F: So, my name is Heather, and hello. Would you like to start?

*[Participant intros]*

F: That’s great. Thank you everybody. So, you know the kind of theme of the focus group is Widening Participation and Diversity, so, we’re going to start quite generally, and just remember you’re talking to each other, you don’t need to direct your responses to me. The first thing I’d like to know is kind of what you guys understand, if anything, about the term, Widening Participation, to general university; has anyone heard of that before?

P?F: No.

P?M: No.

P?F: No.

F: So, it’s widening participation from people who are less likely to go on to university, usually because of their background. Historically, ethnicity has been a barrier to go to university as well. It might be socioeconomic background or refugee status. So, that’s generally what we mean by Widening Participation. So, do you think it’s important to get students from different backgrounds to go into university in general, do you want to have a chat?

P?M: Yes, absolutely. Everyone deserves a wide spectrum of the possibility of education, no matter where he comes from, according to their abilities of course, but.

P?F: As well as, it shouldn’t just be the background of the person that determines their success in university life.

P??F: I also think the wider the backgrounds, the more you can learn from each other, because everyone has got different story, history, or just the background, you can learn from each other and just improve as well, yeah.

P?M: Yeah, I would have said especially important for medical studies, because your patients, they’re going to have like very diverse background as well, so, that obviously when we have a background here in the Uni, we learn about that from each other and then you can also like apply it to patients.

P?F: I feel like it’s not just that every person has the right, or should have the right for equal possibilities and therefore equal choice of what they should do, if they have the same A-Level grades for example, but also like the society benefits from more people applying, and more people will having higher degrees and that’s just more functional, but I mean, it just, it benefits everyone.

P?F: Yeah, I think education is a right for everyone, or should be a right for everyone, and it improves your life and so many other areas as well, and your self-esteem and yeah.

P?F: And many people from different backgrounds bring many different ideas, so, if there wasn’t for example, so, the only basis why we have so many societies in Southampton is whether, like because there are so many different people, for example, like the Somalian Society, would be the Somali people.

F: Okay, great. So, I’d like to pick up on your point about Widening Participation in Medicine and getting people from different backgrounds into a medical degree, does anyone else have anything to say about particularly in Medicine?

P?F: Yeah, I agree on that, because we even had a lecture once, it was about pain and that every culture experiences pain in a different way, and that’s why I think it’s really important to have diverse people, in all sorts of studies, it’s not just Medicine, but particularly in Medicine, because you’re actively dealing with people.

P?M: Yeah, I was going to say that we should not only consider like the ethnicities, but also like religions and obviously like, like every ethnicity, and that especially like with treatment, religious people for example, certain procedures can be like difficult, because obviously if they disagree, they might be less likely to have like a good outcome.

P?M: Not only treatment, and I think also the interaction with the patient and the interaction, as importantly, with the family members of the patients, because that’s, then even I think a bigger culture clash when, I don’t know, for one patient is only maybe the spouse coming every once in a while, and then for the other patient there is like five people always there, and then learning to deal with that, not even deal with it, like just understand it, why it is so, and that it is nothing bad, might be annoying at some point, but it needs to be understood and perhaps also encouraged

P?F: I also feel like by having different ethnicities and different gender groups, demographics represented in a staff population, everyone, it’s like people get used to, the patients get used to finding someone who might be the same age group, or someone they can relate to, if it’s just general-wise, or opinion-wise, but it’s, it makes it a lot easier for them to open up, or let’s say, their expectancy towards the medical staff is more neutral, and that can also help a lot. Because, I mean, we’re taught about the aim of treating someone, the aim of medical treatment is just to benefit the patient, and how are you going to benefit or help the patient if they don’t open up, if they don’t tell you relevant information, if it’s difficult to get this information, what if they don’t like to come and, yeah.

P?F: And I think by knowing the background of the patient, it does not only help you in communication, but also how you want to treat the patient then later.

