

**Scoping a Muslim friendly
Universities audit:
DMU Interim Report**
September 2024

**Richard Hall, Lucy Ansley,
Sumeya Loonat, Lamia Nemouchi,
and The Aziz Foundation**



Team Bios

Dr Lucy Ansley is the Research Fellow for the Decolonising DMU project, which aims to address racial disparity at De Montfort University. Her primary role within the project is its evaluation and supplementary research work. However, she has also contributed impactful support for programme teams and the development of a decolonising toolkit. Lucy has significant experience of conducting evaluation work as part of the OfS 'Addressing Barriers to Student Success' programme, where she conducted the evaluation for DMU. Lucy has expertise in a range of mixed methodologies, including grounded theory and critical race theory, alongside experience in designing and implementing surveys, focus and group interviews, observations, tests and documentary analysis. She has authored 3 peer reviewed articles, 6 project reports and delivered 15 conference papers.

Richard Hall is Professor of Education and Technology at De Montfort University, in Leicester, UK. He is also a National Teaching Fellow and an AdvanceHE Principal Fellow. As a member of the DDMU team, Richard is an Advance HE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence winner, and a UKRI Green Gown winner (for work on decolonising and decarbonising). Richard convenes the British Education Research Association, Social Theory and Education Special Interest Group. At DMU, he is the Chair of the Health and Life Sciences' Faculty Research Ethics Committee. Richard is also a member of the School of Applied Social Sciences Athena Swan Working Group, which received a Bronze Award.

Sumeya Loonat is Senior International Student Lecturer at De Montfort University and Fair Outcomes Champion for the Decolonising DMU project, which aims to build an anti-racist university. She is a DMU Teacher Fellow and Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Sumeya is a doctoral researcher, exploring critical perspectives in the context and construction of minoritised domestic and international students in UK higher education. She has delivered 20 conference papers, including talks on decolonising learning and teaching pedagogy, personal tutoring, and the international student experience

Dr Lamia Nemouchi is a Lecturer in Education at DMU. She is researching EDI in education policy and practice. Lamia worked on researching education using arts in different pedagogies to raise social justice issues to develop intercultural competence. She is currently investigating the experience of Muslim students in the UK education system since the Equality Act 2010 has been introduced and the experience of multilingual students in a monolingual UK education system taking a decolonising multilingualism approach.

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Research Context.....	4
2.1 Disparate outcomes.....	4
2.2 Inequitable experiences.....	5
2.3 Higher Education and societal Islamophobia.....	6
2.4 Resulting 'Satisfied settling' of Muslim students in UK HE.....	7
2.5 Summary.....	8
3. Institutional context.....	8
4. Research Design.....	10
4.1 Background.....	10
4.2 Research aims.....	11
4.3 Methods.....	12
4.4 A note on Quality and Integrity.....	18
5. Proposed deliverables and dissemination.....	19
6. Summary: study timeline.....	20
7. References	22
8. Appendix.....	27
Appendix A – Research diary prompts.....	27
Appendix B – Job Description for Student Advisors.....	29
Appendix C – Person Specification for Student Advisors.....	31

1. Introduction

Allen (2023) notes that the primary foci of research surrounding British Muslim students has historically been political activism and extremism. Saeed (2018) suggests that research on muslim students has focused primarily on Islamophobia or securitisation within universities. A small body of research into the lived experiences of British Muslim students has begun to emerge (Abbas *et al*/2023, Guest *et al*/2020, Islam *et al*/2019), including in relation to intersectional analyses (Mellor, 2010). However, more work is required focusing specifically upon first year undergraduates at their pivotal transition into higher education (HE) spaces.

The specific faith-based context is important because although much work has been undertaken in the United Kingdom (UK) on the race and ethnicity awarding gap (see, for instance, Universities UK, 2022), this has often been conflated with work on decolonising (see, for instance, Hall *et al.* 2023; Shain et al., 2021). Within university access and participation plans, there tends to be a focus on student-centred approaches, belonging, and inclusive learning environments, and the pivot for this has also tended to be the awarding gap, rather than social justice. Moreover, there has been a lack of focus upon students of faith in general and British Muslim students in particular (Stevenson 2014), alongside the socio-cultural practices and environmental factors that impact their belonging within UK HE (Islam *et al.* 2019).

NB we are mindful that we need to distinguish between the awarding gap that mostly serves the institutions and social justice. However, there are studies on the awarding gap for race and ethnicity that speaks to the experiences of Muslim students, but that lacks specific data on religion. This is compounded intersectionally. Here, Stevenson (2018) and Malik and Wykes (2018) show the disparity in achievement between male Muslim students (low achieving with higher rates of drop outs) and female Muslim students (high achieving).

This has tended to limit the opportunity for institutions to engage productively and generatively with the complexity of the student experience, and to enrich that experience. This is in spite of a history of reporting of the negative impacts on the British Muslim student experience (see, for instance, Office for Students (OfS) 2021), and the recommendation by Universities UK (2022) of the need for 'A greater push to implement university-wide change is needed so that the work that universities are doing to create inclusive communities is fully reflected in students' experiences.' Whilst this is a complex terrain that focuses attention upon structural constraints and barrier, communal cultures, and individual and collective identities, deep work is required to enable HE institutions to engage with such complexity.

Yet, intersecting issues impact the range of British Muslim student identities, including: a lack of religious literacy from staff and peers, which often leads to isolation and alienation; support for the representation and expression of faith on campus; access to appropriate funding for study; Islamophobia (amplified recently in relation to Gaza/Palestine); surveillance and the Prevent strategy; the relationship between universities, students unions, and Islamic societies; and, the availability of and access to appropriate, faith-based spaces and environments. Uddin et al. (2022) highlight the greater discrimination experienced by those with more visible signs of Muslim faith, and identifies how 'over-courteous, self-censored Muslim' responses to discrimination act to self-silence (for instance in relation to Gaza/Palestine).

Stevenson (2018) has highlighted the intersecting impacts of these issues with a clear focus upon the need for religious literacy. However, Gholami (2021: 323) notes that though

admirable a focus on such literacy can lead to interventions and 'standard' recommendations that are unlikely to be equal to the task: 'On religious literacy training, for example, it is not clear what this would entail, which groups or individuals would be best placed to deliver such training and whether they would have to focus on religion as a broad category or on a particular branch of Islam'

This is more important for individual institutions, precisely because the Muslim experience of HE 'is not homogeneous, and their experiences are therefore shaped differently, which impacts on their life choices and outcomes' (Malik and Wykes 2018: 17). Additionally, Muslims are arguably the most visible, and monitored, of all religious groups within HE, whilst their own perspectives and experiences continue to be under-reported (Guest et al 2020). In this, it is important to note the explicit work on Islamophobia by, for instance, The Aziz Foundation (AIWG 2024), and Universities UK (2021), which pivot around specific toolkits and the desire for meaningful and authentic actions.

