F: Okay, so, hello again. Very welcome to the focus group. My name is Heather. I am a PhD student at the University of Southampton and I’ll be facilitating the focus group on widening access and diversity today. So, if you’d like to introduce yourself; would you like to start?

P1F: Should we not say our names or is it okay?

F: That’s fine. No, I’ll anonymise everything, so.

P1F: Okay. So, I’m P1F. I’m a Senior Lecturer here in the Institute for Education in Medical and Dental Sciences, and I’m involved in assessment for the Healthcare Programmes, and I’m one of the deputy leads of the MBCHB.

F: Thank you.

P2M: I am P2M. I am the same school as P1F, in the role of Education for Medical Science and Dentistry, I suppose. And I teach on Gateway2Medicine, I’m a teaching fellow. I’m also a Year Lead deputy for MBCHB.

F: Thank you. So, just to get going really, I just wanted to explore what you understand by the terms, Widening Access and the term, Diversity, as well; what do you think of when I say those things?

P2M: P1F, you first.

P1F: Okay. So, widening access, I think about trying to make the workforce that will be our, that are our doctors, and therefore currently our medical students, are more representative of our society, in the UK as a whole. So, we know that some socioeconomic groups will be under-represented. We know that gender probably, women are now more represented in Medicine, and but also, we can think about it in terms of ethnicity as well. So, widening access, I tend to preliminarily think about that in terms of socioeconomic terms, and in terms of morality and people having these opportunities. Diversity, again, to make sure that our workforce, that workforce that will be our tomorrow’s doctors, are representative of society and that you know we have, if we could think about in terms of ethnicity, gender, probably all protected characteristics.

F: Yeah.

P2M: Well widening access to me is an opportunity, so, certainly about everyone look to the British system, particularly for Medicine entrants. I think it’s good to have, or to provide this kind of opportunity to people that were coming from deprived areas, rural areas, but also because probably they are coming from schools, Secondary schools that do not provide the right level of education, and so this is not their fault. This is a system fault, if you like, so, there is a matter of, I don’t know, if there is a trend to change a little bit more the system, in general, but for sure for Medicine in particular, I’m sure that there are, I can prove to you by my experience, brilliant minds could be lost, because they don’t have any opportunity to prove how good they are, simply because they come from you know a specific postcode, or bad school. And diversity, yes, diversity is a contribution to this culture made by people coming from different background, and I think because the society now is multi-racial, multi-ethnical, and also because you know the doctor should be able to face different situations with lots of different people, having a taskforce of potential doctors that know about their own diversity and how to take this diversity into the main public, that would be good also for the patient point of view, so you feel less isolated sometimes, probably.

P1F: I mean my feeling is that at this Medical School, probably other Medical Schools as well, in terms of ethnicity, there is, they are quite a diverse group. If I sit down, like last couple of weeks ago, I was speaking with the Year 1 students about culture and medicine, and in Year 1 we’ve got students from different parts of the World, from different ethnic backgrounds, but my interest is partly also to do with, from my role in assessment, that we know that there is differential attainment according to ethnicity. So, even when we do have diversity in representation, we’re, you know I know want to say, and when I say we, I mean the UK, are, we’re not doing right by different groups, because we see that there is differential attainment at Medical School, according to ethnic group.

P2M: Yeah.

P1F: So, something, it’s good to open, make sure that we have representation, but also that we don’t let down people when they’re here, because everybody, they have to have that ability to get in and so, if differential attainment happens across the five years, then there is something that we’re not doing right, if that gap remains or widens.

P2M: Yeah, I agree. It’s a good point, yeah, yeah. I was thinking a lot about diversity, because as P1F mentioned, we have a huge variety of different ethnicity there, people come from different part of the World and we need to be ready in some way to receive their views, and if it’s possible, to make changes, according to their views, because if you like to host people, and we would like to keep them, to retain them here, we should be able to understand which are the needs for those people and for the people already here, when they’re going to be, they are going to interact with NHS or something like that. So, if you are able to take on board, you know, this new vision, I don’t say that we need to change, we need launch the vision that we already have, taking into consideration the other people.

