

**UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF
ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS AT
LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY**

Final Report

CRSP 579

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INTRODUCTION

The research reported here is a second report of a larger study whose specific objectives were to:

- 1 Identify the ethnic diversity among the student population of Loughborough University;
- 2 Devise a research programme that recognises, as far as possible, this diversity and represents the different perspectives of the ethnic minority students of Loughborough;
- 3 Explore their 'student experience' of the Loughborough Campus and the town, examining both the social and the structural context of being a student at Loughborough University i.e. night time leisure/housing and accommodation;
- 4 Examine the academic performance of BME students in comparison to their White counterparts; and
- 5 Identify different teaching styles or curriculum structures to see if they impact on the student experience.

The research focuses on the undergraduate experience of UK resident BME students. It concentrates on existing cohorts of students who registered between 2005 and 2008. Their views are reported in the first four chapters exploring the themes of background, academic experience and support, experiences of 'fitting in' and social life at Loughborough. This report concentrates on the perceptions and experiences of BME students although it is important to recognise that in a wide range of areas these may not differ significantly from other student groups. Where it is relevant we have highlighted specific issues and experiences that have a BME dimension. These have been brought out further in the concluding chapter.

As a part of the research it was agreed that we would interview eight representatives from the academic staff of four departments/schools at Loughborough University. Our aim was to interview staff who had an overview of admissions and/or teaching and student support. Part of the rationale for this was that it was important to explore the perceptions, experiences and responses that different departments have

over BME participation. It was also an opportunity to examine how different learning environments and curriculum's might (or might not) impact on the participation and experience of BME students.

It the selection of departments it was decided that targeting different learning environments would be the highest priority. As a result the four departments who were approached and included were:

- School of Art and Design (A&D);
- Chemistry (C);
- Aeronautical and Automotive Engineering (AAE); and
- School of Sport and Exercise Science (SES).

This allowed the research to explore, with academic staff, a wide range of learning environments which included; lab based work; workshop/studio environments; sports facilities; work placements; and traditional classroom teaching. The academic staff's perspective is reported in chapter five. We also tried in our student sampling process to interview students from these departments which to a certain degree was successful (see below).

It was also agreed that the research should explore these perspectives of representatives of the main support services available to students. This included: the Student Advice Centre; Counselling Services; Halls of Residence Accommodation Office; Private Sector Accommodation and the Community Warden service. Questions were asked about their awareness of BME issues and if they or their service had any contact.

The perspectives of academic and university service staff are a small sample and it is therefore important to recognise their views may not be an accurate and comprehensive representation of the service or department they work for. A more in-depth study may start to identify other themes and issues.

Research Design and Methods

This part of the study was qualitative using both focus groups and one-to one interviews with BME students, academic staff and support service staff. The questions discussed aimed to explore a holistic understanding of the student experience, for example, it covers questions such as teaching styles; accommodation, the culture at Loughborough and perceptions/experiences of socialising and leisure at Loughborough campus and in the town.

42 students in total took part on the research 21 were male and 21 were female. Twenty-two of these were second year students, 13 were third years and four were first year students (three were unknown). From Engineering we had nine students, from Chemistry seven; Sports Science seven and Art and Design five. The other 14 students came from a range of Departments across the University including Economics, and Social Sciences. In terms of ethnicity 13 of the students were Asian or Asian British, 11 Black or Black British, nine were Dual Heritage and nine were Chinese or other.

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS AT LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND AND CHOOSING LOUGHBOROUGH

1 INTRODUCTION

This section highlights the backgrounds of BME students interviewed and the reasons why they chose to come to Loughborough the respondents interviewed as part of this study came from wide and varied backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, family structure, socio-economic status, and country of origin. They also had different childhood and school experiences and had different routes into the university.¹ The chapter also explores the reasons why BME students chose Loughborough University and what factors helped them decide to come here.

1.1 Ethnic Background

Respondents recruited for this research identified themselves as British ethnic minority students. They fell into two groups: those who had been born and brought up in Britain and those who had lived in other countries but had British citizenship or right to study here. Of the first and largest group, the majority had parents or grandparents who had both migrated to Britain and most of the students were third or fourth generation. Amongst this group there was a small number who were mixed-race. The second group had extremely varied backgrounds. Some respondents were Hong Kong Chinese students who had come to the UK for educational purposes. Many of these had dual nationality, because their parents had previously lived in Britain and gained nationality, or because they had been born in Britain and then lived in their parents' country of origin. Others had migrated to Britain, either from their parents' country of origin or from another European country. Finally, one mixed-race respondent had lived in many different countries due to her father's international job. As this illustrates, a small minority of respondents identified as BME respondents have limited experience of living or schooling in Britain.

¹ It should be noted that respondents' background was not discussed in detail in group discussions. The purpose this chapter is not to describe the whole sample but to provide an indication of its diverse nature.

1.2 Family Background

The respondents came from family structures that were also varied. Respondents lived in a range of family structures and included two parent families; single parent families, sometimes with and sometimes without other siblings. Of the respondents who had lived in other countries, some had travelled to Britain for educational purposes and were living in the UK without their parents or any family networks.

Parental employment also varied across the sample. Parents worked in diverse jobs ranging from a warehouse operative to working for the United Nations in a senior position. This variation in parental employment is also reflected in the different financial circumstances of respondents. Of the second generation of British respondents, many of their parents had come to the UK as children themselves, although a number had been educated in their country of origin. Some of those who had moved to Britain as adults had changed their employment or set up their own business in the UK as a part of the process of immigration. Again, the level of parental education varied, with a number of parents having been to university themselves.

1.3 Educational Background

Our respondents' came from many different types of schools and had been educated in the state and private sector, both in Britain and other countries. The schools attended by those born and brought up in Britain reflected the diverse education provision i.e. comprehensive schools, religious schools, grammar schools and private schools: boarding and non-boarding. A number of respondents described how their parents' emphasis on educational success had been a key factor in them achieving well at school. A small number highlighted how some parents had paid for them to have private tuition. Those who had lived in other countries had a more varied educational experience in that they usually experienced schooling in their countries of origin and the UK. This was due to migrating to Britain with their parents, moving between Britain and other countries, or coming to Britain specifically for educational purposes with or without their parents. A few respondents had only

attended schools in other countries or International schools. Interestingly though, some of those schooled abroad had attended private British schools.

1.4 Deciding to go to University

Most respondents, especially from those households where parents had been to university had expected to go to university from a young age, many suggesting that 'there was never been any doubt'. University was described as part of a natural progression after school, necessary to follow a chosen career path and providing important educational and life skills.

'I have always thought how life kind of progresses is, you go through school then go to university, get a degree, get a job and it just goes on like that.'
(Individual interview K06)

Others highlighted how individual events or activities helped them to decide to go to university. For example, one respondent had been encouraged to think about university when studying A-levels following a visit to her school from a Loughborough University representative. In some households pressure also arose because siblings, cousins and friends had been to university and it was a growing expectation that they would also attend. A number of respondents had not thought of an alternative to university because of their parents' high status occupations and their schooling, because of their parents' direction, or because in their milieu it was akin to failure.

'I went to an international school where most of us had parents in the UN or quite high powered high profile jobs so it wasn't really an option not to.'
(Individual Interview 4)

'I did [expect to go to university] but my parents have always expected me to go to university as well so I never actually thought of doing anything else apart from going to university because they've always pushed me in that direction.'
(Individual interview K1)

'In Nigeria if you don't go to university you are considered a failure.'
(Individual interview K8)

Amongst the respondents whose parents had not been to university some parents had seen it as a way of their children achieving 'a better life' and of 'fitting in better'

and had therefore been very encouraging. Parents had generally suggested to them that it would not be possible to get a high quality job without a good degree. There seemed a growing recognition that having a degree was the way to get on.

Amongst Afro-Caribbean respondents a number had thought they would not go to university when they were younger. They suggested that they had a perception that it was not for them and that they lacked confidence in their own ability. Some also explained it as a result of a lack of expectation and encouragement from school, or challenges related to the pressure they felt from their inner-city culture:

'I thought university was for others. I just thought I won't be going there and then I probably thought I wasn't clever enough. But I managed to get through. When I came here I was like really shocked, I was like, I can't believe I am actually here. It is a good University as well.'

(Individual interview K4)

'But the school didn't really talk much about university and stuff until like the year 11, that is the very, very end. You could go to university, that is all you get. So it wasn't good in that way.'

(Individual interview K4)

'From the area I am from and like from the background it is not really expected ... I had a year group of about 280 kids ... and about 30 of those did A Levels and I think I know all of us, all seven of us went to university and they are all pretty much like my friends ... I think it is just like inner city school and they wanted us to do well but I think it is just the culture from where I am from, you know where I was living and the people you are surrounded by. For them it was more the in thing to go out on the street and do nothing, bum around, and getting involved in crime and stuff like that.'

(Individual interview 03)

1.5 Choosing Loughborough

So why did students choose to come to Loughborough? A number of factors influenced their choices:

- Loughborough's Academic and Sporting Reputation

A critical issue was Loughborough's general reputation as reflected in league tables, Loughborough's prominent position in the higher education rankings helped to attract many of the BME students. In some cases, parental knowledge of Loughborough

appeared to be limited at first, both in terms of its geography and reputation either generally or in specific subjects. However, in some instances, when they found out more about both aspects of the university, parents seemed to be happy to encourage their children to go to Loughborough.

'... when I was looking at universities, Loughborough had just entered The Guardian or The Times, it had just entered the top 10 and also seemed to be run on a league table of student satisfaction ...'

(BME Female Focus Group 01 – p. 9)

'My parents wanted to send me to a really good university, with a good reputation and seeing as it was in the top 10, sixth or something.'

(BME Female Focus Group 01 – p. 14)

Some students were impressed with Loughborough's reputation in the subject they had chosen to study. For a number of students, the choice of subject was seen as the key to improving their career opportunities. The university's good reputation generally and more specifically in their subject, could enhance their career prospects with potential future employers and was the critical factor for them. Furthermore, the strong links that the University has with employers, especially in relation to work placements, also helped to improve students' perceptions of their employment prospects. For instance:

'Also I have heard that Loughborough always had good links with industry, so it is easy when you graduate.'

(BME 21.10.07 – p. 6)

'I did some research of the universities with automotive engineering and I found in Loughborough this is quite a strong subject here ...'

(BME Interview 05 – p. 4)

Some students had heard glowing reports about it through the experiences of other people who had been there. These included friends, family and teachers, who spoke highly of the University's reputation.

'Well one of my dad's friends' daughters she went to Loughborough as well and she said it was really good and then I knew one or two other people who went to Loughborough.'

(BME Interview 09 – p. 6)

'... our teacher said well Liverpool is ranked 50-ish and Loughborough is ranked, you know at that time it was, 12 and now it's even six. And I guess my parents said oh yes reputation, everyone's heard of that, and kind of like pushed me.'

(BME Interview 07 – p. 4)

Some students formed a positive impression of the university, and the town by seeing for themselves by attending Open Days prior to making their choice. In some cases, visiting the University and town had a major influence in the final decision to come to Loughborough. Some were swayed by what they perceived to be the friendly, relaxing environment at Loughborough. This seemed to apply to the physical environment, the students and the lecturers at the University as well.

'I looked at the facilities here on the Open Day and I was really impressed.'

(BME Course Rep Interview 02 – p. 6)

'What tempted me to apply to Loughborough was the visit obviously helped but as I said it was obviously the academia and that helped push my decision.'

(BME group 10.10.07 – p. 1)

'I liked the environment here and I liked the atmosphere, so I thought I would choose here.'

(BME Interview 05 – p. 4)

'I came here for the Open Day I really liked it and I liked the lecturer that was talking to us.'

(BME Female Focus Group 01 – p. 3)

It is not surprising that the sporting reputation of Loughborough was also an influence in student choice. This applied both to those students doing sports-related courses and those who did not. The latter wanted to take advantage of the impressive range of sporting facilities on offer at Loughborough. It is also important not to overlook the fact that some students had very specific personal reasons for coming to Loughborough. One of the students, who had dyslexia, came to Loughborough because they were impressed with the facilities at Loughborough and by the academic support offered by the Disability and Additional Needs (DANS) department.

1.6 Location

Location was also important and was mentioned at three levels. Firstly, it was mentioned in the local context of being a campus university. The fact that Loughborough is a campus University proved to be attractive for many students. Some students were attracted by the vast open spaces that the campus has to offer. Others liked the fact that most amenities and facilities were available to them on one site. In some cases, students said the campus offered them the chance to live in a close-knit community, in a friendly environment, which made the task of making friends easier.

'It is kind of nice to have everything all on one big campus.'

(BME Interview 06 – p. 4)

'And then coming here it does have a nice feel to it, it does feel friendly and close.'

(BME Focus Group 14.11.07 – p. 16)

A second issue was the appeal of Loughborough as a small town. While some students had thought it lacked facilities other students flagged up what they saw were the advantages of being in relatively small town compared to a large town or city. The pace of life at Loughborough was seen as less hectic, while close proximity to the countryside also opened up new avenues for outdoor pursuits.