The De Montfort University (DMU), Muslim-Friendly Universities audit focuses upon the student experience of British Muslim, first-year undergraduate students. It situates this experience against those students' conceptions of their faith, and also in relation to ethnicity, gender and disability. The primary intention is to understand how these students experience their Muslimness in HE. A secondary intention is that this research will materially impact the ways in which universities can recognise intersectional and faith-based complexities in the undergraduate student experience. We intend to understand these experiences, in order to define a co-created action plan to ensure that HE is as inclusive for British Muslim students as their non-Muslim/religious peers. Our starting point for this is through partnerships with students, facilitated with support, advice and guidance from the Aziz Foundation.

A primary gain will be for universities to consider how to enhance their engagement with the richness of British Muslim student identities, in order to support students' sense of belonging and positively impacting attainment, retention, and engagement (Pedler et al. 2022). A secondary gain will be for universities to put in place structures, cultures and practices that anchor their relationships with these groups of students, such that they are able to rebuild the bridge between undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision (Samatar *et al* 2023).

2. Research Context

2.1 Disparate outcomes

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, a global Black Lives Matter (#BLM) movement created the conditions in which anti-racist and decolonial projects within UK HE could gain traction. Across the UK, calls to address classroom and relational inequalities grew, alongside demands to broaden the corpus of study, and to close the ethnicity degree awarding gap. Notably, the OfS ambitiously called for the complete elimination of the awarding gap by 2038 (Samatar *et al* 2023).

However, despite the recognised intersections of ethnicity and religion, relatively little work has been conducted in addressing the disparity of student outcomes and experiences for those with religious beliefs. Analysed by religion for the first time in 2020, awarding data highlighted how Muslim students in particular are receiving lower outcomes than the general student population, with only two-thirds of these students awarded a good honours degree classification (Codioli McMaster 2020). Exemplifying these disparities, HESA (2024) data from 2018/19 to 2022/23 shows a 10% awarding gap in First Class Honours between

students from a Muslim background and the national average, which has increased since the pandemic, following a previous steady rate of 8%.

However, it is clear that this disparity stretches far beyond awarding gaps, and is deeply embedded into the fabric of HE, in terms of its structures, cultures and practices. Regardless of claims to secularity in HE (Stevenson 2018), the very organisation of the academic calendar is grounded historically in particular cultures and practices. For instance, the academic calendar is constructed around Christian holidays (Mubarak 2007), and requires other faiths to accommodate to that reality as it governs study. There is a sense that understanding faith-based experiences, and in this case, the Muslim student experience requires an understanding of how outcomes are shaped against a broader set of accommodations and settling within specific cultures and practices of whiteness.

2.2 Inequitable experiences

These cultures and practices shape the background of the British Muslim student experience, and are in relation with the awarding gap and student outcomes. Taking a critical approach highlights how creating an environment in which British Muslim students can succeed demands more than access to a prayer room and halal food. That said, Islam and Mercer-Mapstone (2021) identified 6 core needs of British Muslim students, for which access is sought (but not always granted): dedicated prayer rooms, Muslim chaplaincy, Islamic Societies, Halal food, consideration of religious observation during exam periods and opportunities for non-alcohol-based socialising (see, for instance, Shaffait 2019).

However, in relation to these core needs, there has been much focus upon the potential for a misalignment of university cultures and Islam as a way of life (Islam *et al*/2019). One key example is the transitional focus upon alcohol-fuelled welcome activities. Muslim students are made acutely aware through this focus on alcohol-based activity, that they are outsiders in the university experience, and must settle for a place within an established culture that is not theirs (Shaffait 2019).

In this context of settling, and of restricted ideas of belonging, it is perhaps unsurprising that around 70% of Muslim students choose to live at home while studying in HE, compared to 40% of the average student population (Allen 2023). This might offer one way of engaging familiarly and communally, about faith and the role of faith in study, which is foreclosed upon within university spaces. Discussions involving Islam within learning and teaching spaces are often very uncomfortable for British Muslim students who find themselves expected to justify the actions of extremists and present their own standpoint on controversial topics (Akel 2021).

This focus upon standpoints, connected to a critique of the essentialism of hegemonic knowledge, cultures and practices within the University, and the potential for creating counter-narratives that enrich the HD ecosystem, points towards the unfolding of what has been termed critical Muslim theory (Abdullah 2013), as resistance to whiteness (Breen 2018; Breen and Meer 2019). This helps to generate critical engagement with the contexts that shape what Guest *et al.* (2020) noted as the discomfort some students feel in being visibly Muslim. It enables a critical stance to be taken in assessing the celebrating of faith through the wearing of religious garments, and refusing to be made and object of suspicion. This is a deep, intersectional component, given that female Muslims in particular experience a higher rate of microaggressions and harassment, likely related to their hair and facial coverings which can be a more prominent sign of Islamic worship (Allen 2023).

It is important to recognise how an enriched understanding of the contextual factors that shape our Muslim students' existence inside and engagement with the University, is deeply implicated in attempts to close awarding gaps. Moreover, it is deeply implicated in, but tends to be hidden by, a focus upon measuring the student experience. This risks fetishising and homogenising that experience, rather than crack it open, in order to understand the myriad ways in which the University is experienced. This includes students who reported feeling pressured to minimise their visibility, such as British Muslim students, so as to avoid drawing attention to themselves.

However, it should be noted that the expression of faith does not simply open-up a negative terrain. It is clear that we need to consider how a focus upon awarding and outcomes might be developed critically, in relation to, for instance, the risks of harassment experienced by the students as they seek to express their faith (Akel 2021). Yet this also offers a clear path to consider more than simply the costs of personal expression, but how personal and communal expression might enrich our university ecosystems, and support a plurality of ways of knowing a world facing intersecting crises or polycrises (Tooze 2022).

2.3 Higher Education and societal Islamophobia

This work on enrichment also has to face the reality that the British Muslim student experience in the UK HE sits inside a socio-cultural terrain that is, at best, wary of Islam. In the Summer of 2024, the shocking murders of three young girls in Southport was seized upon by right-wing and far right politicians, influencers and networks to maintain anti-immigrant, anti-migrant and Islamophobic narratives. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB, 2024) noted:

These actions echo the far-right's growing intimidatory presence, exemplified last weekend on the streets of London with Tommy Robinson supporters openly spewing invective against Muslim communities. They are aided and abetted by sections of our increasingly right-wing media, whose agenda has always been to scapegoat Muslims for society's ills.

In the wake of these tragic murders and the far-right riots that followed, the British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA, 2024) Statement on Far Right Extremism, noted that 'Refusing to call out Islamophobia and permissive responses from authorities have allowed it to become one of the most tolerated forms of racism.'

This is exacerbated in relation to Gaza/Palestine. On X, Lilla Tamea also reported on the outcomes of freedom of information requests about racism, anti-semitism and Islamophobia (@lillatamea 2024). Reporting on 140 responses, she noted in her thread on X, that: 'There is also a clear need to do more for the safety and welfare of students regarding the ongoing war on Palestine. Universities must stop shying away from the conversation and allow / facilitate debate and education - and stop punishing free speech and protest on campus.'