P1F: I think with we gain a lot from having different cultural perspectives. The only thing, and I agree, so, we take that on board and we can learn from each other, but it can sometimes be difficult if, say if somebody has come from a culture that has a different, say women are considered in that culture to be lesser members of society, obviously we are teaching medicine, and that there should be gender equality in how patients are treated, but also how people interact with their colleagues. So, sometimes we may clash over cultural.

P2M: Yes, absolutely.

P1F: And we want to do that, well not clash, that’s too strong, but we want to, we’re teaching a particular culture I think in Medicine, and stand by that as well, so some things we will stand by, and not wish to change in embracing another culture, but there will be many things that we would take on as well.

P2M: Yeah. I think this is something, this is certainly important point from the students’ side as well. So, assuming that these kinds of students, particularly the female students coming from this kind of culture, okay, when they come over UK, they knew what is the society here, they knew what is expecting from us as a society, and they are accommodate themselves into this society. So, I was thinking about, having to say something to them, as how we understand society and how we understand their role in this society, if they stay here, that’s fine, because they are able to accommodate themselves with this new culture. But what happens when they go back? So, they are fully qualified to be doctor, and for us, they’re the same as, there’s no gender distinction, but for those people, those students it could probably be problematic if they decide to go back and be woman in the society where okay, I don’t care if you are a doctor, you’re still a woman; it doesn’t make any sense.

P1F: Yes. I mean I think primarily, because our programmes are, the GMC are approving those, that we’re registered with those, that will, that’s just how it will be and if people choose to do, to come and study Medicine in the UK, that’s how it will be taught.

P2M: Yeah. You know just to make a sort of, you know reflection of a possible scenario.

P1F: Yes.

F: I just wanted to pick up on a point that you made about gaining a lot from having different cultural perspectives; I just wondered if we could talk a little more, a bit more about what that is, what we might gain?

P2M: Well for example, we mentioned about this way to, I mean it’s about self-awareness, and sometimes it’s tricky, okay, because for example now we have mentioned about, something about if you see religion issues, okay. So, we need to be aware, in the way we should talk to them respectfully, without offending them or without causing them some trouble. And in another way for them, religion is also sometimes an issue for our point of view in terms of teaching as well, so, we need to take into consideration they have some specific commitment, that sometimes it’s hard to be overcome, because they have to deal with these kinds of commitments to. So, for our point of view, to be open, and get them, you know able to go over their kind of beliefs, and everything else. It’s a matter to reorganise also our internal, and correct me if I’m wrong, because sometimes we need to know and involve people, for example, they’re able to tell them what they can do, what they cannot do. We’d have to, we need to talk to them in order to say, well what we can see and how we can accommodate something. Does that make any sense?

P1F: Yes, definitely. I think communication is key. And if you think about, just as we as educators relate to students, it’s, there’s a parallel with how clinicians should relate to patients. If you take a patient-centred approach, you’re not following any stereotypes about people from this part like to do things this way. And you’re treating every student as an individual, finding out what their story is, and how you can best accommodate and, with for example, you mentioning, you’re making me think a bit about exams. So, sometimes, if our assessments fall during Ramadan, sometimes we’ve had students ask us, have said, or on a Friday, could they have prayers during the time of the exam, and that, for us, who are not, we’re not familiar with that, may think well we don’t want to not be accommodating, and for example we never set exams on Christmas Day, you know, but also, what are reasonable adjustments and what are not. And I think in the past, members of our Faculty have contacted the Imam, who has been able to tell us what, who’ve said, yeah, no that’s okay, they can do the exam, that’s a circumstance that’s permitted, or you know they should be able to. So, that can be tricky, because you don’t want to be disrespectful to another culture, but if you don’t fully understand it, you could be making.

P2M: Yeah, that’s a tricky, that’s a tricky point as well, because as P1f says, we are you know, historically speaking, European countries, for us our traditions are well-established, so, in some way we are not so happy, or we are reluctant to change our approach, but in the meantime we need to take into consideration other cultural background, and sometimes it’s tricky, because you know there a matter of say, okay, you come here, you have to respect in some way our tradition, our whatever, but in reality, this is not the right approach we should have.

P1F: Yeah. And we do that, we are a multicultural society.

