



Antiracism, Access, and Inclusion

RESEARCH AT FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY

APPLIED INSPIRATION'S SEER SERVICE

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from research conducted at Falmouth University during the autumn/winter of 2023. The research was designed to support Falmouth University in its commitment to promoting an inclusive university and in addressing any barriers and/or practices of discrimination impacting global majority students¹.

Data collection consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews, lasting around 1 hour each, with global majority current students and alumni. The interviews were conducted by Dr Misri Dey, Senior Lecturer, Theatre and Acting, and Ms Faith Kirigha, a PhD student at Falmouth University with expertise in digital authoritarianism and antiracism. Dr Dey and Ms Kirigha were asked to conduct the interviews, and indeed to recruit participants, based on their existing relationships with potential participants, which brought a degree of trust that would have been lacking had an external interviewer been used. Additionally, both Dr Dey and Ms Kirigha had extensive expertise in the subject area and had lived experience as members of the global majority.

A total of 8 interviews took place during October and November 2023. These were a mixture of online and in-person, as convenient for participants and interviewers alike and involved both UK-domiciled and international students. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically. Research design, analysis, and write up were conducted by Applied Inspiration's SEER service.

Research findings are structured as follows:

- Choosing and Transitioning at Falmouth University
- Experiences of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum
- Building Community and Connections
- Culture and Diversity and Anti-Racism at Falmouth University
- Ways Ahead.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Theme	Summary Findings
Choosing and Transitioning at Falmouth	<p>Experiences of transitioning to Falmouth reflect a variety of factors, some of which are typical of the "typical" student journey into higher education: being far from friends and family, returning to formal education after a break, taking time to get to know other people, challenges with accommodation. Interviewees were also responding to the specifics of Falmouth: that is, geographical isolation and an overwhelmingly white majority. In some cases, this was unexpected.</p> <p>Experiences of systems of support varied. The post-graduate student was very positive about the postgraduate community and its supportive culture. In some instances, undergraduate interviewees were able to feedback positively on specific services, e.g., disability, but otherwise the "broad brush" approach of welcoming emails and freshers' activities missed the mark.</p>
Experiences of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum	<p>Interviewees were positive about relationships with staff. In terms of the curriculum, some international participants felt at a disadvantage, particularly around the "hidden curriculum" and assumptions of prior knowledge that relied on experience of the UK education system pre-HE.</p>

¹ The term 'Global Majority' "is a collective term that refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and/or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'". (Campbell-Stephens, 2020, p. 2)

Building Community and Connections	<p>Interviewees commented on strong society life at the University and, in some instances, this was positively received as a demonstration of multiculturalism and variety. In other cases, interviewees commented on notable “gaps” e.g., other students who were deaf/Deaf, or the amalgamation of African and Caribbean into one group, which was felt to be inappropriate.</p> <p>Participants appreciated the natural beauty of the area, and others enjoyed the cultural offerings and café culture of the town. University spaces, in particular the library, were less popular.</p> <p>When forming connections with their peers, accommodation played a big role for some participants. Where accommodation friendships were not successful, this made forming friendships much harder.</p>
Culture and Diversity and Anti-Racism at Falmouth University	<p>Participants were conscious of a sense of difference with some students, particularly with regard to socio-economic status and income. Others felt held back by their accents and fears of not being understood.</p> <p>Participants remarked on being able to “pass” as white and how this mediated their experiences of inclusion. One student who had received racial abuse, did not recognise it as such, which is concerning. Some participants were concerned about the whiteness of industries to which they were hoping to graduate.</p>
Ways Ahead	<p>Participants were positive about Falmouth and Cornwall but were not planning on staying beyond graduation. There was concern about the price of housing in the area and the lack of opportunity career-wise. Several were keen to return to family or to experience greater cultural diversity.</p>

Table 1 Summary Thematic Analysis

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Review antiracist teaching and education programmes across the University:** Whilst participants are mostly positive about their experiences at the University, there is evidence in the findings that awareness of racism and discriminatory behaviour is limited. Some participants feel comfortable because they are white passing, which raises questions about experiences of those who are more visibly global majority. At the same time, experiences of racism are not necessarily recognised as such, and students with strong accents may feel deterred from speaking. Encouraging reporting may be a partial solution, but when the overwhelming majority of those in authority are white, this is limited. Similarly, it is not the responsibility of global majority students to dismantle discriminatory and oppressive structures; this is a whole culture, institutional approach, which needs leadership from the top.
- **Consider the extent to which policy and practice acknowledges the intersectionality of experiences:** participants relayed a variety of experiences and contexts interwoven with prior educational experiences, nationality, age, socio-economic status, disability, ethnicity, and other variables. Initiatives that collapse such differences (e.g., African-Caribbean Society) can be viewed as reductionist. Institutional strategies, frameworks etc., need to be cognisant of this intersectionality.
- **Build on networks with campaigners and activists across Cornwall:** The experiences of participants were necessarily mediated by the specific context of Falmouth and of Cornwall, which is remote and predominantly white. The University can build its global majority population through the expansion of international students and continue its efforts to encourage access to UK-domiciled global majority students. Similar attention needs to be paid to the recruitment and promotion of global majority staff. However, the demographic composition of Cornwall is a larger, more complicated phenomenon. Ongoing consultation with staff and students will surface some of these connections, such as [Black Voices Cornwall](#) and [Cornwall Antiracism](#).