In spite of the election of the Labour Party in July 2024, Muslim students return to campus for the 2024/25 academic session inside a socio-cultural ecology shaped by these recent riots, ongoing Islamophobia, and global events with significant religious ramifications, including genocide in Gaza/Palestine, the threat of a wider Middle Eastern war, and civil war in Sudan. Given the broad sense of identity and belonging across communities, this is a significant background context against which students of Islamic faith are returning to campus. This also has a deep resonance in Leicester, amplified by the disturbances of September 2022.

Thus, it is crucial that institutions like universities, which act as critical intercultural and intercommunal spaces, understand the impacts of events that impact and shape identity and belonging. There is a significant risk that such events lead to silencing and a lack of voice, or diminish the ways in which an individual's identity and belonging feel enabled inside hegemonic institutions. As a result, in the current socio-political context, it is increasingly important that universities understand the ways in which their British Muslim students can express, or are willing to express, their Muslim identity, or their Muslimness.

This matters because there has been an ongoing sense in which such expression has been diminished. In his exploration of Islamophobia in university spaces, Allen (2023) notes that this prolonged exposure to repeat microaggressions on campus, in learning and teaching spaces, and in university accommodation resulted in many of his respondents feeling hyper-aware of their actions, words and appearance, self-monitoring in an effort to appear safe and keep their heads down. This self-monitoring was also central to students' discussions held with Akel (2021), where they spoke of a fear of constant surveillance and needing to minimise expressions of their faith in order to feel safe and not draw attention to themselves. She goes on to note how Muslim students are perpetually 'negotiating, strategizing and navigating fear' (ibid: 36).

Zempi and Tripli (2022) linked this explicitly to the increased surveillance culture on university campuses, under the Prevent Duty. In their work, students again spoke of needing to self-censor and not being able to participate in 'academic discussion' for fear that their views could be misconstrued as extremist. This sense of surveillance and persistent fear of appearing a threat to others, fuelled by the implementation of the Prevent Duty, has created a significant barrier to inclusion and integration of Muslim students, who do not feel safe to express their religion for fear of being marked as radical (Abbas *et al.* 2023). In light of a widening sense of societal Islamophobia, understanding expression and modes of expression and depends any meaningful engagement with social justice agenda is inside our educational institutions.

2.4 Resulting 'Satisfied settling' of Muslim students in UK HE

A helpful way of understanding how British Muslim students accommodate themselves to our universities and their agendas, is in relation to satisfied settling. Islam *et al.* (2019: 94) identified this as 'A mechanism in which (Muslim) students have justified (unconsciously) not having access to a richer and more fulfilled university experience in relation to religious needs'. Shaped by majoritarian norms, previous educational experiences, expectation down-management and self-accommodation, this concept explains how Muslim students reshape their own agency and autonomy, in order to survive (Islam and Mercer-Mapstone 2021).

As a result, satisfied settling highlights that, for some British Muslim students, maintaining a faith-based approach to study and the student experience, demands significant compromise. In this, the students find themselves having to choose between their religion, as a way of life, and their education (Zempi and Tripli 2022). This is made worse by the educational offer being a subpar one, to which they are forced to settle, precisely because it does not meet their needs.

One clear example of this is witnessed in advice and guidance about, and mechanisms for engaging with, student finance. Student loans containing interest are a barrier to education for some Muslim students, as Islam prohibits interest (Habermann 2014; Malik and Wykes 2018). Despite this being an issue explicitly recognised by successive UK governments

(Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) 2014), a funding solution that supports access and participation for impacted individuals and communities has yet to be implemented (Abdulrahman 2020). Moreover, there is limited research available on the impact of this system on Muslims who are trying to adhere to Islamic teachings (Avdukic 2023; Muslim Census 2021). Whilst there remain competing interpretations from scholars about this issue, the structure of funding and access force Muslim students seeking to adhere to particular, faith-based ways of living, to accommodate themselves or limit the choices.

2.5 Summary

This audit will work from the basis that the concept of identity remains complex, multifaceted and intricately linked to cultural, social and historical contexts (Hall 1990). It recognises that the British Muslim student experience in UK universities is conditioned by a range of representations of Muslim people and Muslimness, which have tended to exacerbate the marginalisation and stigmatisation of Muslim individuals, or Muslimness as an identity facet (Ali and Whitham, 2018). This has also led to self-censorship (Guest et al., 2020). Of course, the impacts of traumatic events like the pandemic and the war on Gaza shape societal, institutional and individual representations. However, the audit team wish to use this complexity, in order to understand how these students internalise and express their Muslimness in relation to their specific learning environments.

The audit team wish to understand how the active or passive engagement of institutions with negative stereotypes about Islam can: first, contribute to the internalisation of feelings of othering, potentially affecting access of Muslim students to HE (Islam *et al.* 2019); second, shape their experience within HE to reinforce these self-perceptions through lived experience of microaggressions, subtle biases, exclusionary practices (Ahmed 2012) or practices that neglect religious identities; and, third, understand how these students celebrate their identity in relation to Islam as a holistic system, or 'a way of life, a code of laws, a complete system encompassing and integrating the political, social, and economic, as well as personal, moral, and spiritual aspects of life' (Dabashi 1993: 439). Developing such understanding lies at the heart of our core aim for this audit:

- to analyse how British Muslim, first-year students experience their Muslimness in HE spaces.

3. Institutional context

DMU has one of the most diverse staff and student populations of any UK HE institution. In 2020/21, the University had 27,534 students and 2,848 staff (1,206 academic and 1,642 professional services), with a turnover of £244 million. Of its student body, 49% identify as Black, Asian and Ethnically Minoritised, and DMU recruits from around 130 different countries. Of these students, 14% declare a disability, and the University have been in the top 100 of the Stonewall workplace equality index since 2016.

In terms of religious belief, the make-up of the University's staff and student cohorts based on the signed off HESA return for 2022/23, is given in Tables 1 and 2.

Staff	
Religion	%
Agnostic	0.8
Atheist	1.8

Buddhist	1
Christian	26.7
Hindu	7.7
Jain	0.1
Jewish	0.3
Muslim	8.6
No Religious Belief	32.6
Not Available	1.4
Other Philosophical Belief	0.3
Other Religious Belief	1.2
Prefer not to disclose	13.4
Sikh	2.8
Spiritual	1.1
Total	100

Table 1: religious belief reported by all staff, 2022/23

Religion	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
Any other religion or belief	428 (2.1%)	47 (0.7%)	475 (1.7%)
Buddhist	173 (0.8%)	89 (1.3%)	262 (1.0%)
Christian	5059 (24.5%)	1654 (24.7%)	6713 (24.4%)
Hindu	1318 (6.4%)	1562 (22.9%)	2880 (10.5%)
Jewish	25 (0.1%)	6 (0.1%)	31 (0.1%)
Muslim	4044 (19.6%)	1204 (17.7%)	5248 (19.1%)
No religion	6676 (32.3%)	826 (12.1%)	7502 (27.3%)
Not available	691 (3.3%)	660 (9.7%)	1351 (4.9%)
Prefer not to say	1516 (7.3%)	452 (6.6%)	1968 (7.2%)
Sikh	749 (3.6%)	316 (4.6%)	1065 (3.9%)
Total	20679 (100%)	6816 (100%)	27495 (100%)

Table 2: religious belief reported by undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, 2022/23

There is a significant cohort of Muslim students amongst both undergraduate and postgraduate populations. Within these groups, intersections of race and ethnicity, and gender, as well as disability, each have an impact on identity. Understanding the characteristics and factors that shape the relationships between these groups and the University is critical in defining a meaningful experience that centres Muslimness.

