Countering Islamophobia on Campus

Yunis Alam and Izram Chaudry
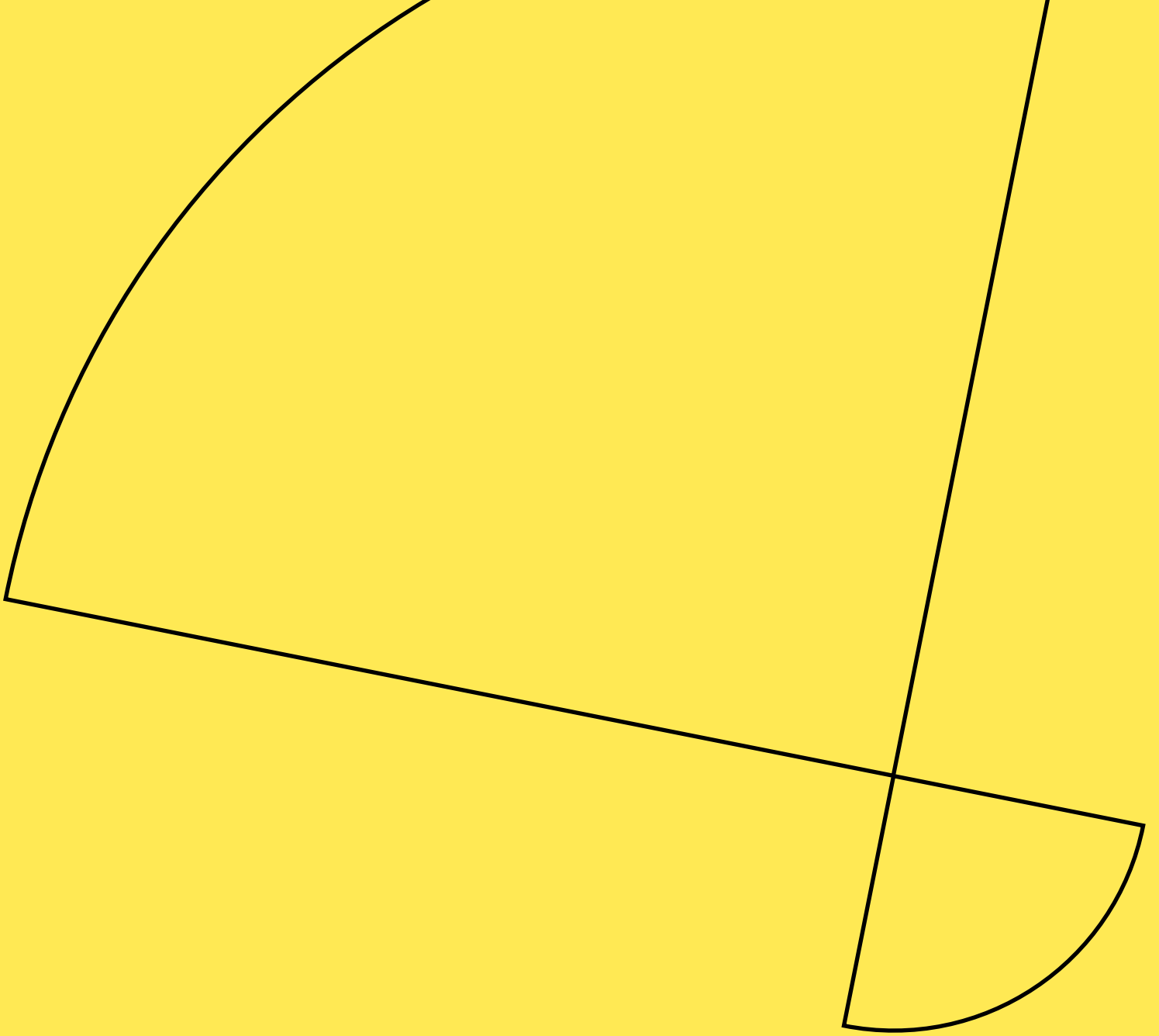
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Author Biographies

Yunis Alam is Head of Department in Sociology and Criminology at the University of Bradford. His teaching and research interests span a range of themes and issues including social cohesion, counter-terrorism and the extent to which Muslims are invariably framed as a threat. More generally, he has written about multiculture as well as popular culture, sport and postcolonial literatures. He is an ethnographer and his most recent work explored how the car becomes a means of transmitting ideas and stereotypes that connect ethnicity, faith and class with criminality and racialised threat *(Race, Taste, Class and Cars* with Policy Press). He is currently producing an ethnographically grounded research monograph, entitled *Race, Coloniality and the Academy: An Ethnography* (Policy Press). Over many years, he has written several novels and short stories exploring ethnicity and racism through the lens of crime fiction.

Izram Chaudry is a Lecturer in Sociology and Criminology at the University of Bradford. He has a PhD from the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds. Izram is the author of *BrAsian Family Practices and Reflexivity: Beyond the Boxing Ropes* (Routledge, 2024). He is also co-editing *Social Class, Physical Education and Community Sport* (Routledge, Forthcoming). Izram has previously written on Islamophobia, Whiteness and Critical Race Theory. More specifically, he has focussed on the permeation of Islamophobia within Higher Education settings through microaggressions. His current work focuses on providing explanatory purchase vis-à-vis why Islamophobic microaggressions occur.

Acknowledgements

To begin with, and although this word of acknowledgement is by no means sufficient, we are above all as ever mindful and grateful to our Maker, Allah (SWT), for all that we have experienced, and all that is to come.

It is worth noting that this project has benefitted immensely from the many individuals who agreed to take part in the research as interview participants. The sample's goodwill and willingness to share instances of their experiences, perceptions and hopes is all the more remarkable and commendable given that many faced challenges that can be at best described as problematic, and at worst, Islamophobic. We hope and trust their experiences have been represented accurately and fairly, and in turn open up conversations in which the notion of speaking truth to power is realised.

We are therefore grateful not only for their willingness to give up their time, but for the energy and labour they donated in participating in this research. We are also highly appreciative of those who have supported the project at various phases. Working with the Aziz Foundation, particularly Zain Sardar, has been an exceptionally supportive and collegiate experience.

We are also grateful to have received support from the University of Bradford in initiating and completing this work. We have been privileged to have received support and encouragement from a number of colleagues across the University. In particular, we would like to thank Fiona Cosson, Zafar Iqbal, Jing Li, Soniya Zeb, Aziza Mills, Engobo Emeseh and Sharon Mason, especially those colleagues who ensured the project ran smoothly through timely administrative and managerial actions. Dave Keoghan and Jordan Mclellan were helpful, often at short notice, in providing us with quantitative data. Anna Wadsworth's expertise in designing this report is similarly appreciated. We are also indebted to Urfan Faqir for taking part in frequent, incisive and deeply analytical conversations relating to the research and wider equalities discourse. Nabeela Khan provided invaluable contributions in interviewing, transcription and in being available to explore some of the themes that emerged, and provided helpful and robust feedback at key moments.

A particular word of thanks goes to our colleagues Paul Sullivan, Chris Gaffney, Aleem Bashir, and Charles Husband, who all provided valuable feedback on a draft version of this document. We would also like to thank Claire Alexander whose support for this project is exhibited in the foreword she has kindly produced for this report.

Institutional Response

The University of Bradford welcomes this report which illuminates the experiences of Muslim staff and students at our university, within the higher education academy more widely and across society generally.

As we strive to deliver our ambition to become an anti-racist university, including tackling Islamophobia in all its forms, the report will help facilitate a deeper understanding of the challenges that must be addressed to achieve our goal. This includes confronting Islamophobia wherever and however it manifests – in our culture, attitudes and behaviours, and systems and processes.

As a university we are genuinely committed to creating an environment where all staff and students are treated with dignity and respect and are recognised and valued as individuals. As part of this we recognise that Islamophobia is a real and everyday experience for Muslim people. We must call out and take firm action to counter both endemic and deliberate Islamophobia.

It is encouraging to see that the report recognises progress made in some areas. However, there is more that we can do, and we welcome the report's practical and strategic recommendations for action. In response we have committed to create a task and finish group to consider the practical and real steps that our university can take.

I'd like to thank the participants for their contribution to this research, the authors for producing this report, the Aziz Foundation for their investment in the research and for the work that they undertake to support Muslim students in higher education.

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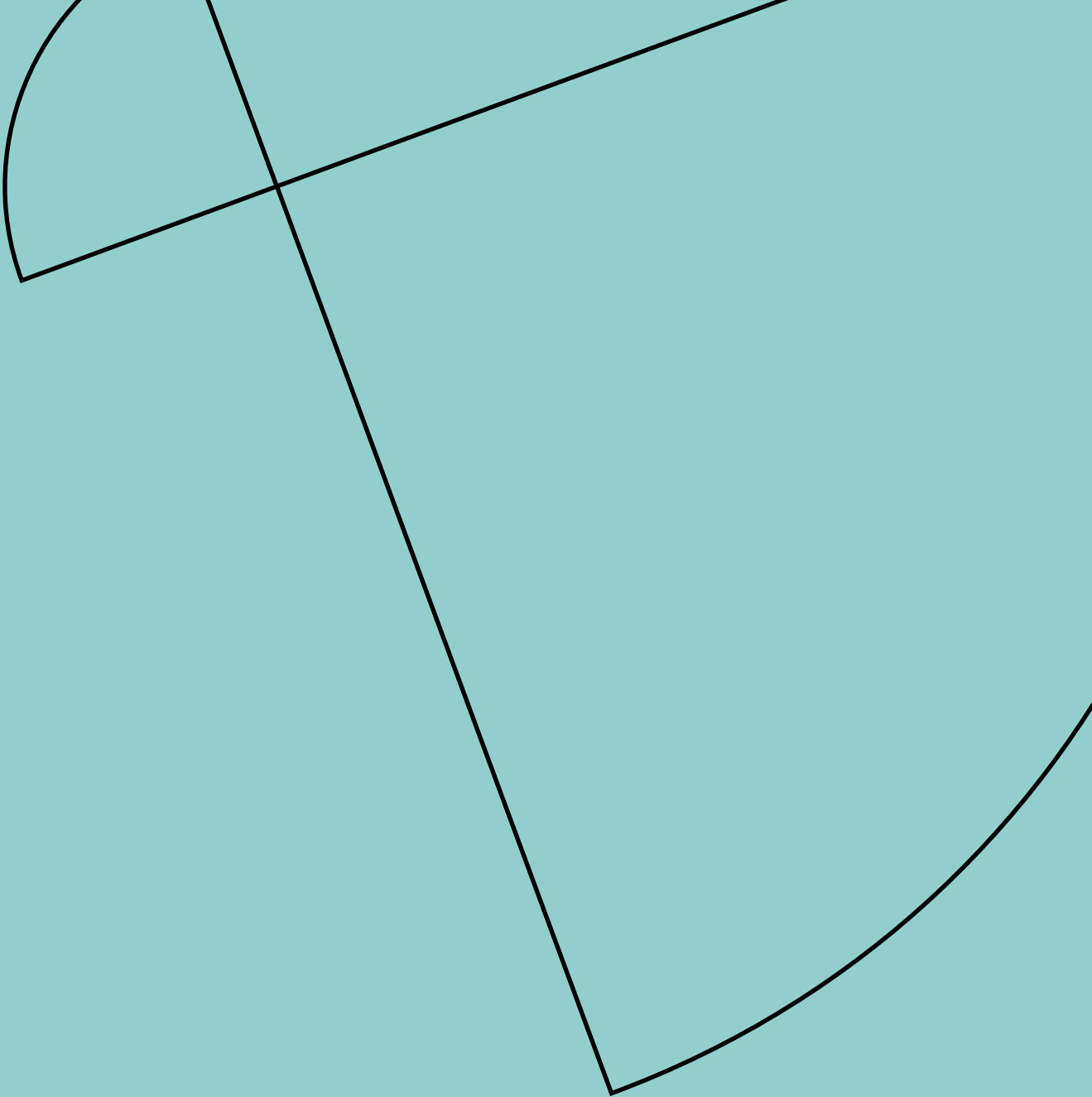
Foreword

In the Introduction to our Runnymede Trust Perspectives edited collection, Aiming Higher: *Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy* (Alexander and Arday 2015)[1] , a decade ago, myself and Jason Arday argued that the Higher Education Sector was ready for change, and that significant institutional change was urgent and necessary.

Our challenge then was for the sector to make tangible structural and cultural change – in staffing, student access, participation and experience. In response to the demands of the increasing numbers of British Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students, who continue to enter the sector at higher rates than their White English counterparts, and given additional urgency in the wake of Black Lives Matter in 2020, Higher Education is slowly (and often reluctantly) changing. HESA notes that for 2022/23, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students made up 28% of university students, while 22% of academic staff, and 13% of professors, were from ethnic minority backgrounds. From 2021/22 to 2022/23 there was an 18% increase in Black academic staff, and an increase of 40 Black professors (25% increase)[2].

Nevertheless, a decade later and, as this insightful and timely report by Yunis Alam and Izram Chaudry makes clear, the challenge continues. Awarding gaps remain intractable, with the BAME awarding gap in 2022/23 increasing to nearly 12%, with larger disparities for Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi students[3]. While there has been a particular, and important, focus in the sector on Black students and staff, there has been less focus on Pakistani and Bangladeshi students and staff, who are, of course, predominantly Muslim. Indeed, statistics on Muslims (rather than on particular ethnic groups) are hard to come by (Stevenson 2018[4], Malik & Wykes 2018[5]), though a 2020 report by Guest et al. (2020)[6] estimates more than 230,000 Muslims studying in UK universities, and comprising around 8-9% of the student population.

It is clear from the following report that issues of religious inequality are inseparable from racial inequality (Elahi & Khan 2017[7], Alexander 2017[8]), but that there are also specificities of experience that need to be acknowledged.

The particular position of British Muslim academics and students is too often subsumed into the broader ethnic category 'Asian', in which entrenched forms of disadvantage and discrimination become diluted or erased. The role of Prevent in universities, also a decade old, has rendered Muslim students and staff hyper-visible, an unenviable position of surveillance and suspicion that has been reinscribed most recently through the playing out of the Israel/Gaza conflict on campuses across the UK. Alam and Chaudry's careful, nuanced and constructive report explores some of the current (intersectional) dimensions of these inequalities and absences in their own institution – the University of Bradford. The report details the experience of Muslim staff and students as they negotiate institutional structures and shortcomings, and the cultural landscape of too-often empty gestures of inclusion and diversity against a backdrop of intended and unintended Islamophobic micro-aggressions. This is a story of determination, of commitment to change, of resilience, although, as the authors powerfully remind us, 'stoicism and resilience are consequences of a context, not solutions'.

As the authors make clear, the city of Bradford has a unique place in the imagination of multi-ethnic, multi-faith Britain. The University of Bradford is, then, uniquely positioned to take the lead on recognising and addressing its own institutional Islamophobia and in taking the lead for the wider sector. This report charts some important ways forward, and I look forward to sharing these lessons for my own institution.

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[1] Alexander, C. and Arday, J (eds.) (2015) Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy, Runnymede Perspectives. London: Runnymede Trust
[2] https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/16-01-2024/higher-education-staff-statistics-uk-202223
[3] https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students
[4] Stevenson, J. (2018) Muslim Students in UK Higher Education. Aziz Foundation. London: Bridge Institute.
[5] Malik, A. and Wykes, E. (2018) British Muslims in UK Higher Education: Socio-Political, Religious and Policy Considerations. London: Bridge Institute.
[6] Guest, M. Scott-Baumann, A. Cheruvallil-Contractor, S. (2020) Islam and Muslims on UK University Campuses: Perceptions and Challenges. Durham, London, Coventry, Lancaster: Durham University, SOAS, Coventry University, Lancaster University.
[7] Elahi, F. and Khan, O. (2017) Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All. London: Runnymede Trust.
[8] Alexander, C. (2017) 'Raceing Islamophobia'. In F. Elahi and O. Khan (eds) Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All, London: Runnymede Trust, pp13–15.

Executive Summary

This report is based on qualitative research conducted at the University of Bradford (UoB) during the Summer and Autumn of 2024. The project sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of Muslim staff and students in the Academy. The researchers undertook a total of 30 semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams with Muslim students (UG, PGT and PGR) and staff (academics and those occupying professional services roles) in order to address the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of Muslim students and staff of studying/working in the Academy?
2. Do they feel a sense of belonging on campus and that their Muslim identities are adequately accommodated?
3. What is the efficacy of institutional interventions (policy, structures, EDI initiatives) for tackling prejudice and discrimination?
4. To what extent are current mechanisms for reporting instances of Islamophobia effective?

An important caveat to note is that whilst the study sample was based at the UoB at the time of the research, their perceptions and experiences were not always necessarily in relation to their time at UoB and, indeed, at times, related to their experiences at previous institutions as well as their general viewpoints of the sector overall. This research produced a range of findings, some of which are perhaps more unusual and distinctive than others. In no particular order, however, our findings reveal that:

- For the bulk of our sample, there was some degree of discomfort around their sense of belonging whilst on campus.
- There was also a professed and deeply felt sense of risk amongst some of our research participants in carrying out their day-to-day roles.
- Muslim staff in particular expressed a lack of trust in university policies, particularly relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), and especially those which involved the reporting of prejudice and discrimination.
- Muslim members of staff also expressed a tendency toward developing and deploying strategies in order to help ensure potential risks were avoided. These included overworking and overproducing.
- Similarly, and although there was some degree of variation, Muslim students also reported some problematic encounters and experiences which were rooted in how they were perceived as Muslims, and in turn how this impacted their studies and broader student experience.
- For a large proportion of our sample, there was a sense of voicelessness, and pressure to remain silent, especially in relation to global events and 'flashpoints' involving Muslims.
- Despite enduring a range of challenging issues, a large proportion of the sample demonstrated personal and professional resilience, whilst also remaining deeply committed not only to academia, but to this institution.

The recommendations section of this report outlines a range of areas through which some of the above findings may be addressed. These are organised under the following broad headings: *Reporting Mechanisms, HR[9] Processes and EDI; Data Management; Religious/Cultural Accommodations; and Senior Leadership and Line Managers.*

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[9] Although the University of Bradford uses the term 'People, Culture & Wellbeing', we have elected to use the term Human Resources/HR because this is the terminology that the bulk of our participants used during interviews, and it is commonly used across the HE and other sectors.

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Introduction

Background and Context

This report is based on qualitative research conducted at the University of Bradford (UoB) over the Summer and Autumn of 2024. The university has several equalities relevant workstreams and a dedicated unit, The Centre for Inclusion and Diversity (CfiD) that are integrated into the structures that are designed to ensure the smooth operation of the institution's strategy, scope and purpose.

There are also 'Staff forums' ('Race', Gender, Sexuality, Disability, etc) which are geared toward supporting employees, whilst influencing policy design. Alongside such infrastructure, the UoB is a University of Sanctuary, and has a commitment toward widening participation and increasing social mobility. In this latter regard, the UoB has recently celebrated a number of successes including topping the Social Mobility Index for the fourth year in a row[10].

As part of this project, we interviewed a sample of staff and students (*n* = 30), who identified themselves as Muslim. An important caveat to note is that whilst the study sample was based at the UoB at the time of the research, their perceptions and experiences were not always necessarily in relation to their time at UoB and, indeed, at times, related to their experiences at previous institutions as well as their general viewpoints of the sector overall. Therefore, much of the data, analysis and findings are relevant to universities, across the higher education (HE) sector, in which there are present Muslim heritage stakeholders, especially students and staff.

The Academy has long purported to be a 'post-racial' egalitarian environment that fosters, among other values, progressive thinking and cultural inclusivity (Arday, 2022).

[10]Further details can be found at https://www.bradford. ac.uk/news/archive/2024/university-of-bradford-tops-so-cial-mobility-index-for-fourth-year-in-a-row.php.

For many Muslims, however, this backdrop does not square with the growing evidence regarding the often surreptitious yet violent (literal and symbolic) episodes of Islamophobia that Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim, endure (Saeed, 2018; Stevenson, 2018; Akel, 2021; Mahmud, 2024).

These include, but are not limited to, the ubiquity of Islamophobic microaggressions (Chaudry, 2021; 2022), the inception, rollout and practice(s) of PREVENT (Husband and Alam, 2011; Saeed, 2018), the persistence of the minority ethnic education attainment gap (Gholami, 2021), as well as shortcomings in fostering campus inclusivity and belonging (Stevenson, 2018; Akel, 2021; Samatar and Sardar 2023). We, therefore, deem it indispensable to further explore the accounts of Muslims navigating *into* and *through* university spaces in order to generate rich, contemporary data which enables us to offer analysis that may contribute towards developing recommendations for a more equitable playing field for all.

Critical to our approach and understanding of this context is that the Academy, whilst having a significant role to play in addressing inequities, is merely part of the wider social and institutional fabric, which constitutes society. As such, problematic issues within university spaces are present elsewhere. For instance, and in relation to Islamophobia, in particular, in the (2024) Runnymede Trust report entitled 'Islamophobia: The Intensification of Racism against Muslim Communities in the UK', they presented several headlines which, although alarming, are not entirely surprising. For example, Muslims are more likely to reside in the most-deprived fifth of local authority districts and in the NHS, those of Muslim heritage are eight times more likely to be referred to Prevent than non-Muslims.

Therefore, much of the data, analysis and findings are relevant to universities, across the higher education (HE) sector, in which there are present Muslim heritage stakeholders, especially students and staff (see, for example, Allen, 2023; Mkwebu, 2024; Wong et al., 2022).

For many Muslims, however, this backdrop does not square with the growing evidence regarding the often surreptitious yet violent (literal and symbolic) episodes of Islamophobia that Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim, endure.

> Institutionalised Islamophobia is [...] not initially located within the domain of individualised actors and individual agency, but is presented as normative, 'common sense' and holds a natural and ordinary banality within the social imagination and understandings of what society is and can be.