- **Capitalize on best practice as endorsed by Advance HE:** we are conscious that this report falls within a much wider programme of research and change for the University, as it develops evidence for the Race Equality Charter. Advance HE publishes a range of good practice initiatives, to help institutions develop their practice <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/good-practice-initiatives>. The following guidance in particular may be useful:
 - De Montford University: Increasing BAME student visibility <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/charters/rec-athena-swan-initiatives/de-montfort-university-increasing-bame-student-visibility>
 - The University of Manchester: Report and Support: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/charters/rec-athena-swan-initiatives/university-manchester-report-and-support>

2. INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings from research conducted at Falmouth University during the autumn/winter of 2023. The research was designed to support Falmouth University in its commitment to promoting an inclusive university and in addressing any barriers and/or practices of discrimination impacting global majority students².

Data collection consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews, lasting around 1 hour each, with global majority current students and alumni. The interviews were conducted by Dr Misri Dey, Senior Lecturer, Theatre and Acting, and Ms Faith Kirigha, a PhD student at Falmouth University with expertise in digital authoritarianism and antiracism. Dr Dey and Ms Kirigha were asked to conduct the interviews, and indeed to recruit participants, based on their existing relationships with potential participants, which brought a degree of trust that would have been lacking had an external interviewer been used. Additionally, both Dr Dey and Ms Kirigha had extensive expertise in the subject area and had lived experience as members of the global majority.

A total of eight interviews took place during October and November 2023. These were a mixture of online and in-person, as convenient for participants and interviewers alike and involved both UK-domiciled and international students. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically. Research design, analysis, and write up were conducted by Applied Inspiration's SEER service.

Findings from this research will support Falmouth in its application to the Race Equality Charter and in providing an evidence base of student lived experiences. Action by the University in response to this consultation will be designed to help Falmouth meet a number of commitments in its 24/25-27/28 Access and Participation Plan (APP) pertaining to continuation and attainment for Black and Minority Ethnic students.

The research aim was to:

- Gain knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of global majority students and alumni at Falmouth University

With the following objectives:

- Explore the experiences of global majority students and alumni including:
 - Experiences of curriculum and teaching and learning
 - Sense of belonging at Falmouth University, to the locality/region, and to wider non-geographic communities
- Develop a critical understanding of key themes and concepts pertaining to anti-racism, particularly with regard to the concept of belonging, to inform data collection and analysis
- Gain knowledge of anti-racist best practice from across the sector, to align with existing practice and intentions at Falmouth University.

Research findings are presented in Section 3 of this report below, structured as follows:

- Choosing and Transitioning at Falmouth University
- Experiences of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum
- Building Community and Connections
- Culture and Diversity and Anti-racism at Falmouth University
- Ways Ahead.

² The term 'Global Majority' "is a collective term that refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and/or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'". (Campbell-Stephens, 2020, p. 2)

This is followed with a summary of findings as recommendations for next steps.

The research proposal can be found in Appendix A of this report, with a copy of the Interview Guide Sheet in Appendix B. The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form are located in Appendix C.

3. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Participants were from a variety of backgrounds, with differing experiences of pre-HE education systems, differing exposures to educational instruction through the medium of English, and with varying life experiences, such as caring responsibilities. Participants were primarily studying, or had studied, arts-related subjects, as reflects the specialisms of the University. There were a total of eight participants.

3.1. CHOOSING AND TRANSITIONING AT FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Attraction to Falmouth University

Participants were generally attracted to Falmouth because of its reputation for academic and creative freedom, its peaceful location, and a sense of supportive community. In some instances, participants were attracted to the University because of existing personal connections. Some participants were also attracted by specific disciplinary specialisms (such as Cinema and TV). Interviewee 4 noted Falmouth's small, close-knittedness, which "made the course sound more engaging than any of the others", and Interviewee 2 was attracted by the sense of peace and simplicity of the region: "I can't deal with [city living]. It is too overstimulating." Interviewee 6 commented that the University was conducive to positive mental health, while Interviewee 8 was attracted by the coastal location:

"I grew up in a seaside town, and I've always... been drawn to that." (Interviewee 8)

Expectations and Preparedness

Participants arrived at Falmouth University with differing expectations and levels of preparedness. In part, these were informed by individual family backgrounds. For example, Interviewee 7 felt far from existing friends and family who would ordinarily be called upon to provide support:

"Initially when I came here, it was really difficult to find accommodation in Falmouth. Falmouth is too far from all the support... my relatives who are mostly... based in central UK or London. So, it was initially a little bit difficult." (Interviewee 7).

As a mature student with child-care responsibilities, Interviewee 7 found it necessary to prepare meticulously. Interviewee 3 was anticipating a white-majority environment, but still found the extent of cultural homogeneity at Falmouth surprising. Participants' expectations and preparedness were also influenced by previous experience of HE. For example, Interviewee 7 was passionate about starting the PhD programme, which was a "lifetime ambition". Some participants noted that it took them some time to adapt the new environment. For example, Interviewee 2 had just completed a busy gap year before enrolling, and so found the return to formal education initially challenging. Interviewee 5 commented that it took time to acclimatise and begin interacting with others:

"No, I was not prepared... I don't know how I would deal with it, but like when I go into a new setting, I put my guard up. I don't show anyone anything... it takes me... a good... three months... to settle into something new." (Interviewee 5).