Any understanding of Muslimness at DMU emerges in relation to its Empowering University Strategy (DMU 2024a). This centres a desire for empowering people, pivoting around diversity, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) is a key cross-cutting theme in that strategy. This connects with innovations that have helped to anchor EDI initiatives across the University, which have been realised in the first UK Race Equality Charter (REC) Silver Award for a University, alongside the national successes of the Decolonising DMU project (Advance HE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence, and a UKRI Green Gown award). Moreover, there are institutional initiatives around Athena Swan, including bronze awards for several academic schools across the University.

Thus, this audit aligns with a range of institutional work on voice, agency and belonging (e.g. Islam 2020). Moreover, it is shaped against REC work that centres the desire: to

overcome differential awarding gaps for students; to repair the undergraduate/postgraduate pipeline/bridge for all students; to support the progression of all academic and professional services staff, for instance in relation to Women's and Race Equality Networks; to review and renew recruitment processes; to develop interventions to address underrepresentation in institutional governance. It is inside this institutional context that any understanding of Muslim identity and agency, or of the lived experience of Muslimness, among first-year British Muslim students, might emerge.

NB we are in negotiation with the University Strategic Planning Service and Information Governance team about gaining access to awarding gap data by religion. We are mindful that, akin to race and ethnicity data, these are protected characteristic data. That said, we want to analyse these data, in order to give context for the work we are going to do with student advisors. We regard this as part of our deeper engagement with the institution about how best to support enrichment and enhancement for British Muslim students, predicated upon an understanding of faith-based outcomes. Engaging with institutional teams around the access to, and engagement with these data is part of awareness raising, and decolonial work.

4. Research Design

4.1 Background

This audit builds upon established, mixed methods approaches developed and tested in the Decolonising DMU project (Hall, Ansley and Connolly, 2023), and explicitly connects with the interpretivist methodology currently being enacted in a DMU Academic Innovation Project (AIP) investigating *The impact of the current Student Loans regime on Muslim student engagement and retention in Higher Education*. Those approaches are as follows.

- The DDMU project integrates institutional surveys of staff and students around critical issues in decolonising (e.g. what decolonising means to the University community, with a focus on the practicalities of decolonising and challenges faced by individuals), with in-depth interviews. It then applies a grounded approach to analysis, in order to centre participant voices. In analysis, Critical Race Theory approaches aimed to bring marginalised experiences to the forefront, or to situate dominant voices against those experiences.
- The AIP deploys a systematic review focused upon retention, aspiration and value, in the relationship between HE and Muslim students who experience the loan system as a barrier. This is situated against OfS condition B3 on student outcomes (continuation, completion, awarding and graduate employment). This work underpins in-depth interviews with 12 DMU Muslim students or former students, who have experienced the loan system as a barrier. Constructivist thematic analysis is used, in order to model characteristics that shape the experiences of these students.

The audit team's approach will utilise an interpretivist approach inside a mixed methods study. This will enable the collection and interpretation of data that are contextually-detailed, and will also reflect upon the positionality of the research team. In all of our work, researcher positionality is central, and needs to be clearly articulated in the context of this specific research.

As British Muslims, one of the Co-Investigators meets the study's participant criteria (Loonat), whilst a second member of the team has extensive fieldwork engagement with decolonial and faith-based experiences of education as an international, Muslim researcher (Nemouchi). Both the Principal Investigator (Hall) and third Co-Investigator (Ansley) have

extensive experience in pedagogic and educational research, in relation to decolonising and anti-racist practice.

However, it is pivotal that this range of academic and staff-based expertise is extended through dialogue with four second-year British Muslim students enrolled at DMU, who will act as student advisers, to support promotion and recruitment, the design of research methods, and dissemination. In this way, they will be involved as advisors, able to build their confidence and expertise in research methods, analysis and dissemination. Co-creation with impacted communities, in shaping participative approaches to research, is crucial in generating authentic outcomes and counter-narratives that respect these standpoints.

NB These advisors are being recruited via Unitemps, and will be paid for their time working on the study (40hrs per student over the duration of the project). The Job Description and Person Specification are given as Appendices B and C.

4.2 Research aims

Our focus will be upon an audit of DMU, British Muslim, first-year students, and their experience of their Muslim identity, conceptualised as their Muslimness, whilst transitioning into the University. This will connect to the Aziz Foundation's suggested audit areas of faith provision, workplace culture/ inclusion, and academic experience. It will specifically focus upon all British Muslim, first-year students at DMU, who begin their undergraduate study during academic session 2024/25. It has the following aim.

- To analyse how British Muslim, first-year students experience their Muslimness in Higher Education spaces.

The concept of HE spaces refers to the physical and virtual environments in which the student experience takes place, and the institutional systems/places within which the academic, social and personal development of the students occurs when pursuing their higher education.

The audit has the following, linked objectives.

1. To identify how British Muslim, first-year students perceive their religious identity (Muslimness) when planning to pursue HE.
2. To identify intersectional factors, including socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender and disability, that impact the experience of British Muslim, first-year students.
3. To explore institutional strategies to ensure the retention of British Muslim, first-year students.

The potential benefits and outcomes for this project are a richer and deeper understanding of the lived experiences of a significant minority of DMU undergraduate students. This will enable the institution to engage in a dialogue about its structures, cultures and practices, and how those support the transition, retention and progression of British Muslim undergraduate students. We intend that this project, connecting to the outcomes of an already-validated, DMU-funded academic innovation project looking at the experience of Muslim students who see interest-bearing loans as a barrier to HE, will build further expertise in engaging with the Muslim student experience in HE. A secondary gain will be building capacity for further UKRI funding bids in this area.

4.3 Methods

This audit seeks to explore the lived experience of British Muslim first-year undergraduates through a qualitative approach that centres student voice (Islam 2020). Using survey and focus group methods, students will be asked to reflect upon their early experiences on campus, in relation to their Muslimness. Reflexive thematic analysis will then be used to identify findings from the data, recognising the interaction between data and researchers (Braun and Clarke 2023).

An anonymous survey will be drafted using themes from the literature surrounding Muslim student experience in HE. Themes such as university choice, accommodation, societies, campus facilities and relationships are discussed. These were considered through the lens of the initial stages of the undergraduate journey (Humphrey and Lowe 2017) before being further refined into three sections: *application*, *welcome* and *first weeks*. In this way, the survey will capture student reflections on this pivotal transition into higher education.