P2M: Yeah. But the meaning of being a multicultural society is to take into consideration the multicultural point of views, and that one is probably the big challenge for us, because there is some reluctance also from our side, of people saying, okay, I don’t care, that’s my culture, this is what I believe, why I should change myself, in the name of what.

P1F: A lot of the people that we’re talking about that have, will have religious festivals that aren’t of the dominant culture, they’re not coming from another country anyway, they’re coming from other parts of England or Scotland as well.

P2M: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that were born here. So, like for myself, I’m not British so our holidays are different than yours, but this is not something that is going to prevent us to be part of, or integrate into the society. I mean that one is an ethical issue, and something that from a philosophical point of view can be discussed what it is. But it needs to be considered by an higher level. When everything has been considered properly and some, if you like, guidelines, indications are provided for, to general society, I suppose, rather than leaving to us to decide what is good, what is bad; who knows, in reality, who knows.

F: And what about, so, you mentioned other forms of diversity includes socioeconomic and rural, why do you think it’s import to have that kind of diversity in Medicine?

P2M: This is a good point. Right, P1F, you first, because you know, you know the classic students better than me, so, yeah.

P1F: Well I don’t know, but I definitely, well taking rural first, we know that it’s, well it’s partly what P2M was saying about opportunity as well, and it’s people aren’t getting the same opportunities because of their rural school maybe doesn’t have the same range of subject choices and so on, but they might make excellent doctors. Also, we want to be able to attract people in to work in rural areas, but built into that, well there’s two things there. It’s the same with socioeconomic background, we want doctors to work in areas of, like for example, in inner cities and so on, and wouldn’t it be great if somebody had grown up and then they go back and work there, but students that come from the rural areas or inner city disadvantaged areas, once they’re qualified as doctors, do we know that they want to go back there. Maybe if you lived on an island where nothing happens and it feels very boring and you go and study in.

P2M: In London or.

P1F: Well they think I’m never going back there. Or also, you now know they’ll maybe want their life to be different. So, I don’t know to what extent that happens, but that’s the reality, but I think if it were true, then it is good if people do want to go back, and people have an understanding of the world that they came from. I think for patients, doctors should be approachable and hopefully regardless of what background they came from, their training will be such that they should be approachable, because you’re not going to be matched with a doctor. We don’t say, oh you’re from the country so, or you came from here so we’ll match you with a doctor from there too. But I just think it’s good that the workforce is diverse, and also that doctors can learn from each other during their training as well. If they’re all, let’s say, if the majority were from independent schools and they’re just brushing up against other people from independent schools, when they’re having small group discussions, it could perpetuate beliefs that are based on their conferred advantages. And by having a diverse grouping, that should hopefully be challenged.

P2M: And you honour them [the challenges], because if you come from a background, a different background, rural area, okay, and you have the opportunity to be involved in a Medical School, where traditionally the students are coming from a specific background, whatever, when these students coming from the classical background, should have the chance to discuss about how does he work there if he lives in such a rural area, tell me something about this, because I don’t know this reality. And if you don’t, if you are not exposed to this different view, then probably if you decide to go in an isolated island in the far north of Scotland, you say, why am I here, because you don’t know the reality, you have no clue about, just go.

P1F: You might have a romanticised view.

P2M: Of course, but reality is different. So, let’s bring you all that, what does it mean, to live in a town of one thousand people and the rest is just land, and you need to stay there and do your profession, you don’t know the reality, I’ll tell you what’s going on there. So, this is a way to share and bring each side the normal.

P1F: So, I think what we’re talking about here is the ideal. It’s not necessarily what happens in reality. I could think about small group discussions that have occurred in some tutorials I’ve been involved in within the Foundation, so, Primary Care, a course years ago, and I remember it was about social determinants of health, and there was a very confident student, who, I think, from his accent and his demeanour, I think he came from quite a privileged background, and he was talking about people in poorer areas, and saying things like, oh some of them have never seen what a vegetable looks like, if it doesn’t come out of a packet they won’t eat it, and I think the others in the group were intimidated to challenge that, partly because of his, he was confident, again probably a product of his conferred advantages, but also it was stigmatizing perhaps for the others to identify themselves as being from the group of people that don’t eat organic potatoes or something like that. So, I think it can be hard to, even if you get that mix, making the environment conducive to openness and acceptance can be challenging. And it was left to me as a tutor to try tease out questions that would, and I also had to be careful not to, because that student that was confident, it’s also not his fault that his background was his background and he was just repeating what he had learned.

