle class people and working class people

Markus: Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. Okay, thank you for that. Any other things you think we University could do to help address the achievement gap. Don't worry if not

Markus: Is it possible, if I think of anything I can email you

Researcher: Oh yeah, that'd be that'd be great. Yeah.

Markus: Okay cuz I always feel like I'm gonna I'm gonna... I'm gonna remember something great or think of something great.

Researcher: Thank you. Yeah. That will be... Okay, good. We can move on now to the ranking activity. So I'm going to show you a list of things that other universities have done to try and address the achievement gap. So I will post on the chat here and I'll share my screen with you in case it will be easier to see. So what I'd like you to do now is to just have a look at this list and to pick maybe like a top five that you think would be the most important in terms of reducing the achievement gap and also to think of why these will be the most important and then I'll give you about maybe five minutes and we come back and discuss it.

Markus: So top five right

Researcher: Yeah. Or, you know, top however many. Thank you.

Markus: What's the fit to submit? Oh, sorry, I understand, I understand. Actually. So just to be clear, the fit to submit checklist is essentially they're saying is the essay is good to go, they check it before you actually submit

Researcher: Yes. Like, like a checklist for things like have you created a cover page. Have you structured your argument, logically, that, that sort of thing. Yeah.

Researcher: So just let me know, anytime yeah. But yeah, we can also talk it through with you.

Markus: I'd say number one is 11, one-to-one support is at the top of that list.

Researcher: Oh, yes. Okay. Yes, I see what you mean, yes, yes. Great. Can you tell me why?

Markus: Um, I think, again, that goes back to my whole essay writing thing, So, student doesn't understand what the teacher necessarily wants or doesn't understand why he's not attaining the grades. [Unclear] The teacher says, if write me an essay or if he gives him or her a question and says write me an essay, when you come back I'll explain in full detail what I like and what I don't, I think that would really help a lot of students.

Markus: Number two, a better explanation of academic standards. I think that, again, relates back to one to one support. If that's not possible, then that would be really great. I think a whole lecture dedicated to just understanding the marking criteria and understanding how they specifically want their essay structured because my girlfriend always tell me this, but the reason why she's so good at writing essays is because her school taught her how to crack the code or how they write, how they would like essays depending on the subject. So in English, there's a code to it, for psychology, there's a certain method to it, for different subject is a method of how you would write the essay in saying things. I think good lecture on just how to understand and how to write a good thing would be great

Number three I'd say it's number one, improve induction to how many friends, the speed friending or something to just integrate the different cultures and different upbringings of the students to one to make a family so that if one student is feeling down, they don't typically want to go to the teacher because they feel embarrassed, they can go to their fellow friend or fellow student and be like, look, right. I don't know what's happening. I don't know how to improve my grade. Can you help me? Without feeling like they're trying to sponge up another person or kind of steal their work. It would make it a lot easier for students to do that. I think.

Number two... oh sorry... four... oh... number 15, that's also good because again it goes back to my points from number one and two. And the last one... I don't think the staff training... erm... Sorry, I messed up my thing. What was I saying... Oh, maths support, because this is tailored to psychology, right? So I think that would also fit

Researcher: Right. Yes. Okay. Yeah, thank you. It's quite interesting to see that there is a huge focus on academic support, but obviously totally understandable, you know. Yeah, I guess that that was the last kind of thing we were meant to do. I would just, I suppose any other final comments before we end the session.

Markus: This is... is this, is this going to help um... psychology students in the future, or is it just a survey to see what typically...

Researcher: It's research covering, I suppose all the disciplines in Oxford Brookes. Just to get an idea of the experiences of black and minority ethnic students. And then also, I'm not sure, actually if white students will also be interviewed or given focus groups, but the idea is just to see to try and identify some factors as to why there is a black and minority ethnic attainment gap compared to white students.

Markus: I actually wanted to ask, what's your opinion on the matter.

Researcher: Um, it's, I think it's very interesting because as I said earlier, the statistical analysis have shown that, you know, back things like background socio economic status cannot fully explain the gap. So now it's quite the, the focus now I think the sector is turning to the lived experiences of students, such as yourself and kind of looking at factors like the sense of belonging to the uni, or if you know the Uni is not able to support black and minority ethnic students in some sort of way. So I guess my personal thought would be the factors that you highlighted, I think about the stuff to do around culture and, the, the, sort of, unspoken rules and university. Like, for example, how, how to write an essay, you know, there are these code that this code as your girlfriend referred to them. And there is this code, as well as to how to do well in uni. Which I think as you say people who are from a working class background or not necessarily from these sort of more privileged backgrounds. You know, it doesn't, it's, it seems, it's sort of the metaphor that has been used to describe it as like a fish out of water. So when you're a student from a working class background you come into uni, you don't know what all these hidden rules are, and you just expected to get on with it. But yeah, so I think the fact that that you pinpointed today are absolutely spot on. For what I've read here.

Markus: Okay. Um, I don't think I'm... I don't think it affects them that much... well depending on the person it does, but I think the past is quite important for students currently entering uni or even for students entering of a uni in the future because my mom still feels a backlash of what teachers said to her and what people said to her in the past. I think creating a positive environment where there is no wrong answer and there's only getting better from where you are now is also important for school, because there's always... always the expectation if you're wrong, you're bad. But if you're wrong, you're not bad, you just need to work harder and improve from what you know at that point onwards. Sorry, I'm rambling.

teachers teacher said to have more people set too high in the past and you know i think i think creating a positive environment where there is no wrong answer. And there's only getting better from where you are now is also important for school because there's always

Researcher: No, that's fine. Yeah, yeah. Um... So yeah, it's interesting to see that, you know, academic focus versus... sorry, academic support is a big focus of your, your experiences at Brookes.

Markus: Yeah, I mean it makes sense. I mean, that's why... that's why at private schools... if you got to a private school you do a lot better because everything in private school is all about one-to-one support and academically focusing on improving you as an individual, as opposed to a whole class. So, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. And that kind of sense of individualized kind of tailored to your

Markus: Yeah

Researcher: areas of improvement. Yeah. Okay. And I suppose. Besides that, any other comments.

Markus: Um, no, no.

Researcher: Okay. All right, then I think we can end because we've sort of come to a natural end now, no point forcing it

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