'Loughborough is a relatively small town compared to Nottingham and Bath. There is lots of nice countryside around Loughborough for me to cycle in.'

(BME Interview 05 – p. 4)

'I live in the middle of London and it was just nice to be somewhere that was not there, just somewhere that had space and that you could see there were things going on.'

(BME group 10.10.07 – p. 1)

'It would be a different experience because Loughborough is a campus rather than like if you are in a City and scattered about.'

(BME Male Focus Group 01 – p. 5)

'I'm from London anyway, like I am not from the calmest area or anything, and it was just different and living away from home I wanted to go somewhere that I felt safe and not overwhelmed.'

(BME 16.10.07 – p. 1)

Thirdly, for some students Loughborough's geographical location could also allow some students to remain close to their family. This was important for a number of reasons. For some students this allowed them to keep their living costs down and to hold on to local jobs that they had in their home town or city (i.e. Leicester). Being able to live at home was their important factor. Student finance and the cost of living in comparison to larger cities was clearly an influence on choosing Loughborough ahead of universities in larger cities, which were perceived to be more expensive.

'I actually live in Leicester. I live in Loughborough during term time but I'm at home most weekends because I work.'

(BME Individual Interview 01 – p. 14)

'Well I didn't want to go to London, it was too expensive.'

(BME Interview 03 – p. 8)

Living at home was seen by some, quite logically, as the cheapest option available to them, particularly in the context of the new funding regime for students. Often, those who expressed a desire to go to a university close to their parental home, continued living at home and commuted to Loughborough when they needed to. Again, this may also be indicative of a desire to maintain close family support networks.

'... it would be more expensive if you are living away from home. Having the support from my parents and things like that as well.'

(BME 16.10.07 – p. 14)

However, in a couple of instances, students chose Loughborough to move away from home and to keep a little bit of distance between themselves and their families. Some students, like those quoted below, felt they had to go away from home to get out of their comfort zone and be forced to meet new people with a view to making new friends.

'I really wanted to move away from home as well for the experience.'

(BME 16.10.07 – p. 2)

'I wanted to get out of home and I knew some friends who had stayed here.'

(BME Male Focus Group 01 – p. 5)

1.7 The ethnic diversity of the university

One final issue to highlight in terms of student choices is the question of students' early perceptions of the ethnic make up of Loughborough University. The issue of the perceived degree of the ethnic diversity at Loughborough University was not a major issue in student selection of Loughborough. However it was something that BME students noticed/gave some thought to once they arrived on campus as undergraduates. Respondents were also asked if they thought the University did enough to attract BME students. A number of students perceived that BME student numbers were already increasing and this was a reflection of a general cultural change in Britain. Some respondents questioned whether the University needed to or should try to attract more BME students or if there was anything that would make the University particularly attractive to BME students. The argument being that the better the university, the more people from all backgrounds will apply.

'I think if it is a good University people want to come anyway so they will be attracting all types of people.'

(Individual interview K8)

'I cannot see that being an issue. There is nothing you can really say to make something appealing to an ethnic minority. It is just neutral.'

(Group Discussion 5)

This being said some students had thought about the ethnic mix of the student population when applying. A number of students did say that they did have concerns, which were also usually expressed by their parents, about the relatively small number of ethnic minority students at Loughborough. But this was based on their early perception that Loughborough was not a large town and therefore not as multi-cultural as places like London:

'My dad said it's sort of up North and you might feel a bit lonely, there's not many Asian people there and you might not fit in properly ...'

(BME Interview 01 – p. 4)

Other students said they were surprised and were worried that, given Loughborough's close proximity to Leicester, there were not more ethnic minorities.

'... I thought "Oh Loughborough, it's near Leicester" so maybe there's still a big Asian population but I found it really wasn't.'

(BME Individual Student 01 – p. 15)

While evidence did suggest it was not a major factor some BME students did think having an environment that did not make them seem different was important:

'I know it sounds weird but as long as you see people around that are similar to you, which I guess is black, it is fine.'

(Discussion Group 1)

In terms of whether the University *does* do enough to attract ethnic minority students, the website and prospectus were discussed. On the website, the comments from students from around the world and the diverse images were thought to be positive. However, respondent thought that there could be more ethnic minority faces on the prospectus of different departments.

While it is important to emphasize that in general students did not seem to choose Loughborough on their perceived understanding of its ethnic make up it may be having an influence that this research is unable to identify. Students involved in this research decided to come to Loughborough and we remain unaware of the views, and perceptions of those students who may have looked at Loughborough's presentation of its ethnic diversity and been dissuaded from coming because they think Loughborough is not multi cultural enough. What this research shows is that representing and marketing its multi cultural connections positively may help alleviate both parent and student concerns at early stage of the decision process.

CHAPTER TWO THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE OF LOUGHBOROUGH

2 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with how BME students experienced academic life. It examines what was influential in helping them choose their course and what their expectations were. It also investigates how they experienced the delivery of their chosen course. It also explores their perceptions of how the courses managed questions of ethnicity in both the delivery of the curriculum and how well students worked together. The chapter also reviews what students thought about the support they received from lecturers, tutors, the Personal Tutor system and Staff/Student committees. It concludes with a discussion about the Careers Advice Service and work placements.

2.1 Choosing a Course

The main reasons given for choosing a particular course at the University was to pursue an associated career or having enjoyed the subject at school. Respondents from Engineering had a strong career orientation, including one Hong Kong Chinese student who came to England at sixteen because he wanted to study Automotive Engineering. A number of respondents described the influence of family and friends in their course decisions. One respondent studying Maths and Management had been persuaded not to study Art and Design because of perceived uncertain job prospects that follow such a course might entail. Respondents from a variety of ethnic backgrounds described an expectation that they study medicine or law, or follow their parents' occupations. This orientation sometimes came from parents but might also arise from the extended family or the broader community. A number of students felt they had resisted the orientation of peers, parents and extended family towards traditional high status subjects and executed significant control over their final decision. For example, one respondent chose to study Forensic Chemistry rather than Medicine, as her parents had wanted.

A number of Sports Science respondents felt that their discipline was not always well understood externally and it was assumed by family and friends that it led to

becoming a PE teacher. Given the high achieving nature of the Sports Science intake, it is possible that the pressure to follow a traditional career may be even greater. One respondent, for example, who was considering which route to take within his degree expected to receive a negative reaction if he specialised in Sports Science rather than Accountancy.

'... even within my degree I am thinking do I go down the Sports Science route or do I go down the Accountancy. If I don't go down the Accountancy route not only what are my parents going to think but what are general people going to think and my brother still laughs at me.'

(Group Discussion 6)

2.2 Expectation and experience of courses

Some respondents felt the course matched the information that they had seen in the prospectuses or received at the Open Day prior to selecting their course. Others felt there were omissions and differences, in terms of the course requirements and content. Some first year respondents thought their course was easier than expected, with some material covered at A-level and grades not counting to their degree. Others felt there was a myth about the first year being easy.

Both Engineering and Chemistry respondents saw their courses as difficult or challenging. This was largely as expected and seen as the nature of their course.

'Well I guess with Chemistry you always know it is going to be, not necessarily hard but it is going to have a lot because Chemistry is just so broad. I think when it came to the teaching aspect they kind of put you in nice and slowly because I do not think, especially in the first year you are overwhelmed with heaps and heaps of work but I think obviously as time goes on you start to realise how much work it is and how much exams and course work and everything is counted towards your grade and stuff like that. So if you are not prepared for that then it is a bit of a shock. I think the way it is taught is very well, I mean you get loads of information on time and you are never left in the dark.'

(Discussion Group 3)

Many of the respondents were enjoying their course and were not experiencing any problems. However, a few respondents had experienced difficulties and had repeated a year or changed courses. One respondent felt he was still struggling.

There is nothing to suggest that any of these views or experiences differ from those of the general student population.

2.3 Course Delivery

Respondents were interviewed from a number of courses and the methods of course delivery therefore varied. Modes of delivery included lectures, tutorials, science or computer laboratory practicals and workshops, studio-based work, and sports-based practicals. Variety of delivery within courses was seen as positive, allowing for different learning styles, greater student interaction and practical understanding. Respondents from one department in particular reported that the quality of lectures was variable and had impacted on attendance. Some lecturers simply read from notes, whereas others engaged students' interest by highlighting key points and using examples from real industrial situations. A number of respondents also had difficulties understanding some lecturers for whom English was a second language (see below). The practical nature of their course was particularly important to respondents studying Engineering, and Science-based subjects or Art and Design. This was something that some (Engineering) students would like more of and there was enthusiasm for practical experiences.

'So essentially you do experiments based on your dissertation to try and know certain aspects to see if they actually work, see if you can replicate some of the stuff that you've studied, see if you can actually discover some new stuff ... You are doing brand new stuff. That is something that I want to do right now is brand new Chemistry'

(Individual interview 3)

'I think in the Science based modules you've got also practical labs whereby it is brilliant because you are learning all that theory in how things work, but you are actually in the labs doing the techniques ... People might be under the impression no you can only do those if you are qualified but you are able to do that as an undergraduate student.'

(Group discussion 6)

'... when I am in the studio I really love it because the course is really cool especially this year now that I have started learning the weaving techniques and stuff. I enjoy that side.'

(Group discussion 4)

The perceived workload varied considerably between subjects. Engineering, Science-based subjects and Art and Design courses were described as intensive, and quite tiring. Students of Engineering and Science-based also described a high number of contact hours. In this context, there was consensus amongst the Engineering discussion group that lectures should be timetabled together to allow for concentrated periods of independent study at home. In contrast, some respondents studying Social Science felt they had too few contact hours. One respondent reported only three contact hours a week, and whilst being self-disciplined in terms of reading, he wanted more active involvement in his course on the part of the Department.

In general, respondents did not feel that there were aspects of course delivery that particularly affected them as BME students. Those who discussed this further argued that there was no need for differential treatment and their experience had been positive because they had not been treated differently.

'Everyone's included ... No-one is ever singled out for any reason. There's never been like a particular issue regarding my ethnic minority that's regarded like a special response.'

(Interview 6)

Treating everyone the same was also described as important in creating a sense of identification within the class, with adjustments based on ethnicity having the potential to alienate and upset people. One respondent thought that perhaps international students may have difficulties understanding lectures due to their level of proficiency in English. He was also supportive of the current system in which lecturers deliver a standard lecture and provide one to one support when necessary. Despite some initial difficulty thinking about how course delivery might relate to ethnicity one student raised questions related to how the University scheduled lectures, suggesting that maybe they should avoid Fridays as it is the Islamic day of public worship.

Interestingly, the question of ethnicity and course delivery did bring up what respondents regarded as a sensitive issue i.e. some foreign lecturers were said to be difficult to understand because of their level of English proficiency. Respondents

were reluctant to discuss this problem with their department for fear that it might be perceived as racist. It had been raised in one department but it was felt that measures taken, such as the lecturer being asked to speak more slowly, had not dealt with the extent of the language barrier and that it was too sensitive to pursue further.

2.4 Working Together

One issue that was raised that seemed important to some students related to how course teaching was organised around group working. Students had mixed views about how this was working at present, with some feeling uneasy about ethnic grouping which they perceived to exist. For example, a respondent studying social science noted that ethnic minority students tend to sit together in lectures and thought that it might be particularly hard for international students to mix with the wider student body. It was suggested that there could be a role for lecturers in giving tasks which involved people working with a mix of people. Whilst not necessarily viewing the ethnically based friendship groups as problematic, it was thought that greater organised interaction would add to overall group cohesion and would be academically beneficial.

Project group formation by ethnicity in Engineering was also discussed. One Hong Kong Chinese respondent preferred working with Chinese or other East Asian friends. He felt they were able to work better together because of a shared background and culture, and, with the Chinese students, a shared language. Culture differences were lifestyle based, such as when dinner breaks are taken, and also about design ideas. On the one hand, this was not identified as problematic; he worked with his friends but did not feel excluded from other groups and had worked well in mixed groups allocated by the lecturers. On the other hand, there was some disappointment that he had not made friends with other British students and had initially discussed this group formation as a result of not having 'many English friends'. The different perspectives that ethnic minority and international students can bring to their academic experience, was also highlighted by a Hong Kong Chinese Art student, who saw the experience of different cultures as advantageous for his design work. Another issue is the knowledge and understanding of fellow students.

One respondent had felt uncomfortable in a sociological discussion on race when students were unsure about acceptable terminology.

'I don't think that I should be treated any different but you do sort of see sometimes that some people do try and tread carefully in certain subjects. I remember quite an awkward situation in Sociology last year when we were talking about racism and people didn't want to say black and it was like well just say it.'

(Group Discussion 6)

A number of students thought that whilst other students were friendly, some had not had much contact with people from ethnic minority groups and so they were nervous and keen not to offend in their interactions;

'... people here they are quite thoughtful because they don't want to offend anyone. But on the other hand it shows that they haven't really got that much experience of coming across people from different places so sometimes they just don't really know what to do.'