P2M: Yeah. Yeah, I mean this is something about how our role as an educator, educator as well, sorry, but I think most of this kind of confidence challenges, they should be resolved amongst students if that student could be challenged or faced by other students, probably. Well, what I’ve learnt so far from students so far coming from deprived area or different background or through the widening access, they’re totally aware of their situation, they are not shy or scared to tell the other students who they are, where they come from and what they represent. So, I hope to see, in the future, here, the same situation where this kind of posh person who start to discuss about his own perceived view of life, how that can be changed by someone who says, look, I’ve struggled since I was ten, and if I’m here, this is to prove to you that okay, if you need something, just ask, if I need something I need to gain it, grab it. Yeah, does that make any sense. I don’t think so far this kind of culture, it’s not well-established yet into the Medical Schools. And I hope through the widening access of these kinds of possibilities, that would be something they can drive to a different region, where we can jump into this kind of discussion, but I think the time the students spend together, when they discuss about everything they want, is a good time when they’re going to actually confront themselves, and try to see who you are and let me tell you who I am. It takes a while I think, but if this is what we want, probably that can be achieved by the students first of all, and then from us, as informed teachers. This is what I think. And also, it’s a matter of how many of them. I don’t know which is the situation down in England, but now we are improving year by year the number of students coming from classical widening access and from G2M, and so, the mission is to have twenty percent of the student population composed by people coming from widening access in general, so, and that one will be a significant number, so one out of four people will be, or, one out of five people, would be from this kind of background. We need to wait.

P1F: Yeah. My feeling about that is that we only ever be able to achieve that if we make available realistic bursaries or reintroduce student grants. The money that, you couldn’t actually live on that alone without a job, and therefore compared to your advantaged, affluent student, a student from widening access background or socioeconomic background, will always have to find another way to, unless the bursary is raised, or they’ll have to live at home and go to university at home, which is shame, because part of the experience for many students is that life of getting away isn’t it.

P2M: Yes. Yeah, I totally agree, money-wise, it’s an important issue for ninety-five percent of them. Unfortunately, at the moment we are not able to provide, because they get some money from SAS, but sometimes it’s not enough, this is a loan for them on top of everything else. We do not provide a lot of suitable bursary, or tailored bursary for those students. There are a couple of them, but you know it’s too, the number is too low. And definitely, yeah, the financial issue is really present there for them, so, most of their struggles are actually coming from money, financial problems.

F: Are there any other struggles that you notice, associated with starting increasing widening access students?

P2M: In which kind of term, your term struggles, from the student side or from the School side?

F: Either, I suppose.

P2M: In terms of from the School’s side, I cannot see a lot, because we are just having you now the first, the initial cohort of G2M are actually now in Year 2, and so far, this seems to be fine.

P1F: I’ve had a student, well when I say, there was a student that I worked with quite a lot when they were in Year 2 and Year 3, and they were from a widening access background, and they had a lot, quite a lot of difficulties with the system, and this student was very outspoken about perceived injustices. And I think because this student was so outspoken, perhaps some of their legitimate concerns were not fully taken on board, because they were viewed to be too passionate or too radicalised or looking for, looking too hard to find these differences. I think the School did try to help, but I do also think that sometimes if you are very outspoken about an issue, people just say, oh, here’s so and so, on their hobbyhorse again, that that can be difficult. And students, some students can feel out of place or not fully fitting in. So, this student I’m speaking of, said that they had good friends but they had made friends with other, what they would call, outsiders, so, they weren’t actually other widening access students, but they were students who were in a minority, ethnically or... I also notice when the class are all in together, that students will, say we’ve got a number of Black students, they’ll maybe all sit together. Or the bridging students, who come from the International Medical University in Malaysia, they, that’s tricky, because they come as a little group, and they have a one-week course, where it’s just them, and then they join the rest of the class, and they’re integrated in different tutorials, so, they will meet other students, but they do, again, they’ll all sit together as well.