Also, Muslims constitute 18% of the prison population despite making up only 6.5 of the national population. In addition, drawing on data derived through the National Union of Students (NUS), the report made reference to higher education also; that 1 in 3 Muslim students experience Islamophobic abuse. These disproportionalities, of course, point to structural and institutional processes which lead to differential and disproportionate outcomes.

We have authored this report at a time in which the fatal public police persecution of George Floyd that occurred during the Summer of 2020, is still a fresh memory for many. What ensued was a wave of anti-racist protests that were underpinned by concerns and consternations in relation to the influence that racism was playing in shaping contemporary social arrangements in the West. Universities faced calls by existing student movements, amongst others, to 'decolonise' and be accountable for their historic and economic links with the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism (Jamil, 2022). In addition, the current racial disparities plaguing the Academy are manifestations of a racialised world in which colonialism has figured heavily (Alexander and Arday, 2015; Ahmed, 2021; Arday, 2022; Bhopal, 2022).

In the years that have followed, therefore, 'decolonisation', 'diversity', 'anti-racism' and 'inclusion', amongst other potent banner terms, have featured heavily within the institutional strategies of many UK universities. By latching onto these evocative narratives, universities have sought to demonstrate that they are attentive to racial disparities and intend to act (Akel, 2021; Mahmud and Islam, 2023). These have, nevertheless, been critiqued as being little more than empty and performative platitudes amidst the unabating prevalence of institutional forms of racism and Islamophobia in the Academy (Ahmed, 2021; Akel, 2021; Allen, 2023; Bhopal, 2022).

For clarity, our use of the term 'institutional' is makes reference to the presence of social, political and cultural 'institutions' including religion, the law, education and the family. Our use is also closely aligned with the now well-established understandings of this term in relation to processes and procedures that inhibit equitable outcomes for minoritised groups. Initially gaining traction in the 1960s, as one element of the US Black Civil Rights movement, with writers such as Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) deploying the term to challenge direct and indirect racial violence, institutional racism has become developed and rolled out in a range of academic, social and political contexts including education (Troyna, 1993), language and literature (Thiong'o, 1995), mass media (Downing and Husband, 2005), policing (Mason, 1982; Rollock, 2009) as well as HE (Akel, 2021). As countless others have theorised, explored and discussed, institutional forms of racism, including Islamophobia, are in place and remain lubricated through the presence of historical, religious, political, legal, colonial and, indeed, moral and value loaded contexts.

In contrast to direct and overt forms of racism, institutional racism becomes manifest in systems and processes, whether they are linked with the law, criminal justice, health, politics and, of course, education. At the same time, it is given license to operate through policies, laws, and the practices and cultures of any and all institutions. Institutionalised Islamophobia is, therefore, not initially located within the domain of individualised actors and individual agency, but is presented as normative, 'common sense' and holds a natural and ordinary banality within the social imagination and understandings of what society is and can be. To that end, institutional racism operates through both conscious and unconscious streams of thought, belief and action (Sivanandan, 1982).

Institutional racism of whatever sub-type is all the more potent as it can remain hidden or obscured whilst it reinforces and exacerbates inequalities between groups, producing widespread differential opportunities and outcomes in relation to employment, healthcare, income and so on. Given the history and meaning of 'race', institutional modes of racism remain rooted to earlier constructions of racial others, whether such marked identities are distinctive through phenotypical features, biology or 'culture'. It is also worth bearing in mind that within the research and theoretical knowledge base, institutional racism is sometimes referred to as systemic racism and structural racism, but each of these terms have their own nuance. More succinctly, however, it can be considered to be "an organised system of privilege and bias that systematically disadvantages a group of people perceived to belong to a specific race" (Dovidio et al., 2013: 312).

The geographical, and thus demographic context in which our research is situated is not (and has not) been insignificant in its novelty and original contribution to knowledge. To elaborate, and from an external vantage point, the city of Bradford (alongside the likes of Oldham, Burnley and Birmingham) has long been subject to a raft of stereotypical and derogatory depictions particularly around its Muslim residents living 'parallel lives' compared to the rest of the UK (Husband and Alam, 2011; Husband et al., 2014; McLoughlin, 2014; Awan, 2018). This has predominantly resulted from the racial, ethnic and religious diversity of the city's residents which includes a significant Muslim population. *Nevertheless, we depart from the assumption that diversity is the antidote to racism or Islamophobia,* a point evidenced by other scholars (Ahmed, 2012; Alexander, 2017; Arday, 2018; Bhopal, 2023; Elahi and Khan, 2017) and, indeed, is a phrase that we are partially borrowing from one of our interview participants. In other words, cities such as Bradford are not insulated nor immune from experiencing Islamophobia *from within* merely because they have a large Muslim demographic.

Against this backdrop, our report has sought to generate rich empirical insights that extend beyond 'taken-for-granted' assumptions and descriptive statistics in order to develop a greater understanding of how Muslim students and staff experience the Academy. Whilst our analysis is specific, and in some ways idiosyncratic, it addresses a much wider set of institutional, political and historical contexts which have, over centuries, entrenched certain systemic types of thought as normative. The terrain that we are alluding to is of course 'race' and racialisation and how such concepts are institutionally located. Whilst countless writers, theorists and researchers have explored these and related matters through their own lenses, the presence and impact of 'race' remains potent. The Academy is not immune to the present context nor the history upon which it is built.

A Brief Note on the Sample's Understanding of Islamophobia

Although many readers will be familiar with the concept, definitions and indeed the contested nature of Islamophobia (Sayyid, 2014; Elahi and Khan, 2017; Saeed, 2018; Akel, 2021; Chaudry, 2022; Ejiofor, 2023), it is useful to briefly provide some reflections on how it was recognised and defined by our sample. One of the first questions we asked our participants was about their understanding of Islamophobia. For the majority of the sample, an invariable aspect of their response involved reference to the broader concept of racism. Phrases such as 'it's like racism' or 'a kind/type of racism' were often followed, unsurprisingly, by further detail around the specific nature of Islamophobia and the extent to which it has a particular focus on Muslims and Islam. For some, there was also an opportunity to critique the notion of 'fear' in relation to the referent 'phobia'. We also noted that whilst this project, and the research instrument that we developed and deployed focussed almost entirely on Islamophobia, there were frequent references to racism. This happened because participants often used both terms interchangeably but especially when reporting on witnessing racism experienced by non-Muslims. In other words, despite the research questions aiming to elicit a relatively narrow scope of data, for some of our participants, there was a tendency to relate some of their personal experiences with those of others who had encountered racist and racialised experiences. The interchangeable use of racism and Islamophobia, in our view and to borrow from Ludwig Wittgenstein (1967: 31), can be attributed to the overlapping features of both phenomena or sharing "family resemblances".

We highlight this context because our understanding, use and approach to Islamophobia recognises that whilst it has unique manifestations and origins, it also shares a common heritage with the broader discourses of 'race' and racism. Furthermore, the impacts of 'race'-based prejudice, racialised thinking and the institutionalised context in which racism operates, constitute a shared machinery in which Islamophobia is similarly in motion. This report, therefore, offers insights around Islamophobia in the Academy, but much of our analysis and reflections also suggest that racism as a matter of general concern requires sufficient dismantling.
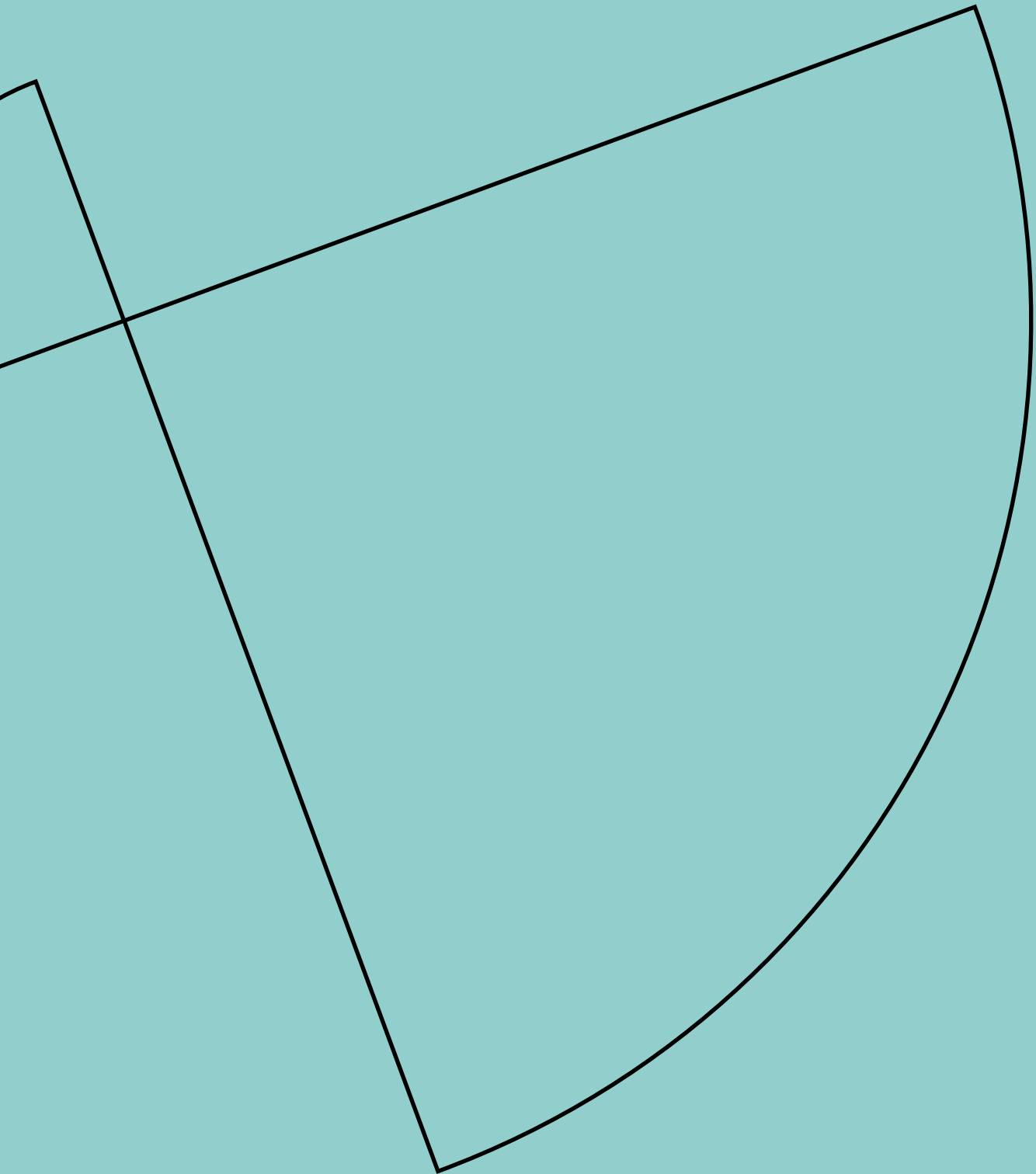
Research Questions

The core issues and themes we sought to explore and unpack were derived from our extant familiarity with the growing research and academic literature in the area of Islamophobia, racism and HE. In turn, particular areas to investigate were problematised and enveloped through developing a series of key research questions that we initially presented in our research proposal. These research questions are detailed below:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of Muslim students and staff of studying/working in the Academy?
2. Do they feel a sense of belonging on campus and that their Muslim identities are adequately accommodated?
3. What is the efficacy of institutional interventions (policy, structures, EDI initiatives) for tackling prejudice and discrimination?
4. To what extent are current mechanisms for reporting instances of Islamophobia effective?

Structure of this Report

Having provided a contextual backdrop to frame the project's aims as well as the shape and scope of this report, we now turn to providing a brief overview of the methodology that was adopted in order to undertake this research. Subsequently, we present and analyse the qualitative findings that were generated around the perceptions and experiences of Muslims studying and/or working in the Academy. Although a diversity of themes and issues were explored by participants in interviews, the more prevalent and frequent topics constitute the bulk of our findings and analysis, and are organised under the following headings:

- 'A Problematic Presence?' – Muslims on Campus
- University Structures – Reporting Mechanisms, Practices and EDI
- Thriving or Surviving: Responding to Islamophobia

We deploy these sections as a way of structuring the substantive and data informed component of this report. These sections have nested within them a number of sub-themes. For instance, in section 1 ('A Problematic Presence?' – Muslims on Campus) we explore subtle and 'hidden' manifestations of Islamophobia, accommodation of religious observance and the influence of 'flashpoints' on the frequency and intensity of Islamophobia. At the same time, it is important to note that in several instances, there is a clear sense of overlap between (sub-)themes. For example, participants may have discussed the ways in which university structures operate and can become prohibitive, but this (sub-)theme could also relate to the context of EDI.

Awais, for instance, recalled one time where *university structures* were being used to produce particular outcomes which sat outside of the university's approach to *EDI*:

I'd been sat in a meeting with other members [of a team] and derogatory comments had been made about another colleague. A manager had thought that they didn't deserve to stay in the organisation. They would see the individual exiting the organisation through probation: they would not pass probation. I've raised that issue to say actually, we're talking about equality and diversity and that kind of stuff. (Awais, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

Similarly, Nomaan discussed the nature of academia in terms of how it remains constituted, highlighting the multiplier effect of ethnicity when it is considered with class, thus, producing iniquitous outcomes or as the Weberian sociological literature would phrase it, adversely impacting 'life chances':

Lots of institutions in this country, lots of institutions abroad, they're really good at bringing in people who are international. But if you look at the nature of the people who are international academics, you'll find that that is not the same as working class minoritised academics. They both might belong to the same ethnic group, but they are vastly different in terms of their lived experiences. People who've never experienced racism until they came to this country as adults, whereas someone like yourself and me, it's there in your face from the moment you're born. And yet universities claim to be inclusive in that regard. And they're not. There is a hierarchy. (Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic).

In addition, and as opposed to offering a standalone section which examines the relevant literature, we have elected to weave in other authors' findings and analysis alongside our interpretation and discussion of the empirical data. Whilst the former approach has its merits and is, to some extent, conventional, 'slicing' in extant academic insight to complement our empirical data helps develop not only the salience of each set of (sub-)themes, it enables the production of an evolving and research informed narrative.
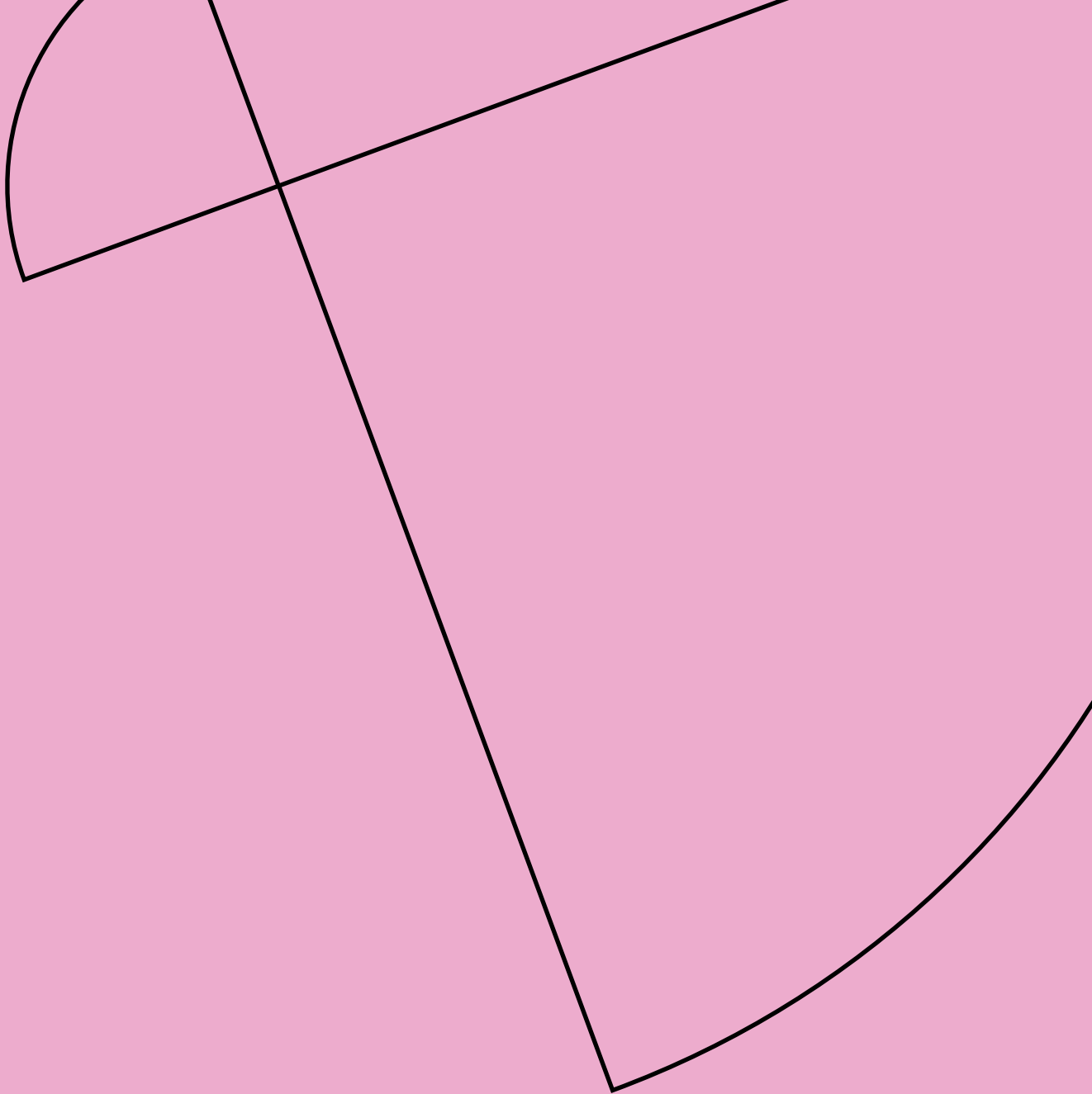
Methodology

Overview

Our report draws heavily on qualitative data that we generated through semi-structured interviews with Muslims either studying or working at the UoB. The significance of locating our research at this particular institution was based on the sizeable Muslim demography in relation to both student and staff numbers (Appendices 1-3).

To elaborate further, one element of the sample included academics and those working in professional services capacities. Alongside these strata of the sample, we also interviewed a number of students at different stages in their educational journeys; undergraduates (UG), post graduate taught (PGT) and post graduate research (PGR/PhD) students. As mentioned previously in this report, whilst the study sample was based at the UoB at the time of the research, their perceptions and experiences were not always necessarily in relation to their time at UoB and, indeed, at times, related to their experiences at previous institutions as well as their general viewpoints of the sector overall.

In the following section of this report, we provide an outline of the methodological steps that were undertaken throughout this project.

Method

Data generation for this research was predominantly completed between May and October 2024 via Microsoft Teams. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore and explicate our participants' rich and insightful accounts. These interviews were conducted and subsequently analysed by the research team (Izram Chaudry, Yunis Alam and Nabeela Khan). The decision to conduct fieldwork virtually was based on pragmatic reasons given that much of our sample had flexible working arrangements and an online format was deemed preferable in terms of limiting disruption to their ordinary working days. Furthermore, Microsoft Teams was useful in recording the semi-structured interviews and providing an instantaneous, although not always wholly accurate, transcription. Given that every hour of a recorded interview takes approximately 6-7 hours to transcribe verbatim (Britten, 1995), the use of Teams became all the more pragmatic and efficient.

More generally, there are significant virtues of using semi-structured interviews which help elicit openness and, thus, rich and valuable data (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Czarniawska, 2004; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Darlington and Scott, 2002), which is especially significant in areas of research where identity, and to some extent, marginality are salient (Devine and Heath, 1999; Hammersley, 2000). Added to this, 'insiderness' or insider research can produce distinctive data that would be absent if any in-depth sense of empathy, identification or commonality was not at play between the researcher and the researched. This is especially the case in research that concerns matters of 'race', ethnicity, racism as well as the broader, and often racialised experiences of minority ethnic communities (Ali, 2006; Bhattacharyya and Murji, 2013; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Bulmer and Solomos 2004).

Additionally, we noted that participating in an interview proved to be a cathartic and emancipatory exercise for many of our participants by providing them with a 'safe space' to openly express their views. This is a further feature and benefit of 'insiderness' being in play in the context of research relationships. Openness and trust may have been elicited because our sample were engaging with a researcher of a similar and to some extent, shared ethnic heritage, without the fear of being judged, reprimanded and by knowing that they were contributing towards a project that was orientated towards not only highlighting problems but also providing solutions. Whilst this may be a further consequence of extant channels of (ethnic and faith oriented) empathy and linked to the 'researcher as insider' context, this feature of the research process also indicates that amongst the sample there is a desire to be heard, which ordinarily is unfulfilled.

[...] participating in an interview proved to be a cathartic and emancipatory exercise for many of our participants by providing them with a 'safe space' to openly express their views.

Sampling

Our sample was constituted of students and academics from various disciplines and degree programmes as well as professional services staff, based at the UoB, who self-identified as being of Muslim faith or heritage irrespective of their practice, school of thought or (perceived) levels of piety. Many participants were recruited via pre-existing contacts and relationships within the institution. In addition, we utilised internal communications across various university spaces and platforms to advertise the research project and also reached out to colleagues and students that we would not ordinarily encounter in order to diversify our data. As such, our approach to developing a sample combined purposive, opportunistic and snowballing elements (Patton, 1990). In the table below we offer a more granular breakdown of the participants that constitute our overall study sample.

Table 1:
Study Sample

Group	Male	Female
UG Students	1	7
PGT Students	1	1
PGR Students	0	2
Academic Staff	7	5
Professional Services Staff	4	2
Total	13	17

In total, we interviewed 30 participants. Within the context of sample sizes in qualitative research, we agree with the view that "it is not the number of cases [interviews] that matters, it is what you do with them that counts" (Emmel, 2013: 154). Similarly, within the purview of qualitative social research, "anywhere from 5 to 50 participants' may constitute a sample" (Dworkin, 2012: 1319). Put differently, recruiting a large number of participants without any credible methodological justification risks failing to examine the data in all of its nuances, texture and complexities with much data eventually not being used and going to waste.