(Group Discussion 6)

Despite the students' intentions though, sometimes this lack of awareness itself was felt to be offensive and was thought to be a barrier between people of different ethnicities. This raises the question of how to deal with lack of awareness and prior experience of people from other ethnic backgrounds and the potential role of the University and student community in addressing this. A Social Science student suggested that the course provided a forum in which events such as religious festivals, International Day, and other university society events could be announced. BME respondents discussed their role in 'educating' fellow students, and whilst they acknowledged that some people would not want to be asked questions about their culture, they themselves were keen to inform people.

'I have probably been asked the same question about 100 times but I really don't mind that. The hundredth time I am happy because it is someone else having an idea about what cultures are about. For example, fasting, I think that is for me the big one where what you can't eat or you can't drink, how can you have only water. But I don't mind that because at least it is ticking in the head and that is something else that they have learnt and yes I can understand to an extent that some people might be offended. But my opinion is personally I would rather answer it than not.'

(Group Discussion 6)

2.5 The Curriculum and Ethnicity

Issues were raised regarding the course curriculum. One respondent, who had lived abroad, noted that some courses were taught with an expectation that students would have knowledge of British culture. This respondent also recounted a situation in which she submitted an essay which drew on an African case study and the lecturer told her that he could not relate to what she had written. This may highlight a need for clarity in assignment briefs and thinking through the possibility of enabling students to apply what they learn to their own experiences and/or to non-British contexts.

Another respondent studying Social Psychology had wanted to write a dissertation on ethnic identity but had been told that she could not pursue it because it was not an area with which members of staff were familiar. She felt that identity was an important aspect of Social Psychology and questioned why no one had been recruited with this research area in mind. In particular, as an ethnic minority student, she felt that there should be support to undertake ethnic minority research. She also pointed out that all her lecturers were white British and would have liked to be taught by some ethnic minority lecturers. However, when the question of the ethnic make up of the staff was put to other respondents it was not regarded it as problematic, the quality of teaching being seen as the important thing.

2.6 Support from Lecturers and Tutors

Assessment of the support received from lecturers varied amongst respondents. Whilst lectures were not seen as a forum in which questions could be raised, some

respondents reported that lecturers encouraged students to contact them via email or in person with any queries. This was something that some respondents had taken up, whilst others were happy that it was available should they need it. Tutorials were also an opportunity to ask questions and they were also able to email tutors for help. One respondent was particularly enthusiastic about the staff in her department and felt that relationship she had with her lecturers was extremely beneficial.

'The positive is the staff is amazing. That is the only word I have for them, they are amazing. Whenever I have had anything wrong with me or any problems there is always someone to help you, there just always is.'

(Group Discussion 3)

Others had not found lecturers easy to approach or had found lecturer accessibility variable. One respondent described a system in which appointments had to be booked in particular 'office hours' through the lecturer's secretary. He felt the appointment times were too short and that students were treated as 'a number not a person'. Levels of support were frequently contrasted with respondents' A-level experience when they had a personal relationship with their teachers. In Art and Design, where tutors support individual and group work, some respondents thought there were too few tutors for the number of people on the course and students would like a greater presence of staff. One respondent suspected discrimination from a particular lecturer in his department, reporting the perception amongst the Chinese students that he answered questions from UK students but ignored them. He also felt that a piece of his work had been unfairly marked. The department in question had not been approached about this by the student concerned.

2.7 Personal Tutors

Experiences of, and views on, the personal tutor support system were mixed. Positive experiences of support with particular issues, such as personal problems affecting studies and queries on assessment results, were reported. In contrast though, one respondent had transferred to a different course after failing some assignments. She was critical of the availability of her tutor and felt that her progress should have been discussed at an earlier stage.

There were different opinions concerning the personal tutor system amongst respondents who had not experienced any particular issues they needed to discuss. One view, held by respondents with varying amounts of actual contact, was that it was only necessary to see a personal tutor if there was a problem. For others, ongoing personal contact and support was seen as important; something experienced and commended by some, but lacking for others. For example, one respondent in her final year was disappointed in the impersonal nature of her academic experience. She had not received personal support or developed a relationship with a member of staff.

'I think the people that I would go to, to write me references probably would not know me by name or face... You are told in your first year that your tutor relationship is going to be amazing and that kind of thing and perhaps if I had had problems and I went to them that might have emerged, but otherwise I am going to leave and it is not like I have left any footprints on any staff member really.'

(Group Discussion 1)

It was felt that this personal contact could be particularly beneficial in the first year, when students were settling into the University system. The variation of practice within the personal tutor system was commented on in terms of: perceived accessibility of tutors; the extent to which tutors initiated contact; the regularity of contact; and tutors' interest in the role. Suggested improvements to the system were to: establish a common procedure so students and tutors are clear about roles and expectations; reduce the ratio of students to personal tutors; and make the personal tutor role voluntary for staff.

2.8 Course Representatives and Mentoring

Each department has a system of course representatives. These act as a point of contact between staff and students, enabling students to raise course-related issues that have not been resolved through talking to lecturers or personal tutors. These issues are taken to individual lecturers or to a staff-student liaison committee. A number of the BME respondents interviewed were course representatives themselves and spoke positively of the opportunity to get involved in the department. Additional interviews and a group discussion were also undertaken with other course

representatives. These did not reveal any issues specific to ethnic minority students. The kind of issues taken up by course reps are lecture delivery, course content and information, assessment criteria, problems associated with large tutorial groups and difficulties with personal tutors. There were no reported instances of course reps dealing with issues related to ethnicity.

In addition to course representatives, a mentor system had also been introduced in a few departments, with first year students allocated a second or third year mentor. Some respondents saw this as complementary to, or overcoming some of the problems with, the personal tutor system. Others felt they would be unsure of confidentiality talking to their peers and preferred to talk their personal tutor. It is also worth noting that, in terms of academic support, a number of respondents would ask their course friends for help before contacting their lecturers.

2.9 Other Sources of Support

Other avenues of both personal and academic support accessed outside the department were the Counselling Service, Maths Support Centre and Disabilities and Additional Needs Service. One respondent had found the Maths Support Centre particularly helpful and suggested the opening hours should be extended. In terms of counselling, there was concern that issues that related to ethnicity would not be recognised by counsellors but no examples were given that supported this claim. Another suggestion was that a counsellor could be allocated to each department, so that student could speak to someone who understood issues relating to their particular course. Greater knowledge about what was available was important.²

2.10 BME Students and Career Support

Two schemes for ethnic minority students offered by the Careers Service were discussed by some respondents: a confidence building session, providing help with CV writing and interview techniques; and a mentoring scheme linking students with a manager of a local or national business. A number of respondents recalled receiving

² As outlined in chapter 6 counselling service already provides this service but this comment may indicate that this is not well know.

emails from the Careers Services about these schemes and they were described to other respondents to elicit their response. Opinions varied about the course provided by the University specifically for ethnic minority students. Some respondents questioned whether it was necessary given that many ethnic minority students 'are already part of the culture of the UK and know how things work and have grown up with it', and thought that the scheme would probably be better targeted at international students. They questioned whether their reasons for going on the course would be different from other students.

'... you are saying that it is strictly for ethnic minority people but you know am I going just because I am black? You know what is so special about me that my white friend can't come along, why does it have to be so different?.'

(Group Discussion 6)

One respondent felt he needed confidence building and was interested in attending. However, he attributed his lack of confidence to difficulties with his course rather than concerns about getting a job because of his ethnicity. One view was that having a specific scheme could be alienating and it was suggested that one-to-one sessions could be available for people who were not comfortable in an all-white group. The view that people should not be treated differently because of the ethnicity was expressed. Therefore, some respondents thought their ethnicity was not an issue and a British born Chinese respondent thought his ethnicity and language skills may be an advantage. Interestingly, although one respondent thought ethnicity might be a factor and therefore a specific scheme might be a good thing, she personally said she would only attend generic training. Another respondent who was taking part in the mentoring scheme, took the pragmatic view that whilst he did not think he faced any particular labour market disadvantages, the scheme would be beneficial and its targeted nature meant he had faced less competition in gaining a place.

In contrast to those questioning the need for a specific scheme, one respondent was supportive because she thought ethnic minorities would have to try harder to make an impression with employers and she intended to attend the course herself. Unfortunately, one respondent had been unsuccessful in applying for the mentoring scheme. He felt that he had not been given an adequate explanation and felt that

scheme had favoured certain ethnic minority groups. There was a suggestion that he had not been successful because he commuted to University and may not be able to keep the appointments. He was upset by this assumption and felt strongly that there should be clear inclusion criteria for the scheme.

2.11 Work Placements

An industrial placement year is an optional part of Engineering and Science based courses and appears to be popular. Respondents for whom a placement was not part of their course had also applied for placements and internships. It was thought they would enable students to: gain practical experience and apply their knowledge; see if they enjoyed the work and, on rotational placements, which areas in particular; earn money; and enhance their employment prospects. Indeed, some respondents were concerned about getting a placement or work experience because it was thought to be necessary for getting a job after graduation.

However, there was variation in the support received in finding a placement. Some respondents had experienced extremely positive inputs from the Careers Service or their departmental staff both academic and administrative who provided details of placements, contacts with specific companies, and help with preparing CVs and applications. Others had found searching for a placement a stressful aspect of their second year and had received little support. In terms of longer term preparation, one respondent felt that it could have been made clearer that first year grades may be a factor when applying for a placement.

CHAPTER THREE FEELINGS OF INCLUSION AND 'FITTING IN'

3 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is focused on issues related to students general feelings of inclusion and their sense of 'fitting in' at Loughborough university. It explores how they feel about being a BME student at Loughborough and how they perceive some of the ways the University policy and practice helps them feel a part (or not) of the university. The chapter also explores students experiences and perceptions of racism and their general views and concerns of being a student at Loughborough.

3.1 British or Ethnic Identity

How people defined themselves was very important to how they feel they should be treated within the university. When asked to describe their own ethnicity some respondents immediately gave a conventional category; British Indian, British African although a number wanted to raise the issue of complexity:

'I would say British then Asian because I was born in Britain, I've never been to India, so if you called me an Indian I might well say that's not really true because I've never even been there. My parents were both born in Kenya, they've both been to India once. And then my grandparents were all born in India, so that's how I'd describe that and people just look at me and go "What?" and I have to explain it.'

(Individual interview 01)

This complexity could influence how BME students related to others and how they saw themselves. For example, one student discussed the notion of 'Britishness' and his relationships as someone with parents from India:

'British Indian. I have been born and brought up in the UK so I consider myself more British as such. My parents were born in India and I guess when I am here I get involved in a lot of things and I mix with all kinds of people, when I am at home I still do mix but there is more kind of community stuff at home. So I don't have that much community sense and ethnic sense here as such. Yes but if I was to describe it I wouldn't call myself a complete Indian as such, I would use that word British. At the same time I wouldn't call myself completely British because I do kind of like and I do respect my kind of ethnic side as well.'

(Group discussion 6)

Being at Loughborough was not very different to how they had experienced life as a BME young person in wider society. In many ways they did not perceive their ethnicity to be an issue within the Universities context or at the very least they saw it as a continuation of how they had managed being 'ethnic' in other aspects of their lives:

The first course I ever went to there were two black girls, there was me and another girl and there were about five Asians ... out of 60 ... But yes it is like it was like spot the black, but I mean like because I had been to a predominantly white school it was just like normal, you know ...'

(Individual interview K4)

3.2 'Fitting In'

'Fitting in' to Loughborough University could be harder if a BME student had come from a very different environment. For example, some respondents from London and Leicester had lived in predominantly South Asian communities. At Loughborough University, they were part of a more ethnically diverse population and were part of a minority rather than a majority ethnic group. These differences were also discussed in terms of religion, as one of the quotes below highlights. For some respondents the change of environment was a positive experience of learning to mix with other people. Others found it a significant change and some reported difficulties with friendships or mixing socially.

'the people that I live with, it's quite a mix because obviously we have an Italian catholic, we had a half sheikh, half Christian, we had a black Christian, we had a white atheist and a white Christian ... It was an interesting experience.'

(Individual interview 01)

'... one of my friends has been to (name of school) which is mostly Black and Asian, and then she went to (name of college) which is mostly Asian people and when she came over to Loughborough, she has found it really difficult. I find she isn't mixing in very well, and she has ended up skipping lectures actually, which isn't brilliant.'

(Individual interview 2)

Similarly, an Afro-Caribbean respondent from London reported feeling isolated initially. His account combined issues of ethnicity and socio-economic status. He described moving from a multicultural city to being one of very few black people in his hall and having to work long hours to earn money for University whilst living with

others who he perceived did not have these concerns. Another Afro-Caribbean respondent felt in retrospect that he would have been happier studying in a multicultural city more akin to his home environment.

In contrast, a British born Chinese student was surprised by the large Chinese population at the University compared with his private school experience and initially found it strange. He provided an interesting perspective in that he was concerned about 'fitting in' with British life and his experience at university had left him wondering what it would be like when he left university and lived somewhere where there were fewer people from a similar ethnic background. This being said there was also a very positive view of how the university environment could be a place to develop personally and for them to express their difference. One respondent described not only developing his self-identity, but also the affirmation of his ethnic identity as a positive resource through cultural exchange and learning.