P2M: I know, I see your point exactly. Nowadays, I think it’s a sense of belonging for them. And there’s something really about you know the students themselves, it’s not about us. And I think it’s not about us, as an Institution, as a School, that we don’t provide the right kind of environment for them to be fully integrated; this is a matter of dynamics, among the students. And how they actually, you know point them with their fingers, just because they would like to define you know the people.

F: Put labels on them.

P2M: Yes. And this is something that I try to tell the G2M student, do not be shy, and be honest of what you are, because any way they try to put you a stigma, a view, or a target on you, just because they would like to recognise you, they would like to make you different. But this is what it is unfortunately, so, I don’t know if you know something about it, so, what we can do to change this kind attitude, but it’s, I think it’s mostly based on the student dynamics. And as you’ve mentioned before, so, students going in a specific environment, go in with a specific background, they just assume it to be better, just by definition. Yeah, it’s a way to select good minds, okay, and this is hard to prove if you don’t put yourself in action, okay. Takes a while, but this is what it is. And on top of this, there is also the implication of seeing the students suffering for sometimes depression, because they don’t feel integrated, they feel you know, isolated. They are not able to participate, fully participate to the university life, just because they feel a sense of isolation, induced by who stood next to them.

F: Do you feel the G2M students integrate with the traditional...?

P2M: I was expecting to see them, when they move into Year 1, to have a sort of you know community, okay, and as you say, sit all together, we can know each other, so, but no, actually, no, they actually spread all over the class, they make new friendships. They were able to create new networks, and that’s good, that’s good.

P1F: Yeah.

P2M: Yeah.

F: So, I wonder what’s different about them compared to the Malay, because you’d think after a whole year, that would be more than you know the week that the Malaysian students get, and you’d think there’d be more integrated? It’s interesting.

P2M: Well I don’t know, because I think if you’re coming from, for example now we have this new Programme for Sri Lanka as well, okay, so, we have another number of students coming from Sri Lanka, and all of them have been kept together before they enter into Year 1. So, this is another indication about if they’re able or not to integrate with themselves. From the G2M point of view, they are, I mean they are pretty much British people. Okay. So, there’s not this feel of, okay, I come from Malaysia, I come from Sri Lanka, who are you, okay, you are Sri Lankan as well, okay, let’s get together.

P1F: They speak the same language, cook the same food. It’s a stronger, it’s maybe just a bigger difference. I also think that in the early days with the bridging students that came from IMU, a lot of work was being done to try and encourage people to come forward if there are things, things that they feel weren’t working so well, but we often found that they were very polite and not inclined to complain or anything like that. So, I wonder also if you, students who come from the IMU might be less inclined to step forward and reach out to meet new people as well. Being more reserved.

P2M: That’s their cultural background.

P1F: And we may be stereotyping.

P2M: No, no. Right, of course, students coming from this specific kind of region in the world, and the first time we met, we had a discussion about show me your critical thinking, tell me what you think. The answer was, I don’t know, what does it mean. Critical thinking? In our culture, in our Country there is no critical thinking.

P1F: That’s what they say?

P2M: And that one is something coming from specific region where they come from. So, the way they are not so open to you. So, so respectful, so don’t disrespect your professor.

P1F: Yes, it would be rude to challenge you. You would, yes, exactly, they would learn from you, the expert, yes.

P2M: From you, for what you represent, you as an Institution.

P1F: Yes. So, you’re maybe, so students are going to be less likely to participate in discussions.

P2M: Yes, yes, simply because they are scared by what you represent; if that makes any sense.

P1F: Yeah, and they want to respect you.

P2M: In a way, yeah. They have.

F: Do you think that’s typical from the students, for example, the traditional entry students or the G2M, do you think they’re less...?

P2M: Absolutely, yeah. Yeah, there’s an ocean of difference. And if you compare students from G2M for example, they’re coming from a family, from the same part of the world, okay, but their parents are coming from that side of the World, they were born here, they consider themselves British, and they belong to this culture. And there’s no longer this feeling of this kind of being educated toward the respect of the institution or whatever, they have to respect; a respect their parents still have, if that makes any sense. But if you were born in that kind of area, you move from there to here, for a period of your life, that could be during for your education, where you still have that kind of mindset, I come from there, is what they told me, since I was born. That one is the big challenge for us. Because in this case you don’t have to behave, because I’m quite a, you know, chatty person, I mean physical, okay, and sometimes you need to pay attention, because you don’t know if what you are going to say or the way you are going to behave, or the way you’re going to ask a question to them, can be problematic.