At this stage, we are also obliged to note that 2 potential participants elected not to take part in the research, whilst another provided an interview before subsequently requesting to have their data, and any record of their involvement, withdrawn. They cited a lack of confidence in their anonymity being maintained and also mentioned the fear of risk and repercussions should they become identifiable. On this note, we discuss our approach to anonymity in the 'Ethics' section in below.

Our initial and substantive fieldwork/interviewing phases occurred during the Summer vacation, at which time students are less likely to either be on campus or find it convenient to take part in such research. As such, we segmented our fieldwork into 2 phases, the first of which concentrated heavily on developing a staff cohort. The second phase of fieldwork, beginning in late September of 2024, concentrated on recruiting and interviewing students.

Data Analysis

We employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase method to construct, analyse and interpret recurring themes and patterns of meaning within the data.

Table 2:
Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Phase	Description of the Process
1) Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing the data, reading and rereading the data and noting down any initial ideas.
2) Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systemic fashion across the data set.
3) Constructing themes	Collating codes into potential themes.
4) Reviewing themes	Checking how these themes work with the coded extracts and entire data set overall.
5) Defining and naming themes	Refining the specifics of each theme via ongoing analysis; ask what the overall story the analysis is telling.
6) Producing the report	Select vivid and compelling extracts, relate back to the research questions and literature to produce a scholarly report of the analysis.

According to Braun and Clarke (2013) researchers may have many insights and thoughts about data, however, the analysis of qualitative data involves the process of writing itself. Thus, analysis emerges through the iterative processes in which data are considered, written about and further reflected upon based on what has been produced. Analysis, therefore, comes through a loop involving what *has been* produced, what is being produced and what *will be* produced. Against this framework, much of our analysis was developed over a number of drafts in order to test its persuasiveness, arriving at a set of convincing and compelling arguments and recommendations.

It is worth reminding the reader that qualitative research does not set out to 'prove' the veracity of an account, but rather to provide coherent and grounded insight into a specific reality and to provoke further debate, research and analysis. Consequently, in our argument below, we extensively link our data to the rich extant literature on Islamophobia and academia in order to allow the reader to appreciate the wider context of our findings.

Data Presentation

Although the interview quotations that we present and analyse are not verbatim, this is not unusual in qualitative research. For example, we occasionally deploy squared brackets to replace words in order to protect the anonymity of our interviewees. Furthermore, quite often during our semi-structured interviews, the raw data had a tendency to change in rhetorical and logical direction as well as many instances of speakers using non-sequiturs, repeating words or, indeed, speaking naturally and thus including idiosyncratic phrases, terms and silences (for example, *erm, urgh, hmm* and so on). Although critical features of nuance within the realm of interpersonal communications, these details have less substantive value when represented on the page as text. Therefore, we have removed those elements of speech which were either examples of verbosity, repetition or produced nebulous meaning and, therefore, inhibited clarity. By way of an example, the following excerpt is presented in its original transcribed form, followed by an abridged, clearer and more succinct version.

Raw Transcript Data:

Right. So, you're constantly being asked to, like, justify things on other people's behalf, but then you're constantly facing racism and Islamophobia. So, it's like you're actually, it's an abusive relationship because if you're, if you spend enough time there, I think you get very triggered like I get very quickly triggered now you know, I find it quite difficult. To not respond and to not get emotive in those responses, which I think to them like fulfils their like stereotype of like all crazy, angry Muslim crazy angry Muslim. Right. And it's like we have to or I have to work not to fulfil those sort of stereotypes for them, which is even more work. It's even more mental work to do that on a daily basis. (Siddique, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

Abridged Data:

You're constantly being asked to justify things on other people's behalf, but then you're constantly facing racism and Islamophobia. It's an abusive relationship because if you spend enough time there, you get very triggered. I get very quickly triggered now. I find it quite difficult to not respond and to not get emotive in those responses, which I think to them like fulfils their stereotype of crazy angry Muslim. I have to work not to fulfil those stereotypes for them, which is even more mental work to do on a daily basis. (Siddique, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

A further feature of our research which we must put forth is how some of our participants were much more vocal and detailed in their responses than others, and this is reflected in the data we present. Broadly speaking, there was, for instance, some distinction in terms of quality and quantity of 'data' between staff and students. Although not consistently the case, for many students, the primary focus was their studies. Any issues, challenges or moments in which they may have been enduring a form of discrimination was somewhat tolerable because their location in the institution was perceived as temporary and predicated on the completion of their studies. Added to this, and especially for younger students, many were in the process of learning to recognise and then respond to experiences of discrimination; the question of 'racial literacy' (Laughter, et al., 2023) is relevant here, as it is with our staff cohort.

Amongst staff, we found that those who had a fairly extensive experience of the UoB, and the sector more broadly, were thus more likely and, indeed, able to offer more depth and coverage in their accounts. We also recognised that amongst our sample there was some degree of variance in terms of 'racial literacy'. Indeed, in the course of some interviews, participants appeared to rehearse their experiences and only through that process, found themselves able to name instances as either racist, Islamophobic or otherwise discriminatory.

Additionally, some members of our sample – across student and staff cohorts – were developing their own knowledge base relating to equalities discourse, racism and Islamophobia because for them, doing so became a personal, political and professional responsibility.

Furthermore, for a significant portion of our sample, becoming familiar with the research, literature and policies around these areas provided some degree of cover and protection. In other words, for some, becoming equipped with relevant knowledge became an ordinary part of their professional knowledge and skillset.

Ethics

Approval for this project was obtained by the UoB's ethics committee prior to the commencement of fieldwork (ethics approval reference number: EC28193). Additionally, we also completed an 'Equality Impact Assessment' document as a way of identifying and addressing and potential risks to protected groups. Given the nature of this research, and the extent to which many of our participants – and indeed the research team – would potentially invite risk, we adopted an overarching approach which firstly protected the identity of all those who volunteered their time and commitment towards the project. This not only anonymised the involvement of participants but also invited them to speak openly, candidly and express 'their truth', a frequently cited phrase within wider equalities discourse. For clarity, 'risk' in this particular context refers to, for instance, risking career prospects or being singled out and subjected to unfavourable treatment if any individual who took part in this research was made identifiable. Thus, we removed any key identifiers (i.e. particulars around individual biographies, the roles and posts that they hold in the institution, etc). Therefore, we assign a pseudonym for each participant, followed by their gender and one of the following broader category signifiers:

- Early Career Academic
- Mid-Career Academic
- Senior Academic
- UG Student
- PGT Student
- PGR Student
- Professional Services Colleague.

As for ourselves, whilst we are confident that the research has followed the usual social research conventions in terms ensuring our research methodology and processes are ethical, robust and have produced valid and valuable insights, we are also aware that such research has the potential to be read as being either 'problematic', substantially political or, indeed, as partisan. It is, however, worth pointing out that we are Muslim heritage Britons, and like many of those we interviewed, have biographies that invariably hold some degree of commonality, not only by virtue of our minority ethnic heritage, but by our very presence in the Academy.

On a more general, and epistemological note, political, partisan and indeed, activist research is welcomed in many sub-disciplines to be found within the social sciences. Furthermore, many types of social research integrate the lived experience(s) and identity/ies of those doing the research ('insider' research, anti-racist research, ethnography and so on) (Alexander, 2024; Bhattacharyya and Murji, 2013; Britton, 2020; De Andrade, 2000; Hammersley, 2024; Pilkington, 2011). We are, therefore, intellectually and politically committed to offering data and analysis that extends beyond unfettered critique and leans into constructive amelioration.
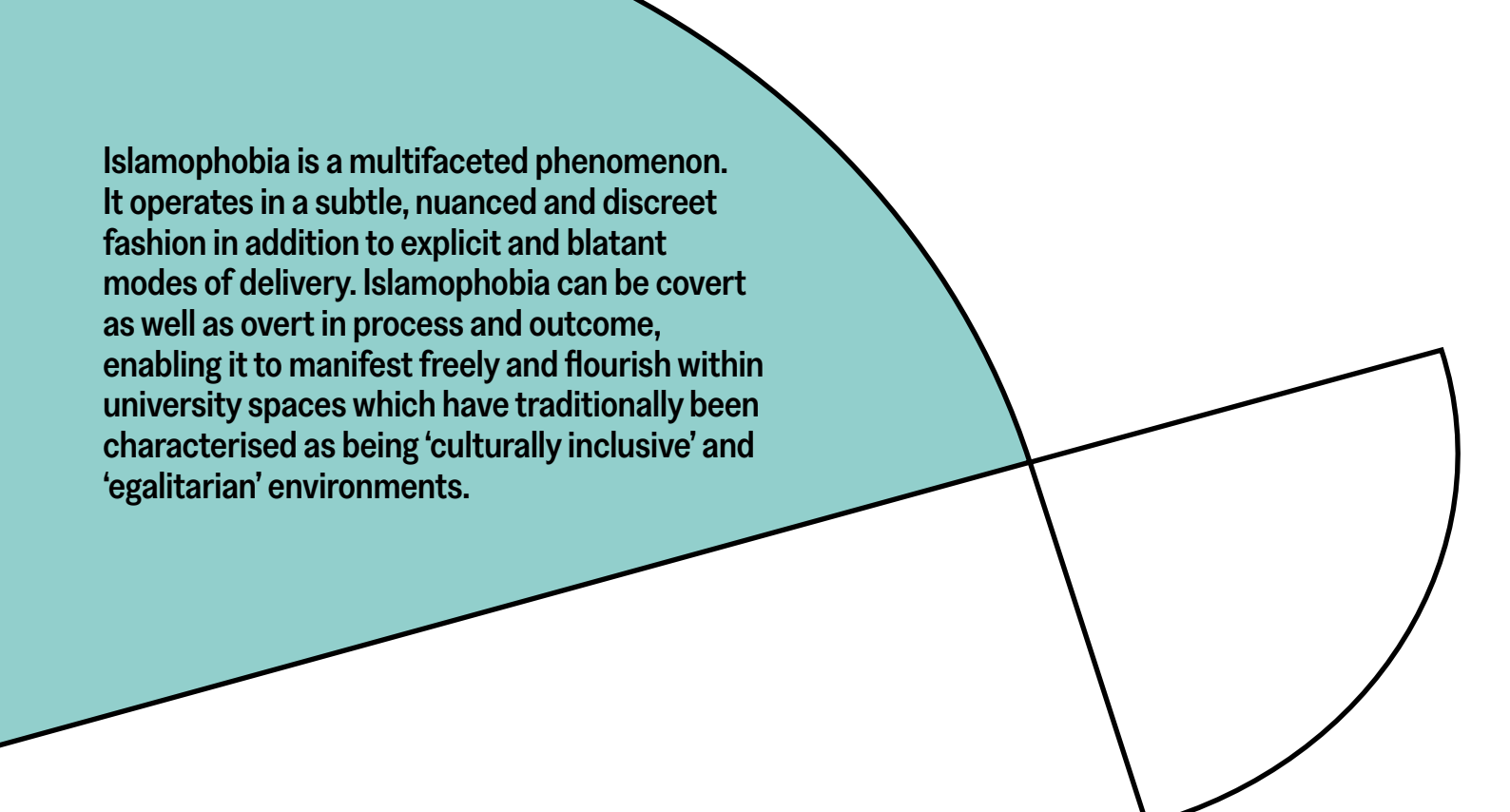
Added to this, it would also be remiss of us not to mention the geographical and biographical features of the city of Bradford. Over many decades, Bradford has become 'fashioned' through a public, political, mediated and arguably externally driven gaze that is riddled with the problematics of 'race', and of course, faith. There is, for example, significant literature around its largest ethnic minority community (British-Pakistani Muslim), the city and various forms of disquiet, criminality, deviance and, of course, threat referring to 'riots', forced marriage, as well as 'Islamist' radicalisation (Alam, 2020, 2006; Amin, 2003; Bagguley and Hussain, 2008; Husband and Alam, 2011; Phillips, 2006). Much of this research and ensuing outputs have been framed within and through discourses of ethnic segregation (Husband et al., 2014; Simpson et al., 2009). Today, much of this context is deemed historical, and although not 'post-racial' by any means, some of the city's institutions are understandably enthusiastic about leveraging diversity and culture for key elements of its biography. Despite this, however, many in the city continue to endure significant levels and types of deprivation (Social Mobility Commission, 2020; NOMIS, 2021).

To be clear, then, this research is indeed underpinned by some of our biographical elements and awareness of the city's demography and prevailing structural determinants which continue to inhibit social mobility, inclusion and access. In our view, it is because of this nuanced understanding, rather than despite it, that this research is as robust in its inception, production and dissemination as any other form or approach which seeks to delve into and investigate the actors and institutions that form the social world.

Section 1:

'A Problematic Presence?' – Muslims on Campus

Islamophobia is a multifaceted phenomenon. It operates in a subtle, nuanced and discreet fashion in addition to explicit and blatant modes of delivery. Islamophobia can be covert as well as overt in process and outcome, enabling it to manifest freely and flourish within university spaces which have traditionally been characterised as being 'culturally inclusive' and 'egalitarian' environments.

Introduction

This opening section to the analysis of empirical data provides detailed insights from Muslim students and staff in relation to their presence in the Academy and the extent to which their racial and faith identities influence their experience(s). We start by examining the particular, discreet, and multiple ways in which Islamophobia operates throughout the corridors of knowledge. This can be considered as having numerous yet distinctive components, features and expressions, some of which are subtle, banal, and everyday, whereas others are more localised, idiosyncratic and, indeed, damaging (Husband and Alam, 2011; Hussain, 2017, 2015; Phillips, 2009).

We then explore the extent to which our participants felt accommodated in practising their faith whilst at studying/working at university as well as the ensuing implications of wider events and geo-political flashpoints. The broader narrative that we seek to advance throughout this opening section is how Muslims feel that they are perceived as being 'peculiar', an 'oddity' and a somewhat problematic presence within the Academy or, as Puwar (2004) puts it, 'space invaders'.

Subtle Slights and Everyday Encounters

Islamophobia is a multifaceted phenomenon. It operates in a subtle, nuanced and discreet fashion in addition to explicit and blatant modes of delivery. Islamophobia can be covert as well as overt in process and outcome, enabling it to manifest freely and flourish within university spaces which have traditionally been characterised as being 'culturally inclusive' and 'egalitarian' environments (Chaudry, 2021, 2022).

Nomaan alluded to this reality when asked if he had ever directly experienced Islamophobia whilst working at university:

It depends on what you mean by directly. That doesn't happen often. University is too polite for that to happen often, but people are open to interpret you. I've had that probably quite consistently from some quarters. Structurally it's there, but that's not the same as directly in the way that I think you're describing it. (Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic).

This message was echoed by Saleem who pointed to the prevalence of microaggressions and the complicity of HE institutions in allowing them to manifest unchecked and unchallenged under 'business-as-usual' circumstances:

In HE, it's very unlikely that you will see more overt forms [of Islamophobia and racism]. I don't think people openly call others the P word. I don't think we'll see any kind of physical violence and so on. The most common manifestation of racism or Islamophobia is implicit. If it's occurring throughout departments, and if there's a consistent theme, and if it's not just down to a couple of rotten apples, then there's some institutional complicity. (Saleem, Male, Early Career Academic).

Similarly, Nomaan elaborated by providing a range of examples that he had routinely encountered which included Muslim students being stereotyped, talked about and, subsequently, mistreated. These entailed colleagues constructing Muslim female students as being 'passive' and 'oppressed', Muslim male students as being 'difficult' and 'deviant' and international students as supposedly being intellectually inferior in comparison to their domestic-based counterparts through 'coded' remarks. For Nomaan, such problematic assumptions tend to be surreptitiously masked behind the language of colleagues purporting to be 'ethical' and attentive to students' circumstances:

You will hear various versions of people trying to save our poor, impoverished and pathologically oppressed female Muslim students. Or they've got family responsibilities or pressure from the family to get married. Lots of stereotypes relating to women in particular. Lots of stereotypes about Muslim men, whether they're students or not. They are deviant or criminal. And some of that is turned into behaviours: class disruption, the way students engage with people or not. I've heard about how international students are only here because the university wants money. Some of that is subverted, because colleagues will say, Well, we're behaving unethically by allowing these students here. So, actually I'm not racist. I'm ethically sound. I'm anti-racist by being racist. (Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic).

Sayyid (2014: 21) has argued that "if being an Islamophobe (or if you prefer, committing Islamophobic acts) is a learned activity, then so is detecting it, pointing to it and condemning it". Put another way, any meaningful response (if at all) to Islamophobia can only be adequate if there is a firm grasp of its varying manifestations. Therefore, in order to respond to Islamophobia, a prerequisite is having the skill and literacy to recognise it. On the question of how Muslim students in particular experience university, according to Islam and Mercer-Mapstone's research (2021), there is a clear gap in acknowledging, let alone valuing the faith element of their identity. For Muslims studying at university, then, meaningful attention toward addressing religious needs are rarely typical or normative. What unfortunately further exacerbates this deficit is the rise of Islamophobic incidences and thus, experiences. In short, if you are a Muslim student at university, there is an ever-present likelihood of encountering Islamophobia through the action or inaction of others. Similarly, for Guest et al. (2020) the wider circuits of knowledge, meaning and discourse relating to Islam and Muslims (including ideas linked with terrorism and extremism, in particular) have enabled the transmission of mistrust, anxiety and fear about Muslims.

This, in turn, of course, opens up possibilities for Muslims to become subject to Islamophobic interactions which are derived from such assumptions.

According to Nadal et al. (2012), being persistently subjected to covert forms of discrimination has a detrimental effect on an individual's mental health and their ability to function daily. This was illustrated by Siddique who described previous instances of being quizzed about everything and anything pertaining to Islam and Muslims. Siddique also made mention of the toll this had taken on his wellbeing. To this end, Siddique felt that it was, therefore, incumbent upon him to resist the urge to display the stereotype of the 'angry' Muslim man despite the taxing implications that his circumstances produced:

You're constantly being asked to justify things on other people's behalf, but then you're constantly facing racism and Islamophobia. It's an abusive relationship because if you spend enough time there, you get very triggered. I get very quickly triggered now. I find it quite difficult to not respond and to not get emotive in those responses, which I think to them like fulfils their stereotype of crazy angry Muslim. I have to work not to fulfil those stereotypes for them, which is even more mental work to do on a daily basis. (Siddique, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

Siddique also recalled a striking experience in which a female Muslim student was arguably ridiculed by a religious/faith-based role holder because of the choices she made in order to practice her religion:

I've witnessed [a colleague working in a religious role] say a comment to a Muslim female student during Ramadan: Oh, it's really hot. God doesn't need you to starve or wear that thing on your head. When that was reported to [a senior colleague], who was managing that team at the time, they said, Oh no, you know, they really mean well. They're a person of God; I'm sure that's not how they meant it. (Siddique, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

Nadal et al. (2012) have documented how Muslim women donning the hijab are subject to curiosity and expressions of discomfort from others in their vicinity, including excessive staring and comments such as "you must feel hot with that on your head" (Nadal et al., 2012: 4). Critical and often one-dimensional commentary about this item of clothing is now relatively usual within and across Western societies and has been normalised. For example,

> Women who wear the hijab are doubly discriminated as being both 'the symbol and victim of patriarchal oppression and seclusion' [...] Unsurprisingly, based on these negative representations, Western nations such as France, Denmark, Belgium, and Germany have instituted restrictions on the wearing of hijab in public places (Joosub and Ebrahim, 2020: 368).

The hijab, burqa and/or niqab constitute core elements within the Western framing of visibly Muslim women. These particular items of clothing produce an effect of hypervisibility and symbolise particular meanings. Women wearing such clothing have been deemed transgressive, regressive and supposedly represent Muslim women as lacking agency particularly in relation to their appearance and dress choice(s) (Bilge, 2010; Golnaraghi and Mills, 2013; Joosub and Ebrahim, 2020). Whilst for many Muslim women such dress practices represent ideals of piety, modesty, agency, resistance and faith, they have nevertheless also been (mis)represented as signifying adherence to a primitive culture and civilisation that supposedly sits outside of the Western frame of rational and normative thought. As a consequence, some Muslim women who 'cover themselves' have been constructed as obvious candidates to be 'liberated' and 'saved'. Bound up within these ideas is the erroneous viewpoint that Muslim women are subjected to and prisoners of exceptional patriarchal forces that coerce them into passively adhering to a premodern faith and tradition.

Rather than understanding the sacrosanct importance of fasting and wearing a hijab, Siddique highlighted how such religious practices are **still** regarded by some as being unusual, unnecessary and 'out of place' (Puwar, 2004). What is even more notable is how Siddique's concerns were practically dismissed, or at best, relegated to insignificance as an innocuous 'misunderstanding.' Once Siddique reported this incident as an issue, the interaction was re-interpreted and located within the space of 'well-meaning' concern and intention. This, and other examples we encountered in many of our interviews indicate a lack of understanding and literacy on the part of those in the Academy who are charged with resolving or at least attending to racial inequalities and discriminations.

Moreover, such examples also point to a lack of efficacy, and even transparency, in the reporting mechanisms for prejudice and discrimination – a significant issue that we explore in further detail later in this report.