P?F: I also think in terms of like practical aspect, it’s quite important to have different, you know ethnicities, because of like language barriers. A lot of patients might not know how to speak English, and you know it’s quite handy if you have someone from their culture, who can actually speak to that culture, yeah.

P?M: Yeah, exactly. Kind of what P10F said a bit, you can’t generalise of the ethnicity or a region from a Country, you know, I don’t know if said it or someone else, but you have to take care that you, if you assume to know a culture and ethnicity that you don’t generalise it to everyone, that yeah, because someone of, from South Asia don’t, or you have the assumption that he or she didn’t like this treatment, or didn’t want it because of cultural reasons, that someone from the same Country doesn’t want it as well. So, you kind of have to explore every case individually, yeah.

P?M: And going back to what they said, I think it’s also important for us as professionals, to have this little support group to be aware of who is actually speaking this language or is from the same world region who could help you out, even maybe not in the same department, but just to know with whom you’ve studied who can help you, to have this resource.

P?F: Yeah, it’s always people you can just call and ask.

P?M: Yeah. Okay, there’s someone Turkish-speaking here.

P?F: Yeah and you can ask what’s your opinion about, what do you think about this?

P?F: I think it’s always we aim to treat the patient in his best interest, and not in our best interest, and that maybe different if no-one knows the exact ethnicity or religious background or why they’re behaving like that, and if you’re confronted with different cultures and different religions with your degree, I think it’s easier to understand and to respect the choice of the patient.

P?F: Yeah, it’s such a benefit to have a really diverse range of people whilst you study, so, it does not, so we already basically get used to it, because obviously we make friends, we’re all in different groups, so, you already get used to it, because someone in your group for example says oh yeah, in my culture this is different, so, it really helps you to start understanding early on.

P?F: And it’s not in our training, but for example in the Med groups, there was something about certain ethnicities don’t want to expose certain body parts during practice examinations, and you can relay this through your patient contacts, that they might as well not want to I suppose, so it could be more difficult to diagnose and treat them

P?F: Yeah.

F: Great. So, we have a few Widening Participation initiatives at Southampton, in terms of medical students from different backgrounds; are you aware of, you’re BM(EU) aren’t you, so, are you aware of other Programmes that we do, and maybe how students get onto them, what, if there are differences and how students get onto the Programmes?

P?M: I mean there’s BM6, which is basically like for people who have like less opportunities to get into Medicine, who are like more difficult background, which is quite useful obviously.

P?F: And I think there is a Programme with Somalia, I think they’re coming in Year 3.

P?M: I think it’s like Malaysia, BMIT

P?F: Yeah.

P?F: From far away!

P?M: Yeah, BM5, that’s like us, but only English on it. BM4, are the people who have studied already.

P?M: To be fair, BM5 is not only English.

P?M: Well no, no, I mean like they stay in England.

P?F: With the BM5, there is an international student group as well, right.

P?M: Right. Right, right, they come just from all over the place.

P?F: Oh, okay.

P?M: Yeah. It doesn’t have to be a specific background.

F: Do you think there are any differences on how they get onto the medical degree?

P?M: Well there is a difference in how much they pay, which is quite unfair, the international students pay.

P?F: Far too much.

P?M: What is it, twenty-five, yeah. I don’t know, a lot more. I mean obviously to political and, yeah, yeah it’s mostly politics I guess, and that’s quite unfair, I mean.

P?M: Do you think it’s only political? I would say it’s probably more for the economy of the university.

P?M: True, but then, the European Union doesn’t have to pay the same price as the extra European Countries, so.

P?F: I think if that’s the case, in all universities in the UK, that’s not just Southampton.

P?M: That’s why I say it’s a political thing.

P?F: Yeah, and it’s in most Countries, that have like a European thing, or Overseas, that kind of thing, I think.

P?M: Still, but it’s only privileged people, so to come here and study, which closes, which I mean like reduces them to, economic status that they are, like.

P?F: Yeah, like obviously only the ones that can pay, then will go to Uni.

P?M: Go to uni in England not from where they’re from.

P?F: I’m not sure about the payment from BM6 students.