'I think it's been, I've learnt so much from it, not just in studying terms but you learn who you are as a person, you learn in terms of your identity and you kind of see the importance of ethnicity as well. Not that it makes you distinctive but how you use your ethnicity to become not part of the majority but just to mix with other people and don't hold yourself back as a result, you kind of use it to your advantage. it's nice to bring culture to other people and to do that for other people. And equally I like meeting other people of different cultures because it's nice, like International Day yesterday, that was really good.'

(Individual interview 01)

Other students initially felt uncomfortable with the lack of fellow students from a similar background to themselves. However, they consciously made an effort to socialise with their peers, regardless of backgrounds. This helped to make their university experience a more enjoyable one than it could otherwise have been.

I went to meet new people, move out of certain circles ...'

(BME Female Focus Group 01 – p. 38)

Other students were even more enthusiastic about meeting new people from different backgrounds. They felt it was a two-way learning process. On the one hand, they felt a need to raise awareness of their ethnicity and culture with their peers. This was because they perceived some students to be prejudiced in their perceptions of ethnic minority people, which may have stemmed from having limited

contact with non-white people while growing up, a point discussed later in the chapter. On the other hand, they were also keen to find out the same types of information about their peers.

'... we're educating them in terms of our cultures but at the same time I feel I am learning a lot from other cultures.'

(BME Focus Group 14.11.07 – p. 24)

It was also mentioned by some students that Loughborough University is a relatively more diverse environment than the particular school they had attended, which helped some students settle in better. Others had the opposite experience, in that they have found University less diverse compared to the schools they previously attended.

'... before at my schools I was probably one of the very, very few students who, one of the ethnic minorities. So it took some getting used to, coming to Loughborough, see so many people black, I thought that was quite strange.'

(BME Interview 02 – p. 14)

'... one of my friends has been to Rushmead, which is mostly Black and Asian, and then she went to Q.E. which is mostly Asian people and when she came over to Loughborough, she has found it really difficult.'

(BME Individual Interview 02 – p. 10)

Some students socialised with other students from a similar background. Those students who tended to have only recently arrived in the UK, wanted to stick together in social circles because they tended to find the similarity of each other's background reassuring. An unintended consequence of this may be to strengthen the separate identities of particular groups. While some interviewees found it easier to associate with people of similar backgrounds, most socialised with students from a wide range of backgrounds. However, interviewees did notice that clustering together was evident among some ethnic groups. For instance, this was an observation by a Chinese student about other Chinese students:

'I just find it a lot easier to make friends with people that are from a similar background to me.'

(BME Interview 01 – p. 7)

'They often group themselves in their own ethnic group. That is why I know a few people who have been living in the UK for a few years and their English is still pretty average.'

(BME Interview 03 – p. 17)

3.3 University Policy and Practice

There were aspects of University policy and practice which some felt were problematic: accommodation is one such major area. Some students criticised the university's accommodation policy, particularly with respect to University Halls of Residence placing similar ethnic groups together. For example:

'... what they do is they put the international students together. They put the mature students together, the British students together and you can see the divide between them.'

(BME Female Group 01 – p.21)

This was felt to be potentially problematic as it encouraged social segregation.

Students also felt that problems also existed about how Halls of residence managed diverse needs especially in relation to food. Although opinion was divided, the provision of food meeting the needs of a wide range of cultural groups was generally seen as poor. Some students who lived in Halls of residence felt that their choice of food was limited due to a perceived religious or cultural insensitivity. This raised questions about how sensitive the University is to religious or cultural dietary needs. In some instances, even where the Hall did try to be sensitive to religious or cultural needs, the quality of food was not perceived to be of a high standard.

'So I live in halls and it is a catered hall so I go in the main hall and get like food. Just normal bad food anyway. Even though they do Chinese food it doesn't really taste good anyway.'

(BME Group 14.11.07 – p. 34)

'Food, I didn't like the food at all because I don't eat beef and pork so the choice was quite limited for me as well.'

(BME Student 09 – p. 15)

Lack of choice was not just limited by religious or cultural issues. In some cases, vegetarians were presented with very limited options. In one particular case, a

vegetarian student was in a position where he inadvertently ate meat because he was told the dish was the vegetarian option.

'I prefer to cook my own food because at least I know how it is prepared and I can eat what I want when I want. The other day I was served chicken pie and they said it was a vegetarian pie and I had eaten quite a bit of it, well not quite a bit.'

(BME Individual Student 05 – p. 6)

Such issue could make students feel that their needs were not met and did not create an inclusive environment.

However, most students did perceive that the University to be making a conscious effort to promote interaction between different groups and to be concerned with various multi-cultural issues.

'I think the University tries to integrate all the students together, and merge them to make them students, rather than just separate minorities.'

(BME Interview 02 – p. 21)

'They do this international day every year where you learn about everybody else's cultures and traditions, that's always really interesting.'

(BME Interview 01 – p. 15)

3.4 Experiences and Perceptions of Racism

There was some mention of specific racist or discriminatory incidents. These affected either the interviewees themselves or people they knew. The nature and extent of such incidents varied, with some being seen as directly racist, while others could be construed as racist. Negative racial stereotypes elicited two types of responses. Firstly, interviewees reported the casual, racist remarks rooted in ignorance. It was felt that this may have stemmed from the fact that the people making the remarks may have grown up in an environment where they had relatively little contact with non-white people. For example:

'... it might be a case of someone who has not actually been in contact with Asians, Africans or people of different cultures and literally just don't know how to act.'

(BME Focus Group 14.11.07 – p. 3)

Alternatively, some interviewees had experienced a more aggressive attitude towards particular ethnic minorities. For example, a Black student's status [as a student] was questioned. This may be related to prejudicial attitudes towards Black people.

'... If I'm walking around campus late at night and I'm wearing a ... hooded tracksuit, people have a negative image...I think a definite aspect of racial discrimination that I've experienced is there have been times when people have questioned whether I am actually a student or not for no good reason ... One time, they [security] questioned whether I was actually a student for no reason.'
(BME Interview 08 – p. 18)

The student perceived that such incidents could be racist but felt that compared to where they came from, in London, Loughborough was much less racist. In London, they were stopped and searched frequently by Police.

Although some students felt that the University campus was a more tolerant environment than the town, BME students did witness incidents of racism from other students. An Asian student had, for example, felt that they experienced racism, possibly subtly, from a fellow student. Another student was shocked to over-hear a fellow student subjected to verbal abuse.

'... one boy ... whenever I used to put clothes in the washing machine to wash my clothes I think he used to switch it off on purpose. Interviewer: And you think that was racially motivated? Yes, I think so because there's a group of us that is Asian and he was like, so yes, he was a bit strange...No, I didn't think about reporting it. No, I just thought "He's just stupid" I think something like that. It's not really a problem.'

(BME Interview 01 – p. 16)

'... one of my friends in Towers actually heard a student say some racial abuse to one of the guys selling food towards the end of the Union. I thought it was really terrible the things he said.'

(BME Interview 06 – p. 24)

The responses to such incidents appeared fairly philosophical. On the one hand, the students were annoyed that they happen, on the other hand they just accepted that they arose out of ignorance or lack of awareness and did not let the incidents affect them.

'Again in my house like X downstairs, he comes from Cornwall and he is not racist but he says where he lives there is only one black family or one ethnic family. And it is no different, it is just the way he has been brought up, that is the way it is.'

(BME Interview 03 – p. 20-21)

Overall, a feeling emerged that racist incidents were more likely to occur in town rather than on campus, although some students played down the racial dimension of incidents occurring in the town centre (see quote below). The reported higher incidence of racially motivated incidents in the town is arguably related to student population perhaps being more ethnically diverse than the local population. For instance, a South Asian housemate of a Sri Lankan student suffered verbal racial abuse while working in town:

'People are quite different, people that are not students act a bit different towards you. I feel a lot more comfortable at University than I do outside of University.'

(BME Interview 01 – p. 17)

'...one of my housemates used to work there [at Bargain Booze] and he's been racially discriminated about as well, Chavs have broken into his car and they've called him Paki and things like that because of our colour really. But it's not happened to me, it's just happened to him.'

(BME Interview 01 – p. 16-17)

'... it will be between locals and students and that's just when it's drunk and that's not race related. I've seen a few in town like working in X but that's just drunkenness. That's just drunk and disorderly.'

(BME Individual Interview 07 – p. 25)

Some incidents in Loughborough town centre, perceived by BME students as racist, were reported to the Police. However, those reporting them were sceptical that an effective remedy could be found.

3.5 Being Made to Feel Different

A variety of opinions were expressed concerning the role of University policies and procedures in helping and supporting BME students at Loughborough. One group of respondents held the view that ethnicity was not an issue and that they should not be treated differently by the university. Indeed, one respondent thought that asking whether the University catered for any particular needs he had as an ethnic minority

was 'political correctness gone wrong' (Individual interview K9). This group maintained that their needs were no different to any other student and that their experience was that of a student and not an ethnic minority student. This was a particularly strong feature of interviews and discussions with some Engineering students. Some tension was evident in this position however, since such students at different times expressed cultural or religious needs that they perceived were not being met. However, sometimes when respondents did acknowledge an ethnic dimension to their experience, this was sometimes coupled with an account which stressed the individual responsibility of BME students themselves. This was both in terms of the benefits of having a positive attitude to combat the potential of discrimination and in terms of they themselves making a positive effort to integrate with the wider student body. With regard to the latter, being open to new experiences was seen as important.

'I think I try to live outside of my skin. I do not see that as a reason to not hire me. I think I speak for myself and whether I am blue, black, yellow and pink it does not really matter if you conduct yourself properly then people usually do not have a problem and even if they do walls get broken down easily by the way you respond.'

(Group discussion 3)

Central to most accounts was the feeling that what mattered was being treated the same as everyone else, being 'comfortable' and 'not being made to feel different' in their academic and social life at university. This is a desire discussed in greater detail in relation to the academic experience and specific Careers Schemes for British ethnic minorities (see previous chapter). This was also the experience many respondents had. Indeed there were some extremely positive accounts of their time at university.

'I think overall it has been very good. I have never had any issues at University that have dragged me down or affected me or anything ... It has always been comfortable and quite enjoyable too ... The ethnic minority issue has never determined anything or affected me in any sense.'

(Individual interview 06)

'They don't do anything special, they don't tend to treat you different from anyone, they treat you exactly the same which is good.'

(Group discussion 04)

'I think the University does have groups that you can join and things like that which is quite good and I think in general it is quite good in treating ethnic minorities. I don't think the whole time I've been at Loughborough I don't feel as though I am different or anything like that.'

(Group discussion 04)

'I would recommend it to so many friends it is ridiculous. So many friends from different backgrounds as well because I just think it is what you make it. I think you can go anywhere and have a good time but Loughborough is probably one of the best places to go just because it does offer you, it opens up everything to you, it does not close any doors. So I would recommend it a trillion times over.'

(Group discussion 3)

CHAPTER FOUR THE EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL LIFE AT LOUGHBOROUGH

4 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is focused on students' experiences of social life at Loughborough. It outlines their early experiences of Fresher's Weeks and the Halls of residences, followed by a discussion of their perceptions and experiences of the drinking culture at Loughborough. It also explores students' involvement and experiences of Union (National Union of Students) supported Clubs and Societies and Departmental social activities. It concludes with a discussion about some of the barriers that BME students feel limit their participation in the social side of life.

4.1 Fresher's Week and Going into Halls

Fresher's Week and the experience of entering Halls are two critically important arenas where BME students establish their friendships. There was a general agreement that these could have a major bearing on the friendships formed and consequently the social life a student leads at university.

'... Fresher's Week is ... a very crucial week ... to get to know people because if you leave it too late everyone else is gathered, especially if you are in Halls.'
(BME Female Focus Group 01)

Some students really enjoyed the experience of Fresher's Week and of living in Halls during their first year. For many, the process of making friends was fairly straight-forward in that everyone else was in a similar situation so all had to make an effort. In some cases, they went on to live with friends they had met in Halls in other environments. The convenience of living close to lectures and having most of the University amenities nearby were major reasons cited as an advantage of being in Halls. Living close to other students on campus was also conducive to establishing long term friendship groups:

'... being on campus, it is easy to go and socialise with people and you have always got somewhere to go.'
(BME Focus Group 21.10.07 – p. 2)

However, the process of meeting new friends was more difficult for some. A number of students perceived there to be limited ethnic diversity in the Halls, which they found problematic, especially in the initial few weeks of coming to university. For example, some students felt that pre-conceived perceptions of them might effect how they were seen by other students. This could effect who they made friends with over time.

'So I was worried that OK can I actually make some friends here, when I go to make some Caucasian friends they will say hey you are Chinese, Chinese people don't make friends. I could stick with them but if I went to them I wouldn't really fit. At the time I knew that I wouldn't fit in with those people, not saying I would reject them but it is because there is a cultural gap. I will still make friends, we can still be friends, but it is different.'

(BME Focus Group 14.11.07 – p. 39)

Second and third year students had a less positive view of Halls. They sometimes felt that living in the same Halls as Fresher's provided a major distraction from their studies. This may well be linked to the different student experiences of Fresher's compared to their second and third year counterparts. It was felt that as first year students only have to achieve a 40 per cent average to continue their degree, they are likely to have more leisure time with less pressure on academic work. Therefore, they are more likely to go out more often during the week, with the consequences that can bring, in terms of drunkenness and noise.

