Appendix: Improving inclusivity for the University of Oxford’s undergraduate Biology course for BAME and state school students

Outreach and access initiatives oftentimes prioritise improving diversity within a space. Although efforts aimed at recruiting/admitting students from underrepresented and marginalised backgrounds are necessary, these efforts can overlook the environment that these students are being brought into. When institutions make little effort to acknowledge, embrace, and accommodate the varied life experiences of underrepresented/marginalised students, these students can experience mentally and emotionally distressing situations.

When asked if they have personally experienced any form of discrimination (e.g., slurs, microaggressions) in their course, 11% of surveyed undergraduate Biology students indicated that they experienced discrimination due to their race/ethnicity, 4% due to their nationality, 4% due to their gender identity, 4% due to their disability, 2% due to their sexual orientation, and 2% due to their socioeconomic background (Fig. A1). Meanwhile, 37% of surveyed undergraduate Biology students indicated that they witnessed some form of discrimination in their course (Fig. A2): 11% due to that person’s nationality, 10% due to that person’s race/ethnicity, 8% due to their gender identity, 4% due to that person’s disability, 2% due to that person’s sexual orientation, and 2% due to that person’s socioeconomic background. During the focus group discussions, one student mentioned that their lecturers varied in terms of their interest in EDI issues. According to them, while some lecturers willingly engaged with EDI issues both within lectures and tutorials, other lecturers seemed very dismissive about having to bring up such topics within their lectures.

Surveyed undergraduate Biology students were also asked about their experiences with discrimination within the University of Oxford as a whole. Overall, 34% of students experienced discrimination within Oxford (Fig. A3): 10% due to their race/ethnicity, 7% due to their nationality, 6% due to their gender identity, 5% due to their sexual orientation, 3% due to their disability, and 3% due to their socioeconomic background. Additionally, 67% of students reported witnessing discrimination within Oxford (Fig. A4): 19% due to that person’s race/ethnicity, 14% due to that person’s socioeconomic background, 12% due to that person’s
nationality, 12% due to that person’s gender identity, 7% due to that person’s sexual orientation, and 3% due to that person’s disability.

Figure A1: 27% of surveyed Biology undergraduates reported experiencing some form of discrimination in their course.
Figure A2: 37% of surveyed Biology undergraduates reported witnessing some form of discrimination in their course.

Figure A3: 34% of surveyed Biology undergraduates reported experiencing some form of discrimination within the University of Oxford.
Experiences with bias and discrimination can have serious repercussions including (but not limited to) mental/emotional health issues, poor academic performance, and decreased motivation to continue pursuing their desired career path. Furthermore, students experiencing such issues will undoubtedly warn their families, communities, and social media networks to avoid certain institutions, thereby making it more difficult to recruit students from underrepresented and marginalised backgrounds. Ultimately, the goal of the below recommendations is to create a welcoming, inclusive environment in which undergraduate students from underrepresented/marginalised backgrounds – particularly BAME and state school students – can fully engage with the personal and academic/professional development opportunities that the University of Oxford offers.

**Improving the culture**

1. Ensure that all members of the department (undergraduate students, postgraduate students, early career researchers, senior academics, etc.) participate in unconscious/implicit bias workshops which cover a range of topics including (but not
limited to) racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism, and xenophobia. While some colleges do offer bias workshops during freshers’ week, not all colleges require mandatory attendance. However, it is important to note that while bias workshops can be useful at introducing and explaining EDI concepts to people less well-versed in these issues, these workshops are only one of many steps needed to address bias and discrimination.

2. Offer a variety of socialising events that are accessible to those with disabilities, have multiple refreshment options to accommodate those with cultural/religious or health requirements, and do not necessarily revolve around drinking/pub outings (as many people cannot/prefer not to drink).

Improving welfare

1. Have welfare officers from diverse backgrounds.

2. Have specific welfare officers who are trained to address specific issues (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia).

3. When asking students to discuss their personal experiences with bias/discrimination at public events (e.g., at a department meeting), resources should be provided to students before and after the event to ensure that discussing such issues will not be detrimental to their wellbeing.

Improving reporting procedures

1. Have harassment officers who are trained to address specific issues (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia), and ensure that students know how to contact these officers.

2. Provide more transparency and clarity regarding the harassment procedures and, if applicable, any differences between the department’s harassment procedures and the University’s harassment procedures.