The existing literature highlights the many and varied ways in which British Muslim students are negatively impacted by their university experience, and so we did not want to take an overly deficit-based approach to our questioning, but rather to offer neutrally framed prompts that enable both positive and negative reflections. The survey will undergo consultation with our Student Advisors early in the autumn term before being launched in November. In addition to questions regarding their experience, demographic data will be gathered to provide an overview of the perspectives represented within the survey data, and allow for intersectional analysis. To ensure student anonymity, only faculty of study will be collected, meaning that students are not identifiable from their demographic information.

Focus groups will then be used to add greater depth to the themes emerging from the survey data, and to explore those question areas in more detail. A draft schedule was developed, influenced by the research literature, and this will also be presented to our Student Advisors for feedback. Alongside each focus group, the research team will make personal research memos about the sessions, noting atmosphere, distribution of participants and any non-verbal cues that may be of analytical significance, to provide additional context for the analysis process.

Researcher memos, or reflective diaries, will play a central role throughout the study and will be completed by both academic staff members and the Student Advisors. The diaries will focus upon the research team's experience of the analytical and methodological process, as well as their positionality throughout. The research team believe that reflexivity is an iterative process, not a check box exercise, and that authentic exploration of researcher positionality is a continual exercise throughout a study (Gani and Khan 2024, Braun and Clarke 2023). The diary writing process is therefore a useful tool in supporting the research team in maintaining their reflexivity throughout. A series of prompt questions will be offered to support the reflexive process, organised under themes that have been loosely aligned with project activity (see Appendix A).

NB within the study as a whole, religion or belief is a key inclusion/exclusion criterion, and as a result a full Data Protection Impact Assessment is required and has been signed off. All data will be managed in transit and at rest on encrypted, DMU technologies, and as soon as transcription has been undertaken, transcripts and original data files (voice recordings, field notes) will be destroyed by the PI from those technologies or by shredding as part of DMU's management of confidential waste. Under the agreed DPIA there will be no way for the PI to

contact participants individually. In order to maintain anonymity no linking data or emails will be stored. So, for instance, where students have moved on from DMU and are no longer members of the Prayer Room or Islamic Society we will not be able to contact them directly. Anonymity and confidentiality are key.

Method	Description of participants	Why method was selected	How the data will be analysed
<p>Anonymous survey based upon themes emerging from established literature in relation to British Muslim student experience of HE. This will include the collection of demographic data: Faculty of study, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious belief and disability status. These data will be gathered in order to align this study with other institutional audits of student experience predicated upon standard HESA data, and thereby enabling comparisons as appropriate. Individuals will not be identifiable, but rather the data will help to provide context and allow for intersectional analysis of the survey data.</p>	<p>British Muslim first year Undergraduate students, enrolled in 2024/25 on any DMU programme [in 2023/24, n = 1258, and we expect on current projections for a similar cohort]. Denscombe (2016) notes that it does not help to seek a benchmark for response rates, but rather to compare to similar studies. In line with this, we will be aiming for a minimum response rate of 20% (approx 250 students), as demonstrated by similar research studies.</p>	<p>To scope the complexity of, and relationships between, factors that shape the British Muslim, first-year students' experience of their Muslimness in HE spaces.</p> <p>We wish to enable as many students as possible from the cohort, to participate should they wish, in voicing their experience.</p>	<p>Reflexive thematic analysis will be used to analyse qualitative responses. This builds upon Braun and Clarke (2021). This has been used extensively in aligned social science research, in order to contextualise live experience against issues of culture, values, history, and so on. We believe that this will enable us to use an established and validated process, in order to situate the experiences of these participants against the literature.</p> <p>Quantitative responses will be analysed using descriptive statistics to explore key trends. Inferential statistics will be used to explore relationships within the data.</p>
<p>Focus Groups to explore themes emerging from the survey in greater detail.</p>	<p>Two focus groups of self-selecting, British Muslim, first-year students studying at DMU. Each focus group will consist of up to six students per group, and we will seek to recruit from the survey respondents.</p>	<p>To allow an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the individual as well as the collective narratives. Following on from previous experience, the team argue that the flexible nature of focus groups permits other questions to arise from the discourse with the participant (Whiting, 2008). This approach will enable the team to compare views, perceptions and</p>	<p>Reflexive thematic analysis will be used to analyse the focus group data.</p>

		beliefs across participants in a validated manner such that outcomes are reliable (triangulation was enabled through the participants acting as different data sources (Heale, and Forbes, 2013)).	
Researcher diaries with a focus on analytical process, our own positionality and moments of salience in relation to our individual identities, this method will follow what Goodman (2014: 103) describes as the concept of salient identities, 'the ones that are predominant or foregrounded in a particular setting'.	All four staff researchers, and four student advisors will keep separate diaries, predicated upon a series of prompts identified through research on positionality and the research process. This was trialled in the Decolonising DMU project.	To capture the analytical and methodological process of the research, alongside our individual experiences of this process, as both individuals and a team. Diaries offer a unique perspective on our individual positionalities throughout the research.	Reflexive thematic analysis will be used to analyse the research diary data.

4.4 A note on Quality and Integrity

This study is bound by the DMU Research Ethics Code of Practice (DMU 2024b), and in particular takes seriously a commitment to rigour, the management and mitigation of risk/potential harm, clear communication and responsibility, and accountability to stakeholders. In this, it also follows both the British Education Research Association (BERA 2024) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, and UK RIO's Code of Practice for Research (See Parry *et al.* 2023). These 3 codes have been used to guide the design of this study.

Thus, the following principles follow.

- Given the qualitative nature of this study, we align with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in our efforts to establish the trustworthiness of the study.
- Researcher reflexivity has been used throughout the design of the study and will continue to be utilised during data collection, analysis and reporting. This is particularly important given the varied positionality of the research team. Credibility, confirmability and dependability can be demonstrated through reflexivity, as it allows for theoretical transparency as the researcher's processes and ideas are captured.
- Member checking, or participant validation in the form of student collaborators, also ensures that the theory developed is accurately representative of the opinions collected from the field.
- Transferability is demonstrated through the use of thick description, the clear presentation of the research design, context and interpretation allows other researchers to be able to judge the suitability of this work within their own setting.

The research team have extensive fieldwork experience in pedagogic and educational research, in relation to decolonising and anti-racist practice, as well as faith-based experiences of education. The PI has significant expertise in safeguarding in vulnerable communities, and the team as a whole has undertaken all mandatory training, including in relation to safeguarding.

The student advisors will be inducted into the project formally, through Unitemps induction, and also in relation to the risks identified here. They will be briefed in relation to: safeguarding; disclosure; relevant sections of the University student regulations; and lone working. We are also in discussion with the Doctoral College around the students accessing research training (such as 'How to Analyse Qualitative Research' and 'Reflexivity in Qualitative Research') in support of their roles. The staff study team also teach on research modules, have developed resources around positionality and the conduct of decolonial research, and have designed training for Decolonising DMU Student Leaders and so will be able to embed this within our support of the students.