Linked with how Muslims are perceived and interpreted in relatively fixed and narrow ways, in a subsequent moment in the interview, Siddique stated how his linguistic and intellectual abilities constituted a source of 'fascination' and 'amazement' from others who expected otherwise because of his Muslimness:
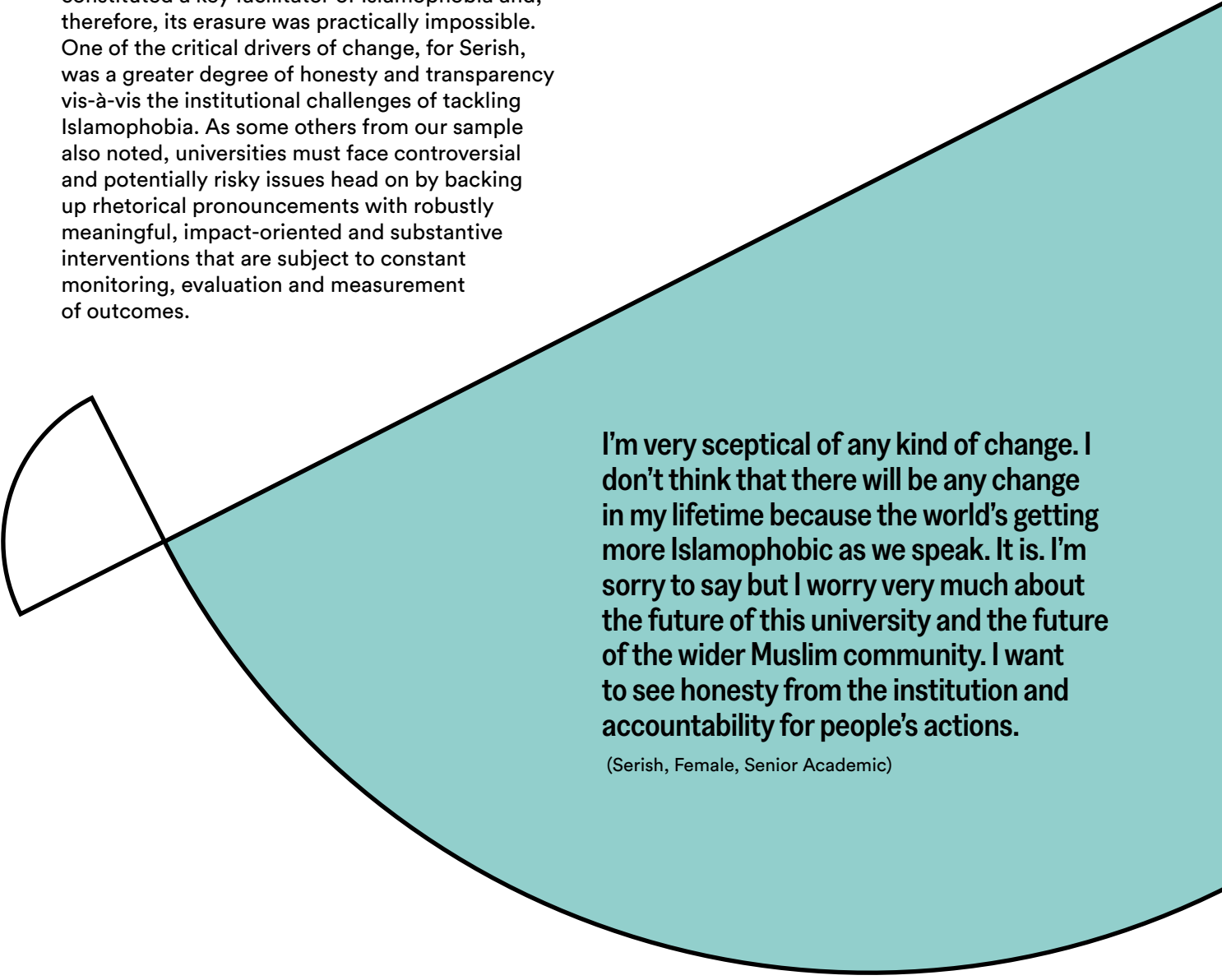
Like I always felt like they [colleagues] expected you to be dumb. They expect the Muslim person to not be that intelligent or to not be that articulate. That's the one that I always get. You always get, Oh your English is really good. And I'm like, Yeah, it's my first language. I was born in the UK and I've been speaking English like since I was born. Why wouldn't it be? (Siddique, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

Siddique suggested that there was a perception of an inextricable relationship between being fluent in the English language and an individual's levels of intelligence. This is overlaid with expectations that are firmly anchored to his ethnic and faith identity; that for a Muslim, he is articulate and appears to be intelligent. He conveyed how he would frequently experience 'shock' and 'disbelief' vis-à-vis being so articulate given that he was a Muslim. There is a wider issue here, in that when people of colour happen to be 'articulate', there may be reactions involving surprise, enthusiasm and, often, compliments. This, however, is compounded and amplified when people of colour, who may also be of working-class heritage, find themselves 'being articulate' in white, middle-class spaces such as academia (Crozier, 2018). This implies, therefore, that 'being articulate' conforms to white, middle-class reference points and *a priori* expectations around who is and who is not capable of normatively possessing such an attribute. What is also possible is that the majority of those who find it surprising to encounter an articulate non-white person may have never actually encountered such an individual. One explanation is that there may be structural reasons for what comes to constitute a deficit in outcome; that non-whites are effectively prohibited from becoming 'articulate'. Equally, of course, the very definition of 'articulate' may require some revision to ensure the concept is reflective of diverse world views, experiences and cultures.

Perhaps the most sombre account came from Serish who stated that she did not envisage any positive change in the near future with regard to eradicating Islamophobia from HE and society, more generally. Her viewpoint, based on her experiences being a senior academic, was that Islamophobia was showing no signs of abating and that HE was merely a microcosm of society:

I'm very sceptical of any kind of change. I don't think that there will be any change in my lifetime because the world's getting more Islamophobic as we speak. It is. I'm sorry to say but I worry very much about the future of this university and the future of the wider Muslim community. I want to see honesty from the institution and accountability for people's actions. But honestly, I don't see change happening anytime soon. (Serish, Female, Senior Academic).

Serish implied that the lack of accountability and justice relating to the actions of perpetrators constituted a key facilitator of Islamophobia and, therefore, its erasure was practically impossible. One of the critical drivers of change, for Serish, was a greater degree of honesty and transparency vis-à-vis the institutional challenges of tackling Islamophobia. As some others from our sample also noted, universities must face controversial and potentially risky issues head on by backing up rhetorical pronouncements with robustly meaningful, impact-oriented and substantive interventions that are subject to constant monitoring, evaluation and measurement of outcomes.

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(Serish, Female, Senior Academic)

Practicing Faith: Accommodations and Obstacles

A key feature of Islamophobia is restricting the agency of Muslims to be Muslim (Elahi and Khan, 2017; Sayyid, 2014). Within the context of HE, this has reportedly entailed institutions falling short of making adequate accommodations which have, consequently, resulted in Muslim staff and students experiencing challenges in expressing their Muslimness and/or observing their faith whilst in the university space (Stevenson, 2018; Akel, 2021; Chaudry, 2022). Nazma, however, recognised some valuable progress when she reflected on how the university had implemented a timetabling policy which restricted taught timetabled sessions on Fridays between 1-2pm, enabling Muslim staff and students to attend *Jummah* prayers:

Now the policy that we've got states that staff and students can have one 'til two off from teaching. We're not allowed to teach between one and two on a Friday because they're blocked out due to Friday prayer. We've got no teaching. (Nazma, Female, Professional Services Colleague).

Nomaan, however, reflected on how this context did not necessarily apply to Muslim members of staff in that they were expected to attend meetings if scheduled at the same time as Friday prayers. He also explored the challenges encountered by some of his Muslim colleagues when booking off time from work to celebrate Eid and how these starkly contrasted, once again, to the ways in which Muslim students would be accommodated around important periods (i.e. examination weeks) to enable them to observe religious holidays:

Two colleagues who worked in the same department wanted to book Eid off and they were told by their line manager that they couldn't because somebody has to do the work. Complete disavowal of, you know, religious observance. So that happens. We are very sort of accommodating when it comes to students. The same example about Eid: students, you don't have to turn up, catch up afterwards, catch up on any missed learning. The same privilege was not afforded to staff. (Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic).

According to Nomaan, there was a 'double standard' around the ways in which Muslim students and staff were respectively (mis)treated, during particular religious festivals, with the former being more accommodated than the latter. These findings mirror those of Akel (2021) who acknowledged the disproportionate burden faced by Muslims when faced with juggling university commitments alongside celebrating religious holidays. This aspect also appears to sit at odds with the supposed benefits of racial/religious diversity being present at managerial levels, a feature that has been critically analysed by a number of scholars (Arday, 2018; Arday and Mirza, 2018; Bhopal, 2017; Singh and Kwhali, 2015; Thomas and Arday, 2021). Although the presence of racial and religious diversity amongst managerial and leadership ranks may enable the transmission and acceptance of relevant knowledge and awareness, it does not automatically remove circumstances through which prejudice and discrimination is (albeit inadvertently) perpetuated.

Several of our participants had, nonetheless, explored the efficacy of existing provision and spaces within the university in order to appraise whether they were adequate enough for them to practice their faith, relatively comfortably, and in line with their beliefs. What emerged was how the university had undertaken some valuable work and made progress in accommodating the religious needs of Muslims:

Absolutely love the prayer room. I think they've done such a good with that. Love the halal options that are available. And again, there's the Friday one to two prayer block out as well. (Nazma, Female, Professional Services Colleague).

Absolutely love the prayer room. I think they've done such a good with that. Love the halal options that are available. And again, there's the Friday one to two prayer block out as well.

(Nazma, Female, Professional Services Colleague)

Likewise, Shabana conveyed how the opportunity and space to pray was not only important, but was significant in creating a sense of community, belonging, connectivity and identity:

That [having a prayer room] just made my experience so much nicer because I wanted to come to university more so that I had the opportunity to pray with my friends and make a deeper spiritual connection with them. (Shabana, Female, UG Student).

Sidrah went further in acknowledging and appreciating provision within university spaces:

I think that from the Shia aspect in terms of the prayer room, it has certain accommodations. Like when we pray, we pray on like a little stone. And so the prayer room always has those stones in it. And if it doesn't, we can always request that there be more stones put in. (Sidrah, Female, PGT Student).

There were, however, concerns about the lack of appropriately equipped wudhu (ablution) spaces which is a mandatory practice in preparation for performing salah/prayer:

They've all been very Let's have these gender-neutral toilets. Well, what about those who identify as Muslim? Are any of our bathroom facilities suitable to go and do wudhu [ablution required prior to commencing prayer] in? Are they heck. An ablution room or something. I want one that can give you access to some water in a way that you can do so easily and in private. It matters. (Nadia, Female, Mid-Career Academic).

Moreover, Ishtiaq bemoaned the extent to which the Academy can create impact on student outcomes through the ways in which it accommodates or obstructs observation of faith. Again, explicit reference is made to how the ordinary affairs of Muslims are encountered and dealt with:

There's no middle ground, there's no understanding when it comes to Islamic practices. Academics hold the power and the students have no power. It's from that perspective that rejecting extenuating circumstances or extension requests or accommodating students that might be late because of prayer or whatever the religious festival that's being celebrated. It's a lack of understanding. And that comes across as very ignorant. (Ishtiaq, Male, Mid-Career Academic).

In the absence of experience and knowledge amongst key decision makers, others with such knowledge are often co-opted to help fill the voids. Although not the same as 'ethnic informants', such 'ethnic insiders' are frequently called upon, formally and informally, to assist the university machinery as and when required (Ahmed, 2021; Khan, 2006). Ishtiaq, however, also pointed to the importance of communication and education, and his own experience as someone who ended up mentoring or upskilling (non-Muslim) colleagues to be inclusive in their planning and practice:

And I think that there's always been challenges, particularly around Ramadan and Eid, getting our colleagues to understand that this is a Muslim celebration that we need to avoid having examinations. I made sure I cascaded that information to the wider faculty when it was Eid-ul-Adha or Eid-ul-Fitr. Avoid examinations because they [Muslim students who were fasting] used to fall in the main examination periods. (Ishtiaq, Male, Mid-Career Academic).

A critical, and often rhetorical question that was posed and to some extent answered by a significant proportion of the participants was centred around how things could be ameliorated. Part of Rehana's view focussed on what appears to be relatively simple but perhaps symbolically important with regard to communicating key periods in the Islamic calendar:

Why are we not sending a message to our staff or students today on time? Happy Ramadan, we understand that you're all going to be fasting. There was nothing. I asked about the message that should be sent. And they said, Oh, we've got university processes and then a message will go out. We were halfway through Ramadan and still had nothing. (Rehana, Female, Early Career Academic).

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(Rehana, Female, Early Career Academic)

Nazma, however, explored the salience of diversity, and how a paucity of minority ethnic and Muslim representation, across academic and professional roles, resulted in a loss of nuanced understanding, appreciation and empathy. There is, of course, a complication with this approach which results in a bind for minority ethnic staff who may end up becoming institutional flag bearers, 'ethnic informants' or carrying the responsibility for shifting workplace cultures. Equally, it is not unusual for minority ethnic academics to find themselves 'being seen as "responsible for race matters"' (Bhattacharyya and Murji, 2013: 1362). Regardless, it is the case that a more diverse workforce demography can help ensure that staff and students feel heard, valued and experience a sense of belonging. In one particular instance, Nazma made a point of teasing out how even the relatively mundane, pragmatic and logistical matter of scheduling taught sessions has implications:

Not having diverse staff on the team makes it harder for them to understand why students might feel I don't want to come in on a Friday, for example. Friday's a religious day for me and I'd rather avoid coming in on Friday. So, if you could move my scheduling, you know, put me in a tutorial group that isn't on a Friday, for example. (Nazma, Female, Professional Services Colleague).

Ishtiaq, meanwhile, covered similar terrain, but also brought in the demographic profile of the student body:

I think there's a major lack of understanding or cultural understanding amongst our staff towards our student body. And that needs to be changed. You know, we accept the facts and figures. These are students that come from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds. I know they've got these mandatory training programmes, but I don't think they're sufficient. (Ishtiaq, Male, Mid-Career Academic).

For the bulk of the participants, there was a degree of critique around the limitations of tolerance on campus. Nomaan helpfully drew together a narrative in which he exposed how the Academy's sense of itself fails to operate effectively in its attempts to promote equality.

Universities think they are intellectually enlightened. But when it comes to Muslims and Islam: very Oh, don't worry about it. You've got prayer room, what more do you need, halal food? People aren't comfortable in dealing with Islam. The whole equalities thing is very superficial. (Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic).

The subject of performativity and tokenism appeared in our interviews with a noticeable degree of frequency, with some participants perhaps cynically referring to it as having shallow utility. We return to this issue, at greater length, in the forthcoming sections of this report.

Triggers and Flashpoints (Israel/Palestine)

During 2024, HE institutions, particularly in the US and UK, became prominent sites for protest and boycott amidst escalations of violence in Palestine. Much of this activism has been led by demands for universities to become more transparent in their business arrangements and financial dealings and to divest from companies with ties to the state of Israel and/or those supporting the war in Gaza (Buheji, 2024). At the forefront of these activities have been students who have sacrificed their campus experience and learning in order to boycott taught sessions and set up encampments across the fields and corridors of their respective institutions. They have not, however, been alone. Despite the likelihood of staunch criticism, ostracisation from colleagues and even risks to employment, students have been joined by university employees in voicing their concerns and airing their grievances over the plight of the Palestinian people. On this, however, Buheji (2024) has documented how academics, all over the world, have consequently been swiftly reprimanded and have either faced suspension or a termination of their employment for being pro-Gaza and/or for demanding an end to what they argue constitutes a genocide in Gaza (El-Affendi, 2024; Giroux, 2024; Nijim, 2023; Segal and Daniele, 2024). It is without any irony that these responses come from institutions which have a history and identity in which 'free speech' as well as academic and political discourse are purported to constitute the Academy's philosophical bedrock.

Against this contextual backdrop, it therefore came as no surprise that many of our research participants referenced the ongoing conflict in Gaza (and Palestine, more broadly), often in an unsolicited and emotive fashion, to not only discuss Islamophobia but also to explore questions around inclusion, notions of belonging and the representation(s) of Muslims and Islam. What emerged was a relatively widespread tendency to use the war in Gaza as a way of further demonstrating a lack of voice, and indeed, power within the Academy. Such external events, therefore, reveal the permeable boundaries of the Academy and how geo-political flashpoints can feature and impact the everyday experiences of Muslims in HE, and, indeed, in wider social contexts.

A notably frequent point of discussion was how the ongoing war in Gaza not only exposed a lack of attention towards a pressing and pertinent human issue, but also put into sharp relief a very pronounced, and to some extent, racialised, 'double standard' when compared to how some have interpreted and responded to the simultaneous conflict involving Russia and Ukraine:

When the Ukraine conflict started, there were flags of Ukraine all over colleagues' doors and we had events every month and we had special lectures instantly. So why is it that we can't for Palestine? I was just told by colleagues that it's a very different situation. You know, Russia is an aggressor and blah blah blah. One of the things that is still keeping me here is the inherent Islamophobia that I have witnessed within the department especially in relation to Gaza. And if I was to leave this space, that'll just get further entrenched. (Maryam, Female, PhD Student).

The presence of a 'double standard' is perhaps a point of contestation, but for Maryam, there was clearly a sense of personal and political responsibility at play and, in that, despite her own perceptions and experiences, she remains invested in the academic 'space' in order to at least attempt to undermine the entrenchment of 'race' and faith-based inequity. Maryam also referred to the wider student community, and how speaking about Gaza proved to be very challenging:

I wasn't allowed to put on certain events that I wanted to. I wasn't able to say things in the way that I wanted to. I was ready to just quit the whole thing because it felt so disingenuous. I was representing the views of the student body. Yet it was being quashed like it was too dangerous, too sticky. Keep it safe. If we're going to have anything, it has to be closed and registration only. We can't have like an open event. So, it was all very closed off in order to just protect some kind of reputation. (Maryam, Female, PhD Student).

Similarly, Nomaan noted how the conversations around Russia and Ukraine played themselves out when they first started. With regard to an institutional response to the violence in Palestine, however, Nomaan was of the view that what eventually emerged sat at odds with the values and principles that the university espouses:

The university responded in a very limited way. Very noncommittal about everything and anything. Also made virtue of the fact that, you know, the university has a department that is dedicated to [subject matter] and made some tenuous links with the situation in Palestine. One of the things that's also been dismaying for me is on the one hand you keep hearing decoloniality, decoloniality, decoloniality, right? And then on the other hand, you've got this settler colonial state which is inflicting pain and suffering on a largely innocent population. It's deploying coloniality. But for the university not to even speak to that is very revealing again about the value of performativity. (Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic).

many of our research participants referenced the ongoing conflict in Gaza (and Palestine, more broadly), often in an unsolicited and emotive fashion, to not only discuss Islamophobia but also to explore questions around inclusion, notions of belonging and the representation(s) of Muslims and Islam.

Would speak to a degree of courage and honesty and living up to these aspirational comments that we hear. But instead, we get these quite risk averse statements. The problem I have is why do you keep setting yourself up like this? Why do you keep saying you're decolonial when you're clearly not? If you didn't say it, I wouldn't mind.

(Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic)

Despite mentioning the tendency toward performativity, Nomaan made relevant the symbolic value of the university instead offering what he called 'a robust decolonial type statement' because it

Would speak to a degree of courage and honesty and living up to these aspirational comments that we hear. But instead, we get these quite risk averse statements. The problem I have is why do you keep setting yourself up like this? Why do you keep saying you're decolonial when you're clearly not? If you didn't say it, I wouldn't mind. (Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic).

Institutional discourses and rhetoric which involve 'decoloniality', 'anti-racism' and 'diversity', often constitute as 'non-performatives' which, over time, become routine and part of the institutional machinery (Ahmed, 2012). These entail the 'reiterative and citational practice by which discourse *does not produce* the effects that it names' (Ahmed, 2012: 117, emphasis original; Butler, 2011). The overall effect here is that universities can absolve themselves of any responsibility and/or the necessity to undertake any further work. Instead, signposting brochures, policy documents, handbooks and even releasing statements that do little more than alluding towards action. Thus, these non-performative elements of institutional practice operate as 'safety nets' and defensive mechanisms for inaction and are part and parcel of 'hollow', 'happy' and generally ineffective streams of diversity documentation and work (Ahmed, 2012).

Conclusion

The preceding sub-sections have covered various overlapping themes and sub-themes that our participants explored in relation to their perceptions and experiences of being Muslim in the Academy. Alongside the variety of topics and issues that were examined, what is just as notable is the extent to which participants demonstrated personal and professional resilience, whilst also remaining deeply committed not only to academia, but to their own institution. This was, perhaps, to be expected when considering the narratives of a large proportion of the staff sample who discussed their pathways into the Academy. Although we have not offered any data relating to this matter in this report, it is the case that the majority of our staff sample had a trajectory into HE that was in many ways 'non-traditional'; and for some, unplanned and stood outside of their career aspirations when they were younger. To some extent, this speaks to the relevance of economic class position and class culture. Indeed, the majority of our staff sample were of working-class heritage and also the first in their families to acquire a university degree. What this context reveals is that for British Muslim academics of working-class heritage, their location within academia can elicit variations of 'imposter syndrome' as well as undertaking activities to ensure their work is beyond reproach. What this looks like can vary from working harder, longer and more effectively/productively than their non-Muslim peers as well as being institutional flag bearers. These may be perceived as 'good', 'safe' and 'moderate' Muslims who formally and informally 'represent', and whose mere presence demonstrates a university's EDI credentials. Whilst we shall return towards these latter points later in the report, it is also worth noting that many of our participants reflected on these tensions, with some referring to the interview experience as an opportunity to express views and thoughts that they would otherwise keep private.

In the following section, we continue offering data informed analysis relating to another significant topic that emerged across the span of our interviews. Within the broader theme that we have framed as 'University Structures', we delve into the smaller yet frequent issues that become manifest at operational, and interpersonal levels of working life, some of which become subsumed as normative and to be expected, and thus, 'ordinary' and 'everyday'. These include individuals' knowledge and experiences of institutional reporting mechanisms and their perceptions of the efficacy of EDI within the Academy.

Section 2:

University Structures – Reporting Mechanisms, Practices and EDI

Introduction

As in the previous section, we have structured this part of the report into distinct components, each of which are once again populated with quotes from the sample. The two elements we offer cover a range of overlapping themes and issues, which predominantly relate to university structures aiming to ensure inappropriate behaviours are prohibited and adequately held to account, should they occur. As such, we first offer the reader insights from our sample around mechanisms that exist to help support equalities initiatives.

