

**PREPARED BY**  
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**AZIZ FOUNDATION**  
BUILDING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

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# INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE AND RELIGION

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WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF  
BRITISH MUSLIM STUDENTS AT THE PGT LEVEL

JUNE, 2021



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## **OVERVIEW**

Dr Zain Sardar is a Programme Manager at the Aziz Foundation. He manages the Foundation's Preferred Partner scheme, leading on engagement with university partners and higher education stakeholders.

The Aziz Foundation is a family charitable Foundation that offers Masters scholarships to British Muslims, enabling them, in partnership with UK universities, to progress in their career and make meaningful contributions to our society.

This Keynote speech below was delivered at Goldsmiths University of London's Staff Conference on 13th October 2020. ***The theme of conference was celebrating diversity and inclusion.***

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## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

# THE AZIZ FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS PROGRAMME AND THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

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The concerns of British Muslims students are close to my heart, and this is especially the case in my role as joint Programme Manager for the Aziz Foundation's scholarship programme.

The Foundation's mission is to enable British Muslim progression onto the postgraduate taught level, and this aim has become even more urgent in the current conjunction, at this melancholic time of pandemic, which has brought the stark inequalities of society to the surface. Briefly, permit me to outline the unique attributes of the Foundation's scholarship programme, which will allow me to situate our work in relation to the HE Sector and the Widening Participation agenda.

The Aziz Foundation's scholarship scheme is setting the agenda for Equality and Diversity within the HE Sector.

This is as:

- It is the biggest charitable scholarship provider dedicated to the postgraduate taught level, with over 350 scholarships awarded over the last two years;
- It is unique in targeting faith communities, and is well placed to understand the 'intersectional triad' of faith, race and gender, and best utilise this knowledge to enable social mobility and educational progression;
- It is actively making the case for Widening Participation at the postgraduate level: the mantra here is, while the regulatory obligation for Widening Participation ends at the undergraduate level, the principle of Widening Participation ought to extend to the postgraduate level;

- And lastly, it operates a means testing procedure, drawing on a range of social mobility data.

The salience of this programme cannot be underestimated. In the current HE context, and at this time of national crisis, fresh graduates commencing the academic year have faced a fraught choice: to study and progress onto Masters programmes with all the limitations to traditional learning and teaching that the circumstances necessitate, or to try their hand in a difficult jobs market, competing with the over 700,000 young people, amongst many others, projected by the Bank of England to have lost their jobs due to economic consequences of the coronavirus. In this scenario, many British Muslim graduates will continue to study hoping for a more welcoming labour market upon completion of their course.

The issues that they face as they start their courses are numerous, and have been documented by my colleagues and I, as well as in the recent literature on the Muslim student experience in HE. It seems the need persists to securitise, otherise, as well as pathologise Muslim students, and this runs deeply in the institutional culture of the contemporary academy.

A recent report by Professor Alison Scott-Bauman, *Islam and Muslims on UK University Campuses: perceptions and challenges*, found that:

*"Common negative stereotypes [of Muslims] are echoed by a significant minority of staff and fellow students...widespread societal discrimination against Muslims and other minority groups [have become] embedded in institutional structures..."*<sup>1</sup>

Further on, it identifies a type of mentality, not uncommon amongst some staff and students, that distinguishes between Muslims as people generally seen to have a benign influence on university life, and Islam as an ideology that is more malign in its effects. This is apparent, for example, in the commonly held view that Islam is a religion that authorises oppression against women, or as an ideology is somehow incompatible with British values.<sup>2</sup> In short, the tendency to hypostatise and homogenise both Muslims and Islam is still prevalent on university campuses today. These problematic points of view appear to retain their potency in the context of the over representation of Muslim students at both the undergraduate and post-graduate taught levels, brought about by the relatively young demographics of