It is possible that student discussions may reveal lived experiences that are difficult to discuss. Participant wellbeing is paramount, and processes have been outlined throughout to ensure students are supported in their contribution to this study. Pre-focus group, a clear set of groundrules will be discussed, reminding participants that they can only share what they are comfortable with and will be advised not to share any information that increases the risk of them, or others, being identified. If any of the participants appear to show signs

of distress they will be offered the chance to withdraw immediately and will be signposted to relevant support services offered by DMU to ensure their wellbeing.

5. Proposed deliverables and dissemination

The following deliverables will form the core set of outputs from the audit.

- Final Report: the data from the survey and focus groups will underpin a final report from the project, which addresses the key aim and aligned objectives.
- Action plan: the recommendations from the final report will underpin an action plan that will address success measures and challenges based on the reported, lived experiences of British Muslim first-year students, with implications for institutional policy and practice.
- Briefing papers: from the ecosystem of audit/research projects, two briefing papers about core issues and challenges for British Muslim students will be developed. The first will focus upon for senior leaders, and the second for programme/curriculum delivery teams. They will also be disseminated to internal/external teaching excellence networks.
- Symposium: drawing energy from the ecosystem of audit/research projects and audits relating to the experiences of Muslim students in HE, a symposium will disseminate findings, exchange ideas and promote future collaborations to advance the understanding of the experiences of British Muslim students in Higher education. This will be advertised in partnership with The Aziz Foundation, and held at De Montfort University.
- Peer reviewed publications: a peer-reviewed journal article will be drafted for submission across the whole of the team, including research assistants.
- Funding applications: from the ecosystem of audit/research projects, it is intended that this audit will also underpin either a British Academy/ Leverhulme *Small Research Grant*, or a *full-bursary PhD application*.

6. Summary: study timeline

Building upon the foundations given above, in relation to literature review, institutional context, research design, and the recruitment of student advisers, the project will now progress through 6 key phases of activity. These are mapped against the project duration given overleaf.

1. Planning Phase
2. Student Advisor Recruitment
3. Fieldwork 1 – Survey
4. Fieldwork 2 – Focus Groups
5. Reporting
6. Dissemination

This report shares our progress in the first phase of the project, planning and ethical approval. Work has also begun in both areas of fieldwork, in the form of developing draft survey questions, the focus group schedule and research diary prompts. As we enter the autumn term, and students return to campus, we will be recruiting and training out Student Advisors, from the second-year British Muslim cohort. Once they have received their inductions, the students will begin consulting our data collection tools and supporting the recruitment drive when the survey opens in November.

The final report for this audit will share reflections on the recruitment and training of the Student Advisors, as well as the findings from the survey and focus groups. Recommendations for higher education institutions will also be generated from these findings.

Reflections from the research diaries will be used to generate an additional academic publication, reflecting on research collaborations between staff and students.

A key element for the enrichment of this work is funding agreed from DMU's strategic investment fund. As part of a co-creation bid, to support the work of the Education Studies Research Group at DMU, a day-long symposium will enable the project team to work with British Muslim first- and second-year students to develop their priorities for research in this area. This will include co-creating the action plan designed to ensure that HE is as inclusive for British Muslim students as their non-Muslim/religious peers. These priorities will be developed using arts-based and creative methodologies (led by Nemouchi who has expertise in these areas), in order to test the outcomes of this audit. The link to future research priorities, will focus upon institutional and sector-based potentialities and possibilities, grounded in the standpoints of these students. This will involve 15 participants, paid at E23 for 7.5 hours, plus refreshment at £13 pp (£2781.00).

	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24	Jul 24	Aug 24	Sep 24	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25
Planning Phase	[Teal bar spanning Apr 24 to Aug 24]											
Grant Agreement	[Teal bar: Apr 24 - May 24]											
DPIA	[Teal bar: May 24 - Jun 24]											
Ethical Approval	[Teal bar: May 24 - Jun 24]											
Literature Review	[Teal bar: May 24 - Aug 24]											
Student Advisors	[Light teal bar: Aug 24 - Oct 24]											
Recruitment	[Light teal bar: Aug 24 - Oct 24]											
Project Induction	[Light teal bar: Oct 24 - Nov 24]											
Training	[Light teal bar: Oct 24 - Nov 24]											
Diary study setup	[Light teal bar: Oct 24 - Nov 24]											
Fieldwork 1—Survey	[Dark teal bar: May 24 - Mar 25]											
Survey drafting	[Dark teal bar: May 24 - Jun 24]											
Consultation refinement	[Dark teal bar: Sep 24 - Oct 24]											
Data collection	[Dark teal bar: Nov 24 - Dec 24]											
Analysis	[Dark teal bar: Jan 25 - Feb 25]											
Fieldwork 2—Focus Groups	[Dark green bar: May 24 - Mar 25]											
Schedule drafting	[Dark green bar: May 24 - Jun 24]											
Recruitment	[Dark green bar: Jan 25 - Feb 25]											
Arranging sessions	[Dark green bar: Jan 25 - Feb 25]											
Data collection	[Dark green bar: Jan 25 - Feb 25]											
Analysis and synthesis	[Dark green bar: Feb 25 - Mar 25]											
Reporting	[Light blue bar: Jul 24 - Mar 25]											
Interim Report	[Light blue bar: Jul 24 - Aug 24]											
Final Report	[Light blue bar: Feb 25 - Mar 25]											
Dissemination	[Light green bar: Nov 24 - Mar 25]											
Collaborative conference	[Light green bar: Nov 24 - Dec 24]											
Symposium	[Light green bar: Feb 25 - Mar 25]											

7. References

Abbas, T., Awen, I. and Marsden, J. (2023) Pushed to the edge: the consequences of the 'Prevent Duty' in de-radicalising pre-crime thought among British Muslim university students. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 26(6), pp. 719-734.

Abdullah, M.R. (2013). *Islamophobia & Muslims' Religious Experiences In The Midwest— Proposing Critical Muslim Theory: A Muslim Autoethnography*. Unpub. Ph.D. Thesis, Kansas State University.

<https://www.proquest.com/openview/9ee6e13adf8fd6f13395020830a90af1/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>

Abdulrahman, M.M., (2020) 'Higher Education Loans Board in Kenya from the Islamic Sharia Perspective', *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, 18, pp. 34-42. Available at:

http://journalarticle.u...18-Dec-2020_4_34-42.pdf

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Akel, S. (2021), *Institutionalised: The rise of Islamophobia in Higher Education*, Centre for Equity and Inclusion, London Metropolitan University, London Metropolitan University: Centre for Equity and Inclusion

Allen, C. (2023) Everyday experiences of Islamophobia in university spaces: A qualitative study in the United Kingdom. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/17461979231210996>

Ali, N., and Whitham, B. (2018). The unbearable anxiety of being: Ideological fantasies of British Muslims beyond the politics of security. *Security Dialogue*, 49(5): 400-418.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010618794050>

Anti-Islamophobia Working Group (2024) *Strategies for Eradicating Islamophobia in the UK*.

<https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/resources/>

Avdukic, A., Khaleel, F., Abdullah, A., & Brawe, A. H. (2023). Religion as a barrier to the use of student loans for higher education: A community-based participatory study with Somalis living in England. *British Educational Research Journal*, 49, 370–404.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3847>

BERA (2024). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, fifth edition (2024).