'But living in Halls in the second year probably wasn't the best idea. The fact you have Fresher's disturbing you all the time, all the time.'

(BME Individual Student 01 – p. 5)

4.2 Drinking Culture

Concerns were raised about the drinking culture amongst Loughborough students. There was evidence that the cultural values of some interviewees, sometimes based on religious beliefs, meant that they did not find the drinking culture present at Loughborough attractive.

'I think just generally in Asian culture it's [drinking] ... just not promoted ...'

(BME Individual Interview 01 – p. 10)

'I completely missed Fresher's week, I didn't go out ... we all went down to the union and stuff like that. And then I saw complete dickheads and that and I was just like I don't find that enjoyable. I don't find the fact that I can wake up the next morning and not remember anything that happened or regret something that I had done because I was drunk or feel ill.'

(BME Individual Interview 03 – p. 16-17)

Although non-drinkers sometimes appeared to feel marginalised when they socialised, they generally accommodated to the situation and still managed to enjoy themselves. However, there certainly appeared to be some “otherness” experienced by BME students who tended not to drink and some non-drinkers would like more activities that are not strictly speaking drink-related.

'People would not be leaving you out but as a result of you not drinking and being in the minority you are automatically separated.'

(BME Individual Interview 06 – p. 17)

'I think it is more just bowling and more things in The Union, even karaoke nights or comedy nights or something. I know it would involve drinking but something that does not say “Come and drink”.'

(BME Interview 07 – p. 17-18)

It is important to acknowledge the influence that family background and values have on the decision of some students not to participate fully in the drinking culture, which was felt to be emphasised strongly at Loughborough. For example drinking is a very important issue for Muslim students and something they felt strongly about. However, it is also important to recognise that other BME students either embraced the drinking culture at Loughborough or did not let it affect them unduly.

'I went to the Union quite a lot and Hey Ewe on a Wednesday and then also I would go into town on a Sunday or Tuesday for Wild.'

(BME Female Group 01 – p. 25)

'They are the cheap nights. Well Friday is quite expensive now. Friday was never like a really cheap night, it was just the end of the week, “Let's get smashed”.'

(BME Group 21.10.07 – p. 19)

4.3 Clubs and Societies

For some participants, involvement in Societies formed a major part of their social life. The types of Societies they joined varied; some joined societies because of their

personal interests, such as Sport or Music societies and Student Action. Others joined Societies to meet other students from similar backgrounds seeing it as a way of making new friends.

Given Loughborough's reputation for sport, it is not surprising that there are plenty of opportunities to participate in Sports-based Societies. Some focus group participants and interviewees took advantage of these opportunities. The sports they engaged in included: Tae Kwon Do; cricket, athletics, gym; and cycling. However, Loughborough's reputation for sport could be counter-productive in some instances. Some students were put off by a perceived elitism of some of the sports clubs. It was felt that sometimes, only students of a very high standard were welcome in some sports clubs, which was off-putting to those who just wanted to participate for enjoyment.

'The reason I don't do sport is because Loughborough is very elitist I think in terms of sport and if you want to try a new sport I think they make it very difficult for you because everyone is at such a high level already.'

(BME Individual Interview 04 – p. 12)

Other students disagreed and thought that the sporting scene at Loughborough was fairly inclusive. Intra-Mural Sports offered them a less competitive alternative sporting environment, which some students found more attractive. There was also a social dimension to joining Sports Clubs and taking part in Intra-Mural Sports as it was seen by these students as a good opportunity to meet people.

'There are a lot of ... Great Britain athletes ... who train down there all the time, but if you see them training and you want to ask them what they are doing, they don't mind at all. If you are willing to go and speak to people, then they will give you the time of day.'

(BME Focus Group 21.10.07 – p. 12)

'You meet people through sport so you play Hall sport and you meet people through that. But again, after a Hall sport event, after you've done your Intra Mural football, they are out to Friday Night Disco or whatever.'

(BME Focus Group 14.11.07 – p. 26)

Joining Cultural Societies was an important way of meeting people from a similar background for some students. Some students just felt more comfortable socialising with others from a similar background, especially in unfamiliar surroundings. These

Societies provided an easy way for them to do so. Some felt that this was an easier way of meeting friends than the opportunities for friendships gained from living in Halls.

'Last year, I was in the Chinese Society and I helped organise that by being one of their committee members ... I met a lot of people there as well. And I met some people a bit like myself, who live here and are Chinese.'

(BME Interview 02 – p. 12)

'I just find it a lot easier to make friends with people that are from a similar background to me.'

(BME Interview 01 – p. 7)

'Yes I find Clubs and Societies for me has been an easier way to make friends than living in Halls.'

(BME Individual Interview 08 – p. 14)

However, some students felt that Societies defined by ethnicity and nationality were exclusive and divisive, even within the target group. There was a concern that in some cases, only students from similar backgrounds socialised with each other, with limited contact between people of different backgrounds. This effectively creates enclaves, which may increase rather than ease tensions between students from different cultures.

'I think it would be nice if there were things in between each others' Societies ... Indian to them [The Indian Society] does not mean Sri Lankan or Bangladeshi or Pakistani. Indian means Indian.'

(BME Female Group 01 – p. 42)

'I don't like that whole idea of "Oh, we're brown so we stick together". It shouldn't be like that. In my personal experience, I've never met white people who do, "Oh I'm white, so we can't talk to him" ... So ... the Indian Society people have moaned that people are racist and I'm like, "Not being funny, but you're not helping the situation.'

(BME Individual Interview 01 – p. 11)

Second and third years were considerably less active in clubs and society's than they were in their first year, with a higher priority being given to academic work. Some students who did not participate directly in sport clubs were involved in sports-related activities such as coaching and outdoor pursuits. A number of students were also active outside of the arena of Sports and Cultural Societies. These activities

ranged from being on a Hall Committee, involvement with the Territorial Army and volunteering as a Special Constable.

'I've been involved in quite a few camps that are kids camps, kind of looking at young carers giving them a break from their duties in the Peak District.'

(BME Focus Group 14.11.07 – p. 26)

4.4 Departmental Social Activities

There is variation, both within and between departments, in the extent to which respondents identified with and felt part of their department. Sports Science in particular has strong departmental identity and pride. One respondent from another department mentioned this and felt that all degree courses should have a similar status. Respondents from Sports Science, Chemistry and Art and Design commented on the friendly and social nature of their department.

There are also differences in the social opportunities within departments. In recent years the course representative system has developed to include a departmental committee responsible for social activities. This was first initiated within the Social Science department and is based on the Hall committees.

'... the thing with the socials is more we want to create an identity within the uni and we want to have an affiliation, a bit of camaraderie, because we have got something to be proud of, the fact that we're Sports Science, and everyone is really good friends within their halls and you get such a good atmosphere. It is very difficult when you go into lectures because you know people from your halls and then you sit in lectures and you don't know anyone, so we really want to sort of change that and make it so you've got lots of friends within your department.'

(Course rep interview 01)

Sports Science and Chemistry respondents enjoyed social activities, such as Balls, barbeques and sports activities organised by their department and felt that everyone within the department knew each other. In contrast though, social science respondents thought few people knew each other because of the limited contact hours. Social events, it was thought had limited attendance and there was disappointment that students did not work or socialise together. An Engineering respondent thought there was little interest in socialising within their department

because of the high number of contact hours students had and the lack of gender balance, suggesting course-based team-building activities instead. However, plans were underway to hold a joint social with another department and organise a finalist Ball.

4.5 Experiences and Perceptions of Loughborough Campus and Town

Given the campus-based nature of the university, it is not surprising that the hub of social life for many students is the Students' Union. Both positive and negative reasons were cited for this. On the positive side, the Union's central location and the fact that it offered an inexpensive night out attracted some interviewees. The frequency of going to the Union varied: some went to the Union several times a week, while others barely ventured there at all. For the former group, the following quote is typical:

'I mean on campus, the Union is just the place to be for everything. You come there every week and don't get bored of it.'

(BME Interview 06 – p. 15)

Another interviewee felt that the opposite was true because of over-familiarity:

'I think after a while people will tend to go out into town and stuff because I find it boring because after two years it is the same thing.'

(BME Male Focus Group 01 – p. 7)

The balance between socialising on and off-campus varied, therefore, some students spent most of their time on campus, mainly at the Union, while others spent a greater proportion of their time in nightclubs and bars in town. Other students who had socialised in town felt disappointed by what they perceived as the limited opportunities that Loughborough had to offer. In some cases, this led to them travelling further a field to socialise, for instance, to Nottingham, Leicester, or even Birmingham and London. There were a range of suggestions from the BME students about how the student experience of Loughborough could be improved. Bowling alleys were most commonly cited, while more bars, restaurants and cinemas were also suggested in order to improve the student experience at Loughborough.

'I am quite surprised that they have not done a lot to cater for students like bowling alleys and a nice little leisure centre and stuff like that.'

(BME 07 – p. 17-18)

However, there were students who were satisfied with their student experience in Loughborough. They tended to view the compactness of Loughborough, compared to the bigger cities that they have come from in a positive light. Those who took this view felt that Loughborough was student friendly with most amenities provided within easy reach.

'It is quite a student orientated town ... for me, there is everything that you need ... it is quite compact, you don't have to go miles and miles away, but at the same time it is quite large ...'

(BME- 06 p. 14)

Some students felt a 'town v gown' tension existed between students and local young people. In most cases though, the tensions were perceived to be underpinned by drunkenness rather than having racial undercurrents. Despite this, the third quote illustrates that racial element cannot completely be discounted.

'It is divided, there is a local side and then there is a student side and I went to the local side by mistake.'

(BME Female Group 01 – p. 26)

'If there is or if there are it will be between locals and students and that's just when it's drunk and that's not race related.'

(BME Individual Interview 07 – p. 25)

'I remember when I first came here, I think being in town when there are not a lot of students around is when you think, "I am the only black person here ..." You might get the odd one or two that you can tell are a bit ignorant but you get over it.'

(BME Group 10.10.07 – p. 10)

4.6 Barriers to Socialising

While this section has outlined the range of activities in which BME students participated, it is important to acknowledge that there are a range of factors that restrict their ability to have an active social life and it is to these factors that we now turn. It is also important to recognise that having an active social life was not always a desired outcome of going to university for some participants. For second and third

year students, the inclination to go out may decline as pressures of academic work increase. In such cases, it is often a conscious decision not to go out so much as academic, and sometimes, paid work can limit their opportunities to socialise.

'Whereas I am always working, I work the door on a Friday, I tend not to go out on a Wednesday and if I do I don't drink. So I don't have the same sort of interactions.'

(BME Individual Interview 03 – p. 15)

Having said earlier that Halls and Fresher's' Weeks can be a good opportunity to establish friendships, not making the most of those two arenas can narrow down the options for socialising later on in a student's university life. Not participating in many social occasions can have a similar effect, which was recognised by some students.

'... because I don't go to socials I don't feel I am making ... as many friends ...'

(BME Focus Group 14.11.07 – p. 5-6)

Cost can also be an important restriction on engaging in social activity. This also appears to be the case with sporting activities. This may be an inevitable consequence of the changing nature of student finance, especially now that students have to pay tuition fees and most have to take out loans to cover living costs. A consequence of this may be the increased need to work, which impacts on time and possibly, for some, the quality of academic work. Time was more of a barrier than cost for one ethnic minority course representative, who had to dedicate a significant proportion of their week to executive duties.

'The flying was really, really cheap but it was just the time issues really. It was really difficult ... This year I am just doing the counsellor stuff ... I have got department committee meetings and I have started meeting my reps regularly.'

(BME Course Rep 02 – p. 28)

Living outside of Loughborough also impacted on the nature of the social life that some students could lead. Some students were living at home and commuted in, usually from either Nottingham or Leicester, for lectures. Other students, while living in Loughborough during term time, did go back to their parental home fairly often during this period. Some had weekend jobs to go back to. This could be evidence of strong familial ties that are more characteristic of Asian (South and Far Eastern)

households. One example of this was this quote from an Asian student from Leicester:

'I have come over here for my education, I am back and forth.'

(BME Individual Interview 02 – p. 10)

One other important point raised by some BME students related to the issue of language skills. Students with limited English felt they were more likely to find their social circle restricted to other students of a similar background. However, it does not necessarily follow that the activities they undertake will consequently inevitably be restricted. Some students either live with or near students from similar backgrounds, which makes it easier to socialise at each other's houses or go out as a group.

'... everyone is still within the student triangle, so it is not too hard to pop round and have a chat or whatever.'

(BME Interview 06 – p. 18)

CHAPTER FIVE ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES

5 INTRODUCTION

As a part of the research it was agreed that we would interview eight representatives from the academic staff of four departments/ schools at Loughborough University. Our aim was to interview staff who had an overview of admissions and/ or teaching and student support. Part of the rationale for this was that it was important to explore the perceptions, experiences and responses that different departments have over BME participation. It was also an opportunity to examine how different learning environments and curriculum's might (or might not) impact on the participation and experience of BME students.