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1. Guest, M., Scott-Baumann, A., Cheruvallil-Contractor, S., Naguib, S., Phoenix, A., Lee, Y. and Al Baghal, T. (2020), *Islam and Muslims on UK University Campuses: Perceptions and Challenges*. Durham: Durham University, London: SOAS, Coventry: Coventry University and Lancaster: Lancaster University, p.61  
2. Ibid., pp. 26-27



British Muslim communities. Certainly, Muslim students have benefited from the major gains achieved over the last 20 years from the increasing number of disadvantaged students entering Higher Education. This is an achievement lauded by the Social Mobility Commission's 2017 report *Time to Change* in which the Widening Participation agenda was the only bright spot in an otherwise bleak assessment of successive governments attempts to enable greater social mobility.<sup>3</sup> The Social Mobility Commission's report also informs us that improving access has been the consequence of increased funding on widening participation during this period - a rise from £400m to £800m.<sup>4</sup>

It also needs to be considered in light of the establishment of the Office For Fair Access, since rolled into the Office for Students (OfS), in 2003, with its powers of regulation and veto over institutional Access and Participation Plans (APPs). Interestingly, the report states that years of experimentation on the Widening Participation front has not yet resulted in greater clarity over which initiatives are most effective.<sup>5</sup> As an aside, this is starting to be addressed with the recent creation of Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) as the What Works Centre for Widening Participation.

3. Social Mobility Commission, 'Time For Change: An assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017', The Stationary Office (June 2017), p. 66

4. Ibid., p. 62

5. Ibid

It seems to be the case that increasing numbers of Muslim students has not been accompanied by a corresponding rise in the quality of the student experience of these cohorts (as indicated by recent reports and our own research), reflecting the wider societal inequalities and the 'suspect community' label or the 'enemy within' status that Muslim communities have been forced to bear (giving substance to the claim that 'Islamophobia has passed the the dinner table test' popularised by Baroness Sayeeda Warsi).<sup>6</sup>

To put it another way, while the rise in numbers of students from low participation neighbourhoods entering HE is to be welcomed, increasing access has not meant a fundamental shift in the power relations between different communities within the academy. This was a key point made in the joint NUS-UUK report on the BME attainment gap in 2019. It states that progress in widening access and the student experience has not benefited every student equally and, furthermore, inequalities still seemed to be embedded in the student lifecycle for BME cohorts.<sup>7</sup> What seems to follow then, is, firstly, that increased access and Widening Participation cannot be thought separately from the EDI initiatives that are imperat-

ive for creating an inclusive learning environment, that build leadership skills amongst BME students, and remove some of the structural barriers they are confronted with. And, secondly, it appears that the social mobility faultline has merely been displaced, and has now opened up at the higher, postgraduate level. This displacement is due to: the partial successes of widening access pre-entry, a highly competitive jobs market, and economic inequalities that still plague British Muslim, and more widely, BME communities post-graduation.

## **2. STATING THE PROBLEM**

To elaborate on the problem - and perhaps lay bare the problematising of the Muslim student within the academy - HEIs are seen to uphold a structure of feeling, a 'normative whiteness' as some Critical Race Theorists<sup>8</sup> and EDI practitioners would put it,<sup>8</sup> that is at odds with the lived experiences of BME and Muslim students. It has been clear that a seismic shift still needs to take place, and the time for this to happen seems ripe, particularly in light of the wave of activism unleashed by the Black Lives Matter Movement. The problems encountered by Muslim students manifests itself most evidently in the degree awarding gap, the starkness of

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6. See Sayeeda Warsi, 'The Enemy Within: A Tale of Muslim Britain', Penguin (2017)

7. National Union of Students & Universities UK, 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK Universities: #ClosingtheGap', NUS (May 2019), p. 1

8. Arday, J., 'Dismantling power and privilege through reflexivity: negotiating normative Whiteness, the Eurocentric curriculum and racial micro-aggressions within the Academy, Whiteness and Education', 3:2, 141-161 (2018)

which was revealed by a hugely significant report by Advance HE, analysing for the first time the data on the religion and belief of student cohorts, which HEIs are now obliged to submit to HESA. The report's conclusion sums up the issue at hand:

*"[What is] Particularly striking is the under attainment of Muslim students compared to the general student population."<sup>9</sup>*

In more specific terms, the report found that only 18% of Muslim students achieved a 1st class degree classification at the undergraduate level, compared to 30% of those from non-faith backgrounds. Moreover, less than two thirds of Muslim students graduated with a 1st or 2:1 overall.<sup>10</sup> Coupled with this, Muslims are the smallest faith grouping as a percentage at Russell Group institutions,<sup>11</sup> despite the finding, already mentioned, that Muslims are well represented in Higher Education at both undergraduate and postgraduate taught levels. In its further granularity in specifying those disadvantaged through the awarding gap by faith affiliation, this report refines the foundational data, analysed by the NUS and UUK in 2019, which laid out the scale of the problem in respect to the awarding gap.

It also lends further weight to the urgency - communicated through the NUS-UUK report - that university leaderships need to demonstrate in taking strong action to close the awarding gap.<sup>12</sup> And, indeed, this has become a regulatory imperative as the Office for Students (OfS) has set the ambitious goal for the sector to completely eliminate the awarding gap by 2038. This is, of course, a goal which will need to be achieved in partnership with Third Sector and community organisations that work closely with, and therefore understand, BME communities.

In light of the awarding gap, what is critical here to the Muslim student experience is comprehending the intersectionality between ethnicity and faith, as both of these need to be thought together. We already know that Muslims strongly identify with their faith (it is core to their identity) and that this is important to their sense of belonging. We should also consider the double penalty that Muslim students face - due to their ethnicity as by and large they are from BME communities, and due to the misconceptions or lack of religious literacy surrounding Islamic practices, whether it is displaying outward markers such as wearing the hijab or making use of university facilities, such as the need to seek a prayer room to complete their

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9. Advance HE, and McMaster, N.C., "Research Insight: Religion and Belief in UK Higher Education." Advance HE (March 17, 2020), p. 47

10. Ibid., p. 22

11. Ibid., p.1512.

12. National Union of Students and Universities UK (2019), p. 2



obligatory prayers. Intersectionality is a common theme in the joint report, *'The Experience of Muslim students in 2017/18'*, published in 2018 and co-authored by the NUS Black Students' Officer and NUS Women's Officer at the time. It details the lack of trust British Muslim students still place in University structures. A national survey of 500 Muslim students found that this distrust stems from the lack of confidence in the reporting mechanisms that tackle hate crimes and racist incidents,<sup>13</sup> and the chilling effect induced by the 'Panoptic verticality' of extended state surveillance in the HE Sector through Prevent, a key plank of the UK government's counterterrorism strategy.

Put otherwise, there is significant deficit in trust in institutional responses to safeguarding and responding to the claims of Muslim students. Consequently, the reporting duty placed on universities to report suspicious activity through Prevent is seen as a major inhibitor for Muslims students participating in student societies and SU governance and democracy.<sup>14</sup> These findings were corroborated by the Scott-Bauman report to which I have already referred. The report draws on the evidence of 2,022 national survey respondents, from 132 universities. It finds that Muslim students are seen as



13. National Union of Students. "The Experiences of Muslim Students in 2017-18", NUS (18 March 2018), p. 19

14. Ibid., p. 13

'objects of suspicion',<sup>15</sup> and that university management and teaching staff are not always cognisant of the gendered experience of Muslims on campus. It further states that there is 'clear evidence of unconscious bias, casual racism and explicit discrimination'.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the majority of respondents see the instituting of anti-discrimination measures as more important than upholding unlimited freedom of expression. This is, no doubt, to counteract the influence of Prevent, which is perceived as amplifying the 'effect of sustaining negative stereotypes and disabling the mechanisms universities have for subjecting... stereotypes to critical scrutiny'.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.INTERNAL RESEARCH AND TESTIMONY**