Emotional and Personal Wellbeing

Initial experiences of emotional and personal wellbeing varied, but with some common themes across participants. As participants were immersed in an overwhelmingly white British locality³, some experienced a heightened self-awareness of difference. Interviewee 1 described transitioning and meeting new people as "nerve-racking and intimidating"; whilst this may well be common for all students, it was enhanced by a recognition of the "town and the demographic", which made them more self-aware of their own presentation. Interviewee 1 reported that they

³ Falmouth is 94.9% White, (vs. England at 81.0%) (ONS, 2021b). Cornwall itself is 98.6% White (ONS, 2021a)

became more careful to not present stereotypically. Such feelings were internalised, with the participant adding “I’m not sure if that happens to everyone, but that was just me.”

Participants also commented on an initial sense of isolation:

“Even though I was enjoying living in Falmouth, I was quite isolated as I’d just moved... I didn’t have any friends... I wasn’t properly in the community. I was lingering around the edges... the transition was really, really hard... I was struggling emotionally at the time.” (Interviewee 4).

Interviewee 8 added:

“... the most challenging thing was having to deal with being on my own” (Interviewee 8).

The experience of liminality, or being on the edges, is echoed in the testimony of Interviewee 3, who described shifting to “university life” and associated increased independence as “[an] in-between place... not sheltered... and then full-on adulthood”. Interviewee 3 reported focusing on time management and meal preparation as effective strategies. Whilst this experience is not unique to global majority students, it is important to note that global majority students are managing transitional experiences alongside navigating the presentation of self and the amplification of visible difference found in culturally homogeneous spaces.

Interviewee 7 commented on the inclusive experience in their relationship with their landlords:

“I feel at home because... my landlords, they are really good people... tolerance and community participation are crucial for they were interested in knowing even though they’re from a different... culture and background... they also involved me in the events and the community activities, and they took me with them... wherever they went” (Interviewee 7).

Accommodation

Experiences of accommodation stand out as one of the most significant aspects informing transitioning to Falmouth. Interviewees 2 and 3 felt that student housing (i.e., halls of residence) was more conducive to integration into university life and events, although there were some concerns about the quality of student accommodation on offer:

“I moved straight into a privately rented house... I definitely should have gone into hall, but XXXX is not the nicest place to live” (Interviewee 2).

However, Interviewee 4 reported “hating” living in halls. Meanwhile, interviewee 6 felt positive about living in halls during the first year stating, “[it] is really good because it’s very convenient to commute to campus”. Experiences for participants are mediated by the dynamics (and personnel) of shared accommodation, including cleanliness, upkeep, and mutual respect. Both interviewees 7 and 1 spoke of their living partners as inclusive and welcoming, which had a positive effect on their experiences of transition.

Choices and experiences of accommodation were influenced by finances. When moving into private accommodation in Year 2, some international participants experienced difficulties providing a guarantor. Interviewee 6 commented:

“...funding for the second year, funding a house or like a private home. It’s very stressful. Not only about me, but... even the local students, they do feel it as well.” (Interviewee 6).

Meanwhile, Interviewee 8 found accommodation to be particularly expensive and, whilst not getting on particularly well with their flatmates, felt “kind of lonely”.

Systems of Support

Participants commented on both institutional and peer support. Experiences of institutional support varied according to different needs and contexts surrounding participants. For instance, Interviewee 7 was a postgraduate student, and spoke highly of the support they received from university staff, from the postgraduate research (PGR) community, and from their supervisors:

"When I came here, they assured me all sort of support in terms of... finding accommodation".

Interviewee 3 (an undergraduate student) on the other hand, was ambivalent about the institutional support and guidance received. Welcome emails from the University were felt to be too vague and Freshers' Week overwhelming. Available resources to help with induction and transition were felt to be fragmented:

"I don't remember feeling like completely brought in... I wasn't really sure where I was supposed to be."
(Interviewee 3).

They added, in reference to Freshers' Week events:

"[They] seemed to be thrown at you in one bunch and I didn't actually understand any of it." (Interviewee 3).

This participant felt they lacked information on the right channels to use in communicating some of the problems: "I just wasn't really sure... who I could talk to."

However, as term progressed, Interviewee 3 was able to build on positive encounters with their personal tutors and with Student Services. In particular, Interviewee 3 was able to relate to their tutor, with whom they shared a cultural background.

Interviewee 5 was very positive about the proactive approach of the disability team. They felt that proactive contact demonstrated a genuine interest in fostering an inclusive learning environment. Interviewee 6 was also very positive about the international team, which provided pickup services from the airport, and arranged for the onward journey to Falmouth:

"It eased me a lot because [it was] the first time travelling abroad and you don't know how to get to Falmouth... it's kind of scary." (Interviewee 6).

Peer support proved crucial for some participants as they navigated the challenges of university life. Interviewee 4 emphasized the significance of peer relationships, particularly in the aftermath of a challenging incident. For Interviewee 6 the connection with a fellow international student served as a crucial source of assistance in preparing for classes and understanding coursework. Interviewee 7 raised the collaborative ethos within the postgraduate team, where her peers helped her secure a job at the University:

"When I raised... that I'm struggling financially... they helped me find a job within the university... they were really helpful" (Interviewee 7).

Additionally, Interviewee 8 highlighted the role of friends for mutual support, contributing significantly to the overall student experience.

3.2. EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING, LEARNING, AND CURRICULUM

Relationships with Staff

Participants were generally positive about their lecturers and other staff members. For example, Interviewee 4 commented:

"I could sing like the praises of XXXX for the rest of my life, and I could probably shout it from the rooftops, and it probably still wouldn't be enough" (Interviewee 4).