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-fifth-edition-2024>

BIMA (2024). *BIMA Statement on Far Right Extremism*. <https://britishima.org/statement-on-far-right-extremism-aug-2024/>

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2021). *Reflexive Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2023) Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and becoming a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 24(1), pp. 1-6.

Breen, D. & Meer, N. (2019) "Securing Whiteness?: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Securitisation of Muslims". *Identities*, 26: 5, 595–693.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2019.1589981>

Breen, D. (2018). *Critical Race Theory, Muslim Schools and Communities: Faith Schooling in Islamophobic Britain?* London: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Codioli McMaster, N. (2020) *Research Insight: Religion and Belief in UK Higher Education*. AdvanceHE. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/research-insight-religion-and-belief-uk-higher-education>

Dabashi, H. (1993). *Theology of discontent: the ideological foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York: New York University Press.

DBIS. (2014) *Sharia-Compliant Student Finance: Government response to consultation on a Sharia-compliant alternative finance product*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281111/sharia-compliant-student-finance-product.pdf

Denscombe, M. (2016) *The Good Research Guide: for small-scale social research projects*. London: McGraw-Hill

DMU (2024a) *The Empowering University*. <https://www.dmu.ac.uk/empowering-university/index.aspx#:~:text=Our%20strategy%20is%20delivered%20through,People%20and%20Partnerships%20with%20Purpose.>

DMU (2024b) *Research Ethics Code of Practice*.

<https://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/research-documents/dmu-research-ethics-cop.pdf>

Gani, J.K. and Khan, R.M. (2024) Positionality Statements as a function of coloniality: interrogating reflexive methodologies. *International Studies Quarterly*, 68(2). <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae038>

Gholami, R. (2021). Critical Race Theory and Islamophobia: challenging inequity in Higher Education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 24(3), 319–337.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2021.1879770>

Goodman, D. (2014) 'The Tapestry Model: Exploring Social Identities, Privilege, and Oppression from an Intersectional Perspective', in Mitchell, D., Simmons, C. and Greyerbiehl, L. (Eds) *Intersectionality in Higher Education: Theory, Research, and Praxis*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 99-108

Guest, M., Scott-Baumann, A., Cheruvallil-Contractor, S., Naguib, S., Phoenix, A., Lee, Y. and Al Baghal, T. (2020) *Islam and Muslims on UK University Campuses: Perceptions and Challenges*. Durham: Durham University, London: SOAS, Coventry: Coventry University and Lancaster: Lancaster University. <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/33345/1/file148310.pdf>

Habermann, M. (2014) 'Islamic Finance and the Student Loan Market for Muslim-Americans', *Undergraduate Journal of Humanistic Studies*, 1, pp.1-13. Available at: http://carleton-wp-prod...07/Mike_Habermann_2.pdf

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.) *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222-237). London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Hall, R., Ansley, L., and Connolly, P. (2023). Decolonising or anti-racism? Exploring the limits of possibility in higher education, *Teaching in Higher Education*. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2023.2201676

Heale, R. and Forbes, D. (2013) 'Understanding triangulation in research', *Evidence-based nursing*, 16(4), pp.98-98. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/eb-2013-101494>

HESA (2024) *First degree qualifiers with a permanent address in the UK by classification of first degree and personal characteristics*. DT051 Table 26. Open Data CC-BY-4.0. <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-26>

Humphrey, O. and Lowe, T. (2017) Exploring how a 'Sense of Belonging' is facilitated at different stages of the student journey in Higher Education. *Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change*, 3(1). https://winchester.elsevierpure.com/files/340639/788788_Lowe_ExploringHowSenseofBelonging_original_deposit_with_set_statement.pdf

Islam, M. (2020). Developing religiously inclusive cultures for Muslim students in higher education. York: Advance HE. <https://tinyurl.com/3axn8szf>

Islam, M. Lowe, I., & Jones, J. (2019). A 'satisfied settling'? Investigating a sense of belonging for Muslim students in a UK small-medium Higher Education Institution. *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal*, 2(2): 79-104.

Islam, M., & Mercer-Mapstone, L. (2021). 'University is a non-Muslim experience, you know? The experience is as good as it can be': Satisfied settling in Muslim students' experiences and implications for Muslim student voice. *British Educational Research Journal*, 47(5), pp.1388-1415.

@lilatamea (2024). Reports of Islamophobia at UK Universities. <https://x.com/lilatamea/status/1829476768442454065?s=46>

Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Malik, A. and Wykes, E. (2018). *British Muslims in UK Higher Education: Socio-political, religious and policy considerations*. London: Bridge Institute. <https://www.azizfoundat...er-Education-report.pdf>

MCB (2024). *Bigots Exploit Southport Knife Violence Tragedy to Attack Muslims*. <https://mcb.org.uk/bigots-exploit-southport-knife-violence-tragedy-to-attack-muslims/>

Mellor, J. (2010). The Significance of Bonding Capital: Class, Ethnicity, Faith and British Muslim Women's Routes to University. In Y. Taylor (Ed.), *Classed Intersections: Spaces, Selves, Knowledges*, 73-93. London: Routledge.

Mubarak, H. (2007) *How Muslim Students Negotiate Their Religious Identity and Practices in an Undergraduate Setting*. Available online: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251290330> *How Muslim Students Negotiate their Religious Identity and Practices in an Undergraduate Setting*

Muslim Census. (2021) *Lack of Alternative Student Finance has directly disadvantaged almost 120,000 students*. Available at: <https://muslimcensus.co...o-university-education/>

OfS (2021). *English higher education 2021: The Office for Students annual review*. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/annual-review-2021/>

Parry, J., Woodhams, J., and Ahmed, A. (2023). *Code of Practice for Research: Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct*. UKRIO. <https://ukrio.org/wp-content/uploads/UKRIO-Code-of-Practice-for-Research.pdf>

Pedler, M.L, Willis, R, and Nieuwoudt, J.E. (2022) A sense of belonging at university: student retention, motivation and enjoyment. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, vol.46 (3), pp. 397-408.

Saeed, T. (2018). Islamophobia in Higher Education: Muslim Students and the “Duty of Care”. In: Arday, J., Mirza, H. (eds) *Dismantling Race in Higher Education*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60261-5_13

Samatar, A., Sardar, Z., and The Aziz Foundation (2023). *Transitions: British Muslims between undergraduate and PGT studies*. London: The Aziz Foundation.

Shaffait, H. (2019). Inclusion at university: Muslim student experiences. Kings College London. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/geography/assets/kcl-sspp-muslim-policy-report-digital-aw.pdf>

Shain, F., Yıldız, U.K., Poku, V. and Gokay, B. (2021) From silence to ‘strategic advancement’: institutional responses to decolonising in higher education in England. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 26 (7-8): 920-36.