F: So, it’s interesting that you have kind of recognised perceptions I suppose, about these students. Do you have any similar like, well, perceptions about G2M students or students on the traditional programme, like do they have similarities as a group, do you think?

P2M: In terms of issues, I can see that the kind of issues the students experience is pretty much the same, no matter where you come from, in terms of specific issues that you can have as a student in the School. For them, for the G2M, as we already discussed before, it’s mostly about the struggle for their real lives; there’s a lack of money, you know the problems related to this. But if you compare what kind of issues a normal, standard students have compared to a G2M, referring to the School, I can’t see any difference. So, if we have to interview because they’ve got some problems, no matter where they come from in terms of background, we often discuss exactly the same problems they have with the School. For the others things, it’s a matter of pastoral care, but this is something that I know, because they approach me outside, if you like, the School, for something different than the School issues. Yeah.

P1F: Yeah. I’m just thinking about that, about what you were saying about can you repeat your question? It was about the differences that we identified for students that join a Programme halfway through, we’re noticing differences between them and the other students. So, you’re asking, are there similar differences between widening access, G2M type students, and the traditional students?

F: Yes, exactly.

P1F: So, if I can draw, I think there can be a difference in confidence with traditional students being more confident to speak out in tutorials and things like that. If a parallel is also, the mature student. So, for example, I think students that are, not even, I don’t even know if we call them mature, but students who have done, had a degree first of all; they’re graduate entry, they’ve come in as graduates, I think they’re also more inclined to participate in the debate, and I notice that in some of the SSCs that we do, we’re having a discussion, students that have a first degree, will speak, and the other ones kind of look up to them, because they’re four years older than them. So, I think there are, I think that there’s a confidence with those students. And similarly, I think that students from the traditional entry tend to be more confident at speaking out, putting forward their ideas, than students from less traditional backgrounds.

P2M: Do you think this is because the way they have been educated by Secondary School? Because sometimes the student that have come in from G2M or widening access, they have come in from REACH schools, that by definition is classified as low-level, low-performance schools. And most of the time, having talked at the time you know with head teachers there, they discourage students from that specific schools to apply for Medicine, because Medicine is too much for you; they have this kind of you know consideration about okay, probably I don’t say anything, because if I say something, they will be just stupid things to say, because I’m not clever enough, so, this is they’ve told me.

P1F: Yes. I honestly don’t know, again, I may be making generalisations, but whether they’re in independent schools, there might be more opportunities to do things, that will build self-esteem and confidence, so, in terms of extra-curricular activities, opportunity to have a voice, because there are less of you in the class. And the teacher/staff ratio is different. And, just that whole conferred advantage, a sense of entitlement possibly, that their voices should be heard, which, that’s something we wanted to increase for, as you say, maybe your schools have been more about “be quiet and get on with the work”. Rather than encouraging people to think.

P2M: Tell me what you think, yeah, that’s definitely a point, yeah. Yeah, so, this is what it is I suppose, yeah, I’d say so. But for me, as a G2M tutor, this is mostly one of my main role there as well, so to encourage the students to be more engaged, more, better participation, so don’t be shy, tell me what you think, and some of them are really, really so quiet, they don’t say anything because they’re still, you know scared, shy, by the university life. That is a huge impact, in terms of transition for them, yeah, and that’s kind of reflected by the attitude they have when they are in a class.

P1F: If you’re the first person in your family to go to university, it might seem, you know if your parents didn’t, it may be seen as an alien environment, rather than just something that you were sort of expected to do since you were quite small.

P2M: But also, you know for the people I’m dealing with, some of them are estranged by family, okay. So, it’s actually, everything on their shoulders, but also this link with family that is missing, yeah, so, for some of them it’s a sort of revenge or something like, okay, I’m going.

P1F: I’m going to show you.