5.1 Student Recruitment and Widening Participation

All four departments operate transparent systems for University entry that aims to ensure equal opportunity to all students making applications. At the heart of the process is a desire to get the best students into Loughborough University. Two of the departments involved (Sport and Exercise Science - SES and Aeronautical and Automotive Engineering - AAE) have very high admissions requirements (3A's and 2A's and 1 B) and are oversubscribed by demand. Neither of these two schools go through clearing. As a result each year many applicants are unsuccessful. Art and Design (A&D) does not operate a direct entry system. It requires all students to undertake a Foundation qualification before they are accepted onto the degree programme. The criteria for entry is far more flexible and requires students to have either two A level's (Grade A – C) or a two year qualification of ND or AVCE. Access for students in A & D tend to be through the provision of a portfolio of work. Chemistry (Ch) has a wide range of courses with different entry requirements. They tend to go through clearing each year to ensure they make their numbers for the variety of courses in each academic year.

Across the four departments it was clear that there was no particular targets or strategies for increasing BME participation in their respective courses. Below is a typical response:

'We don't have a particular aim in that direction (extend BME participation). We do have a widening participation officer but work is all aimed at schools as a category for widening participation. We don't particularly look for ethnic minority students, we look at schools and whoever's there, we would address.'
(Academic 03 - p.17)

It was generally assumed that any increase in take up by BME would be achieved by the widening participation (WP) work that targeted particular schools and areas. BME students were clearly seen as a group that would benefit from action that helped increase participation for some of the most disadvantaged students: At one level WP was creating a situation where senior admissions staff were seeing the responsibility of increasing participation of disadvantaged groups as lying with WP officers or the university. In the departments WP and admissions did not seem connected. WP was being seen as a way of generating interest in departmental courses for hard to reach groups but not about the admissions process itself. It remained unclear how (or if) the process of WP feed into the admissions system.

WP is clearly a challenge to the departments especially those with high entry requirements. This being said a number of strategies were being used that aimed to increase the take up of disadvantaged students. For example:

- In AAE students that did not quite have the grades to enter through M- Eng would be encouraged to apply for B-Eng. The entry requirement is slightly lower and if, after the first year they make the grade required they can transfer to the MG.
- AAE do not use the UCAS tariff which allows them flexibility in choice of student;
- If a student in AAE does not look like having the grades required grades they can recommend them for the Science and Engineering Foundation course. If successful students will be accepted onto the degree programme;
- SES will take students in to the second year of the degree programme from Loughborough College who have gained a Foundation qualification;

- SES will consider background and circumstances in making judgements about students. They will in special cases lower the entry requirement to ensure a student from a disadvantaged background is admitted; and
- Requiring a Foundation qualification in A & D ensures some of the most disadvantaged students can have access.

How effective these measures are in terms of increasing numbers of BME students remain unknown (by the University and departments). Throughout the admissions process no monitoring of the ethnicity of students by departments seems to be undertaken. Admissions tutors outlined the complex process of admissions explaining how difficult it was to get the balance right in terms of student numbers. Being also able to monitor the balance of different ethnic groups at this stage is clearly difficult and it is not until decisions have been made that it is usually possible to see the ethnic make up of new cohorts. This being said staff felt that little monitoring at any stage of the process took place. Across all four departments staff expressed uncertainty about what the make up of their student cohorts were and how they represented the different BME groups. Part of this arose because centralised information was not always available to them and that departments had no mechanism (or requirement) for using this information in their future planning.

5.2 Supporting and Monitoring BME Students Academic Progress

All four departments operate the Personal Tutoring system and all students have access to academic and personal support through this process. Staff have responsibility for a number of students over their time at Loughborough. The Personal Tutors system is important as it not only offers students support it also allows the department ways to identify problems quickly. This is a voluntary system (for the student) and can only be effective if the tutor is pro-active and students use it. Within this process most departments do not identify to Personal Tutors if a student has been accepted with lower grades, because of special circumstances or through a Foundation programme. They arrive in the department without Personal Tutors knowing that they may have come in through a WP route. This is because departments do not want to be seen to be potentially stigmatising a student or giving

them preferential treatment. One exception is in SES where they are starting to identify BTEC students so that their progress can be monitored and any problems identified quickly.

Departments can also have other mechanisms of offering support to students. For example, in AAE students have to undertake a project in their final year this requires close working with an academic member of staff and opportunities can arise for students to bring up problems they are having. More informal processes can also be in place, for example, in A&D the environment helps create a culture and practice that allows close dialogue between students and staff:

'A lot of our teaching isn't in lecture format to large groups, it's studio based and the dialogue is fairly constant and a member of staff will be engage in going around to see students.'

(Academic 06 – p.5)

All departments have procedures for dealing with 'failing' students or those that are in danger of dropping out. This aims to find solutions quickly and actively involves the Personal Tutor. No department thought BME students were more vulnerable to drop out (although none had any evidence to support such a claim). One strategy that has been developed, that is seen to help some BME students, is the 'stretch degree'. This is popular in SES and allows flexibility for students that have heavy demands because of their sport commitments. This was seen as a positive move in that it creates different ways of supporting students who may have come in through vocational routes or through sports specialisms, which can be a major pathway for BME students:

'So if we've got this highly talented BME student who is having a problem and he's got commitments through a national governing body applying pressure we can ease that pressure by stretching the degree.'

(Academic 02 – p.24)

A more formalised mechanism for identifying student problems is the staff student committee. Department staff see this as an important route for students to bring up more broader issues usually related to the curriculum although it can be more open ended:

'Its an open forum, so anything can be raised. What tends to be raised is if there is an inconvenient day for handing things in. But there would be an opportunity for people to raise Ramadan or Festivals these sorts of things.'

(Academic 03 – p.3)

Issues of how the practice and policy of the department impacts on equal opportunities on a day to day basis is normally managed through departments allocating the role to a named person. The quality of this system and how it monitors issues related to students concerns varies. In some of the departments this role was seen as an mainly an administrative role and therefore someone else's responsibility. This person would be seen as the 'spokes person' on such issues. It was thought, in these cases to be mainstreamed although it was unclear if this really had an impact on how people thought about, operationalised or responded to equal opportunities issues. What this role was and how it contributed was not always known by senior staff:

'... we do have a equal opportunities co-ordinator, I am just looking at the previous minutes and yes, so we do ...'

(Academic 04 – p.3)

This being said some departments saw this role as more 'integral' to the day to day operation and something that was to be considered at any decision point although this was not always monitored neither was it always clear how it worked in practice.

5.3 The Curriculum and Learning Environment

Departments had different positions on how the curriculum could, or should touch upon issues of 'difference' and 'diversity', although it did seem that the social sciences and humanities saw it as, not only appropriate but as important to the learning experience. In Art and Design, for example, issues of post-colonial literature, globalisation and identity are subjects critical to the curriculum. In this context students are encouraged to reflect on themes of identify and difference in their work. While ethnicity is a part of these debates other factors are also seen as important i.e. sexuality, and gender. It is what people 'bring with them' and in Art and Design it is seen as a creative force in student work. The department are

continually reviewing how they encourage students to engage with notions such as internationalism and globalisation seeing these as positive aspects of doing Art and Design. In the science departments there is more uncertainty about how the curriculum can engage with such concepts and ideas:

'Chemistry by its nature is a science subject. I am trying to look at the periodic table up here ... it would have to be too subtle for me to notice but I am sure that it is more relevant in some subject areas. More none science based subjects ...'

(Academic 04 – p.6)

This being said it was recognised that if they taught the history or philosophy of science within Chemistry it would be possible to explore issues related to ethnicity. As a part of this discussion there was a concern raised about the risks of introducing these types of debates into the Chemistry curriculum in that those advocating evolutionary theory, such as Christian fundamentalists could cause a distraction to the learning process. Engaging, with what were seen as social questions in science was valued but seen as challenging.

Regardless of the structure of the learning environment (workshop/ placement/ studio) it was recognised that BME students had particular needs that had to be considered. These did tend to be identified around religion, and in particular with religious festivals and events. No discussions arose about other cultural needs. Ramadan was seen as a major festival that most departments had given consideration too. Structuring courses and activities around this was seen as very important. For example, in AAE some of the activities in the workshops can be full days and in Ramadan Muslim students can, by mid afternoon, feel tired and weak which can be dangerous. In these circumstances staff in the department are encouraged to re-structuring sessions to avoid the risks. How far this was given the status in all four departments or the organisation of the timetable is unclear and it did seem to vary. For example, as one member of staff said:

'Ramadan, yes we are aware when it's Ramadan but the only thing is really the students wanting the day off to recover from the party at Eid for which we don't have a great deal of sympathy for (person laughs).'

(Academic 03 – p.3)

This could also explain why Ramadan was not always addressed directly in the timetabling:

'No I am fairly sure our timetabling co-ordinator, not intentionally under any circumstances, does not take that (Ramadan) into account ... there are loads of factors concerned in generating a timetable but I don't think this is taken into account.'

(Academic 04 – p.3)

Some of the problems around timetabling related to the University system in that flexibility outside the framework provided by the University is difficult to move therefore even if they wanted to be more responsive this could be difficult. Similarly, making changes in term time about teaching can also be difficult:

'That one (moving teaching) I find difficult because I completely respect their views but at the same time we are stuck in the structure of terms and its difficult to find a compromise.'

(Academic 04 – p.12)

Some of the departments had also encountered other religious needs that they were trying to respond too. For example, in AAE a student on placement had wanted to have time, in the day, to pray. As a result the department negotiated with the employer to ensure this was made available. In SES issues of Muslim women and their bodies was becoming something they had to consider in organising sporting events, such as swimming. Similarly issues of 'life drawing' in which the model is naked A & D was raising concerns amongst some Asian parents during the recruitment process. Finding solutions to these issues was not straightforward or without their difficulties but departments were becoming increasingly sensitive to such religious issues and trying to find solutions.

5.4 Integration and Cohesion

All four departments tend to see the creation of cohort identity amongst their different year groups as very important to help students settle at university. It was also seen as something that could improve the learning experience. This identity can be created by students themselves and is seen in some departments as a part of the student experience. How this operates and what helps foster or create this sense of

belonging varies by department. For example in A & D the distinct access routes into the faculty is seen as an important feature:

'They come through a different route, they come through Foundation route, so that creates a bit of difference'.

(Academic 06 – p.9)

Also being physically located in another part of the University separate from the main buildings and having a learning environment that is open and interactive most of the day creates opportunities for students to feel as though they are part of the A & D school. This, it is suggested, creates a feeling of inclusion amongst most students and is reflected in how in years two and three students tend to share accommodation off campus. In AEE the creation of a cohort identity is more difficult to achieve. Not only are numbers high but also they do not have physical space for these process to take place. The lack of meeting rooms within their building is seen as a major problem.

In Chemistry the department has encouraged and supports (like many departments) a student body who organise activities (Chemical Society). This organises six a side football, and netball tournaments alongside pub crawls and the Chemistry Ball. These types of activities are seen as being open to all and help forge inclusion. This being said there was acknowledgement in some departments that if these activities are dominated by elite students who do not recognise the diversity of interests of others this can be exclusionary. For example, it was suggested that some of the student activities were built around large alcohol consumption of young men which was marginalising for Muslim students and young women.

5.5 Community and Family Relationships

One particular issue about integration of BME students was raised over the difficulties some faced in coming to a university, especially if they have come from a very different educational environment than the majority of students. Some BME students came from communities where university was not a traditional part of the communities understandings of transitions into adulthood and where understandings

of university life were unknown. This, it was thought can have a potential detrimental impact on their learning and their feelings of inclusion:

'So when they come they are slower to engage with HE and then its catch up and I think there has been two occasions where catch up has meant they've got so far behind they haven't linked into the idea that there is someone to can go and talk to. So they have talked to nobody and the deeper they get in to trouble ...'

(Academic 02 – p.36)

This is also seen as a lifestyle issue in, that for some BME students, coming to university dislocates them from their communities and they are thought not to feel as though they fitted in at Loughborough. This relates to a second point about some BME students living off campus and not being part of the everyday life at the university. This was seen as a tension for such students and something they struggled with:

'It is more about they set their mind at the start and they themselves probably weren't going to embrace themselves falling in with the university experience, either because they thought they wouldn't like it or their peer pressure, at home, say's don't live there come and stay with us ...'

(Academic 02 – p.36)

These issues were discussed in relation to African Caribbean students but concerns were also raised about Asian students who were now deciding to live at home so as to avoid the cost of university Halls. It was felt that this had potential to isolate students from the cohort, the department identity and their feelings of belonging to the university.

There was also a growing concern about how demands from families of some Asian students could be difficult for them to manage. One example given was where a young man's father had died and an elder brother had let the family down. This student had to leave at short notice to take on the family responsibility. He had no option but to step into this role which affected his participation at university. It was also thought that some young male Asian students would not talk about family problems especially if they felt it was something they were ashamed of:

'There was an incident a couple of years ago when we know something was going badly wrong with the student's life and found it very difficult to get him to come in and say, unless it is their performance, there is nothing you can do ... he was so, in his mind ashamed of his family and what was going on ...'