There appear to be two linked tendencies here. For some, there is a lack of awareness about reporting mechanisms. However, for those who have some familiarity (textual or experiential) of the same mechanisms, there is a lack of confidence in their efficacy. This section is then followed by 'EDI' – Positive or Performative?' in which participants offer their views on their experiences and perceptions of EDI policies and, indeed, its purpose.

Reporting Mechanisms

For most of the sample, there was a distinct absence of information and knowledge around the ways in which problematic, and indeed discriminatory behaviours, could be reported, recorded or resolved. This finding was complicated by a number of participants who may have had some experientially derived insight into institutional reporting mechanisms, processes and culture, but nevertheless professed a lack of confidence in their efficacy. This is a particular point we shall pick up and explore more deeply in due course, but to begin with, Bismah was explicit about her dearth of knowledge for making a complaint if a matter were to arise and how reporting may or may not yield a satisfactory outcome:

I don't know how. I wouldn't know how to, like, report it. Like, I don't know what they do because we haven't learned about that. Like if I experienced it myself, who do I report it to? Is something actually gonna get done or is it just gonna be reported. (Bismah, Female, UG Student).

Likewise, Saif was unclear on how any instances of prejudice or discrimination ought to be formally reported:

So if we do see something on campus, or experience something, who do we go to? Yes, there is Students Union Advice Centre, which is packed with a lot of other issues. Their main focus, however, is academic misconduct and supporting students in other ways. I know we have a counselling service, but that's completely different as well. My main question would be If I do report this, is anything gonna happen? So, I think awareness regarding that, if there is a mechanism how it works. What will happen if you report stuff like that? I think students need to know. (Saif, Male, PGT Student).

Similarly, Nimrah expressed some degree of confusion, although speculated as to how some institutional processes and procedures may work. She also noted how her institution was able, and had the resources, to ensure all colleagues were adequately informed about reporting their experiences of racism and Islamophobia through various means including induction into the workforce and other relevant mandatory training modules:

If I'm being completely honest, I do not know the policies, procedures, rules and regs around any of this. There needs to be more training that you have to undertake when you start as a staff member. They have safeguarding training, and all of these kind of videos and stuff that we have to watch in modules and courses that we have to complete. And I can't recall if it was on the training. It may have been, but maybe it wasn't as prevalent which is why I probably can't remember. In terms of detailed mechanisms or procedures, I don't have a clue. (Nimrah, Female, Early Career Academic).

For Maryam, however, this particular issue was also problematic as it downplayed the distinctive and, to some extent, idiosyncratic features of Islamophobia by compounding and diluting it, albeit inadvertently, within the wider arena of prejudice and discrimination. Maryam stated that she had insufficient precise information for reporting any experiences of Islamophobia, but also, lacked confidence that any reports would be taken seriously and/or lead to what she could consider to be fair and just outcomes:

Truth be told, I don't even know if I would go down that route because I wouldn't have a lot of confidence in it being taken very seriously, I feel like Islamophobia is a certain distinct type of prejudice. So just stick it under racism, which is probably how it would be treated. (Maryam, Female, PhD Student).

Ishtiaq's perspective added further nuance and texture to the perception and operation of policies around reporting prejudice and discrimination, including how widely known they may be. Ishtiaq mentioned how the information is neither accessible nor effectively transmitted, which leaves many like him unsure and relatively uninformed. When asked directly if he knew about the reporting mechanisms, he replied 'absolutely not,' before adding:

[...] Reporting processes are not very clear. That's the first thing. Second, do you have confidence in whoever picks up that report for investigating and bringing the matter to a conclusion? No [...] Like I said: what you're saying is not what you're doing. So, if there was a case of Islamophobia, I absolutely have no hope that it'll get properly investigated. In my view they will respond with, 'it's a misunderstanding'. That's not what it is. It wasn't intentional. It comes from a place of, you know, it wasn't said or done to harm you. That's how it is normally managed. (Ishtiaq, Male, Mid-Career Academic).

Despite this prevailing context, there were a limited number of participants who had attempted, with varying degrees of success, to use university mechanisms in order to report what they perceived to be breaches of policy relating to 'race' and religious equality. That said, relatively few in the study sample noted a sense of confidence in the mechanisms that can be deployed when reporting racism or Islamophobia. Of these, Qasim's perception was unambiguous and one which expresses a significant degree of trust in extant policies:

My understanding is if anybody does anything which is against HR principles, you can raise a grievance against that person mentioning the incident, explaining what happened. You know, I'm fairly confident if I did have a situation where I was concerned that somebody was treating me in a bad way, I could just raise it, you know, or go direct to HR. I wouldn't hold back. I sense that there'd be no issue with taking forward a complaint as long as it was solid and evidence based. I don't think there'd be an issue saying, Well, look, this is the issue. I'm sorry. But this is what happened. And we need to address it. (Qasim, Male, Mid-Career Academic).

As alluded to above, however, such levels of confidence in reporting mechanisms, particularly those that are hosted by HR, were relatively infrequent throughout the course of our research. In the quotation below, for example, Siddique begins with a theoretical or, indeed, speculative premise around how he would proceed to report an instance of Islamophobia. This was then supplemented with some commentary on what actually occurred on one specific occasion where reporting became necessary:

Internally how I would report it is I would tell my manager and I would expect them to report it to their manager and want the conversation to be: do you want to take this into a formal route through HR or do you want to informally resolve? But where I have formally taken it forward to HR, actually all that happens is either HR just drag it on for as long as they can and you sort of lose the momentum and you lose the rage and nothing comes out of it. (Siddique, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

Siddique references inertia, and quite possibly even active forms of resistance in allowing a report of racism to flow through in a timely and responsive manner. Indeed, several participants recalled similar experiences that sat clearly within the domain of HR. For 'race' scholars such as Sara Ahmed, this is not unheard of:

> Even if you follow their procedures, it can feel like you are pushing against a current. This is counterintuitive given that procedures are institutional instructions; they are telling you which way to go. You are being told to go in a direction that slows you down. The gap between what does happen and what is supposed to happen is thus filled by intense activity. You might have to push to get them to meet their own deadlines. It is not as if once you push, the work is done. You have to keep pushing, because at each step of the way, you encounter a wall, made up, it seems of a curious combination of indifference and resistance. If a procedure is represented on paper as a straight path, a complaint can be rather messy and circular... You can enter the complaint process but not be able to work out how to get out (Ahmed, 2021: 35).

Indeed, for some, HR was perceived as, albeit indirectly, an inhibiter of progressing such cases

I get to see how HR operates. I've been on hearings with HR as support for different parties. I've got no faith in them. They brush things under the carpet. I mean, can you believe that I was actually sat in a hearing with someone who had accused someone, in my opinion, rightly so, of racial discrimination. It was brushed into the carpet and what the result was that person [the complainant] was absolutely emotionally and physically exhausted, that they handed their notice and they left. I've got no faith in HR. I don't have any faith in the reporting mechanisms. (Serish, Female, Senior Academic).

For some members of our staff sample, there appears to be a reluctant acceptance that reporting mechanisms have a superficial and performative value: although they exist, no discernible action appears to flow from them. At the same time, there is reportedly a lack of transparency in terms of what actions/consequences ensue once a matter is reported which, often, produces an erosion of trust as the complainant is not able to assess whether the matter has been adequately investigated and resolved. In effect, it is through the construction, implementation and operation of policies where racial discrimination and Islamophobia are further compounded and allowed to go uncontested. These issues are, regrettably, and evidently not particular to any institution but challenges that continue to confront the HE sector (Ahmed, 2021).

Whilst participants made comments around the efficacy of reporting racism or Islamophobia, many also were keen to offer insights around the risk that doing so posed to them, personally and/or professionally. The possibility of 'blowback' was recurrent particularly amongst those who had, over time and through frequency of encountering problematic issues, become familiar with potential consequences, which not unreasonably became a deterrent in lodging reports in the first place. Returning to Ahmed (2012):

> Racism is treated as a breach in the happy image of diversity; racism is heard as an injury to the organisation and its good will. To even use the word "racism" can mean to become the subject of ill will – to become what makes the organisation ill, what compromises the health of the organisational body or what gets in the way of institutional happiness… *Describing the problem of racism can mean being treated as if you have created the problem, as if the very talk about divisions is what is divisive.* (Ahmed, 2012: 153, emphasis added).

Ahmed's points are borne out in some of our data. Awais, for instance, reflected on how the problem that he had previously identified and called out shifted itself so that he, as the person who was reporting the problem, become the source of the problem. To push Ahmed's metaphor involving health and happiness further, it is neither the nature nor the symptoms of the condition or illness that requires remedy, but rather, it is the patient whose diagnosis that creates disharmony and disruption:

It became this thing about that there's a problem between yourself and your line manager. In reality, the issue wasn't between me and my line manager. The issue was that I'd seen activity which went against the university values and that kind of stuff. And because I called it out, I became the problem. (Awais, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

There is, therefore, a limit to an institution's capacity to recognise or attend to the matters that go beyond the 'happy image of diversity'. Malik, meanwhile, revealed a not untypical viewpoint and experience which results in an ethical and practical dilemma but also constrains and inhibits reporting itself:
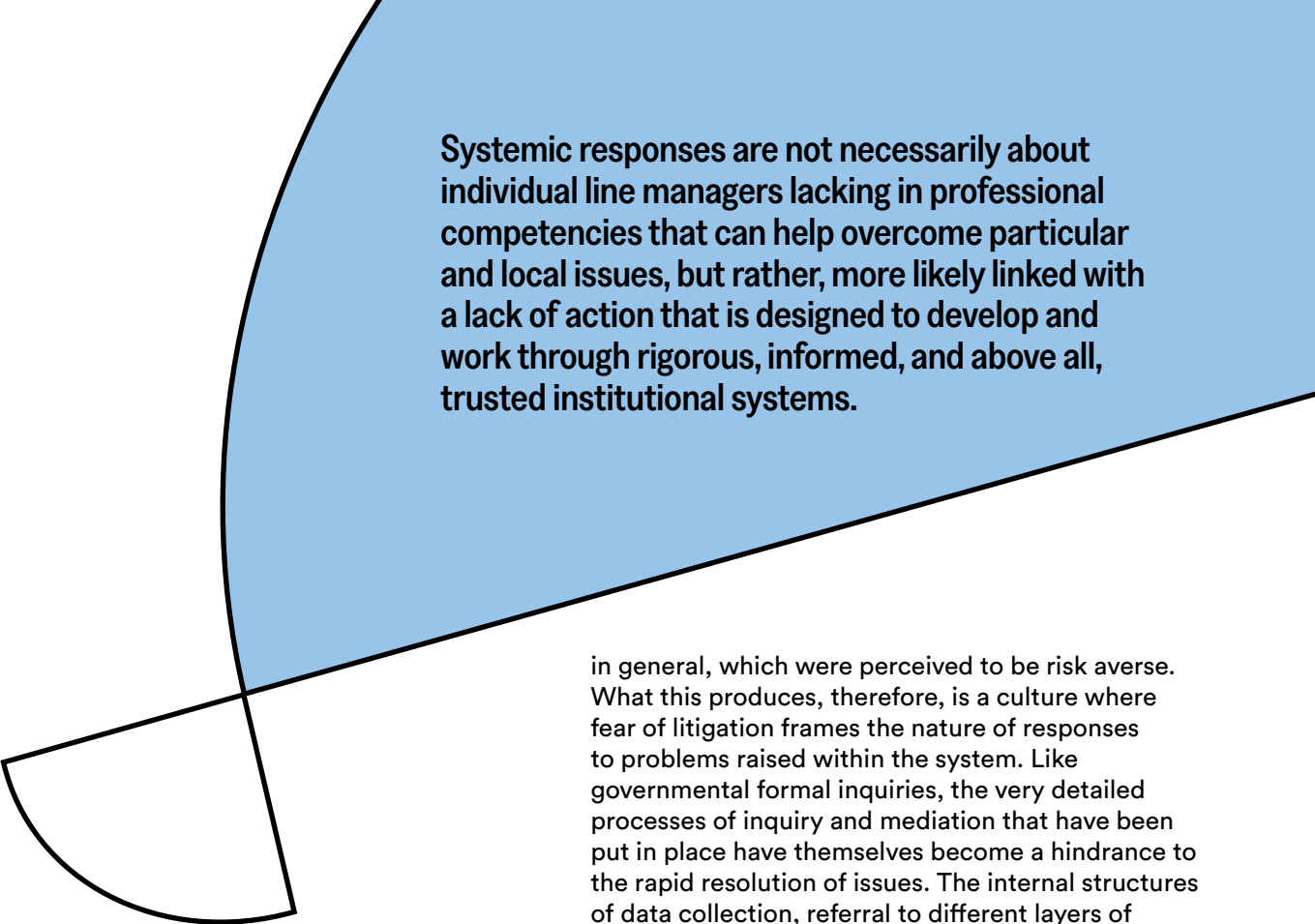
I think if you report it, I think you'll become a bit of a target. When nothing happens, then everyone's like, Why? Why didn't you do anything about it? When you don't report it, you're not doing anything about it. Kind of rock and a hard place. Then people stop reporting stuff. (Malik, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

For Zara, the reluctance in reporting instances of prejudice or discrimination were similarly rooted in a fear that she risked creating a 'target' for her back, thus, exposing herself to risks that could lead to negative implications and impacts:

I feel like you risk having a massive target on your back. There's lot of fear with that. If you want to complain about someone or if you have an issue with something there is always a risk. What has scared me is that if I report this person, what if my grades are messed with. (Zara, Female, UG Student).

Systemic responses are not necessarily about individual line managers lacking in professional competencies that can help overcome particular and local issues, but rather, more likely linked with a lack of action that is designed to develop and work through rigorous, informed, and above all, trusted institutional systems.

This sort of experience is neither unusual nor it is absent from the body of academic literature relating to the inception and operationalisation of equalities policies in the Academy (Arday, 2018; Ahmed, 2021; Bhopal, 2022). Ahmed has argued, for instance that, "to become a complainer is to become the location of the problem" (2021: 3). However, such systemic responses are not necessarily about individual line managers lacking in professional competencies that can help overcome particular and local issues, but rather, more likely linked with a lack of action that is designed to develop and work through rigorous, informed, and above all, *trusted* institutional systems.

In other words, it is precisely because managers are now, more than ever, socialised and trained to be managers (rather than leaders), that they are asked to become more competent at being managers. It is no surprise, then, that managerial types of responses produce outcomes that are first and foremost invested in adherence to process and procedures as opposed to the experiences and outcomes of those that they manage.

A more general but frequently shared view that emerged from our staff sample was linked with processes often stalling. Here, there was reference to elements within and across universities, particularly those relating to HR and management,
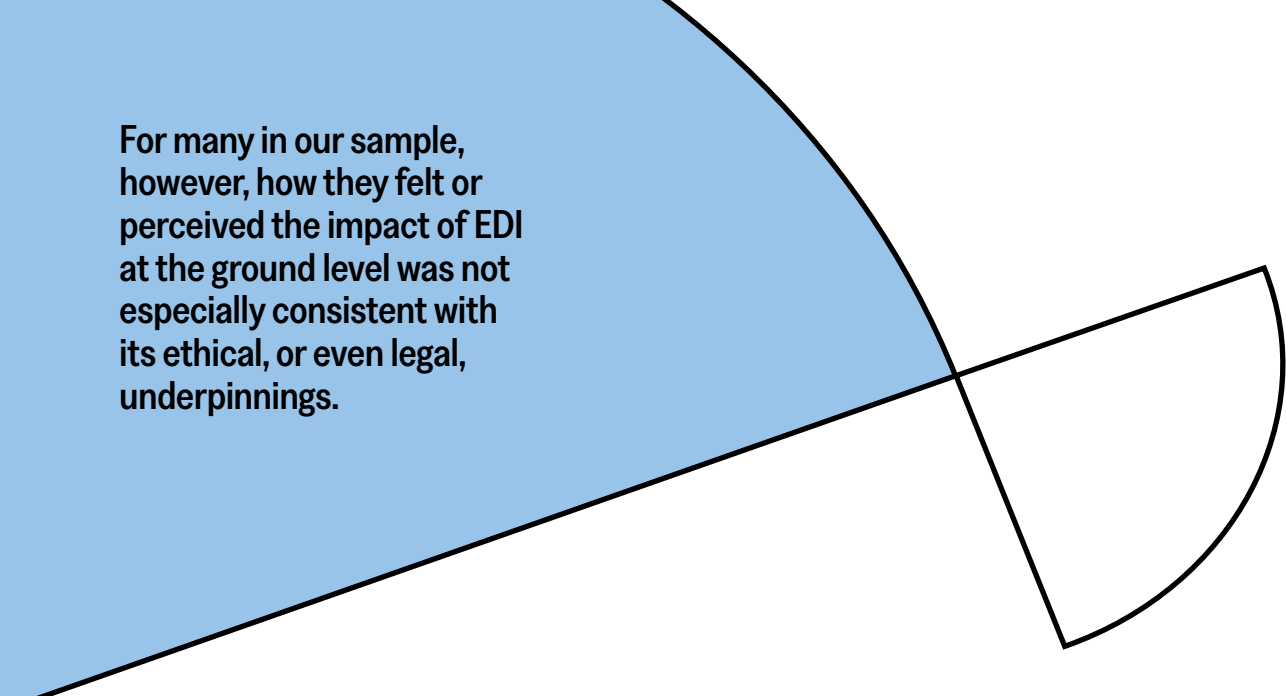
in general, which were perceived to be risk averse. What this produces, therefore, is a culture where fear of litigation frames the nature of responses to problems raised within the system. Like governmental formal inquiries, the very detailed processes of inquiry and mediation that have been put in place have themselves become a hindrance to the rapid resolution of issues. The internal structures of data collection, referral to different layers of managerial accountability, the absence of pressure for equitable and speedy resolutions of issues, and a fear of owning personal responsibility for a decision means that typically such processes can last month's rather than weeks or days.

Furthermore, a number of our research participants reflected on how current policy and practice relating to reporting could be improved. A sample of quotations that are emblematic of the broader views are offered below. To begin with, Saleem refers to the need for greater transparency, particularly with how allegations are resolved. Furthermore, his view speaks to the value of allegations being recorded, monitored and such data being made visible:

I think the university has to be a bit more transparent in terms of how many allegations of racism, Islamophobia occur within the university and what they're doing in terms of resolutions. (Saleem, Male, Early Career Academic).

Furthermore, Nimrah offered an alternative take, however, musing over the possibility of providing platforms that are aimed at those who are perhaps at risk of experiencing Islamophobia:

I think everybody should have to do an induction module. Staff do it, but students don't. Part of that induction module should cover these categories. Race, gender, religion. And we should have these clear examples to say this is how it shows up in your working practice. And actually these are the values of our community. (Nimrah, Female, Early Career Academic).

For many in our sample, however, how they felt or perceived the impact of EDI at the ground level was not especially consistent with its ethical, or even legal, underpinnings.

Similarly, Bismah considered the value of less formal spaces in which issues relating to Islamophobia could be raised, discussed, and worked through, including how reports and complaints may be addressed:

A lecture where they can talk about if you're experiencing Islamophobia on campus. How to report that: what will be done and how will the university respond to it. Or they could do like online form. And then you just talk about what happened and then it'll get sent to someone and then they will deal with it. (Bismah, Female, UG Student).

The latter point raised by Bismah is something that the UoB has invested in, and at the time of writing this report, rolled out a reporting platform/mechanism called 'Report + Support'. This intervention has been used across a significant number of institutions across the country and gives stakeholders the opportunity to 'whistleblow' anonymously. Whether it has any noticeable impact (beyond the process of reporting itself) remains to be evidenced. For Siddique, however, a critical question that follows, and has to be asked is:

If you break those values, what are the consequences? The reporting mechanisms and the consequences: it has to be explicit. Because otherwise there is no punishment for breaking those rules. Everybody gets to do what they want. Have the reporting mechanisms and actually adhere to them. (Siddique, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

One general finding from the preceding analysis has been how some of the participants expressed dismay when recalling their experiences when juxtaposed against values and principles particularly in relation to 'EDI'. Therefore, we shall now turn towards exploring our research participants' views and experiences of the idea and efficacy of 'EDI' and related institutional interventions.

'EDI' – Positive or Performative?

Over the last two decades, the discourse of EDI has increasingly featured within the institutional language of UK universities. In fact, it would be unusual to read a university student handbook, website page or brochure which fails to mention principles or values pertaining to EDI. This has been underpinned by many universities reflecting on their colonial pasts whilst responding to the (dis)advantages faced by particular marginalised and/or minoritised communities. Thus, the drive towards EDI aims to represent institutional efforts towards creating a 'level playing field' for staff and students regardless of their often layered and intersecting backgrounds. EDI has, however, received a mixed reception. For some, it constitutes a form of evidence that signifies positive change and transformation, whereas, for others, it is tokenistic, performative and ineffective (Ahmed, 2021; Bhopal, 2022). At the same time, it is said to epitomise the prevailing 'culture war', with those particularly on the right of the media and political spectrums labelling it as yet another aspect of all that is 'woke' (Pilkington, 2022) and a source of 'reverse racism'.

For many in our sample, however, how they felt or perceived the impact of EDI at the ground level was not especially consistent with its ethical, or even legal, underpinnings. One possible explanation for this is due to the peculiar nature of EDI as an idea, and as an area of work. A fundamental feature of EDI is that it aims to recognise and then address structural inequalities, including those that can be connected with the idea and operation of 'race'. EDI, therefore, is not only linked with legal imperatives (undertaking work that aims to ensure outlawed forms of discrimination do not take place), but is wrapped in political and ethical fabric, and often articulated by those who operate professionally in the sector as 'experts', specialist trainers and exemplar leaders.