P?M: I don’t know, no. Oh yeah, and BM4 students, they, as I understood it, it’s more difficult for them to get student loan, because they have already studied.

P?F: That’s why they come, they’re not allowed to be BM5, because they have already finished a degree, that’s why they have to, in order to get, join the Medical School.

P?M: I know someone who has done a degree before, and then is also BM5, so, there are few like those, I mean even if they are from another university

F: What do you think are the issues around the different fees, depending on your background, what do you think those issues are?

P?F: In some Countries it might be easier to get a student loan, maybe.

P?F: I think it’s interesting from a German perspective, because obviously there we don’t pay study free, and then we come here, and some people worry about it, some care more than others, I haven’t really understood who gets how much, or whatever. Not just like medical students, but also other degrees.

P?F: So, I work for the Outreach Team for the university, and I speak to schools that we want people to come from there and from lower socio-economic backgrounds and I would say that in terms of these, a lot of students won’t actually apply to university, because they might not have to pay the higher fee because of their background, yeah, I’m not too sure when it comes to different groups, you’re having to pay in advance as well.

P?M: I mean I think also, as a German group, in Germany we are quite stigmatised as going to the Private university, it’s kind of a, in some peoples’ eyes, it’s a failure, because you weren’t good enough to get into the other universities in Germany, so, that’s why you have to go abroad, or like how we call it, A-Level refugees, translated, which I don’t know, I can imagine that it’s in the head of some people, that it might disadvantage them, that stigma.

P?F: And how things are done, so, young people who want to study, but whose parents, whose families don’t have a lot of money, they don’t see that they have an opportunity to study and to do something else, and even though they might have a chance to get a loan, they don’t want to have debts, and to be unsure, they even get a job and then they just don’t take the risk.

P?F: If it’s not common in the family, and no-one’s used to the concept of now we have to pay, now when do you want to pay it back, maybe we need to support that a bit

P?F: Probably also not supporting and encourage, people who don’t have enough money, because they’re not used to having their financial situation where they earn that high, so, maybe not encouraged to try and get it or get into university and take that part, it’s just putting people off, that could make that easier.

P?F: Yeah. Maybe they’re discouraged because their parents, in a way, couldn’t achieve it, but like obviously they couldn’t, they haven’t been to Uni, and this might be another discourse, factor

P?M: I mean I think you’re also kind of raised like that, because your parents just, well I’m not these academics, they probably work kind of outside, in an office, didn’t study economics or whatever, so, other children, maybe also have this view that they should follow the path of the parents, so, they’ll just kind of stick to that and they don’t have the, maybe not the courage or they are just too unexperienced, or don’t want to upset their parents by doing something else.

P?F: I guess in maybe wealthy families, if their parents really want their kids to go to school, they start really early, getting them tutors or whatever to make sure they have a chance to get into university and to make sure they get in, because they can pay for it anyway, and maybe people that can’t pay for university may also not be able to pay for tutoring, or just not have their priorities in school and stuff, to get into university, which kind of lowers their chances of getting in as well, not just financially.

F: So, these kinds of students that we’re talking about from these backgrounds where there might be money issues or they might be first in the family and not that kind of support, how, if they do go on to university, how do you think that kind of background influences them at university, what impact do you think that has on them?

P?F: I don’t think that you can really tell; I can’t tell personally that, I can’t say, okay, that student comes from a socioeconomic family that is not as high as the others, that’s what I think.

P?F: I think it might be harder for them, especially as it’s also expensive to live, and to take care of yourself and get food and a nice place to live, and I think if you have to worry about that a lot, it might influence your studies.

P?F: I think it might, it could also impact your studies positively though, because again with the, I don’t know thinking that you can’t fail because that would be another year for paying, and you have to study really hard to make it worth it, because it’s such a big debt for you, and such a big burden, so, it could also be that they’re quite focused and like yeah, concentrating on their studies.

P?M: Yeah, but then on the other hand, anxiety levels and everything. I mean imagine you’re constantly under stress of losing a year, or like losing another semester fee or year fee.