P2M: Right, better life. Thank you mum, thank you dad, but, yes. For some of them it’s actually a matter of, okay, I don’t care about you as a family, I do what I want, and what I want is this. I don’t know if that makes any sense. So, there is not this kind, see, some families can have an expectation, but although they went through the G2M, or the Gateway Programme, in reality, it’s an expectation they came up with later on as a second chance, because they never thought that their sons or their daughters, they could have this chance, and when they realise okay, there is an opportunity there, oh, suddenly a lot of expectation on you, but they never thought about Medicine before there, for students when there is a family on the back supporting them in some ways. But also a good percentage of them, there’s no relationship at all with their family, and it’s a matter to be on your own all the time, and everything you have to do and everything you have to prove, every challenge you’re going to face, it’s about you and you.

P1F: Thinking again about traditional students, and what I was saying about it being a norm to go to university, so it would feel more familiar, there is also a high proportion of students who do Medicine whose parents did Medicine. And I understand that in one sense, because you, what you see your parents doing, you think, oh I fancy that, or that, it’s the norm, but for those students the environment is going to be even more familiar and comfortable for them.

P2M: Oh yes, absolutely. And lecturers there, or someone initial from the NHS, oh, my dad knows him [your dad], my mum knows him. You already have the sort of, relationship

P1F: Yes. But even if they’ve got parents who are doctors in another part of the Country, just having grown up with medic parents is going to, it normalises everything; you’re comfortable.

P2M: Yeah, you know how that works, having parents who work in the NHS as clinicians, so you already know the life of these people. You’ve been introduced in an environment where the people surrounding you when you get here are from the same kind of background.

P1F: And you can have discussions with them.

P2M: Yeah, yeah. Discussions are always the same. There’s a mindset really there.

F: Yeah. And have you noticed, I know G2M is still quite young, but have you noticed those kinds of differences, do they change as they progress through the course, do you know?

P2M: What, on the specific students?

F: Well just sort of the kind of differences, like you know the lower confidence and higher confidence?

P2M: Well I mean they acquire skills; they acquire knowledge and they acquire self-awareness and they feel more confident, that’s for sure, but I think is a normal, you know.

F: But is there still a gap, do you think?

P2M: I don’t think so, no. I have just to tell you though, the top student of first year, two years ago, was a G2M student. I should say in the beginning if you are a brilliant mind you are a brilliant mind, the only way to prove this is through your scores and marks, okay, and grades. If you are not, you are not.

P1F: And in fact, you’ve actually been able to do it against the odds. You know without some, without a bedroom of your own, where you’re not disturbed by siblings, with a tutor if you need it, without all these things that could help.

P2M: And that’s not available for them, they are not available for G2M or widening access students.

P1F: You’re going to be really quite brilliant to have done that.

P2M: Now, having looked at the performances of the students at the university, no, there’s not a huge difference. I see they are quite well up, marginally, into the class or into the year, in general, yeah. The main issue is on the first year, because the first year is the real transition year for them. If something happens, happens on the first year. Second year is, they’re really, you know, and I don’t see, I can’t see there is still a gap. Now, I’ve seen yesterday some of these students; they’re fully confident and they’re really nice, so, perfectly embed into the class, so, if I don’t tell you that those are G2M students, and the way they speak and the way they interact with students, you don’t realise, you cannot spot them and that’s good in terms of integration.

P1F: What about, you know how I’m always saying that sometimes people are, from the widening access background might be quieter in tutorial groups, there’s a confidence thing, in a world where there are lot, a higher proportion than normal people from independent schools or affluent backgrounds, is there a stigma associated with having a regions accent, or not just regional, but having a sort of traditionally working class accent for a particular area, that might make people, that might silence people, or do you think that that’s sort of gone on and it’s actually?

P2M: This is a really good point. Right, I think this is a matter of personality, okay. So, if there are some students on the G2M, they’re really looking for a chance, they’re really looking for a sort of, you know, way to, I can’t find the word in English, but anyway, a way to demonstrate how good they are, okay, so being challenged from this side, oh, shut up because you’re speaking like me, shut up, I have an accent, so, you cannot speak proper Queen’s English, fair enough, okay, but if I know that this is one of my weaknesses, I will work toward my accent, and make my accent better. So, if there is a matter of what kind of language would you speak, and taking over your example, can be received as a sort of, oh come on, it’s better if I don’t speak, yeah. But I think, from the kind of people we are dealing with here, that one will be a challenge that will be positively received, and I will work towards.