Interviewee 5 also noted:

"I don't know everyone here, but the teachers that I've met, they've been lovely and amazing so yeah" (Interviewee 5).

And Interviewee 7 stated:

"they bring you in the discussion... they appreciate you a lot. So... I have never felt neglected... I'm 100% heard." (Interviewee 7).

However, Interviewee 2 felt they could have received more support following the death of a family member.

Curriculum

Responses from participants are indicative of not only differing experiences, but also different learning needs, areas of interests, and sense of accessibility of the curriculum. In some instances, these are mediated by prior educational experience. For example, Interviewee 6 (an international student) received helpful support on developing an academic approach to essay writing. Participants also varied in their feedback on preferred depth of immersion into the curriculum. Interviewee 2, for example, requested more in-depth discussions to complement the interesting coursework on their course, particularly when new terminology is used:

"... Sometimes I do get a bit lost with what they are saying... just with the terminology they use... I don't feel like we go into some of the subjects in as much depth as I like." (Interviewee 2).

Interviewee 1, meanwhile, felt there was a need in some cases to bridge gaps in the curriculum for those who had not previously been exposed to the UK education system and specific content that was otherwise taken for granted:

"We're doing work and someone's like, "Oh yeah, sound like this person... I have no idea who this person is." (Interviewee 1).

Interviewee 2 voiced a need for more support during stressful periods, with Interviewee 8 also stating:

"Some bits of my course I found a little bit challenging as well... I would stress out completely" (Interviewee 8)

Assessment and Feedback

Experiences of assessment and feedback varied amongst participants. Interviewee 3 was pleased with ongoing feedback on their work and learning:

"I think one... thing that really helped was like any sort of sessions where we've had continuous feedback on stuff that we're doing. It has helped massively because now we know what direction to go in" (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 4, meanwhile, felt the Covid-19 pandemic had changed their experience of assessment, with individual assignments and video-based collaborations creating a more organised and clearer feedback system. Interviewee 6, a postgraduate, already had experience of assessment at an HE-level so did not feel too anxious, although they were very positive about the personalised guidance they received from tutors, which played an important role in developing their confidence and feeling supported. Similarly, Interviewee 7 (a PhD student) felt well-supported by their supervisor, particularly with important deadlines.

“... that attention that my supervisors gave, the kind of time that they gave... I don’t think anybody gets that much... attention and time from their supervisor... I’m really grateful for it and feel very lucky...” (Interviewee 7).

Interviewee 2’s experiences of assessment feedback were not positive:

“I don’t think I got any useful feedback. For example, with the last two projects we did last year, I don’t think I got any feedback. I just got my grades online and then that was it... There was no feedback... I’m like “oh, what could have been done a bit better?”” (Interviewee 2).

Other participants also commented on varying standards of feedback and a lack of clarity from some tutors/lecturers in some instances.

3.3. BUILDING COMMUNITY AND CONNECTIONS

University Societies and Finding Shared Experiences

In reflecting on experiences of community and connection at Falmouth, participants spoke of the role of university societies. For some participants, this was an important means by which they could meet others with similar life experience, and begin to explore the broader student experience. For example, Interviewee 5 chose to join the African Caribbean Society, the Asian Society, and the K-pop Society. These were gatherings whereby Interviewee 5 could learn and explore beyond their own cultural background and could build relationships across a range of groups.

Prior to enrolment, some participants made use of Open Days as a space of inquiry. Interviewee 4 made use of Open Days:

“to see if there's anybody else that looks like you that you don't even register doing sometimes” (Interviewee 4).

Similarly, Interviewee 5 was keen to meet with others with similar life experiences:

“I haven’t seen anyone... other deaf people, which is weird... I’d like to meet some other deaf people... like a deaf meet up...” (Interviewee 5).

Interviewee 3 commented on the university app, which was very useful in helping them to navigate the early weeks of university life, to find information, and to stay connected through different events:

“... the app that was... my ... lifeline in the early weeks of like trying to find stuff out... social event. I had to find them from the app because I think everyone had a group chat on Snapchat.” (Interviewee 3).

Social media was therefore particularly important for some participants.

Some participants expressed some concerns with the way some university societies are formed. Most prominently, Interviewee 1 expressed concern about the African-Caribbean society, which they found was an unhelpful amalgamation of very different cultures and experiences:

“I think African and Caribbean cultures are different, and yes, they share similarities... I'm not sure what they share, but my global perspective, or like from my perspective, African cultures... are a bit different from Caribbean. So, I'm like, why do we then box them as one, because. They are different [...] I just don't get the grouping” (Interviewee 1).

Interviewee 2 was disappointed with their experiences with university societies:

"I don't feel any connection with [the student body] to be fair... I don't feel a massive need to [...] I would definitely say it's important. I haven't made connections with anyone, I would definitely like to, but it's just not happened" (Interviewee 2).

Space and Place

Participants found a range of spaces to frequent that resonated with them, commenting mostly on the range of cultural and natural spaces available in and around Falmouth. Academic spaces such as the library were useful around times of assessment, but participants made use of other social spaces. Interviewee 3, for example, reported:

"I think to me, my friends, it was like mostly like food establishments so 'Koofi' café. Didn't go to the library too much. That was more of a 'I'll go to the library when I need a bunch of stuff in, like essays'" (Interviewee 3).

Interviewee 4, however, found the library to be a distinctly negative space, preferring green spaces available:

"I was fully terrified of the library... I hate it. I hate it so much. I was constantly scared that I was going to be like doing the wrong thing... I really liked... the little orchard..." (Interviewee 4).