Such colleagues not only represent an institutional response to addressing the legal imperatives framing the erosion of racism and Islamophobia in academe, but they also literally embody the moral claim of the institution to be 'ahead of the curve' in addressing such behaviours. They are the secular chaplains and bishops of an over-scripted, and highly contested, moral order that is central to the shared social imaginaries of contemporary liberal democracies. They offer a credo of egalitarian decency and a hint of valorous struggle against evil that does not exact too great a toll in personal sacrifice and commitment 'to the struggle'; a communitarian self-regard framed by often repeated assertions of virtuous intent.

EDI comes from a number of assumptions and assertions which are generally agreed as unproblematic and, indeed, perhaps even obvious. Firstly, in order for EDI to exist, it has to be the case that racism (and other forms of prejudice and discrimination) exist. Secondly, but underpinning the first point is that it has to be agreed that 'racism is bad'. Thirdly, and this is perhaps the most contested feature of this discussion, is that EDI can address and help overcome 'race'-based discrimination. A corollary of these ideas is that EDI has to be good because it is invested in combatting something that is bad. Moreover, and put a different way, EDI comes to be an ideological response to the ideologically premised challenges that flow from the very idea of 'race' itself. Unfortunately, however, at this juncture there is a departure in that robust attention to structures and inhibitors of 'race' equality is relegated and often displaced by interventions that, at best, seek to address symptoms and manifestations of racism through visible, but not always impactful interventions. Examples include celebratory exercises, the lauding of 'role models', and, where possible, promoting diversity (as opposed to addressing inequality) as evidence of action that goes beyond demography.

Within our sample, however, there were a small number of participants who supported and valued EDI as an indispensable feature of a HE institution. According to Qasim, the EDI structures and practices that he experienced were effective, particularly because they were being overseen and to some extent, spearheaded, by senior leadership:

There is an EDI wing to the university, and they have their events and they send out their emails. It's there, it's in the background. It's not separate to the university. It's supported by the university. The [senior leader], as far as I understand, it matters to [personal pronoun]. It's part of [personal pronoun] portfolio. You get some leaders for whom it's really a tokenistic add-on thing and then you get other leaders, they recognise the challenges. (Qasim, Male, Mid-Career Academic).

Similarly, Nimrah echoed praise for the UoB by particularly acknowledging the efforts of the Centre for Inclusion and Diversity (CfID) in working towards developing a sense of inclusion and belonging for all whilst also rolling out indispensable initiatives such as fully-funded scholarships for BAME PhD students:

I mean like compared to other universities, Bradford's quite good in terms of making a place of inclusion where everyone feels accepted and what not. I think the Centre of Inclusion [and Diversity] do a good job. They have scholarships, for example, available for ethnic minority students. I think it's called Brad-Attain. (Nimrah, Female, Early Career Academic).

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(Nimrah, Female, Early Career Academic)

Arday (2017) has argued for the necessity of fully-funded doctoral studentships for aspiring BAME scholars as channels through which poor levels of representation particularly amongst the PhD ranks can be addressed. In addition, such initiatives would support BAME individuals in obtaining a doctorate to pursue an academic career, and this in turn would constitute a pipeline which diversifies the composition of the academic workforce.

Despite some participants reflecting a positive account of EDI, the overwhelming viewpoint across the sample was one of cynicism and negativity around the efficacy of EDI in the Academy. For instance, Maryam was of the view that EDI was not being accurately translated nor effectively trickling down and having a positive and meaningful impact on the behaviours and practices exhibited by her peers/colleagues:

Within the department, there's definitely individual views that I find problematic and what the institution can do about that, I don't know. You can have policies in place. You can say that you're committed to decolonization and inclusivity, diversity, all the rest of it. But whether that then translates and reflects in individual's behaviours, I don't know. (Maryam, Female, PhD Student).

According to Rehana, there was a discernible disconnect between institutional rhetoric and the nature of practices and interactions amongst colleagues regarding contentious and 'difficult' subjects:

There's a massive contradiction you only find when you start doing this work. We're claiming to be doing EDI, but yet when difficult conversations come up, we're scared of losing friends. We're scared of rubbing people up the wrong way. We're scared of people not wanting to hear this. (Rehana, Female, Early Career Academic.)

Although in the extract above, Rehana explicitly raises the risk of fear more than once, underpinning this fear is a lack of confidence in individuals to call out problematic behaviours, possibly because this could leave them 'marked'. This context may be complemented by an over-confidence amongst those who conduct themselves without fear of any consequence at all. In other words, some may feel they are immune to critique by virtue of their position and power whereas others may consider themselves as allies, and therefore similarly immune given their politics and diversity signals. Added to this, for Rehana, there is a further complication involving a reluctance to accept that Islamophobia

is present and has impacts: 'people not wanting to hear this'. In some ways, then, even within the domain of EDI, Islamophobia may be acknowledged, but there appears to be little substance involved in its eradication. This was a point that was picked up by Nadeem, for whom Islamophobia was firmly located amongst the lower rungs on the hierarchy of importance within the scope of EDI work. He implied that EDI, as an idea more broadly, was complicit in (re)producing forms of inequality as opposed to identifying and eradicating them:

So, in EDI, things like race and Islamophobia, they're begrudgingly acknowledged as problems, but they exist on a hierarchy where some forms of racism and inequalities are considered to be more important than others such as Islamophobia. (Nadeem, Male, Senior Academic).

Similarly, there was a large degree of scepticism felt by Nomaan in relation to the statements that universities were making compared with the results that they were producing. In other words, he was unconvinced that diversity alone was the solution (or 'silver bullet') towards eradicating racism and, therefore, an inadequate basis for making claims about being 'inclusive', 'anti-racist' and/or 'decolonial':

Universities are really good at making claims, making a huge amount of virtue about how accessible, inclusive and all the rest of it they are. But that has a limit. That is not the full story. The university wants to show that we are a very ethnically diverse university. We love inclusion. We are anti-racist. We are decolonial. Diversity is not an antidote to racial inequality. Visible presence of diversity can mean anything. (Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic).

Diversity is not an antidote to racial inequality. Visible presence of diversity can mean anything.

(Nomaan, Male, Senior Academic)

Despite an increasing presence of BAME academic staff within HE, racial inequalities continue to persist in the Academy. BAME staff are more likely to be on temporary contracts, less likely to be in senior management roles and also less likely to be on higher salary bands compared to their white colleagues (Advance HE, 2023; Bhopal, 2024). Elsewhere, Ahmed (2018) has explored the performative element of 'diversity work' and how people of colour, particularly women, are often faced with the burden of ameliorating the image of the institution and/or challenging any claims that it is racist. Not too dissimilar from the practices of some advertisers, universities represent themselves by using (and at times, accentuating) minority ethnic heritage academics, and indeed students, in order to lay claim that the Academy is fair, inclusive and equitable for all:

> Diversity becomes about changing images of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organisations. In practice, changing the image of the organisation as 'white' as well as 'male dominated' means that women of colour within organisations have to be pictured more. We know the picture: those happy smiling colourful faces that are instantly recognisable as images of diversity. That this work of repicturing an organisation falls unevenly on those who inhabit organisations is very important. The further away you are from the norm the more you have to appear. It might be assumed that being a symbol of diversity, being diversity, does not require doing very much at all. But being a symbol of an organisation is how you end up working for an organisation by enabling it to appear in a way that is not consistent with how you experience the organisation (Ahmed, 2018: 324).

Linked closely to Ahmed's writing are the points raised by Saleem below:

What Bradford seems to do, and they seem to accentuate this quite well, is that they are very EDI orientated. They are going to clamp down on discrimination, and to prove that, they have keynotes, they have conferences, they have seminars. There's a disconnect in terms of saying what you're going to do and then what you end up doing. And if you look at some of the keynotes or some of the strategies and the principles, they're quite convincing. However, speak to those people that have always experienced discrimination or that have reported – after many years of bottling up – have mustered the courage to speak out in terms of how well these policies and procedures that the university purport actually work out. (Saleem, Male, Early Career Academic).

Ahmed (2012: 86) has described similar circumstances as the university doing the document(s) rather than "doing the doing". Developing strategy and policy involves other work, including the generation of content through meetings and committees, possibly surveys, seminars and other opportunities for consultation and listening. Whilst these processes are not diversionary and nor do they have a solely ritualistic presence, focusing on these areas of work can take priority over undertaking meaningful work on the ground. What we are left with is something of a void: things are said, agreed and written into policy and then, policies are implemented and then, theoretically at least, change occurs. Except, for many in our sample, that does not seem to the case. In this instance, Saleem was of the view that EDI work was solely orientated towards performatively organising conferences and facilitating keynotes and seminars rather than actioning anything that would amount to positive, tangible and measurable change. Saleem also highlighted issues around his colleagues of colour experiencing 'moving goal posts' whilst applying for and being rejected during rounds of promotion:

Look at what the university says around EDI in terms of this is a place for us to excel and grow irrespective of your background or your social identity. You will be able to progress based on your merit. I look at a number of academics, and I think to myself, you should be well up in the academic ladder, but you're not. I look at that in terms of how is it that people of colour, academics of colour, end up climbing up the academic ladder. I know colleagues that have gone for particular posts and they're always given feedback. There's always another reason and it feels like the goal posts are continuously moved back and you square that with other [white] academics and the person of colour is miles apart. (Saleem, Male, Early Career Academic).

For Saleem, and whilst this may be a point of contestation, EDI was underpinned by 'interest convergence' – a key tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT). As Gillborn (2005, 2006) has argued, interest convergence emerges when White groups support (advances towards) racial equality presuming that they benefit **more** from those advances and as long as their own positions of power remain unthreatened.

I look at the drive behind EDI, there's a degree of interest convergence [...] progress will be made towards racial equality when it is in the interest of those in power. If they're not claiming to welcome you, irrespective of your background, that's gonna hit the pockets [...] (Saleem, Male, Early Career Academic).

Saleem loads the salience of student numbers and thus economic viability into his argument, noting that 'race' equality, or even 'diversity' initiatives exist for a fundamentally pragmatic (in a business sense) reason which may sit alongside notions of justice, morality and even politics. Saleem's point is reinforced by Bell, who has noted how:

> The interest of blacks [people of colour] in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when that interest converges with the interests of whites in policy making positions. This convergence is far more important for gaining relief than the degree of harm suffered by blacks or the character of proof offered to prove that harm (Bell Jr., 1980: 523).

Likewise, Siddique suggested that the drive towards EDI was largely informed by attentiveness to the 'market of students' and, more specifically, appealing to those from an ethnic minority background. The principal drivers are:

Marketing and money. The institution is interested in their market. They market EDI values because the majority of students are actually black and brown people. (Siddique, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

Conclusion

The preceding two sections may have elicited surprise or possibly anxiety for some readers. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that our sample has not been constructed for the purpose of generating statistically representative data. Indeed, and in a more general sense, the qualitative research approach we have taken was designed to produce nuanced insight that has a different type of value, quality and purpose in comparison to data that are statistical in nature. Although universities have many processes, policies and even dedicated infrastructure that are designed to combat and eradicate all manner of discriminations; the bulk of our sample reported challenges that are connected with and emerge through these same areas of work. There is ambiguity and in some instances ignorance around reporting mechanisms, a context that could be addressed through more effective information flows, induction processes and training. However, for those who have attempted to navigate complaints and reporting processes, they have been met with resistance, reluctance and, in some instances, encountered role holders actively blocking or undermining progress.
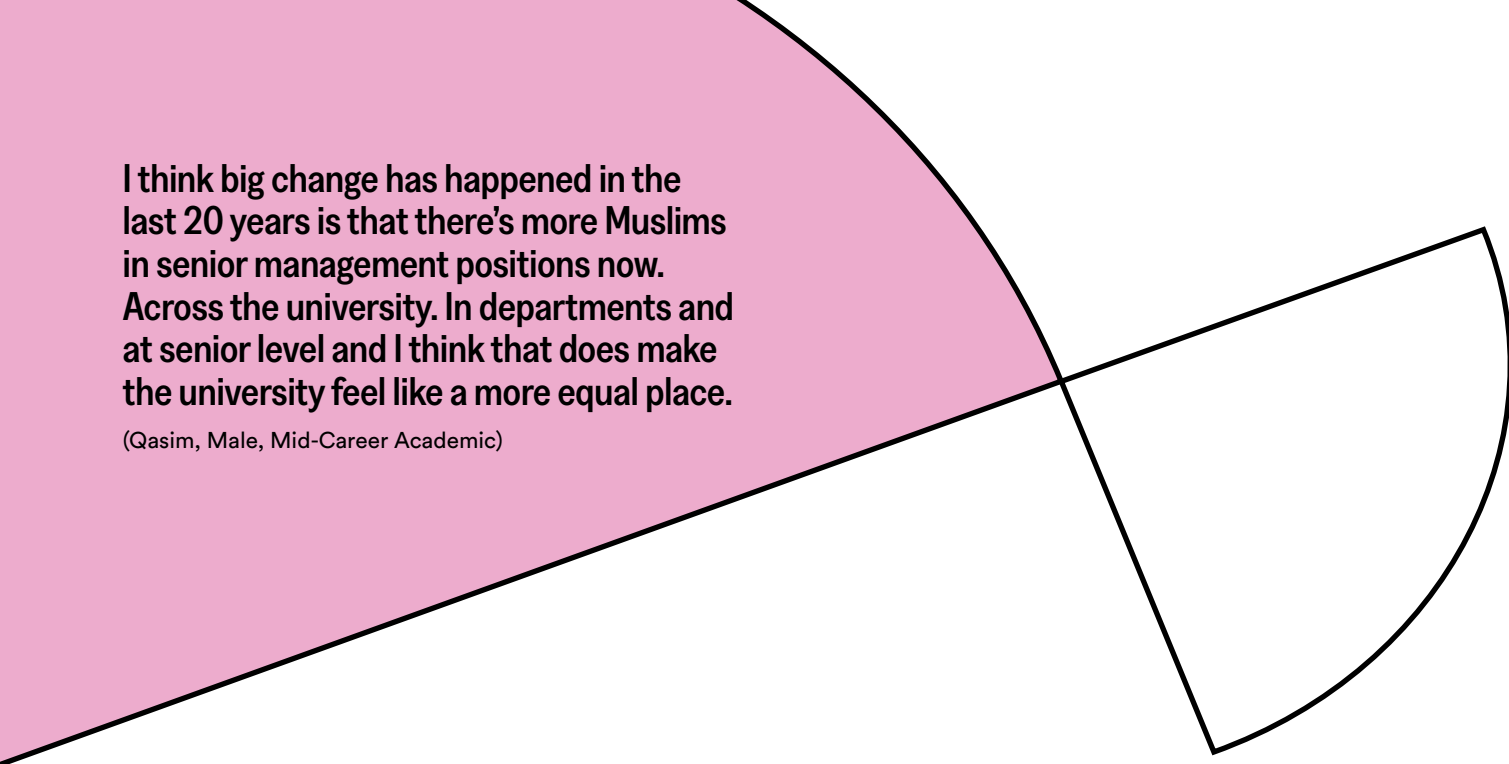
In relation to EDI, the picture is slightly more mixed, with most having a critical appreciation for its necessity, and some valuing the work itself. For some, EDI is complex but also works in tandem with a broader business model which arguably and to some extent, leverages and makes virtue of diversity tokenism. What is more important, however, is that for many, the work of EDI can have greater impact. EDI remains a 'double-edged' sword. On the one hand, it is indispensable for institutions to demonstrate a commitment towards eradicating structurally ingrained inequalities. Conversely, EDI initiatives have been vociferously criticised for being performative, tokenistic, disingenuous and 'smokescreens' which mask prejudice and discrimination. The aftermath of the George Floyd murder in Minneapolis in 2020, sparked a global outpouring of support for the #BlackLivesMatter movement and forced universities to address racism. Much of the initiatives, however, have been 'short lived' and have appeared to only benefit universities themselves (Bhopal, 2024). To this end, whilst our findings evidence some pockets of success and positivity, they overwhelmingly highlight problematic issues around the perception and efficacy of EDI in tackling structural inequalities within the Academy.

In the forthcoming and final section of the analysis, we explore how our participants, in terms of their attitudes, outlooks and working practices, responded, to their experiences of Islamophobia in the Academy.

Section 3:

Thriving or Surviving: Responding to Islamophobia

I think big change has happened in the last 20 years is that there's more Muslims in senior management positions now. Across the university. In departments and at senior level and I think that does make the university feel like a more equal place.

(Qasim, Male, Mid-Career Academic)

Introduction

In this final section of data presentation and analysis, we focus on how our sample interpreted and, subsequently, responded to different facets of their campus-based experiences of Islamophobia notwithstanding other forms of prejudice and discrimination. Some of the insights we include are complemented with analysis, and where necessary, cross referenced with overlapping and previously discussed themes. It should be noted that across our sample, how issues and concerns were recognised, responded to or reported were not uniform, although there were some commonalities.

In what follows, therefore, we commence with a brief section entitled 'Post-Islamophobia'. This draws upon some limited views and experiences that are arguably idiosyncratic and sit in opposition to the bulk of our participants' perceptions and experiences of being Muslim in the Academy. They are not, however, presented and explored as a means of superficially aiming to arrive at some form of balance, but to demonstrate that for some the Academy is, broadly speaking, an inclusive and equitable working and social environment. This is then followed by an examination of the various ways, in terms of attitudes and working practices, in which our participants responded to a predominantly challenging context.

'Post-Islamophobia'

There were limited viewpoints generated around the current state of academia for Muslims and how discrimination and specifically Islamophobia had supposedly become a 'thing of the past', and thus not an issue. Despite the convincing and compelling empirical accounts that have featured in this report, Qasim was of the opinion, for example, that UK universities had become post-Islamophobic and that any instances of Islamophobia were aberrations rather than relatively normative:

The experiences of discrimination that people talked about in universities does seem to feel like it was a part of the past; the recent past not, you know, like 50 years ago, maybe 10-15 years ago. But it does feel like that there's been some kind of positive change in the last five years – ten years. You know, you hardly ever hear of a Muslim academic now facing discrimination. I mean, you do hear of it, you know, but before it was the norm. (Qasim, Male, Mid-Career Academic).

One way of evidencing this viewpoint came through Qasim's reference to 'representation' within the workforce. Indeed, Qasim substantiated his argument by referring to what he considered to be higher numbers of Muslims in senior positions in comparison to the preceding two decades:

I think big change has happened in the last 20 years is that there's more Muslims in senior management positions now. Across the university. In departments and at senior level and I think that does make the university feel like a more equal place. You know, people are able to apply for good senior level jobs and they get them and they have a measure of power. (Qasim, Male, Mid-Career Academic).

According to some of our student participants, diversity, particularly at the UoB, contributed towards their levels and sense of belonging:

I am from Bradford which is very diverse with lots of Muslims around. And I can see that also in the university, it is diverse and there are lots of Muslims around. Because of that, I feel like I belong and that I can express my religious identity freely. (Shabana, Female, UG Student).

Similarly for Sidrah:

I think a key thing in Bradford is the very high Muslim population. And there are lots of people you know and have previously worked with and I think that has really contributed towards making me feel that I belong at the university. (Sidrah, Female, PGT Student).

Although some in the study sample acknowledged that ethnic diversity within academia was now a reality and has its benefits, it is not the same thing as, and nor does it necessarily lead to the eradication of 'race' or faith-based inequality. As Nomaan noted previously, for example: "Diversity is not an antidote to racial inequality." Conversely, Nimrah alluded to a version of diversity being in and of itself valuable as well as holding the potential to create greater impact: "I mean like compared to other universities, Bradford's quite good in terms of making a place of inclusion where everyone feels accepted and what not" (Nimrah, Female, Early Career Academic).

To clarify, a minority of our sample were of the view that the manifestations and intensity of Islamophobia had waned in the Academy. This sits overwhelmingly at odds with much of the empirical evidence that we have generated, presented and analysed; it is also a noteworthy feature that has been rehearsed through wider research and writing relating to the Academy and decoloniality, 'race', class and Islamophobia (Alam, forthcoming; Meghji, 2021; Bhopal, 2024). At the same time, for Qasim and a few others, the evidence is clear and discerned through direct, unambiguous and uncritical observations. For instance, were Islamophobia actively in play, there would not be any Muslims occupying senior positions in the university.

What is absent, however, is how long some of these Muslims have taken to become senior leaders and to what extent they have had to perform 'whiteness' in order to climb the academic ladder (Bhopal, 2024) and perhaps just as importantly, an appreciation of their own starting points.

In very crude terms, class also becomes relevant because with class comes habitus, and with that, comes economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990). As such, then, there may well be Muslims in senior leadership positions, but, to borrow from bell hooks (2000: 35), "they may also be elites to begin with and thus have some degree of privilege and advantage in relation to those who have working-class heritage".

A further counter to the superficiality of 'representation' and visibility is that from within our sample, some individuals are/were or on their way to becoming senior leaders. However, some recalled the obstacles they continue to face, including the tried and tested *work twice as hard for half as much reward and recognition.* For a number of staff, this seemed to be a feature of their academic and leadership trajectory and a feature they noticed in the professional biographies of others, as noted previously by Saleem.

For the remainder of this section, therefore, we explore viewpoints and responses that are more reflective of the preceding analysis sections which covered the prejudicial and problematic experiences faced by Muslims in the Academy. These are linked and coalesce around experiences that are coloured by the appreciation, and sensitivity towards risk and how it can be mitigated. In short, for many, the expectations placed upon them – in terms of workload, professionalism, as well as role performance – are demanding and excessive, certainly in comparison to their white counterparts. Were these matters incidental or occasional in their frequency, then of course we would be concerned but would consider such perceptions to be anomalous or unusual, and therefore not institutional in their origins.

A further counter to the superficiality of 'representation' and visibility is that from within our sample, some individuals are/were or on their way to becoming senior leaders. However, some recalled the obstacles they continue to face, including the tried and tested work twice as hard for half as much reward and recognition.

The possibility of being labelled, for example as 'problematic', is not peculiar to students and there are examples where staff elected not to make a fuss or raise matters even informally for fear of being branded as 'trouble causers'.