This leads me to our own internal research. Interviewing scholarship candidates over the last two years has given me a number of opportunities to hear the autoethnographies – or the personal narratives – of Muslim students who have encountered insidious racism, a seemingly remote student support system, and high financial barriers to participation amongst other hurdles to a fulfilling student experience. Many of our candidates have sought to overcome these barriers, either by actively counter-

ing them through attempting to instigate institutional change or by sheer resilience and the force of individual coping strategies. I have heard their stories on the interview panels for our scholarship programme. Reflecting on these, I have often felt like a judge listening to the type of powerful testimony that might be given at a public enquiry. And, through this listening exercise, I have grown convinced of power of 'testimonial justice' and the authentic voice to expose the institutional pathologies that hold back British Muslim students, and generate feelings of 'out-of-placeness' within the academy. To try to capture these narratives, we at the Foundation have surveyed a large sample of our scholarship candidates. We have had 140 respondents, and much of this data is rich in the experiences of Muslim students, and illustrates the operative intersectionality between ethnicity and faith. The questions in our survey touched on the perceived faith literacy of academic and administrative staff; to what extent the student support system was deemed to be fit for purpose; barriers to further study, and post-Masters expectations. The results of this survey relate immediately to candidate's experience of the undergraduate level, yet much of the findings are applicable to the postgraduate taught level.

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15. Guest, M., Scott-Baumann, A., Cheruvallil-Contractor, S., Naguib, S., Phoenix, A., Lee, Y. and Al Baghal, T. (2020), p. 5

16. Ibid., p. 5

17. Ibid., p. 6

#### **4. FINDINGS**

## REPRESENTATION

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It is evident from completed candidate surveys that respondents realise the critical edge that Masters courses will give them in a difficult jobs market. This is especially so, as these courses have become passports to the professions, and are critical for professional development, particularly with those trying to assume senior management roles in their chosen industry.

For respondents, role modelling was key in encouraging and inspiring them to achieve within their fields. Observations like these are common:

*"Throughout the three years of my degree I have not been taught by a Muslim female lecturer or professor. For someone who aspires to do this in the future, this lack of representation can be a major inhibitor."*

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This is echoed by another respondent, who states 'the representation of Muslims in higher education (particularly visibly black Muslim women, like myself) is rare. Therefore, it's hard to envision yourself in these places too.'

The comment perfectly encapsulates the triple penalty experienced by Black female Muslim students. We must remember here that the awarding gap adversely affects Black students to an even greater extent than those from South Asian backgrounds. In addition, the 'minority within a minority status' of Black Muslim students can come with a heightened sense of alienation. There is also the concern expressed by one respondent that representation in academia is paramount in shaping research agendas, guiding and providing support to those conducting postgraduate research, particularly in sensitive areas to do with race & religion.

One respondent puts it as thus:

*"Representation in postgraduate degrees of professors and academic staff – [is] more important at [the] postgraduate stage as specialised research into a specific topic shapes the majority of the postgraduate degree."*

The lack of visible Muslim academics and senior managers in University settings can undermine the confidence of Muslim students, but this is further exacerbated by the microaggressions directed at Muslim staff:

*"Many academics at my university were supportive in the right way. However, some staff did make derogatory comments towards Muslims, particularly those in higher positions of power i.e. Director of Admissions, and coordinator of student ambassadors. There was also a 'white-male' led culture which had the ability to make you feel isolated at times."*

The feeling of being a minority can also be reinforced through a curriculum that does not reflect the diverse lineages of Muslim students, as another respondent articulates:

*"The course I studied, which was English, was very ethnocentric (white, middle class) and there were few (about 8) Muslims in total on the course and overall less BME students. This made it harder to relate my experiences in seminar because I felt judged and uncomfortable sometimes, especially if the topic was about religion and/or sensitive issues such as colonialism, terrorism etc."*