Interviewee 4 in fact eschewed much of the traditional student scene for the natural spaces across the county and found a sense of community here:

"I'm not big on like nights out or anything... I didn't feel like I was massively part of what was happening in town all the time and different shows happening and gigs and like events. But we kind of all had like this separate community of people who were just, like, actually exploring Cornwall while we were here to make the most of it, which is really, really nice" (Interviewee 4).

Interviewee 3 was similarly keen on outdoor activities and exploration, while Interviewee 8 commented on the healing power of the beach in summer months.

Interviewee 7, conversely, found a sense of personal resonance with the wider cultural offerings of Falmouth with the community arts centre, Cornish Bank:

"I think Cornish Bank is a place I really love... the first time when I went to Cornish Bank, I went to see a movie. It was about... something from the Middle East... resonated with myself... I felt really, really attached to that place..." (Interviewee 7).

Building and Sustaining Friendships

Participants reflected differently on their experiences of building connections with others, with many finding challenges in this area, including a sense of isolation. Interviewee 1, for example, felt a need to push themselves to turn acquaintances into actual friendships:

"I have very amazing course-mates... but in terms of friendship and individual relationships, I don't think I encourage myself to do that" (Interviewee 1).

Similarly, Interviewee 3 experienced challenges in approaching flatmates and coursemates:

"... my flatmates were [...] socially awkward... With the course, it's a similar sort of thing of... not knowing how to approach them" (Interviewee 3).

Aside from personal difficulties, some participants reflected on notable divisions between themselves and other students. Interviewee 2 remarked on socio-economic differences amongst students:

"I definitely had challenges around making friends... some students here are very obviously quite rich, and I have never been able to... talk to them because they are just so different" (Interviewee 2).

Meanwhile, Interviewee 6 found language and cultural barriers affected capacity to make friends, alongside personal differences:

"... recently I feel I'm struggling with making connections with people around me. Maybe the first reason I think is because I'm quite introverted. And sometimes there's some culture shock between me and my peers, but also, I tend to be not showing much like feelings or emotions. Because it's kind of a vulnerable thing, to do it." (Interviewee 6).

Interviewee 6 continued:

"Sometimes, if they say something that I can't understand... I will ask if they can say it again. But I'm afraid if they say it again [but I still] didn't get it. I feel very embarrassed, and I don't know how to continue the conversation" (Interviewee 6).

Despite these challenges, Interviewee 6 finds solace in connections with fellow Chinese students: "I do have like a Chinese group chat, like who's studying in Falmouth or Exeter University".

3.4. CULTURE AND DIVERSITY AND ANTI-RACISM AT FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Feedback on diversity at Falmouth is mixed and exemplifies a complexity around participant experiences. On one level, participants acknowledge Falmouth as an inclusive environment and are positive about the efforts the University is making to promote inclusion. For example, Interviewee 7 comments:

"... they're working really hard to make it more inclusive and that shows in their attitude and their, you know, yeah... how Falmouth University had always made me feel at home, never made me feel somebody who is coming from a different background or is from different colour or anything" (Interviewee 7).

Interviewee 4 noted a recognition of age as a marker of difference and commented on the benefits of studying with other mature students:

"... it made it a bit easier when I started cause also there were a few more older students as well... there was like this mutual misunderstanding that we couldn't really broach a lot of the time" (Interviewee 4).

For some participants, therefore, the sense of inclusion or otherwise comes from a visible recognition of similarity. For example, Interviewee 2 remarked on the lack of other Irish students at the University:

"I haven't met anyone else Irish who's actually from Ireland... it'd be nice to have more people who are Irish here" (Interviewee 2)

For Interviewee 2, the focus on inclusion from the University was seen as one directed at the LGBT community:

"I wouldn't say it's inclusive... I would say it should be more inclusive. It's inclusive in terms of the queer community, but there's not a whole lot of other diversity here at all" (Interviewee 2).

Interviewee 8 valued the University's Black History Month activities and LGBT news, recognising this as a deliberate attempt at inclusion:

They reflect on their experience saying:

"I think the one thing I like about Falmouth is that they see everyone kind of all the same. Like they understand a lot about what each person goes through. And I've definitely found like, with my friends

definitely, they are very considerate, and they respect me a lot more than what I'm used to. Some people don't even realise that I'm one of colour cause I'm lighter skinned than anyone else in my family. Yeah, it's, I think I definitely feel like I belong, yeah" (Interviewee 8).

However, for this interviewee, and perhaps others, the sense of inclusion comes from being able to “pass” visually: that is, an assimilation into a white norm.

In terms of experiences of racism and reporting structures, few interviewees reported experiences of racism. However, when Interviewee 2 refers to an incident of being called a derogatory name referring to a traveller heritage, they remark that this felt insensitive rather than racist. This may raise the issue of understanding of what is and is not racist, what is permissible, even for victims of abuse. Interviewee 4 did not agree that Falmouth was an anti-racist university, citing “there’s a lot of other stuff that Falmouth could improve on”. They specify the University’s largely white community and the difficulties of addressing structural concerns with an overwhelmingly white authority. Interviewee 6 commented on experiences of racism outside of the University, and Interviewee 3 referred to the whiteness of specific industries in which they were hoping to graduate.