(Academic 01 – p.12)

The relationship between family and the student, for Asian students seemed very important and if it became a question of making a decision to priorities some point of their life, it was felt that they would always have to choose their family.

CHAPTER SIX STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

6 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the views and perspectives of representatives from a range of University support services. These include; the Student Advice Centre; Counselling Services; Halls of Residence Accommodation Office; Private Sector Accommodation and the Community Warden service. Questions were asked about their awareness of BME issues and if they or their service had any contact.

6.1 Student Advice Centre

The Student Advice Centre (SAC) covers a comprehensive list of subjects, which include: Housing, Finance, the Law, Academic and Disciplinary issues, Immigration, Employment and Consumer issues, Tax and Disability. SAC is staffed by students who act as information givers and three fully-trained Advisors. SAC is open to all students and it is widely advertised and promoted as such.

SAC does not deem it necessary to tailor their services on the grounds of ethnicity and the explanation given was that most students are required to speak English and are able to do so. In reality, language skills are arguable only one aspect that any special provision might address and other differential provision reflecting cultural issues, seem to be unrecognised. The majority of students that visited SAC wanted advice about housing issues. Student finances were also the subject of much consultation, as were student relationships (particularly with house-mates).

International students were seen as having additional needs, such as needing assistance with issues concerning passports or help in arranging flights home in the event of a death in the family; and advice on academic misconduct, particularly plagiarism. These latter issues were not seen as being problematic for 'home' students, since it was assumed that such students were in familiar national surroundings and should misfortune strike they would be more capable of managing it. BME students were therefore not viewed differently from any other UK students.

Unless a student is advised by one of the three Student Advisors (as opposed to being given advice by a student volunteer in the Centre), the student's visit will be neither recorded nor monitored. It was reported that currently they were reluctant to create a record for those who came for advice because she felt that this entailed a protracted and unwieldy bureaucratic and technical procedure that entailed, for example, opening a document on the student, saving it to a file, re-opening it, and so on. In addition, although details of ethnicity are requested in the customer satisfaction questionnaire, the results currently remain unanalysed by the Centre. It was stated by the person interviewed that she had not considered ethnicity as an issue and that maybe in future they would monitor BME separate from International students.

This categorisation is rooted in the fact that, whether the student has international or 'home' status, determines the level of help and advice the Centre can give them. For example, 'home' students are eligible for Legal Aid and also qualify for larger loans than international students. The interviewee felt that international students are not being provided with the level of service that they need. She felt this was especially significant given the increasing number of overseas students studying in the UK and paying higher fees for this facility.

6.2 Counselling Service

The Counselling Service provides counselling support to students (in addition to staff). This is usually either in the form of workshops or acting as part of the support team supporting Departments, including students within those Departments. They provide emotional support and signposting advice. The Service promotes itself via its website and out-reach work in academic departments. The Service also distributes, leaflets, posters and uses email to inform students of the services on offer. The marketing process is a standardized, English-language based exercise. Different languages are not used to recruit students of different ethnic origins. Similarly, the counselling itself is only offered through the medium of the English language. There is a training function which trains students to counsel other students; this is done through via email as well as face-to-face delivery. Typically, the Service deals with issues, including: severe depression, chronic depression,

suicide, self-harm, sexual abuse, eating disorders and support around traumatic incidents, such as, shootings, the tsunami and road traffic accidents.

The Counselling Service have a small but increasing number of ethnic minority students using their Service; particularly Chinese students:

'But the numbers of (ethnic minority) students coming in are increasing. Chinese students, a wide range of students really and they're bringing in problems that our local students bring as well. There's racial stuff that goes on in towns, harassment and stuff that goes on in towns, a bit of bullying that goes on and the culture differences. You know the stuff. What am I talking about? I'm talking about when they come to a country they're coping with change.'

(BME SS3 - p.2)

This quote implies that a wide range of ethnic minority students are using the Service to raise the same kind of issues that UK students bring to the Service but in addition they are raising issues to do with racial and cultural issues that are bearing on them negatively. An over-arching point is made that they are coping with 'change' and all 'change' is stressful, even positive change, negative aspects of change obviously all the more so. It was claimed that international students are particularly prone to see counselling as associated with being 'mad'; depressed or having mental illness which are seen as stigmatised categories, making it especially difficult for them to come forward to seek help. In addition, the feeling was that ethnic minority students, in particular, often seemed to feel guilty for talking about personal issues outside the context of the family. This perspective is qualified for BME students who the Counselling Service find to be more familiar with the notion of counselling, and, therefore, less resistant to approaching the Service and less likely to view it in stigmatising, negative terms.

However, at a more general level, the feeling was that students and their families depict a great convergence in terms of their expectations and desires concerning the final outcomes of higher education, which involved an over-arching desire on the part of the students to 'prove' themselves to their parents: 'repay the faith' (BME SS3 - p.15) enshrined in the parental financial investment.

Although, as outlined above, racial harassment is raised as an issue with the Counselling Services, to date this has not happened to any great extent and where it has occurred, it has predominantly been located in the town-setting, such that:

'Students living in Loughborough have actually said (that racial harassment has taken place) and also it has been recorded on the University campus that there's been quite a bit of racial abuse going on in town. At the moment, if they're in any way bullied, (it's) racism.'

(BME SS3 - p.12)

The Counselling Service has not been made specifically aware concerning who it is who is perpetrating racial bullying but their understanding is that it is town-people rather than other students and that the site of such incidents is the town rather than the campus. Counselling Service were aware of students dropping out of university. It was felt that issues such as difficulties at home, financial difficulties, failing to 'fit-in' or mental illness were key factors. They did not perceive ethnicity as specifically related to this issue.

6.3 Halls of Residence Accommodation

In their first year at university, all Loughborough under-graduates are offered accommodation in a Hall of Residence. They receive a pack of information describing the full range of accommodation on offer. The student expresses a preference and once they have been allocated an ID number a computer is input with this information and the accommodation is allocated electronically. Any complaints generated by this process are treated on an individual, 'manual' basis, as are individual needs that are expressed, which are treated on merit.

It was the view of the officer interviewed that Halls of Residence accommodation did not have a particular range of issues for BME students that needed addressing over and above those that might arise with the student population in general. This is reflected in the following quote:

'I don't think they have any different issues really. I don't think there is any difference because if they are already here or if they are a UK student they are well used to the UK.'

(BME SS1 - p.17)

This later appeared to be about to be qualified in relation to Muslim women students, but in the event UK women Muslim students were again excluded from the comment:

'The only thing I would say, if I was going to say anything, is that we have the problem with Muslim girls because ours are obviously not all segregated and we have had, they have come from abroad, they haven't been here as UK residents. And the UK residents are usually integrated anyway and they don't worry about whether they are sharing with boys or girls, they've usually gone past that.'

(BME SS1 - pp. 17/18)

It may be, however, that those UK Muslim women who would have objections to mixed accommodation or whose parents would have such objections, are not opting to live away from home but are travelling in to the university. Where Muslim women students are accommodated in single sex accommodation in Halls, there may still be contact with young men using shared kitchens within the accommodation, so that this does not entirely solve the problem. Similarly, in single-sex flats rented from the university, young women sharing the accommodation with Muslim women students may have male visitors, so a male-free environment cannot be guaranteed.

Notwithstanding, this interviewee's general feeling was that UK ethnic minority students were already familiar and comfortable with the wider UK culture, however, she did identify a sub-group, who she described in the following terms:

'We still have obviously a small minority that are still very much in their own country's culture, they are living here, they have been living here but their families have kept in the same culture So they are still demanding that they have exactly the same as they would at home. And it is not always possible.'

(BME SS1 - p.21)

She felt such students should be prepared to be more culturally flexible, for example:

'It is the same as if we went abroad and said to the "oh no, I don't want this Greek food, I only want fish and chips". They can't do it because it is not in their way to do it. So you can only do so much.'

(BME SS1 - p.22)

Similarly, the same interviewee felt that students from ethnic minority backgrounds should be more flexible concerning the nationalities with whom they were prepared to share rooms. For example:

'We try very hard not to put Sikhs together with Hindus because that doesn't work either, there is conflict sometimes. By the same token I get exactly the same with my exchange students. I have exchange students every year and Spanish do not like to go with Italians. French do not like to go with Spanish, Germans do not like to go with Norwegians. It's a nightmare. It's a nightmare. They just don't gel. We've found at the moment Chinese and Pakistanis don't gel.'

(BME SS1 - pp.22/23)

She commented that the latter conflict had resulted in issues for the Halls staff this year and that she did not understand what was the basis of it. In her comments the interviewee seemed to underestimate or gloss-over the deep-seated cultural, religious and historical conflicts that may inform the back-ground to some of the mere 'preferences' she perceives.

One of the main issues that has arisen relates to the food in the Hall's:

'Because obviously come January, Ramadan starts and they only want Halal meat or whatever or vegetarian. Well, it is a lot more expensive Halal meat and, although we do cater in some of our dining rooms it is not on a daily basis.'

(BME SS1 - p.19)

On days that Halal meat is not provided a vegetarian option will be available.

This interviewee, despite objecting to the fact that she felt that some ethnic minority students "used the race card" (BME, SS1, p.26, p.29) when they were losing the argument and resorted, as the interviewee saw it, to claims of racism, nonetheless, felt that her own practice would benefit from further training around addressing

cultural issues. No ethnic monitoring is undertaken of Hall usage. This is seen as the fairer option by the interviewee, who sees the same treatment for all, as synonymous with equality of provision, for example:

'If you're talking about the UK's own students, I don't know whether they are an ethnic minority or not. It doesn't bother me whatsoever. I've got a name and a number. So as far as I am concerned, they could be sky blue pink or whatever and they will still get the same service and the same accommodation.'

(BME SS - p.1)

Of course getting the 'same' accommodation may not be deemed appropriate when viewed from a diversity perspective.

The same interviewee later elaborated: *'they are names and numbers, not people'* (BME SS1 - p.3). She saw this as positive because she associated it with being non-discriminatory.

6.4 Private Sector Accommodation (PSA)

The private sector aspect of university accommodation is administered on the basis of an accreditation scheme for private landlords and run in conjunction with Charnwood Council. The university's involvement spans three different levels from solely advertising the accommodation for landlords, through to fully managing the property (overseeing the property for the year and collecting rent). Housing lists comprising the private properties provide a regulated choice of private accommodation for student customers. This Service also offers students advice on the legal aspects of tenancy agreements and assists them in sorting out any problems that do arise during the course of the contract. The Service is promoted via websites (including that of the Student Union) and advertisements in Halls of Residence.

There was no perceived need for any special arrangements around BME students evidenced by the interview with private sector accommodation officer. The point was made that in general no particular demands or requests had been forthcoming from this group in relation to such accommodation. However, on occasion BME women

students had stated that they wanted to live in women only households and, with sufficient notice, this was said to be straightforward to arrange. There was, however, a perceived problem on the part of some landlords, that Chinese tenants may be associated with cleanliness problems in private rented accommodation (these were allegedly related to cooking arrangements and the disposal of rubbish). It was also noted that Asian families sometimes became particularly involved (sometimes several members of the same family) in inspecting the property that the particular Asian student was considering occupying.

Given that legal contracts, governing the tenant/landlord relationship were a central aspect of the Service administered by PAS, these were only available through the medium of the English language. This, of course, will not pose a problem for the group with which this study is primarily concerned, but it may be an issue for other ethnic minority groups and it may indicate a reticence to positively recognise difference. For example:

'And we haven't got any contracts translated because I'm wary of it, if you do it for one then you should represent everybody, shouldn't you, I don't think it's fair. Although I know X (colleague) has approached the International Office about getting one done in Chinese now because it is more and more necessary. But we do have pictures, to say this is how things should look and we've got pictures of dirty things and underneath: "This will cost so much off your deposit to have it cleaned off, if it's like this".'

(BME SS2 - p.9)

Aside from Chinese students who the private accommodation respondent said wanted to live together, she tended to conflate all ethnic minorities in her discussion, as is they were an homogenous category:

'Some other nationalities will ask because they don't want to be with people from their own, because they've come here to learn English and they've come here to mix with other people. And they can be quite firm that they don't want to live with other French students, they don't want to live with their own, they want to be integrated. But it's really only the Chinese who always want to live within their own communities.'

(BME SS2 - p.6)

Any difficulties that might arise she tended to put down to 'religious' issues and the PSA interviewee reported that she did not recollect any complaints from BME

students concerning racism. Private Sector issues centred more on International Students, often at a Post-graduate level, rather than BME under-graduate students. For example, one Muslim women from overseas reportedly wanted her father to live with her in an all female house and, more generally, some Asian International Students arrive in Loughborough on a very low budget, such that they cannot afford properties administered by the PSA Service. The Private Sector interviewee reported finding some ethnic groups more or less easy to deal with in terms of the background characteristics she perceived them to possess, for example, the perceived arrogance of Nigerian men and the perceived impatience of Chinese students (BME SS - pp.15/16). In terms of BME undergraduate students and undergraduate students in general, the Private Sector Accommodation Officer felt:

'But as far as the undergraduates are concerned, I honestly can't think of any (issues around race). We've got some wonderful mixed groups of different backgrounds, but also different cultures, obviously different features and what have you. I don't know how you'd put it, they all just look wonderful and they all mix together and I don't think any of them within the group have the first idea that there are any, they're all battling the same. They've just got a name and that's all they'll ever consider. They just mix, they just don't expect to do anything else.'