**FINDINGS**

**WITHSTANDING DISCRIMINATION OR FEELING  
THE ONUS TO ACTIVELY CHALLENGE IT - THE  
STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Many Muslim students feel compelled to take the initiative to campaign for a more inclusive learning environment. They take into their own hands the mission of enhancing their student experience. Hence, there are instances in which respondents feel that the onus, or burden, is on them to actively challenge discrimination, as demonstrated by the following quote:

*“There is still a huge amount of misunderstanding surrounding our religion and I would always take it upon myself to try and change peoples opinions.”*

Organised petitioning and campaigning are therefore a commonplace, as indicated in this example:



*"At first, there was no Jumua' prayers at the university but after substantial lobbying, we were able to secure the main hall."*

Still, there are others who absorb the trauma of discrimination, and I quote:

*"Often we'd be viewed as inferior or made to feel marginalised at times which was tough to adapt to at first but eventually you become accustomed to it which is sad."*

There are also abiding feelings amongst Muslim students that institutions find them too demanding and in response they are loath to go out of their way to accommodate Muslim student needs and sensibilities. This is affirmed by one respondent who makes the point that:

*"Though the student support system was suitable whilst I was at university, there was no support or real understanding of British Muslim student's experiences, we often asked for more prayer rooms and this was not supported as there was already a Chaplain's centre available. This however was not always accessible..."*

The notion that Muslim students are somewhat excessive in their demands leads to entrenched forms of stigma-

tisation. This is evident in a sample of the survey responses, in which one scholarship candidate describes being made to feel like an 'outcast' for missing lectures clashing with prayer times, while another's discomfort in a student support system lacking in any human touch leads him to write:

*"Overall [it was] a very isolating experience and [I] only [had] friends to rely on for support."*

In a small minority of cases, there are also experiences conveyed of overt harassment, with Muslim students being treated with suspicious regard. This is a particularly revealing in one episode communicated by a respondent:

*"There was one instance of security stopping someone from praying in a quiet corner of a building. After [a] backlash, [the university's] security [staff] received sensitivity training for religions and cultures. Most recently I was followed around and spied on by security and I was told it was because I didn't look like a student. They thought I was a phone thief. Harassment with regards to race and religion isn't uncommon from staff."*

**FINDINGS**

**SOCIAL CAPITAL & FINANCIAL PRESSURES**

**SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Respondents also attach importance to studying Masters programmes as way to build up social capital to address the imbalance in power relations experienced by BME students in majority-white institutions. Hence, an aspiring barrister and advocate explains the benefit of her course as providing her with opportunities to become “more familiarised with [my] career path” and to “gain access to a support network that can help me to connect with other aspiring barristers.”

Furthermore, an aspiring actor expresses their desire, and I quote, to “*continuously attend networking events [that] will help me keep building connections. Studying this masters will give me a huge amount of knowledge and skills that will elevate me towards a greater number of jobs and notable acting roles.*”



Another respondent puts it succinctly: *"I hope to form relationships with my lecturers which will be useful in learning more about the field. Hopefully, I'll be able to get a job based on those connections."*

## **FINANCIAL PRESSURES**

Respondents, unsurprisingly, also cite financial pressures as a major source of concern. It is evident that a lack of Shariah-compliant student finance system is hampering Muslim students, many of whom assume a principled position in respect to taking out interest-bearing loans. This does create cases of financial exclusion, of which this is typical:

*"To pursue my undergraduate studies I had to take out loans from [the] student finance company. This is something I struggled with especially after the government changed repayment methods and we now pay interest on our loans which conflicts with my religious beliefs. Although there are postgraduate loans available, I do not consider this a viable option for me so the cost of post graduate courses is a factor which potentially prohibits me from pursuing my studies if I am unable to obtain funding."*

These enduring concerns that haunt British Muslim students - many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds - revolve around financial barriers that can break up the pipeline into academia. Take this comment:

*"Though I have a full-time job now, I also help with finances at home and so, this wage alone would not allow me to pursue further education to allow me to reach my aspirations of becoming an academic lecturer in Islamic Anthropology."*

Indeed, pressure to start earning for graduates who are committed to financially contributing to their family is another overriding issue cited by many respondents.



