AZIZFOUNDATION

Summary: Understanding Islamophobia in Higher Education webinar
In conversation with Sofia Akel

Introduction:

Sofia Akel, Race Equity Lead at London Metropolitan University's Centre for Equity and Inclusion, gave a presentation to the Aziz Foundation's university partners and HE stakeholders on 15th June. A summary of key points can be seen below.

Purpose:

On the back of adopting a definition of Islamophobia, the London Metropolitan University set about investigating the extent of Islamophobia prevalent in their own institution. Sofia led the research and managed to publish the report within a four month period.

Methodology

- **Qualitative surveys** were conducted of both Muslim staff and students.
- Data on the religion and belief of student cohorts utilised to foreground the **'Muslim awarding gap'**
- A **holistic approach** is adopted, looking at all aspects of the student and staff experience. Sections that the report focused on include:
    - **Faith Provision/observance; Workplace culture/Inclusion & Progression; Academic Environment; Prevent; Welfare (Microaggressions & Safety); Complaints Procedure**
- A **critical methodology** is deployed, in order to bring to the surface the particular intersectionality of disadvantaged faced by Muslim students - the double burden of faith and ethnicity.

Some of the Key Findings:

- Fear of **religious discrimination** inhibited participation in SU democracy
- Lack of confidence in **halal food options**
- Some Muslim students did feel comfortable reporting incidents through the **students camplaints system**
- The **awarding gap** disportionately disadvantages Muslim students
- **White Muslims lose their 'privilege'** as they become racialised, and this is borne out in the awarding gap data

Some of the Recommendations:

- **Islamophobia Awareness training** for senior leadership
- Implementation of **Education for Social Justice framework** (commitment to examine, through curricula, people's identities, cultures and communities)
- **Student Complaints Panel** members to have a good understanding of Islamophobia
- Lectures that clash with prayer times to be **routinely recorded**
- Collection of **staff data** on religion and belief

Implementation of recommendations so far:

- **Financial advice** now offered for all Muslim students
- Lobbying government to establish the promised **shariah compliant student finance system**, putting it back on the agenda
- New trusted **halal food supplier** brought in to increase choice for Muslim students
- Implementation of recommendations in other areas currently underway