P?F: That’s true.

P?M: That it’s not very healthy.

P?F: Yeah, and also BMEU offers lots of other opportunities, where society is so helpful, it’s practical itself, and you can’t go on ski-ing trips and this, and that, and there’s so much about that around student life, and if you have to think about, am I going to go to afford that, or am I going to go to this, can I do the staple social things, you might feel a little left out sometimes, or, that’s just is a thing I could imagine, that not having a lot of money could cause, or just like going back home sometimes is really expensive too, like getting a flight back or getting a train back if you don’t live that close, if you did want to go back, because say, like well someone from Manchester or someone who is really got away from Southampton, apply here, if they think about, are they likely going to apply for Unis that are really far away

P?F: I have a question on, like can you see in, like can you tell from our year, that oh, that person is not, is not as, the same as the other students, do you know what I mean, oh, that person comes from a, yeah, that’s what I mean, like that person comes from a socioeconomic background that’s maybe not that successful, could you, would you say that you can see that, anyone?

P?F: I think, not necessarily by the way that someone looks, because you should just assume that that based on ethnicity for example a person might not be as well off, but I think if you speak to people, maybe you hear about other backgrounds. I know quite a few people that are kind of from a socioeconomic background, they have to work quite a lot, so, you’d hear them say, oh I was doing a nightshift yesterday, or, you know I think once you start hearing people talking about very unsociable hours, or them working quite a lot, I would then kind of tend to assume that maybe they do need that money to cover their rent, or just do extra things to you know just basically live.

P?F: What about people with kids; like there’s, we’ve got some people in our year who have children and they have to take care of them, and try to, then you’ve got to work extra hours to pay for that, and it’s that is just on top of what we’re supposed to do anyway. I feel like our degree, I mean obviously, but in general, can be quite time-consuming and adding like more stress and more responsibilities.

P?F: Yeah, also you could tell because they might not be going out as much or socialising, because most of the social activities involves spending money, so, if they’re buying things for a house party or paying the entrance fee, or getting a new dress, it’s all, or most of the social activities, or going to the movies, involve money.

P?F: Yeah, especially you think a degree or going to university should always be something you enjoy, and the best time of your life, and if you don’t have the possibility to go out and to socialise, you’ll, I think it’s very easy to get socially isolated, and I think that’s naturally another burden with this degree, because there are many things going on in our heads, and like, yeah.

P?F: I know there is one girl in my, in one of our groups, and she’s working and she’s going to quit work because she can’t get along with work and the study work, but she still didn’t really, felt left out. I mean she still went out for social activities. She went mostly to all the lectures, she came to all our practical stuff and obviously now at the end, where the exams are getting closer, that’s why she has decided to quit, but before, I think she managed it quite well.

P?M: And you know there’s also a form of teaching I guess to organise yourself sort of thing, you know and but I think also that knowing that some people have it harder, some people have it better, makes you appreciate what you have and what, well what maybe parental support you have for your studies that you are grateful, or even motivated to work more, because some people don’t have it as good as you, necessarily.

P?F: I kind of want to add to what P10F was saying. I think it depends on work opportunities you get, because I just want to say that as well. A lot of people are doing like HCH shifts and these are quite long shifts so they tend to do them at the weekend, and I think that you also need to differentiate between someone working because they actually need the money, in terms of background, or do they just want some extra money in case there are hardships, and I think when you actually need the money it becomes hard if your work has unsociable hours or, I think sometimes some people, really they’re struggling, either going to lectures or work at the same time, because they actually do need the money and if they could have days off they would do it, or if they could attend lectures, but I think thinking of how many lectures we have, and I think if someone’s going to work after the lectures or on the weekends, it’s making it quite hard to like balance everything.

P?M: And then imagine if some, if a lecturer doesn’t show up or the lecturer is completely useless, and then how much anger that must provoke.