**FINDINGS**

**POST MASTERS EXPECTATIONS**

The feelings respondents hold towards their prospects post-Masters degree is supported by research conducted by IPSOS MORI in 2017, on behalf of the Aziz Foundation, on the social attitudes of British Muslims. Muslim communities tend towards holding high educational and professional aspirations, but are faced with a number of challenges in accessing professional industries and employment. Take this example of a promising barrister:

*“The Bar is a notoriously elite profession and the places are few and far between – the Pupillage spots in London are heavily dominated by privately-educated, Oxbridge graduates. I have my fair share of notable achievements, but compared to my peers, it can be intimidating.”*



And again, a budding artist has this to say:

*"I feel there is a lot of unconscious bias and obstacles against British Muslims, especially in the creative industries....Self-esteem is also a massive issue. It is hard to be confident and feel as though you belong in spaces when aspects such as financial hardship can hold you back. However, I'm striving to overcome these feelings and progress as far as I can."*

To add to the barristers identified by those I have just quoted, there is much evidence of the gendered experiences of British Muslims, and this comes strongly to the fore with a number of respondents, whose comments I shall reproduce here:

*"Being an Asian female can feel like an obstacle and means I will have to work even harder than the average Joe to get to a senior position. I know it is possible but it is also daunting to know that sometime these factors will stunt any career progression."*

*"I feel like people won't take me seriously and will value my opinion less. I'll need to say things with conviction and stand my ground."*

*"As a South Asian woman who visibly identifies as a Muslim– I feel like the narratives and stereotypes surrounding these layers of my identity may affect my job opportunities."*

*"I feel slightly unconfident about my job prospects because there is the anxiety that Muslims and women are underrepresented in the media industry..."*

*"It is a known fact that women and Muslims, on the whole, remain underpromoted in the media sector, as the senior positions are predominantly occupied by Caucasians and males. I also think minority groups tend to be overlooked in the recruitment process because there is an automatic suspicion when it comes to 'ethnic-sounding' names on CVs. But I am hopeful that a Master's degree will grant me a foot in the door, and I am willing to work hard in order to succeed."*

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

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Lastly, I would like to end by itemising some of the recommendations that we are calling for universities to consider adopting, in order to drive the creation of an inclusive learning environment for British Muslims. We are calling for:

1. All HEIs to adopt the working definition of Islamophobia, as developed by the Runnymede Trust and modified by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims.<sup>18</sup> We have already seen opposition political parties such as Labour and the Liberal Democrats adopt it, although, I might add, not as of yet the Conservative Party, the governing party. It is now time for universities to start leading the agenda on this. This will initiate the process of building trust between British Muslim communities and

the HE sector, addressing some of the issues surrounding the securitisation of Muslim students raised by the Scott-Bauman and NUS reports.

2. We are calling for parity of esteem and financial resources between Pre-entry or Undergraduate Widening Participation and Postgraduate Widening Participation, with the latter taken as seriously as if the regulatory obligation had already been extended. The Widening Participation agenda was lauded as somewhat unique in its effectiveness and potential to level the playing field, as was noted by the Social Mobility Commission report in 2017. However, in light of the broken pipeline that still stifles the production of BME and British Muslim academics, it is time now to extend its reach.