(BME SS 2 - p.13)

The picture is portrayed, therefore, of positive diversity. Again there is no ethnic monitoring of the occupancy of private sector accommodation under the Loughborough University accredited scheme. The relevant paper work recorded the number of students occupying the particular property but not their ethnicity and the respondent from the Service felt that the request for such information would be inappropriate and unnecessary (given their perception that there are few demands that can be directly related to this dimension).

There were no particular issues that the interviewee from the PSA Service felt particularly affected BME students or indeed ethnic minority students in general causing them to drop-out of Loughborough University. She felt all students might equally suffer from the sorts of difficulties that might lead to them dropping-out from university. For example, homesickness, financial difficulties, illness, family problems:

'I certainly don't think you could pin it down to it being anything at all to do with any sort of minority. It's just human beings all trying to live together.'

(BME SS 2 - p.17)

6.5 Community Wardens

Community Wardens were established to promote good relations between the student population and the residents of Loughborough town. They were seen as particularly necessary given the large numbers of students present in a relatively small town and the particular predominance of students in specific areas of the town. When they were established there were a number of conflicts between students and town's people; these revolved around issues, such as, unacceptable levels of noise (particularly during the night-time) and unacceptable methods of disposing of rubbish. Community Wardens, therefore, engage in conflict resolution and they also act as a sign-posting service for students, putting them in touch with, for example, Local Authority Services, the Police or Counselling Services. The main line of communication between the Community Warden and students is by email and the Warden is able to obtain from the University lists of all the students living in particular areas or streets. Community wardens deal with conflicts emanating from student lifestyles:

'Students have a particular lifestyle because they're young, because their households are anarchic. You know, when you're at home, stereotypically mum's in charge of the household and mum decides who's going to put the rubbish out and make sure that it happens on the right day and just keeps things ticking over. In a student household there are four, five people living there and nobody's in charge. So things don't get done or they get done very variably. These lifestyle differences also affect noise at night. Students get ready 'to go out; 9 p.m., 10.00 p.m. at night, often with music playing. Then 3.00 a.m. they come home, slightly. Stomp their way upstairs and slam the front door. Can't get to sleep. So they have to chill out by playing a very loud game of Play station. You can imagine the next door neighbour gets disturbed.'

(BME SS 4 - p.4)

The Community Warden felt that the problem surrounding the disposal of rubbish was largely a general one, rooted in an ignorance of the particular disposal and recycling processes of Charnwood Borough Council and the problem that student

households were essentially *'four virtually independent individuals, not one family'* (BME SS 4 - p.6). In short:

'Bournemouth has one way of handling its recycling. Camden has another way of handling its recycling. Edinburgh does it yet a different way. Beijing something different again. You get these four students from those different places living together in a house in Charnwood and Charnwood doesn't do it any of those four ways, it does it a different way yet again. You get piles of over-filled wheelie bins and the side waste doesn't get taken away. The garden gradually fills up.'

(BME SS4 - p.6)

None of the issues outline above were seen as being particularly related to BME students. Most complaints were related to Chinese students. They are perceived as producing more waste (adding even more to the problem described above) and there have also been reportedly specific complaints about *'shouted conversations'* (BME SS4 - p.7) in *'very loud and staccato'* (BME SS4 - p.7) Chinese voices. The concentration of Chinese students living together in close proximity was also noted by the Warden, as was the fact that they were a group which rarely sought the initial contact with the Community Warden themselves.

'Ethnic minority groups don't contact me much. They are very much the exception. Like I say they tend to live together. A whole household full of Chinese people and they look after themselves.'

(BME SS4 - p.17)

In terms of how he deals with students in relation to their ethnicity he tries not to concentrate on differences:

'I have always chosen not to learn their ethnicity. It's pretty conspicuous from the names, especially when they're Chinese and even Asian, it's fairly obvious, but I choose not to know. Maybe this is because I don't trust myself. I'm aware that I might be prejudiced.'

(BME SS4 - p.10)

CHAPTER 7 FINDINGS

In presenting our findings, we are seeking to draw-out the main messages that have emerged from our study. It is not our intention to then proceed to make recommendations, since we feel that the view the University takes in relation to our findings and any actions that might follow from this, is more properly the prerogative of senior members of the University.

An over-arching point that should be bourn in mind when interpreting these findings is that the British ethnic minority population of under-graduates cannot be viewed as an homogenous category. This may seem fairly obvious, however, some of our respondents at times discussed students in this group as if that were the case. BME students came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and family structures and varied to the extent that they had spent long periods of time living in this country ranging, for example, from undergraduates who had been born and raised in Britain to those who held British passports but who had lived in other countries for most of their life and had travelled to the UK for educational purposes and were living here without any nearby parental or family support.

It is also important to recognise that across the research BME student consistently had positive things to say about their experience of Loughborough University. They actively chose to study at Loughborough and were, in the main enjoying their experience of being a student. They also recognised that the challenges facing the university in finding ways of supporting BME students was a difficult one although they generally felt that they could see Loughborough was taking some very positive steps.

7.1 Choosing Loughborough

No link was identified between prospective students' perceptions and understandings of the ethnic make-up of Loughborough University and the likelihood of them electing to come to Loughborough to study. However, we have no way of knowing whether a group of prospective students did make this calculation and thereby rendered themselves de facto not part of our sample of Loughborough

undergraduates. The study does suggest, however, that representing and marketing its multi-cultural aspects positively may allay any negative perceptions on this score that do exist either currently or potentially.

7.2 Monitoring

Across all four departments focussed on in this study, there were no particular targets or strategies for increasing BME participation. It was generally assumed that any increase in take-up by BME would be achieved by more general widening participation strategies. How effective such strategies are in terms of increasing the number of BME students remains unknown by the departments (and the university). Throughout the admissions process, no monitoring of the ethnicity of students by the departments seems to be undertaken. Similarly, later in the process of student life, little monitoring took place at any stage in the departments and across all four departments staff expressed uncertainty about the make-up of their student cohorts and how BME groups were represented in these. This was partly because centralised information was not always available to departments and they themselves had no mechanism (or requirement) for using this information in their future planning. All departments do have procedures for dealing with 'failing' students or those who are in danger of 'dropping out' and no department thought BME students were more vulnerable to this phenomenon, however, none could provide any evidence to support this assertion. Similarly, apart from the Student Advice Centre (who have not analysed the ethnic background information they collect), none of the Student Welfare Services monitored the ethnic background of students using the service. None of the Student Welfare Services felt that BME students had particular needs and none, therefore, made any special provision for this group (apart from some specific provisions concerning food and Hall of Residence accommodation – see below).

7.3 The Impact of Organisational Structures

Regardless of the structure of the learning environment (workshop/placement/studio) it was recognised by departments that BME students had particular needs that should be taken into consideration. These tended to be identified as based in

religion and religious practices and events, for example, Ramadan. There was a growing awareness that different BME students' may have needs that impact on how courses are delivered. There are good examples where departments are responding positively i.e. negotiating time on placements for praying and single sex swimming for Muslim women. How far such issues were given the same status in all four departments and how far the timetable could be reorganised around them remained unclear. Some of the problems around timetabling related to the university system, in that flexibility outside the framework provided by the university is difficult, related to such factors as modularisation. Similarly in relation to equal opportunities, issues relating to how the practice and policy of the particular department impacts on equal opportunities on a day-to-day basis is managed by departments allocating the role to a named person. The quality of this system varies and in some departments the equal opportunities role was seen largely as an administrative role and, therefore, someone else's responsibility (the named incumbent). The role-holder would be seen as the 'spokes person' on such issues and the extent to which, under these circumstances equal opportunities can be seen as 'mainstreamed' remains unclear.

7.4 Hall of Residence Accommodation, Food and Alcohol Conflicts

From both BME students and Hall of Residence staff, there is evidence that there has been some contention over the provision of halal meat on a regular basis (when halal meat is not provided a vegetarian alternative is offered). This does not entirely address the students' complaints, plus a further difficulty has arisen because the use of the same cooking pots and utensils to prepare and cook the halal meat or vegetarian meal are deemed to render it contaminated and still, therefore, unfit for consumption by some groups. A cultural issue has also arisen about the provision of single-sex accommodation for Moslem women, again measures to accommodate this requirement also often fall-short of providing satisfaction because single-sex accommodation in Halls, still requires sharing of mixed-sex kitchens and single-sex flats rented from the university, may receive male visitors to other flat-mates; a male-free environment cannot, therefore, be guaranteed. Descriptions of these difficulties by a staff respondent involved rather an under-estimation of the potential impact and a glossing-over of deep-seated cultural and religious beliefs and down-played significant historical conflicts that may inform the back-ground to some of the

demands which she appeared to perceive as mere 'preferences' (and, therefore, compared to the English wanting 'fish and chips' when abroad or Spanish students not wanting to share accommodation with Italian students). In practice, Freshers' Week and the experience of becoming a resident in Halls are two critically important areas where BME students (not unlike other students) establish their friendships. There was a general agreement that these could have a major bearing on the friendships formed and consequently the social life a student leads at university. Some students really enjoyed the experience of Freshers' Week and of living in Halls during their first year at university. For many, the process of making friends was fairly straight-forward, however, for a number of students the process of making new friends proved more difficult and some linked this to a perceived lack of ethnic diversity in the Halls, which, initially, at least, proved problematic. Concerns were also expressed about the drinking culture amongst Loughborough students. There was evidence that the cultural values of some respondents, sometimes based on religious beliefs, meant that they did not find the drinking culture present at Loughborough attractive. Some non-drinkers therefore sometimes felt marginalised when they socialised, generally they adapted to the situation but there certainly appeared to be some 'otherness' experienced by BME students who tended not to drink and some non-drinkers reported that they would like more activities that are not drink-related or, at least, not where drinking alcohol constitutes a central part of the activity.

7.5 Integration v Special Provision

Some BME students wanted to see greater integration ethnically of the student body, others welcomed some recognition of difference and special provision to address this. Working in groups to carry out academic work is an example. There were mixed views about how to organise this type of working. Some felt uneasy about ethnic groupings working together and felt this should be actively discouraged by lecturers in order to aid integration. Others felt ethnic clustering was beneficial because they felt that those sharing the same cultural background worked better together, especially if some students were rather limited in their English Language skills. This could, however, feed into a more general lack of ethnic mixing. This issue is replicated in the decision of whether or not to cluster ethnic minority students

from a particular ethnic background in close proximity in Hall of Residences and also the value or otherwise of having Union Societies based on particular ethnic groups; together with the question of whether or not to provide specific career training for ethnic minority undergraduates (this is currently offered). BME students expressed views on both sides of this divide. This issue is part of the wider question of whether equality involves treating all undergraduates as essentially similar or whether true equality means recognising difference in order to address differing needs. Some of our BME respondents saw themselves as no different to counter-parts whose origins were British over many generations, whilst others wanted recognition of different needs in some areas, such as, for example, food or certain religious observances. The question also relates to wider debates in society as a whole concerning the value and beneficial outcomes of policies promoting integration versus those emphasising multi-culturalism. These issues are clearly challenging to the university and there are no easy answers although, however Services are constructed it is important that BME students do not feel stigmatized or problematised. Finding positive ways into supporting students is critical if they are to feel a part of the university.

7.6 Racial tension and Racism

There was some mention of specific racist or discriminatory incidents. These affected either the respondents directly or people they knew. The nature and extent of such incidents varied, with some being seen as directly racist, while others could be construed as racist. Sometimes BEM students felt themselves to be the subject of negative racial stereotypes. These might take the form of either casual stereotypical remarks rooted in ignorance and lack of cultural awareness or they might be associated, in a few cases, in prejudiced attitudes expressed in aggressive terms. Although some students felt that the university campus was a more tolerant environment than the town, BME students did witness incidents of racism from other students. Overall, however, our study indicates that both students and welfare services appeared to feel that racist incidents were considerably more likely to occur in Loughborough town centre than on the university campus. In terms of discussing such issues with Student Welfare services, it seems that such concerns are much more likely to be voiced to the Counselling Service than, for example, Community

Wardens, who despite their role in community conflict resolution, reported no experience of students contacting them about this issue. A number of students thought that whilst other students were friendly, some appeared to have not had much contact with people from an ethnic minority background, which made such fellow-students nervous and keen not to offend in their interactions with BME students. Despite this, lack of awareness itself was sometimes felt to be offensive and was thought to be a barrier to close relations between people from different ethnic backgrounds. Some of our respondents had, therefore, taken on the role of seeking to educate their fellow-students along this dimension. However, this may be seen to represent a burden that is not predominantly the responsibility of the BME student but is perhaps more properly addressed by raising the awareness of the majority group and allowing them to accept their own responsibility for educating themselves in this area. Awareness Training for staff is already an established part of university life and, arguably, awareness training for students would be equally valuable.