3.5. WAYS AHEAD

Interviewees are positive about Cornwall as a place, but few spoke of intentions to stay on beyond graduation. Some international interviewees spoke of returning home after graduation, and Interviewee 2 commented on the difficulty of making friends:

"It's a lot more difficult to make friends because everyone is very clicky or it feels like they've already got their tight groups, and it's really hard to infiltrate them" (Interviewee 2).

Economic factors also contributed to interviewees’ plans, including the price of housing. For Interviewee 7, a post-graduate student, there was a lack of teaching opportunities and Falmouth’s isolation made it difficult to commute to other universities. Interviewee 2 was put off by the lack of industry in the area, particularly in film. Similarly, Interviewee 3, reflecting on the entertainment industry, noted:

"... sometimes I do think... how many other brown people they have around that look like me" (Interviewee 8).

Interviewee 5 was attracted by the idea of wider travel and greater cultural exposure, and others were drawn back to where they had family.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Interviewee testimony necessarily reflects the variety of contexts and experiences of each individual and it would be inappropriate to reduce findings as somehow uniform. Experiences are varied and reflect the multifaceted nature of the social university experience.

In this section, we draw together some key threads from the themes discussed in section 3 above, before offering some recommendations for next steps.

- Experiences of transitioning to Falmouth reflect a variety of factors, some of which are typical of the “typical” student journey into higher education: being far from friends and family, returning to formal education after a break, taking time to get to know other people, challenges with accommodation. Interviewees were also responding to the specifics of Falmouth: that is, geographical isolation and an overwhelmingly white majority. In some cases, this was unexpected.
- Experiences of systems of support varied. The post-graduate student was very positive about the postgraduate community and its supportive culture. In some instances, undergraduate interviewees were able to feedback positively on specific services, e.g., disability, but otherwise the “broad brush” approach of welcoming emails and freshers’ activities missed the mark.
- Interviewees were positive about relationships with staff. In terms of the curriculum, some international participants felt at a disadvantage, particularly around the “hidden curriculum” and assumptions of prior knowledge that relied on experience of the UK education system pre-HE.
- Interviewees commented on strong society culture at the University and, in some instances, this was positively received as a demonstration of multiculturalism and variety. In other cases, interviewees commented on notable “gaps” e.g., other students who were deaf/Deaf, or the amalgamation of African and Caribbean into one group, which was felt to be inappropriate.
- Participants appreciated the natural beauty of the area, and others enjoyed the cultural offerings and café culture of the town. University spaces, in particular the library, were less popular.
- When forming connections with their peers, accommodation played a big role for some participants. Where accommodation friendships were not successful, this made forming friendships much harder. Participants were conscious of a sense of difference with some students, particularly with regard to socio-economic status and income. Others felt held back by their accents and fears of not being understood.
- Participants remarked on being able to “pass” as white and how this mediated their experiences of inclusion. One student who had received racial abuse, did not recognise it as such, which is concerning. Some participants were concerned about the whiteness of industries to which they were hoping to graduate.
- Participants were positive about Falmouth and Cornwall but were not planning on staying beyond graduation. There was concern about the price of housing in the area and the lack of opportunity career-wise. Several were keen to return to family or to experience greater cultural diversity.

Recommendations for next steps/discussion

- **Review antiracist teaching and education programmes across the University:** Whilst participants are mostly positive about their experiences at the University, there is evidence in the findings that awareness of racism and discriminatory behaviour is limited. Some participants feel comfortable because they are white passing, which raises questions about experiences of those who are more visibly global majority. At the same time, experiences of racism are not necessarily recognised as such, and students with strong accents may feel deterred from speaking. Encouraging reporting may be a partial solution, but when the overwhelming majority of those in authority are white, this is limited. Similarly, it is not the responsibility of global majority students to dismantle discriminatory and oppressive structures; this is a whole culture, institutional approach, which needs leadership from the top.

- **Consider the extent to which policy and practice acknowledges the intersectionality of experiences:** participants relayed a variety of experiences and contexts interwoven with prior educational experiences, nationality, age, socio-economic status, disability, ethnicity, and other variables. Initiatives that collapse such differences (e.g., African-Caribbean Society) can be viewed as reductionist. Institutional strategies, frameworks etc., need to be cognisant of this intersectionality.
- **Build on networks with campaigners and activists across Cornwall:** The experiences of participants were necessarily mediated by the specific context of Falmouth and of Cornwall, which is remote and predominantly white. The University can build its global majority population through the expansion of international students and continue its efforts to encourage access to UK-domiciled global majority students. Similar attention needs to be paid to the recruitment and promotion of global majority staff. However, the demographic composition of Cornwall is a larger, more complicated phenomenon. Ongoing consultation with staff and students will surface some of these connections, such as [Black Voices Cornwall](#) and [Cornwall Antiracism](#).
- **Capitalize on best practice as endorsed by Advance HE:** we are conscious that this report falls within a much wider programme of research and change for the University, as it develops evidence for the Race Equality Charter. Advance HE publishes a range of good practice initiatives, to help institutions develop their practice <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/good-practice-initiatives>. The following guidance in particular may be useful:
 - De Montford University: Increasing BAME student visibility <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/charters/rec-athena-swan-initiatives/de-montfort-university-increasing-bame-student-visibility>
 - The University of Manchester: Report and Support: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/charters/rec-athena-swan-initiatives/university-manchester-report-and-support>