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18. See All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, "Islamophobia Defined" (27 November 2018) and Farah, E., and Khan, O., 'Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All', Runnymede Trust (November 2017)

3. Thirdly, we would like HEIs to be proactive in incorporating set targets relating to the access, participation and attainment of British Muslim learners in Access and Participation Plans (APPs),<sup>19</sup>

4. Furthermore, we wish to see the social mobility fault-line or gulf at the postgraduate level tackled with holistic, targeted programmes. These should include BME ambassadorial programmes, as developed by the former NUS president Malia Bouttia. The programme at the University of Hertfordshire<sup>20</sup> has shown promise, but we would like to see these schemes replicated across the sector and tailored to British Muslim postgraduate students, to help build the necessary leadership skills within these cohorts. More generally, the development of so-called 'black box' interventions which increase social capital amongst disadvantaged groups at the undergraduate level is well documented, including in a recent report by David Robinson and Viola Salvestrini on behalf of TASO.<sup>21</sup>

5. Finally, we call for the 'broken pipeline' at the postgraduate level - best articulated at the postgraduate research level by the EDI pressure group Leading

Routes in their eponymous report<sup>22</sup> - to be bridged with appropriate funding opportunities, along the lines of the PSS scheme trialed by HEFCE at Birmingham, Sheffield and a host of other institutions.<sup>23</sup> We would like to see HE sector contribution to postgraduate taught scholarship programmes become mainstreamed, in spite of the funding crisis besetting the sector.

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19. Atherton, G., 'More than luck: Enabling access and success in Higher Education for Gypsy, Romany and Traveller (GRT) communities', Sir John Cass Foundation (August 2020) and Atherton, G., and Mazhari, T. 'Working Class Heroes - Understanding access to higher education for white students from lower socio-economic backgrounds', NEON (8 April 2019)

20. For an example of a BME student leadership programme that is demonstrating some early successes, see Barefoot, H.C. and Boons, C. 'Developing a BME Student Advocate Programme' in *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2019)

21. Robinson, D. and Salvestrini, V., 'Summary Report: Understanding the impact of interventions to address the inequalities in the student experience', TASO (November 2020)

22. Arday, J., Bath, S., Lewis, C., Williams, P., 'The Broken Pipeline: Barriers to Black PhD Students Accessing Research Council Funding', *Leading Routes* (September 2019)

23. For more on the PSS scheme and an assessment of its impact, see Hancock, S.E. and Wakeling, P.B.J., 'Progression to and Success in postgraduate study: Interim evaluation report', University of York: Department of Education (22 March 2019); Hancock, S.E., Ewart, A. and Wakeling, P.B.J., 'Evaluation of the Postgraduate Support Scheme 2015-16: Report to HEFCE', HEFCE (August 2017)

## 6. CONCLUSION

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To conclude, while I said that amongst some in the HE Sector there remains a need to pathologise Muslim students, it is really the institutional pathology failing British Muslim students that Widening Participation and EDI practitioners ought to be fighting against.

To paraphrase Jason Arday, who adapts Audrey Lorde's well-known quote, EDI and Widening Participation initiatives have to go one step further and assist BME and Muslims students in developing 'the tools in which to dismantle the master's house'.<sup>24</sup> In my reading, this can be considered a call for the transformation of the institution we call the 'university'. It is a call to instigate a new emancipatory micro-politics, enabled by the extension of the Widening Participation agenda.

The question now that confronts us is: is this the 'moment' that the HE Sector can realise the utopian energies unleashed by movements such as Black Lives Matter, to embed a learning environment that is inclusive enough to appease the concerns of British Muslim students? Moreover, can the Sector acknowledge the triple penalty experienced by Black Muslim students, which will be critical in addressing questions around the awarding gap and institutional Islamophobia?

I firmly believe that this is a golden opportunity for forward looking institutions to seize the agenda, as the issue of Widening Participation at the postgraduate level becomes more and more pressing for certain communities. I shall leave the final word to one of our survey respondents, who has this to say about their post Masters expectations:

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24. Arday (2018), p. 152

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*“This is the only aspect which I am not optimistic about currently but I am hoping will change. There was a report by the Social Mobility Commission and the conclusions were [that] the British social mobility promise is that hard work will be rewarded. Unfortunately, for many Muslims in Britain today this promise is being broken.”*

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