P1F: That’s it. So, you’re talking about making yourself understood. I am talking about something different, which is, people can have a strong accent, like Billy Connolly, but he’s very easy to understand. I’m talking about people maybe feeling, is there a stigma, even if you’re, what you’re saying is completely easy to comprehend, that you feel everybody else here talks posh, and I might not want to speak out.

P2M: Yeah, but do you think this is something that they already know about themselves, and for this reason they avoid to speak, or is something that they realise when they start to speak and they see the reaction of the students around them.

P1F: I don’t know.

P2M: Because that one, you know it does add a different perspective. Because if I am assuming, I don’t have a good English and I prefer to stay silent, so that otherwise you are going to judge me, this is my self-awareness about my level of English. But if I realise this after I speak, that would be a different reaction. Right, I’m going to stay silent, because I realise my English is not good and then I have been with you, that one is.

P1F: So, you might not speak, you might just think, oh, they don’t speak like me, I don’t speak like that, and just not speak.

P2M: I don’t know.

P1F: I don’t know either.

P2M: No, I don’t know, to be honest, I don’t know. I don’t know, because never, never come across this kind of, this kind of consideration from students so far, so none of them told me, oh okay, I don’t feel confident enough to be involved in any discussion because of my accent or because how I speak English, it’s my second language and I don’t want to talk to them because I know I’m not good enough, because it’s my second language. Because second language is one of the criteria for G2M students for example. Well this is a good point actually; I don’t have any answers.

P1F: No, I know, I don’t.

F: I’ve just seen the time and I’ve got about two minutes left with you. I just wondered if, just before we finish up, if you’ve got anything to add about the impact of having a diverse student body, like is there anything gained by having diversity in a learning environment?

P1F: Yes, definitely.

P2M: Yes.

P1F: So, I think what we were saying before about learning from each other, but also, if you have grown up somewhere were maybe you don’t know, say you’re, there weren’t many Muslim students at your school for example, then if you’ve got classmates and friends in tutorials that are Muslim, you get to see that they laugh at the same things as you, that they’re not, it could stop making ‘other’, you know, ‘othering’ people, because you have an opportunity to get to know people, if your university cohort is more diverse than your school.

P2M: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, this is what I can see as well, yeah.

F: So, is there anything that either of you want to add that we maybe haven’t covered?

P2M: I don’t think so.

P1F: I’ll just say one thing, which I didn’t want to say earlier, because I thought it’s not about my experience at Aberdeen, but it was from hearing some Black students at a conference, talking, that had gone to university, they were like, this student was, had grown up in London and then had gone away to a more rural part of England to Medical School, and had said how, that having grown up in a very diverse, culturally diverse environment, she didn’t feel different, because it was just all part of the mix, but if you then move to that, to be the token Black person in your Halls of Residence, it’s very hard, because then you become everybody’s token Black friend or, what we were saying about being able to learn from each other, that’s good, but not if you feel that you’re just there as a reference point for people to ask you for, what’s the Black experience, or what’s, because obviously there will be so many different experiences, and you want to just be, you want to be accepted as an individual and not just there to speak up on that, on everyone’s behalf, so I think that.

P2M: Everybody thinks about your experience, and there is a risk of generalising when you do not have that range.

P1F: Yeah, and that could apply for widening access as well, you don’t want to only be seen of as the voice from the inner city or something like that. Although we do want them to learn from each other, there’s a balance.

P2M: Yeah. I mean G2M, it’s an ongoing experience, so, we need to know when we do reports, which is the real impact. So far, it seems to be positive, but as I say, probably we need to wait a little bit longer, because there is an added transition in third year when they start to be involved in clinical, then there will be the contact with the patients in a different way, yeah. Maybe in the coming years, we can tell you so much more of the experience of what we learn from them, but at the moment, yes, I would say it’s quite positive, generally.

F: Yeah.

P2M: Yeah.

F: Okay, great. Well thank you very much.

P2M: You’re welcome.