Stevenson, J. (2014). Internationalisation and religious inclusion in United Kingdom higher education. *Higher education quarterly*, 68 (1), 46-64

Stevenson, J. (2018). *Muslim Students in UK Higher Education: Issues of Inequality and Inequity*. London: Bridge Institute. <https://www.azizfoundat...-Education-report-2.pdf>

Tooze, A. (2022). Welcome to the world of the polycrisis. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/498398e7-11b1-494b-9cd3-6d669dc3de33>

Uddin, M., Williams, A. and Alcock, K., (2022). Visibility as Muslim, Perceived Discrimination and Psychological Distress among Muslim Students in the UK. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 16(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.135>

Universities UK (2021). *Tackling Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred Practical guidance for UK universities*. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-12/tackling-islamophobia-and-anti-muslim-hatred-uuk.pdf>

Universities UK (2022). *Closing ethnicity degree awarding gaps: three years on #ClosingTheGap*. London: Universities UK. <https://www.universitie...-gap-three-years-on.pdf>

Whiting, L.S. (2008) 'Semi-structured interviews: guidance for novice researchers', *Nursing Standard*, 22(23), pp. 35-40. Available at: 10.1136/eb-2013-101494

Zempi, I. and Tripli, A. (2022) Listening to Muslim Students' Voices on the Prevent Duty in British Universities: A Qualitative Study. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 18(2), pp. 1-16.

8. Appendix

Appendix A – Research diary prompts

Positionality statement. To begin the research diary exercise, we will each write a reflexive position statement, introducing ourselves as researchers and contemplating how we arrive at this study – the identities we bring, our prior experience and our insider/outsider status. You may wish to refer to the [Decolonising DMU guide on Positionality and Position Statements](#) to support this.

For each of the remaining stages of reflection, a series of prompt questions will be offered to support the reflexive process, organised under themes that have been loosely aligned with project activity.

Motivations

- What motivated you to engage in this project about the experiences of British Muslim first-year students?
- Why is this project important to you?
- What do you aim to achieve through your engagement in this work?
- What would you like to gain personally from the experience?

Methods 1

- How are we making methodological choices, and what are the implications for the study?
- What do you feel the main challenges are for the research team in this project?
- What do you feel are the main opportunities for the research team in this project?
- How might you locate yourself in relation to the intended participants of this study? How might they view you and your role in the research?

Analysis 1

- How do you relate to the emerging themes from the survey? Can you see your own experiences reflected in them? In what ways does your experience differ?
- How are your relationships (within the research team and with the participants) influencing the research?
- What do you feel are the main challenges for the University emerging from this project?
- What do you feel are the main opportunities for the University emerging from this project?

Methods 2

- How are we making methodological choices, and what are the implications for the study?
- What do you feel the main challenges are for the research team in this project?
- How are your relationships (within the research team and with the participants) influence the research? What power dynamics are at play?
- How do you relate to the wider environment within which this study is taking place? How does your perspective on it influence the research?

Analysis 2

- How do you relate to the emerging themes from the focus groups?
- How are your relationships (within the research team and with the participants) influencing the research?
- What do you feel are the main challenges for the University emerging from this project?
- What do you feel are the main opportunities for the University emerging from this project?

Dissemination

- What do you feel are the key themes from the study? What is most important to share?
- What do you feel are the main challenges for the University emerging from this project?
- What do you feel are the main opportunities for the University emerging from this project?

Final Reflections

- How do you reflect upon the approach that this project took to engaging British Muslim first-year students?
- How do you reflect upon the outcomes of the project for students, staff and the University?
- What do you feel you have personally gained from your engagement with the study?

Appendix B – Job Description for Student Advisors

	Duties of the role
Overall purpose of the role	<p>Working with The Aziz Foundation, De Montfort University is undertaking an audit that focuses upon the wider, student experience of British Muslim, first-year undergraduate students at the University. The primary intention is to understand how these students experience their Muslimness in higher education spaces.</p> <p>The project team is seeking to recruit four British Muslim Students, who are in their second-year of study at De Montfort University, as student advisors to the project. These advisors will act as research assistants to help in the authentic planning of fieldwork, supporting recruitment, and peer review and dissemination of outputs.</p>
Main duties and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will engage in project team meetings to help plan the survey that will be available to first-year British Muslim Students at De Montfort University. • You will support the recruitment of first-year British Muslim Students for an audit that focuses upon their student experience at De Montfort University. • Building on the survey, you will support the recruitment of eligible students for one of two focus groups that will explore how these students experience their Muslimness at De Montfort University. • You will help peer review projects outputs, including conference presentations, briefing papers for academic staff and University leaders, an action plan for the University, and a final project report. • You will engage in relevant training and development, alongside mentoring opportunities, in order to develop your project management, research and dissemination skills. • Perform any other duties commensurate with the job grade as reasonably required from time to time. • Treat all DMU staff, students, contractors and visitors with dignity and respect. Provide a service that complies with the Equality Act 2010, eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations with particular attention to the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (or none), sex and sexual orientation. • All members of staff are responsible for their contribution to improved environmental performance and in reducing greenhouse gas emissions at DMU. It is therefore required that all members of staff are aware of how the Environmental Policy relates to their own role at the University. Staff conduct must reflect the values inherent in the Environmental Policy and where required staff must cooperate with environmental compliance and conformance requirements to help minimise our emissions to air, water and land. • The postholder should have a positive attitude towards health and safety, and be aware of and comply with all health and safety policies for the university, as applicable. There will be a requirement

Duties of the role	
	<p>to complete all mandatory health and safety training as deemed to be relevant for the position held. The postholder is expected to help maintain a safe working environment for staff, students and visitors by working closely with the local safety coordinator as required. Any accidents or dangerous incidents must be reported promptly through the university's reporting system.</p>
Skills and experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please note that full training will be provided in relation to public speaking and engagement, and there will be support available in the form of mentoring. • This student advisor role is open to any De Montfort University, second-year Muslim student with British nationality. You must be interested in supporting the first-year British Muslim student experience, through reflection on your own experience. • This is an opportunity to help develop skills and experience in relation to research and evaluation of the student experience, and the dissemination of findings. • You must be self-motivated and have excellent spoken English. • You must have a strong commitment to inclusive team-working.

Appendix C – Person Specification for Student Advisors

Area of responsibility	Requirements	Essential or desirable				
				A	I	D
Academic Background	British Muslim student enrolled on the second year of a De Montfort University undergraduate programme.	Essential		✓		✓
	Have a good understanding of the British Muslim student experience in higher education.	Essential		✓	✓	
	Experience of contributing to group-work as part of undergraduate work.		Desirable	✓	✓	
Knowledge / Skills / Abilities	Ability to network effectively with first-year undergraduate students to promote research initiatives	Essential			✓	
	Ability to communicate research findings with a range of different audiences		Desirable	✓	✓	
	Ability to reflect on the personal experience of a project.		Desirable			
Planning and organisation	Good organisational and administrative skills, including liaising with the project team	Essential		✓		
	Ability and experience of working to deadlines.	Essential		✓		
	Ability to work effectively in a team to achieve the goals of the project.	Essential		✓	✓	
Other	Be committed to equality and diversity within the workplace and across the research project.	Essential		✓	✓	
	Willingness to develop own skills as a student advisor.	Essential		✓		