Project scope
Project title
Antiracism, Access and Inclusion at Falmouth University
Rationale for the project
<p>Falmouth University is committed to promoting an inclusive university and to address any barriers and practices of discrimination impacting students of colour. This research is designed to support Falmouth in this endeavour, through consultation with global majority students.</p> <p>Findings from this research will support Falmouth in its application to the Race Equality Charter and in providing an evidence base of student lived experiences. Action by the University in response to this consultation will be designed to help Falmouth meet a number of commitments in its 24/25-27/28 APP pertaining to continuation and attainment for Black and Minority Ethnic students.</p> <p>Our research in 21/22 concerning experiences of students of colour with Falmouth's Student Services was limited by a lack of student engagement, but did reveal findings that included students of colour feeling unsafe and experiencing racist harassment and discrimination. This is supported by concerns and anecdotal evidence from staff.</p>
Aims and objectives of the research
<p>The research aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of global majority students and alumni at Falmouth University <p>The research has the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the experiences of global majority students and alumni including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Experiences of curriculum and teaching and learning ○ Sense of belonging at Falmouth University, to the locality/region, and to wider non-geographic communities • Develop a critical understanding of key themes and concepts pertaining to anti-racism, particularly with regard to the concept of belonging, to inform data collection and analysis. • Gain knowledge of anti-racist best practice from across the sector, to align with existing practice and intentions at Falmouth University.
Approach and scope
<p>We will approach this evaluation using qualitative methods, situating ourselves methodologically between "middle ground" and "artistic" approaches (see Ellingson, 2009, below). Data collection will take the form of one-to-one, semi-structured interviews, either in person or remotely (depending on participant availability and preference). These interviews will be delivered by Dr Misri Dey, Senior Lecturer (Theatre and Acting), and Faith Kirigha, PhD student at the School of Communication. Both Misri and Faith are well-experienced in anti-racist practice at Falmouth University and elsewhere, and have relationships of trust with global majority students and alumni, who may be approached and invited to participate.</p> <p>Whilst APP work focusses on UK-domiciled undergraduate students, this research will also involve postgraduate and international students; all experiences will help build understanding of the multiple contexts for global majority students, and Falmouth's commitment to anti-racism pertains to a much wider</p>

audience than that mandated by Access and Participation. We will aim to engage 10-12 students/alumni, with the majority (c.80%) weighted towards UK-domiciled undergraduates.		
Recruitment will begin in September '23, with data collection taking place in October '23.		
Key deliverables, timescales, and responsibilities		
Critical literature review	August 2023	SEER
Best practice review aligned with review of existing practice at Falmouth	August 2023	SEER
Provision of Participant Information Sheet for recruitment purposes	August 2023	SEER
Drafting of interview guide	September 2023	SEER
Recruitment of participants	September 2023	Dr Misri Dey and Faith Kirigha
Conduct interviews	October 2023	Dr Misri Dey and Faith Kirigha
Interview transcription and thematic analysis	November 2023	SEER
Compilation of final report including all findings	December 2023	SEER
Risk implications		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of student engagement: we are hoping to maximise engagement through the relationships of trust Faith and Misri have developed with students over time. Participants will receive a £20 voucher. • Risk of harm to students: Faith and Misri are skilled facilitators, with expertise in this area. We are confident the data collection will happen sensitively. • Confidentiality: due to small populations of global majority students at Falmouth, it will not be possible to guarantee anonymity, although all reporting will be deidentified. We will inform participants they can speak confidentially, although confidentiality will be broken in the event of disclosure of harm to self or others. • Data protection: Falmouth University and SEER have a signed Data Sharing Agreement. We will ensure data is protected and shared in accordance with our privacy policy https://collaborativehe.com/privacy-policy. 		
Financial implications		
To be delivered as part of Falmouth University's SEER membership.		
Student incentives to be provided by Falmouth University		
Recompense for interviewees (Faith and Misri) to be provided by Falmouth University		
Project team		

Dr Frances Johnson, Head of Research and Evaluation
Dr Misri Dey, Senior Lecturer, Theatre and Acting
Faith Kirigha, PhD student, School of Communication

References

Ellingson, L. (2009), *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research: An Introduction* (London, SAGE)

FALMOUTH

UNIVERSITY

Research into Race Equality, Access and Inclusion: Interview Question Guide

This interview forms part of our research into race equality, access, and inclusion at Falmouth University. We're interested in learning from your experiences of studying at Falmouth University, particularly as a student of colour. We will not name you in our reporting, although small populations at Falmouth mean we cannot always guarantee anonymity. Findings from this research will support the university in its application to the Race Equality Charter, and will inform the university's efforts to address continuation and attainment gaps for Black and Minority Ethnic students.

This interview should last between 45 minutes and 1 hour, although you can stop the interview at any time.

Privacy Statement (This can be replaced with Falmouth's own privacy statement)

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. We will not share your personal information with anyone outside of our organisation (Applied Inspiration) without your consent. We will use your data for the purpose of research and evaluation, and will only share de-identified information with relevant stakeholders to support research, evaluation, reporting and dissemination. We do not use these results in any way that might affect you as an individual, and responses will be stored on a secure database in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This does not affect your rights to access the data held about you or to have it rectified. To find out more about how we use your data, you can read our privacy policy (<https://collaborativehe.com/privacy-policy>), or email support@appliedinspiration.co. We will only share de-identified information and will remove identifying information where possible. You can speak freely during this discussion. However, in very rare cases, confidentiality will be broken if you disclose behaviour or actions of others that explicitly indicates a risk to yourself or others (for instance, abuse, or plans to harm yourself or others). In such cases, we have a responsibility to disclose this information to relevant personnel.