However, because some of the aforementioned issues were not only a recurrent theme within individual interviews, but appeared with regularity across most of those whom we interviewed, we are resigned to consider this as a manifestation that is located at institutional levels, at universities, and trickles through and down at operational levels.

Mitigating Against or Inviting Risk? Developing Survival Strategies

Whilst we identified a range of approaches that the study participants undertook in order to minimise and mitigate against risk, it became apparent that for most, their actions were based on a belief that their very presence within the Academy presented for them with an amplification of risk. For some, even following university guidance and policy posed a risk to them and thus became part of a learning cycle in which grounded insight could be used to reduce future risks. Even the 'ordinary' and seemingly innocuous aspects of working life required careful consideration and could be informed by the support and advice of others. As Saleem conveyed, 'Quite often I feel sometimes I need a second opinion.' For Haleema, however, the risks as a student were acute and became manifest explicitly through her decision to raise matters directly:

I struck up a conversation with my PAT [personal academic tutor], and I remember this conversation and I remember how badly it went down and I kind of just said, Look, my experiences so far at [...] this university have been really poor. I don't feel like you guys have a lot of knowledge around what my faith brings or what a lot of other faiths bring as well. I kind of feel like I've been partially racially discriminated as well because at the time, I wore hijab and I kind of felt like that was a problem, you know, and that was kind of made to be something that was really negative as well. (Haleema, Female, UG Student).

The response that Haleema received was far from satisfactory or effective and involved her PAT asking:

*What would you like to do? You know, is this something that you want to go down the route of formally? You know, we advise against that. You know, we wouldn't want it to impact your studies. So, I kind of felt almost like I was being threatened. It was kind of like if you're gonna open up this can of worms, right, you better be ready to bear the **** because it's gonna have an impact on everything. And you know what? It did. It had a massive impact on my results that year.* (Haleema, Female, UG Student).

Haleema offered further detail pertaining to the particular modules in which she supposedly underperformed and that were, not coincidentally, delivered and assessed by the same academics that she had complained about:

*It was really difficult. My results suffered massively. [The lecturer Haleema has complained about] and another colleague who I know they were both very good friends, I scored really low grades like I'm talking 40s only like a 41. I kind of wasn't surprised. And I guess at that point I kind of thought, Right, ****, you know what? You've made a rod for your own back here because now you've still got a year to go. You're now really problematic student, Haleema is a really problematic student.* (Haleema, Female, UG Student).

The possibility of being labelled, for example as 'problematic', is not peculiar to students and there are examples where staff elected not to make a fuss or raise matters even informallyfor fear of being branded as 'trouble causers'. This also connects with the previously discussed possibility for those who *identify a problem to become the location of the problem.*

In a different, but related way, Saleem alluded to the additional cost and burden that came with working in such an environment that is heavily layered with the potential for risk and harm to be visited upon him:

You're walking on eggshells. You have to be diplomatic. Quite often you have to overthink scenarios and prepare for more than what I think is necessary. And I think that does take a toll. If I'm thinking about emailing colleagues within the department, I should think about tone, about use of language, about how is this gonna be received by certain colleagues. (Saleem, Male, Early Career Academic).

The 'toll' this mode of working takes can be significant. Often it is (problematically) integrated and situated as merely a feature of the role and, although an additional pressure, academics require themselves to undertake necessary levels of adjustment in order to feel secure. These working practices are additional to the normative aspects of working life, and their ideation and operation can result in fatigue or what line managers or lecturers might identify as underperformance amongst their colleagues or students. Laiba, an undergraduate student, for example, mentioned this as a particular issue that is couched within the idea of university and the possibilities it offers:

University is political in itself, and like being able to go to university and being able to study and learn is inherently political. So why can't we express political views? But at the same time, it's like we've almost got to think twice before we do express our political views and ideations because it's just one of those things where you will be judged for it. Especially like as a Muslim you will be especially targeted, in

my experience, for your views because of like the media and other things like that. That shouldn't really impact stuff that goes on campus, but it still will at the end of the day. (Laiba, Female, UG Student).

Saleem was of the view that the same pressures and circumstances did not equally apply to many of his other colleagues who happened to be of white ethnic heritage:

Sometimes I feel like I have to be overly diplomatic in situations rather than just speaking what my perspective is. I've heard numerous times that academics of colour have to work 10 times harder. I can see where they're coming from in terms of all this other extra stuff that goes round. We don't just send the email, we have to prepare for sending the email. We have to discuss the email. Then we have to send the email and we have to brace ourselves for what's to come next. (Saleem, Male, Early Career Academic).

What Saleem is clearly referencing here is an inherent sense of foreboding; that he and others have to 'brace' themselves for the potentially damaging repercussions that may spring from the most innocuous of activities. Similarly, Sidrah's view discusses these issues from a student perspective:

I think as a Muslim, especially like a South Asian Muslim, you kind of feel the need to prove yourself. Like I know that when I do my assignments, I feel like I have to push myself because I don't want people to have that negative portrayal of me and South Asian Muslims [...] So, I think being South Asian and Muslim and a female as well, it kind of pushes you to really want to work harder and but get that step further because you don't want to be seen as like oh, well, they don't really care. (Sidrah, Female, PGT Student).

Again, experiences of being interpreted, monitored or subject to amplified levels of scrutiny and stereotypically-located expectations is neither unique in the Academy, and nor are such experiences especially linked with particular individuals. In other words, how minority ethnic individuals navigate their on-campus life is predicated by the pressures that come through institutionalised, indirect and subtle manifestations of practice, behaviour, competences and expectations. Although there are additional burdens that Muslims in the Academy feel obliged to take on, they are rarely recognised and thus accounted for by others. As such, these features can only be recognised if the individuals involved have developed a nuanced and shared racial literacy.

Sometimes I feel like I have to be overly diplomatic in situations rather than just speaking what my perspective is. I've heard numerous times that academics of colour have to work 10 times harder. I can see where they're coming from in terms of all this other extra stuff that goes round.

(Saleem, Male, Early Career Academic)

What also comes through our data is the value of informal networks and support mechanisms. Indeed, Saleem's approaches toward safeguarding and inoculating against risk and harm were developed through recognising another colleague's approach towards reducing the possibility of professional harm within the context of the Academy. The data pointed to a sense that Muslims are potentially vulnerable to critique, correction or measures that would not, in all likelihood, become apparent if they were white and/or not Muslim. What such experiences underscore is the increased sense of risk and disproportionality that minority ethnic individuals (regardless of their profession, role, or indeed the wider context) in general and Muslims in particular are subject to, a point borne out by research across HE, employment and criminal justice (Arday, 2021; Bhopal, 2020; Ozturk and Berber, 2020; Vomfell et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2022). In the following quote, Saleem explicitly references the value of adopting and emulating the practices of other academics:

I've kind of adopted some of [another Muslim colleague's] traits around risk assessment and risk aversion. I don't think it's anything exclusive to me just being an ECR. I see other fellow [white] ECRs and they're clumsy themselves: if I made those mistakes, things would come down on me like a tonne of bricks. (Saleem, Male, Early Career Academic).

Meanwhile, Laiba's strategy is similarly informed through the influence and guidance of others. As an undergraduate student, she may consult with other students and possibly lecturers, but the first and perhaps most important trustworthy source of consultation is her family (Chaudry, 2024). Speaking in relation to being involved in student politics, particularly around the Gaza/Israel conflict, she reported that:

I have wanted to join societies like that [Gaza and Palestine Society], but I've been warned by my parents to be like, just be careful of joining that kind of society because it sticks a label on you. Sometimes you have to be careful especially with these types of subjects and how you're talking about them. (Laiba, Female, UG Student).

Awais, whose role sits within the space of professional services, had evolved a methodology that included regularly documenting his experiences on paper. This process also became important as it enabled a means of learning how to navigate potential pitfalls through describing and reflecting on his experiences.

As it was happening and as I was going through the process, I found myself documenting at the end of every day what was going on and reflecting back and reading back on what I was going through. It was very interesting because things like coercion were coming into play, you know, from my line manager. I think there was an element of undermining the work that I was doing. (Awais, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

At the same time, another theme or practice that emerged was the tendency for participants to feel the need to go above and beyond the expectations of their roles. Often, this was a feature that they benchmarked against the performance of their white peers.

As it was happening and as I was going through the process, I found myself documenting at the end of every day what was going on and reflecting back and reading back on what I was going through. It was very interesting because things like coercion were coming into play, you know, from my line manager.

(Awais, Male, Professional Services Colleague).

For much of our academic staff sample, being productive is important, but in order to gain recognition, many may feel compelled to exceed normative academic expectations. Indeed, some participants explicitly referenced versions of the phrase *"I have to work twice as hard to receive half the recognition that others get automatically."* Illustrating this, and other features of the overworking narrative, Fizaan recounted his experiences when he first started a lecturing post early in his career: *"I had already proved myself 'cause I was publishing, and I was also teaching. And then at the same time doing extra work."* Fizaan then moved into explaining and justifying why he had elected to continue proving and over-proving himself:

*I didn't want anybody to use their racist assumptions or prejudices to squeeze me out. And there was some degree of fear there. Because there was always some degree of hostility from certain individuals. (*Fizaan, Male, Senior Academic).

For Fizaan, the risk that he was potentially subject to was borne of racism. And that risk itself could materialise in being "squeezed out"; to lose his privileges, post, potentially his livelihood and his professional reputation. In this instance, overworking is a response to the increased risk of job insecurity but also crosses into the space of risk mitigation. As an inevitable product of overworking, Ishtiaq referred to how the particularised and exceptional achievements of minority ethnic staff were not always recognised as being valuable or, indeed, excelling ordinary expectations:

There is no credit given if you consider that I pulled off one of the best outcomes for a professional programme, nationally speaking. No credit given, considering I ranked [the programme name] number one in the NSS. No credit given considering that I've managed to increase the university income. The [name] programme managed to get one of the most positive outcomes. No credit given there. (Ishtiaq, Male, Mid-Career Academic).

Beyond not receiving adequate recognition and credit for success, Fizaan reflected upon his experiences of being marginalised simply because he had been effective in his roles and often visibly seen as exceeding normative required expectations. However, for Fizaan, this was not merely a question of envy but something much that linked with his ethnicity:

There might have been situations where I actually felt that there was a bit of overt discrimination. So, for example, you know, you'll do all the work, and sometimes some of the academics would ignore you. Totally ignore you. And you'd feel as though you're an odd one out. You'll get the looks. You'll see that somebody's whispering behind you or whatever. (Fizaan, Male, Senior Academic).

In response to the problematic experiences and circumstances of our sample, we generated insights that indicated expressions of assertive and overt forms of resistance as opposed to working *around* and *through* rising levels of Islamophobia. For instance, Nadeem sought to accentuate his Muslimness rather than dilute or conceal it, making reference to the many approaches and practices that he unapologetically presents on campus:

I don't make any apologies for being a Muslim. I don't hide it. I don't shy away from it. I throw it in their face and wear it publicly. I'm confident enough to be able to do that and I'm confident enough to be able to speak, challenge and speak to anybody that does that. I'm not going to compromise my faith. I'd give all my certificates and all my qualifications back and go stack shelves in Tesco before I do that. I pray in my office and I go to Jummah prayers on campus. I also make Islamic references and analogies in my lectures. I acknowledge that it sort of accentuates my feeling of isolation and it sort of makes me stand out a bit, but I'm prepared to do that for the sake of Islam. And it's something that I'm prepared to do. It's a hill that I'm prepared to die on. (Nadeem, Male, Senior Academic).

> There might have been situations where I actually felt that there was a bit of overt discrimination. So, for example, you know, you'll do all the work, and sometimes some of the academics would ignore you. Totally ignore you. And you'd feel as though you're an odd one out. You'll get the looks. You'll see that somebody's whispering behind you or whatever.
>
> (Fizaan, Male, Senior Academic).

> Now that I'm armed with the right type of knowledge and experience, I believe I have the confidence, the vocabulary, the ability to be able to articulate myself better, to be able to call out these situations when I see them, and often that doesn't involve being vocal and saying I feel like you are treating me differently because, but it just means owning the space a bit more and being unapologetic for being there.
>
> (Maryam, Female, PhD Student)

Although Nadeem stated he would rather leave the Academy than compromise his identity, he did concede, however, that his decision to express his religious identity, as he saw fit, exposed him to isolation and risked a degree of hypervisibility, an issue that has been discussed in depth elsewhere (Chaudry, 2021). Whilst expressing pride in identity is not unusual, in this instance and in this context, it is done with an awareness of the adverse costs it may impose; although hyperbolic and perhaps metaphorical, the preparedness to 'die on that hill' speaks volumes about Nadeem's disposition, and his experience of an ever present, but varied, racialised and Islamophobic professional environment. A significant aspect that contributes toward Nadeem's approach is that of confidence, which for him is elicited through having an in depth, and critical appreciation of equalities discourse. Thus, and once again, racial literacy comes to the fore.

Similarly, Maryam was of the view that her mere presence constituted a form of resistance and that it was incumbent upon herself to challenge and contest Islamophobia wherever and whenever it appears. As with some of our other participants, a feature that informs Maryam's approach is that of enabling confidence in order to foster equity, but is underpinned by acknowledging the value of personal, professional and perhaps political responsibility:

I feel like I hold some responsibility as I am a Muslim in academia. I feel like being in this space and occupying it, we need to take a certain responsibility to ensure that we're able to call out behaviours like Islamophobia that we are not comfortable with. There's certain things that I have witnessed that are against students that make you uncomfortable, and I think to be able to call it out is something that we need to have the confidence to be able to do. So, to be better equipped in that sense. I think that there's an individual responsibility amongst us to not think that the institution is bigger than us and that can come at great personal cost. (Maryam, Female, PhD Student).

Implicit in many more interviews were varied tones that pointed to an assertion of Muslim identity. The excerpts above underline how accentuating religious identity (in particular, expressions of Muslimness) alongside being actively attentive to Islamophobia constituted subtle and more acute forms of resistance to an at times uncomfortable working context. In Maryam's case, however, she also makes reference to her own sense of responsibility and thus agency. These facets of identity are underpinned by having a degree of confidence that can only be elicited through being equipped with commensurate levels of 'power'. In this context, we are referring to individual and culturally located forms of knowledge rather than economic or political (institutionally speaking) power. One element of this is, of course, the value of developing and deploying racial literacy.

Although most of our sample were not defined as belonging to the higher rungs of senior leadership, many exhibited a different form of political power that comes through an ownership of academic, technical and discursive forms of knowledge. Many were, therefore, confident in their own capacity to recognise racism. Some felt 'empowered' enough to challenge such phenomena publicly, whilst others perhaps chose to bank these encounters in order to build up a repository to be called upon in future, as reference and learning points, in their professional journeys. More generally, the question of racial literacy was something that was explored by many, including Maryam and Nadeem:

Now that I'm armed with the right type of knowledge and experience, I believe I have the confidence, the vocabulary, the ability to be able to articulate myself better, to be able to call out these situations when I see them, and often that doesn't involve being vocal and saying I feel like you are treating me differently because, but it just means owning the space a bit more and being unapologetic for being there. And that does come from a place of having much more confidence in your own identity and who you are. (Maryam, Female, PhD Student).

For Nadeem, however, what was also important was how this racial literacy could be used, and furthermore, how not deploying our agency made us complicit in the mechanisms that serve to conspire and act against us through perpetuating racial/religious inequity:

So, we need to start first and foremost by acknowledging that racism and Islamophobia is rampant in the sector [...] And we need to take that seriously. That's the most important thing that we need to do. (Nadeem, Male, Senior Academic).

Perhaps implicit, here, is the extent to which developing a racial literacy can lead to positive and, indeed, transformative change. For Nadeem, what may precede the development of this stream of knowledge is the acknowledgement that racism and Islamophobia exist and are, indeed, structurally located. From there, it becomes imperative to have in place effective means of equipping us with the necessary skills and knowledge that enable us to firstly recognise, and to secondly address inequities and discriminations, whether they are predicated institutionally or not. As discussed in earlier parts of this report, versions of these mechanisms may be already in place (policies, guidance, strategies and so on), but as we have also demonstrated, their efficacy is, at best, limited.

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Conclusion

In this final section of the data informed analysis, the focus has been on examining how our participants interpreted and responded to their experiences within the Academy, particularly in relation to reflecting on their attitudes, outlooks and working practices. Throughout their accounts, many participants provided context around their positions within the university. Their vantage points enabled them to observe, and in some instances, adapt what were to become elementary aspects of their own practice. In and amongst this, our participants explored their own experiences, often 'storying' their encounters. Unsurprisingly, the variation across participants' experiences led to a variation in their responses, but only up to a point. By and large, the responses and viewpoints we gauged appeared to depend on a number of intersecting personal and professional features.

These included the position and role of each sample member, their own professed degree of racial literacy and their capacity (confidence and power) to address problematic issues. This latter point is linked with levels of racial literacy and a certain degree of willingness to take what might be termed political decisions as risks. In addition, there is also the extent to which their positionality enables opportunities in which racism, Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination may emerge or be recognisable. For many of the academics in our sample, their experiences were traversed through often signposted, formal and institutionally located processes. For some, these processes tended to lead to policy driven dead ends or indeed, were met with resistance from their managers and/or other colleagues. In addition, for especially experienced academics, there emerged a sense that they had gradually come to accept the *status quo.* This futility was arrived at because many had tried, failed and had come to a point that, to borrow and extend Ahmed's metaphor; even attempting to become mechanics in order to change the institutional machine, was foolhardy (Ahmed: 2021, 25-8).
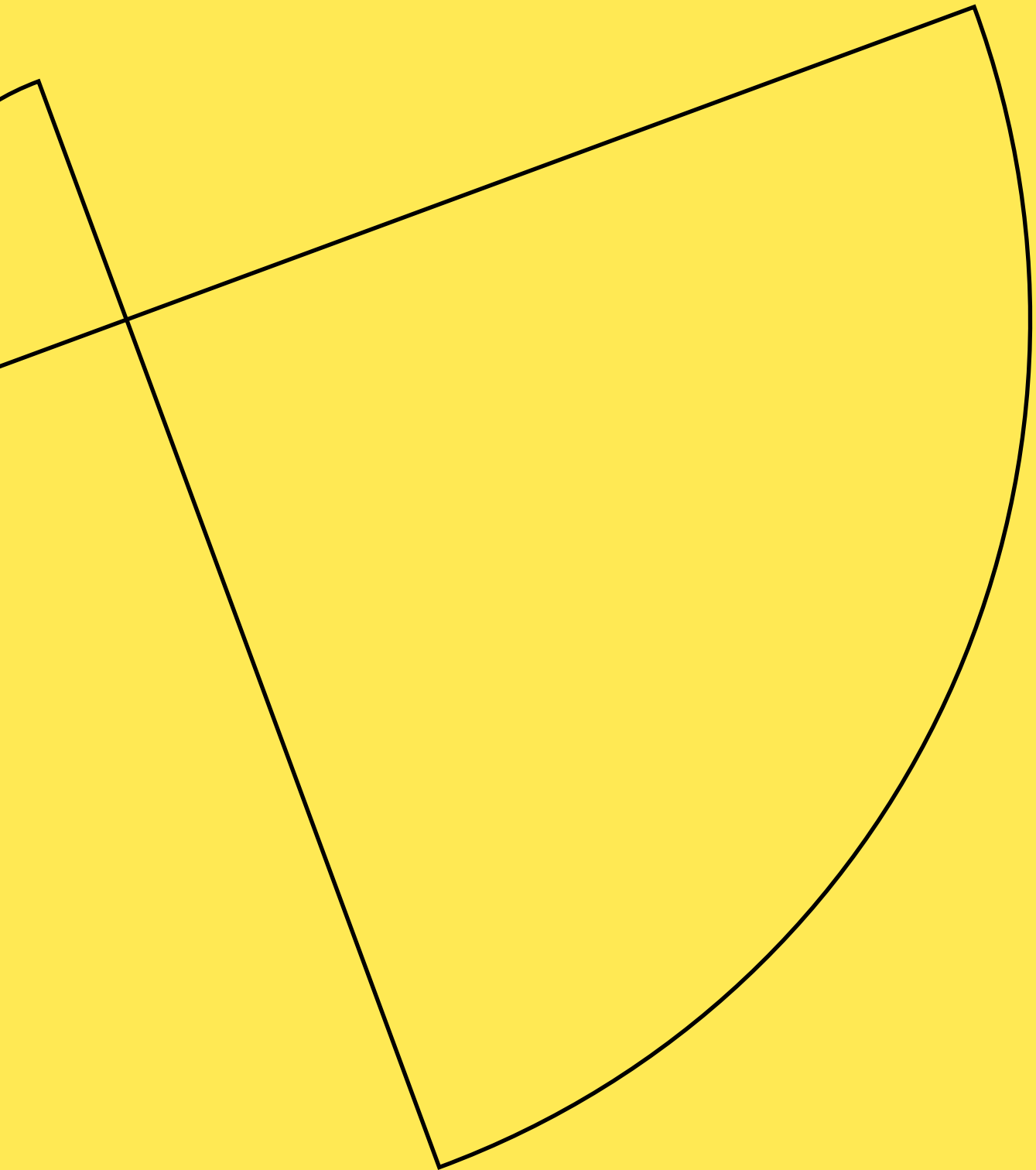
Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

It is necessary to explicitly state from the outset of this section that a number of our recommendations are neither novel and nor will they be unsurprising to many. Such recommendations, we found, feature regularly in reports like this (Akel, 2021; Franssen et al., 2024; Stevenson, 2018; UniversitiesUK, 2021) as well as being present throughout much of the equalities oeuvre. In addition, our recommendations are not exhaustive but rather attend to many of the key priorities that emerged throughout the course of our research. It is also worth bearing in mind that our research does not set out to situate the UoB as being distinctive or especially problematic in relation to race and faith-based discriminations. Indeed, as the wider literature around racism and HE continues to demonstrate; such issues are institutional in the wider structural sense.