If you change your mind about participation, please let us know within seven days of this interview and we will delete your contributions from our data.

Do you have any questions about any of the information I have provided?

In proceeding with this interview, you are signalling that you consent to taking part and to the use of your data as outlined above.

Introductions and Initial Attraction to Falmouth University

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about your background? What you are studying at Falmouth and what year you are in? (If alumni, what you studied and what you are doing now?)

- 2) What initially attracted you to Falmouth University? Was it an area of the country you were familiar with?
- 3) Do you feel you had clear expectations of what to expect when arriving at Falmouth? Did you feel prepared to start university here?

Transitioning into Falmouth

- 1) How would you describe your experiences once you arrived at Falmouth? E.g., accommodation and meeting your flatmates, freshers' events, getting to know the town.
- 2) Where there any areas or spaces you were drawn to at this time? E.g., particularly clubs or societies, academic spaces, places in wider community.
- 3) Did you encounter anything you found challenging? Or anything that smoothed the transition for you?

Experiences of Curriculum and Teaching and Learning

- 1) How have you found the teaching and learning at Falmouth on your course?
- 2) How have you found the staff on your course? (Have you found them to be supportive?)
- 3) How have you found experiences of assessment so far? (Have you found you've been able to represent yourself and your skills well in these? Did you find any feedback useful?)

Building Relationships and Connections at Falmouth

- 1) Do you feel like you were part of any communities while studying at Falmouth?
- 2) Would you say you've made some good friends at Falmouth? Are there people you feel close to? Or with whom you have found things in common?
- 3) How about outside of the university e.g., in Falmouth itself or in Cornwall- are there places and people you feel a sense of connection to?
- 4) What would you say are the barriers, if any, to building relationships and connections at Falmouth? Is it somewhere you can see yourself staying after graduation?

Opening Up Discussion and Final Thoughts

- 1) Falmouth University commits to being an anti-racist institution- does this align with your experience? In what ways?
- 2) If you were ever to experience/witness any instances of discrimination at Falmouth, would you feel confident to report it?
- 3) Is there anything else you'd like to add or mention before we finish?



Student Participant Information Statement

Research into Antiracism, Access, and Inclusion: Falmouth University

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research project identified above which is being conducted by researchers from Falmouth University in collaboration with Applied Inspiration's SEER service. SEER works with Falmouth University to help deliver evaluation and research to inform their work in access and participation. You can visit our website here: [Specialist Evidence Evaluation & Research \(collaborativehe.com\)](https://collaborativehe.com).

Why is the research being done?

The overarching aim of the research is to gain knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of global majority students and alumni at Falmouth University. Findings from this research will support the university in its application to the Race Equality Charter, and will inform the university's efforts to address continuation and attainment gaps for Black and Minority Ethnic students.

What choice do you have?

Participation in this research is your choice. Whether or not you decide to participate, your decision will not disadvantage you. If you do decide to participate, you may decide to withdraw from the project up to seven days after participation in the interview without giving a reason.

What will you be asked to do?

You are asked to attend an in-person or online interview at a date and time as arranged. The interview will be with Dr Misri Dey or Faith Kirigha, as previously arranged. This will be an informal discussion, and you will be asked to respond freely to questions about your experiences at Falmouth University and in Falmouth itself. We are particularly interested in your experiences as students of colour.

How much time will it take?

Up to one hour

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

There are no risks to participating- it is entirely voluntary and you are under no pressure to say anything you are not comfortable with. You will receive £20 voucher from Falmouth University for taking part.

How will the information collected be used?

We will record the interview using a personal Dictaphone provided by the interviewer facilitator. This recording will be transcribed and analysed thematically providing data for our evaluation. We will not name individuals and will remove any information that may identify you.

How will your privacy be protected?

Any information collected will be de-identified and stored securely and only accessed by the researchers, except as required by law. All participants will be de-identified upon transcription, and transcripts will be protected on a secure online server and stored on a password protected shared drive, accessible only to the researchers. Audio files from the interview will be stored on a password protected shared drive, accessible only to the research team.

Participants will be able to review the transcript of the interview up to 14 days after data collection. Transcripts will be stored for a period of two years.

What do you need to do to participate?

We have already received your interest in participating. If you have questions about the research please contact frances@appliedinspiration.co

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Consent Form

Research into Antiracism, Access, and Inclusion: Falmouth University

Privacy Statement

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. We will not share your personal information with anyone outside of our organisation (Applied Inspiration) without your consent. We will use your data for the purpose of research and evaluation, and will only share de-identified information with relevant stakeholders to support research, evaluation, reporting and dissemination. We do not use these results in any way that might affect you as an individual, and responses will be stored on a secure database in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This does not affect your rights to access the data held about you or to have it rectified. To find out more about how we use your data, you can read our privacy policy (<https://collaborativehe.com/privacy-policy>), or email support@appliedinspiration.co

We will only share de-identified information and will remove identifying information where possible. You can speak freely during this discussion. However, in very rare cases, confidentiality will be broken if you disclose behaviour or actions of others that explicitly indicates a risk to yourself or others (for instance, abuse, or plans to harm yourself or others). In such cases, we have a responsibility to disclose this information to relevant personnel.

Statements of understanding/consent

- I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information guide for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw during the study and within 14 days without giving reason. If I withdraw, my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.
- I understand that my personal data will be processed for the purposes detailed above, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (2018).
- Based on the above, I agree to take part in this study.

Name, signature, and date