Our recommendations are, nevertheless, sketched out and, to some extent, reiterated in order to draw attention to the limited reach and impact of measures that are already in place not only at the UoB, but also in other HE institutions, many of which have undertaken varying levels of engagement and action as responses to the growing evidence base. As such, we begin with what might appear to be quite ordinary and not especially bold suggestions for attending to discrepancies and inconsistencies that often stem from the very mechanisms that aspire to resolve, negate or merely attend to manifestations of inequality and discrimination within the Academy.

A more constructive and significant aspect of the recommendations is that they are offered as a way to open up possibilities for cycles of learning that, in turn, produce data and knowledge through which interventions can be monitored and, where necessary, developed further. We commence by introducing each theme, locating its salience within the research data, and then offer a limited number of concrete recommendations which, at the very least, ought to be opportunities for university leaders across the sector to consider, discuss and use in aiding the development of strategy and operation. Implicit in all our recommendations is the need to go beyond 'ownership', especially amongst senior leadership. What must follow collective ownership of these issues is commitment and persistence in setting measurable targets and in critically monitoring their achievement. **We, therefore, urge that the UoB undertakes activities that will aim to meet the recommendations within 24 months.** Underpinning this is the necessity to have in place a reflexive ability to identify any failures in how ownership translates into an explicit agenda for change. Part of this involves shifting from the general language of inclusion and diversity to the development and deployment of substantive and robust action that is geared toward addressing the presence and repercussions of Islamophobia.

Reporting Mechanisms, HR Processes and EDI

Institutional mechanisms for reporting experiences of prejudice and discrimination became one of the key areas in which a large proportion of our sample situated their experiences. Most of our participants claimed to know little about relevant policies and procedures for making a complaint. A remaining constituent of the sample had some experience(s) around reporting but lamented the lack of efficacy in how policies and procedures were interpreted, implemented and, subsequently, operationalised and experienced. Inconsistency and incoherence, for instance, featured as a similarly present aspect in relation to how grievances, complaints and especially instances of Islamophobia were received when reported to and processed by line managers and members of staff who undertake HR work. For some participants who had direct experiences of reporting grievances, HR processes produced a degree of anxiety and frustration, in part, attributed to a perceived lack of HR transparency, impartiality and/or accountability.

In order to remedy or at least address some of these systemically rooted challenges, practical steps can be considered. For instance, a logged paper trail of the passage of a complaint through university systems would offer some insight into the shuttling of case material from desk to desk, and the displacement of accountability in a fog of institutional deliberation. It might also reveal which desks or spaces are particularly 'sticky' at which point issues and processes stall. If such an approach were to be developed and deployed, each case file should have a date-line log in which the passage and temporal location of case materials is recorded.

As mentioned previously, whilst in the process of undertaking our research and writing this report, the UoB launched a new online reporting tool entitled 'Report + Support'. The purpose of this, according to the UoB, is to provide a platform for staff, students and others to report instances of bullying, harassment, discrimination and other forms of unacceptable behaviours – either anonymously or by providing contact details. It also provides information about internal and external support, policies and procedures.

Despite this much needed and overdue intervention, we recognise that the university will still need to take a pro-active and multipronged approach towards ensuring that awareness of this new mechanism is amplified, in addition to monitoring its utility and potential in developing trust, confidence as well as channels of accountability.

Additionally, there were mixed views and evidence of knowledge vis-à-vis the role and efficacy of EDI within a university context. For some, it served a degree of usefulness, predominantly within the space of celebrating diversity whilst, for others, it was present but not essentially active nor effective in initiating and driving substantive and transformative change. Although some of our participants reflected on positive experiences with EDI, particularly in relation to individual members of staff who had provided support during challenging times, others were of the view that EDI was, at times, complicit in not addressing racism.

The recommendations relating to the aforementioned themes are, therefore, as follows:

1. Our research strongly indicates that Islamophobia has the impact of increasing career-pipeline inequalities. Thus, HR leaders and line managers, particularly those responsible for recruitment, selection and promotion should review practices and processes which may inhibit the inclusion and progression of Muslim staff.

   a. If the premise upon which this recommendation is derived requires further scrutiny or support, then it would be necessary to initially undertake much deeper analysis of extant data, to be followed up with the generation of additional and insight rich qualitative data. It should be noted that in the course of this research, we did endeavour to deconstruct and analyse relevant numerical data that sliced ethnicity, faith, job role and so on with applications, selection, promotion and HR disciplinary procedures. Unfortunately, however, the datasets we received proved limited in terms of enabling comparability and capacity to generate accurate and meaningful analysis. This is a point we also raise as a recommendation.

2. Those responsible for attending to the broader student experience, attainment gaps as well as enhancing inclusion and participation may find value in reviewing their practices, expectations and developing their pedagogical skillsets in attempting to account for and address the presence and impact of Islamophobia.

3. Implicit to the points above, it would be remiss of us not to note that in order for these recommendations to be effective, there must be in place required competences to recognise extant and future challenges.

4. Existing reporting mechanisms should be monitored, and subject to further revision and simplification, based on staff and students' perceptions and experiences of their visibility and efficacy. Within the scope of this recommendation, particular aspects include:

   a. For the university to do additional work in communicating its adoption of the APPG definition that Islamophobia is "rooted is racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness" (APPG, 2021: 12).

   b. The university should demonstrate its investment in tackling Islamophobia by appointing a dedicated religion and belief EDI/HR specialist.

   c. Clear guidance on the relevant reporting procedures during staff and student induction events, for instance, through mandatory e-learning modules.

   d. Clearly identifiable and signposted contacts, with relevant knowledge and competence, within each unit or directorate.

   e. Accompanying this, the availability of a clear and accessible map and workflow of reporting mechanisms would help ensure take up and, thus, confidence.

5. Although processes may be in place in relation to providing complainants with support, the university may demonstrate a more nuanced degree of openness and support by allocating each case a suitably trained impartial/independent mentor/reviewer who could act as a bridge between formal university structures and individuals who lodge complaints relating to alleged experiences of prejudice or discrimination.

6. Linked to point 5, the university may wish to consider the value of ensuring a sample of all complaints are independently and impartially quality checked in terms of process and outcome. This would not only put in place measures which enhance transparency, inclusion and accountability, but could lead to a greater degree of confidence in the processes.

   a. This may also involve the introduction of impartially located debriefs for those involved.

   b. The constitution of a 'pool' of quality checkers, drawn from different units across the university, who are allocated cases to review.

7. To revisit the purpose, presence and efficacy of EDI as an area of work within the university.

   a. For the work of EDI to be given much more profile and pathways to impact. This may include, for example, EDI being 'rebranded' as a key driver to material change.

   b. A staff/student survey complemented with more qualitative data, for instance, could generate information relating to the expectations and scope of EDI.

8. For the university to establish a Muslim staff and student support network/forum. We appreciate there are various staff networks already in place which may provide support relating to ethnicity, gender, faith, spirituality and religion. However, given the nature of Islamophobia and some of the challenges Muslims face in raising matters, the value of a network designed to support Muslims in particular is worth pursuing and supporting.

9. For the university to expand its fully-funded PhD's for minority students by dedicating some projects that are geared toward establishing deeper levels of scholarship and research relating to the broad area of 'Muslims in HE' and related themes. If adopted, this recommendation would simultaneously increase the pipeline into HE, for aspiring Muslim heritage academics and develop an integrated and routinised approach to understanding and responding to data effectively.

Data Management

For this research, we accessed and examined a range of datasets that are held by the UoB (see, for instance, Appendices 1-3). We received various statistics, but as already noted, some of these were not especially useful in terms of the extent to which confident analysis could have been drawn, or did not present opportunities for identifying patterns, making comparisons and/or drawing conclusions. For instance, the data around promotions according to ethnicity, gender as well as nationality was nebulous and not consistently presented in comparison with other types of data. In other cases, how the UoB handles and presents data was also deemed to be problematic; for example, one dataset might refer to the category 'BAME', whilst another uses a variety of more specific ethno-national markers of identity. Therefore, recognising anything that remotely resembles patterns or trends, in some instances, was close to impossible.

Our proposed recommendations, in relation to the management of data, therefore, include:

1. It may be useful for senior leaders to consider how data are organised and elicited, and whether extant data flows are effective in understanding and attending to themes in which disproportionality may be present. To this end, then, it would be necessary to establish a starting point in which questions that require data asked, rather than configuring questions which suit the nature of the data that do exist.

   a. This recommendation is offered as a partial response to the university not routinely generating 'race' and faith equality data that offers meaningful comparisons or scope for fulsome and confident analyses. The datasets that we accessed were not especially useful given the variability of identity categories across different domains of recording.

   b. Within the construction of such a survey, it would be necessary to develop questions which help to establish variance and the intersections between markers of identity i.e. 'race', faith, ethnicity, gender, etc.

   c. In particular, the university may consider the value of 'race' and faith rooted data that connects and monitors potential relationships with job and promotion applications, grievances, disciplinary procedures and leavers in terms of staff data. Further, this area of work could also incorporate student data that includes much of the above in addition to data on student attainment and outcomes.

d. For existing and new datasets to be annually analysed and communicated to students and staff across the university in order to monitor (and **address**, where necessary) **any identifiable areas of concern,** patterns or trends.

2. For the university to introduce a robustly designed annual 'race' and faith equality survey that is open to all those who are part of the university community.

3. For statistical data to be complemented with qualitative data, to help offer deeper levels of insight and impact. One sample component could include those who initiated or were subject to formal performance, grievance and academic conduct processes (i.e. grievances, investigations, disciplinary procedures, etc).

4. For 'race' and faith equality data to be critical elements that feature in the co-production of realistic and action-oriented targets and interventions which aim to foster and promote 'race' and faith equality.

   a. In this instance, the university may find it useful to explore some of the data that is elicited through the processes in which relevant targets and interventions are produced.

Religious/Cultural Accommodations

For many of our participants, the capacity to practice their faith on campus rarely presented problems that were insurmountable. This indicates, perhaps, that some degree of tolerance and inclusivity around religious identity and observance already exists. Indeed, some of those who we interviewed did mention how things had improved in this regard. However, there were a number of comments around particular issues which only emerged at given, and often high-profile moments in which Muslim identity is rehearsed in the wider public sphere. The recommendations beneath, nevertheless, reflect some of the key issues that emerged under this particular theme.
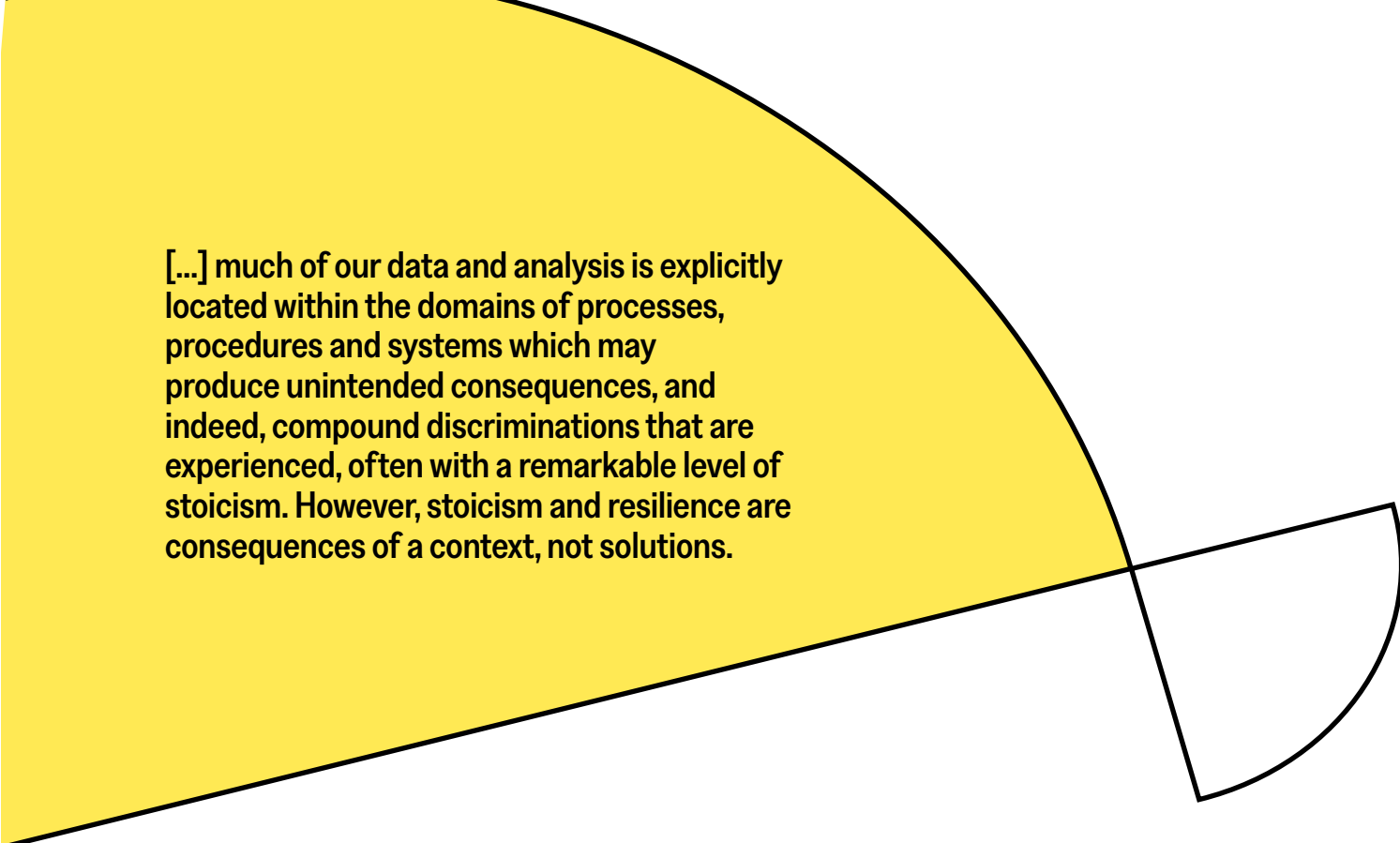
1. The university may consider the value of providing or increasing the number of appropriately equipped spaces in which Muslims on campus may be able to perform ablutions and prayers.

2. Linked to point 1, line managers and academic members of staff should be obliged to accommodate Muslims wishing to perform prayers without the need to offer a detailed explanation and justification for short absences, at various points in the day.

3. Religious festivals, such as Eid. should not be taken out of the annual leave allowance of Muslim staff; the same should also be afforded to colleagues of other minority faith identities.

4. Line managers should anticipate that annual leave requests for religious festivals, such as Eid, will be made on short notice given that Eid is subject to moon sightings (i.e. the night before the day of the religious celebration).

5. Ensuring that taught sessions and key events on the academic calendar (i.e. exam periods, graduations, etc) do not clash with significant religious periods such as Eid. For longer periods of religious observance, such as Ramadan, for the institution to have in place accommodations through which inclusion, participation and (student) attainment can be prioritised (for instance, taught sessions and/or exams beginning after 10am).

Senior Leadership and Line Managers

The UoB has, over a number of years and through various means, committed to developing senior leaders to become equipped with knowledge and understanding around diversity and equality matters. Recent and *in situ* interventions are aligned with the UoB's EDI Delivery Plan and include a range of initiatives and priorities. For instance, located within the scope of the university's 'Learning Partnership', the *Executive Board (EB) Connect* and *Leadership Connect* schemes of work are aimed to equip the Senior Executive Team to lead on EDI matters, with a view to embedding inclusion across the institution. Alongside such areas of work, there are concerted and structured approaches that are designed to eradicate differential outcomes, for students and staff, much of which is featured in the development and updating of policy and ensuing 'action planning.' It is worth bearing in mind, however, that some aspiration driven activities and policy areas are not especially new. For some of our especially established sample of staff, there was little confidence in the efficacy of challenging the now long-standing obstacles, issuesand anxieties that they have experienced during their working lives.

Linked to some of the points raised above, there may be a general sense of awareness relating to EDI matters amongst those who occupy student facing and line manager roles. However, our research indicates that this does not necessarily translate into equitable outcomes. Although senior leadership may be on board, the extent to which this political buy-in trickles down is not especially noticeable in relation to many of the experiences our sample shared. For many Muslims, there is a strong likelihood that they may, at some point, be asked to upskill or attend to gaps in knowledge amongst their lecturers,

colleagues and line managers through additional, albeit informal, knowledge sharing relating to culture and faith practice.

Whilst this seems relatively common amongst some of our sample, they encountered either unapologetic ignorance or positions that articulated awareness of culture but did not necessarily translate into differentiated nor accommodative working practices. In other cases, and by way of example, whilst a lecturer or line manager may have known about Eid, Hajj or Ramadan, they did not take steps to accommodate or appreciate the value of these religious concepts and practices in the lives of especially 'practising' Muslims. In turn, such approaches offer risk in that they may produce unhealthy relationships and outcomes. For several respondents, a critical issue was that their lecturer(s) or line manager failed to understand or appreciate the extent to which their religious identity mattered. Once religious identity was in effect discounted, there emerged a risk of exclusion, demotivation, underperformance and so on.

Our recommendations under this theme, therefore, echo some of those already presented, and include:

1. For those in student facing and line manager roles to undertake compulsory and robust training, delivered by appropriately skilled and informed colleagues, around faith and inclusion. For new staff, this could be integrated within induction processes.

2. For Performance Development Review (PDR) processes in general to be more substantively co-owned and co-produced by line managers and those being line managed.

3. For the university to develop systems of accountability in relation to the efficacy of accommodating faith practices. This might include, for example, clear outcomes aligned with meeting and not meeting clearly designed and agreed targets.

4. For the university to establish an 'Islamophobia Working Group' that influences the broader remit of EDI and Executive Board. The composition of this group would be routinely refreshed (every three years, for example) and include senior leadership as well as Muslim staff and students. The terms of reference and/or scope of this group would be initially open, but through consultation, discussion and agreement a more precise scheme of work and reporting processes could be developed.

5. For the university to allocate funding in order to appoint a Muslim faith support worker as opposed to continuing to support unfunded and unpaid Muslim faith 'advisors'.

6. For the university to be proactive, timely and sensitive in responding to the impact of 'flashpoint' events. Furthermore, opportunities for discussion should be promptly opened up so that Muslim students and staff can be heard, have their concerns acted upon, and to signpost key sources of support.

> [...] much of our data and analysis is explicitly located within the domains of processes, procedures and systems which may produce unintended consequences, and indeed, compound discriminations that are experienced, often with a remarkable level of stoicism. However, stoicism and resilience are consequences of a context, not solutions.

Final Remarks

As noted at the beginning of this section, many of these recommendations are not especially distinctive from the recommendations that feature in an array of other reports, reviews and EDI-oriented texts which aim to enhance the experiences and levels of inclusion amongst minority ethnic groups and individuals. What our recommendations do offer, however, is an opportunity for the UoB, and other universities, to not only 'demonstrate', or perhaps signal concern and aspiration, but to develop circuits of knowledge which are to be applied, and perhaps just as significantly, to be resourced in order to become systematically monitored, reviewed and reworked. Each of our thematically located recommendations has within them the possibility to go beyond performativity – a key and recurring issue that emerged throughout our analysis of empirical data.

Once again, we are also mindful that some of the data, analysis and recommendations may, perhaps, induce anxiety or even frustration for those who are committed to promoting equality and equity. To be clear, much of our data and analysis are explicitly located within the domains of processes, procedures and systems which may produce unintended consequences, and indeed, compound discriminations that are experienced, often with a remarkable level of stoicism. However, stoicism and resilience are consequences of a context, not solutions.

In order to promote equity, there is a requirement for universities across the sector to make space for difficult, complicated and, above all, honest and open conversations that feed into the creation of robust programmes of necessary, and transformative change. Without such measures, depth is lost and without depth of understanding, the production of effective and durable interventions becomes little more than performative.

It is through an appreciation of such issues that this report has been fashioned. As noted at the outset, we are not only invested as merely researchers, but also through our wider identification with some of the challenges that our sample continue to experience. Finally, we hope that this report can be interpreted as being one in which the identified challenges are not insurmountable, but as we have mentioned previously, can be addressed through taking a wider, more expansive and committed approach toward dismantling the machinery and design of Islamophobia that, regrettably, continues to operate.

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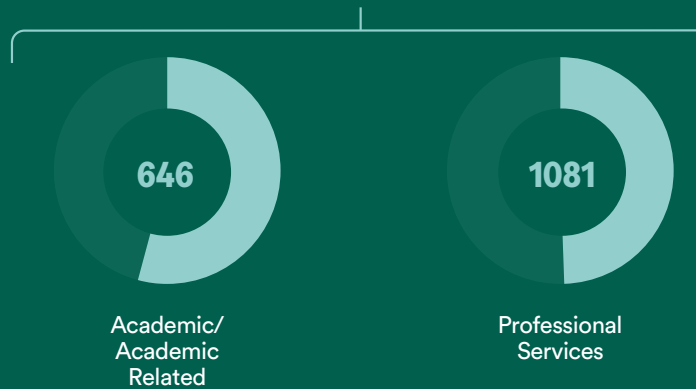
Appendices

Appendix 1:
Total University Staff (2023/24)

**Staff by Academic/Academic Related
and Professional Services / Other**

646

1081

Academic/
Academic
Related

Professional
Services

Appendix 2:
Number of Staff by Religion (2023/24)

Other	Buddhist	Christian	Hindu	Jewish	Muslim	No religion	Not Available	Prefer Not To Say	Sikh
19	9	322	55	3	243	576	412	63	25

Appendices (Source: University of Bradford)

Appendix 3:
Number of Students by Religion (2023/24 Student Enrolment Counts)

	UG	PGT	Research	Overall
Muslim	4728	1023	60	5811
Christian	1195	1192	87	2474
No religion	1348	476	44	1868
Sikh	260	338	2	600
Refused	230	172	5	407
Hindu	124	269	7	400
Buddhist	24	72	6	102
Other	64	29	2	95
Spiritual	36	21	7	64
Jewish	3	3	0	6
Not Known	0	0	1	1

Appendices (Source: University of Bradford)