P?F: Yeah, I think it makes a difference if you work, if you need the money or just want it

F: Cool. So, there’s clearly some sort of differences in some peoples’, the personal lives of students who come from a different background, that you’re aware of and sensitive to, which is lovely. What about studying; so, did you have opportunities to study with people from different backgrounds on the course, did you do any group work or seminars?

P?M: Yeah.

P?F: Already in our curriculum, we have so many different groups. We have tutorial groups, we have anatomy groups, or we used to have anatomy groups, we have placements groups, and then we had, last year, we had different SSU groups, so, we are likely really in our like, we have, there are many times when we can get to interact with so many different people.

F: Great. And when you’re doing that, do you feel like there’re any differences between you at that point, when you’re working and studying together?

P?M: I mean especially like for Muslims and Ramadan, obviously like they are limited, like eat the food at night and not during the day, they prefer to like work late at night. And I know me and my friends, like we used to like work only at night for the exams, so, we met up every evening at eight, and then we just studied until like five in the morning. So, there are the days when this, they have differing study hours, but then it’s also useful, because then I prefer to study then too

P?F: Yeah.

P?M: In terms of participation and engagement, I would say that we BM(EU) students are a little bit at the top of the bar, that compared to BM5 students, because I don’t know, because, maybe because we are little bit older, maybe because it’s also a cultural difference, I don’t know.

P?F: I think just in general how our school life is, in Germany, compared to here.

P?M: Perhaps, yeah. So, I notice quite a bit that we are more engaging and that the teachers tend to know our names because they have interacted with us more.

P?M: That, it’s really individual level again, I mean it really depends, some people don’t say a lot, and some people say more. Some BM5 ask questions, some don’t even show up to lectures, so, they can’t ask or say anything, so, and what I would say, it’s not really depending on the background in general, but the individuals, because you have, no matter of their background, there are both cases, both people, or both kinds of people, so, it’s, I wouldn’t say it’s more, I don’t know, I would not say that it’s all people of one ethnicity communicate only in lectures more. Maybe it’s different to the outside of the Uni, because they meet people, some ethnicities are really communicative outside, they just chat a lot, but got to be different in the lectures as well, so, it’s.

P?F: Again, the groups, I’m not sure if you can necessarily tell whether somebody is doing BM5 or you are BM6, because I couldn’t tell who does what.

P?F: I think studying and learning does not have an ethnicity or a cultural thing, because even in our small group right now, we’re different individuals who are learning in different ways, we’re learning at different times during the day, and I think that’s important and that’s nothing to do with cultural differences, so.

F: Okay. So, we’ve kind of mentioned as well about some differences in people from maybe lower socioeconomic backgrounds having less ability to socialise, because they’re working and maybe they can’t afford to but do you guys interact mostly with other BM(EU) students or do you socialise with students from all the different Programmes or?

P?M: I’d say such and such. Me, personally, I’m more amongst BM(EU), because we also live together, and that makes it easier.

P?F: I’m massively the opposite.

P?M: You’re anglophile, yeah.

P?F: I think it socially happens on who you live with, maybe if you live alone it’s not as much who you interact with, but like if you’re living with BM(EU)s, these are the ones who are going to be around you most of the time, but if you’re living with, BM5s or other people, who don’t do Medicine, you might be even closer to these students.

P?M: But I wouldn’t say we are isolated in that sense, if we’re only speaking German most of the time, I mean, yes, we’re speaking German most of the time, but we also have BM5 friends.

P?M: So, I live also with the other guys of us, and the most thing where I socialise with the others is football, I play with the Roosters. So, it’s, yes, we’re together for training things, sometimes social, so, it’s, yeah, just things like regular activities, where you don’t just only talk about Uni, just talk about football, talk about the teams, how we’re playing, so, it’s really engaging as well.

P?F: It really depends on what you’re doing, like for me personally, when I’m doing a specific social or society, then I’m more with other friends, but when I’m doing, more like when I go out with friends, go to the cinema or go out for dinner, then I’m more with my German friends. It really depends what I’m doing.

F: Okay. We’re on the last question guys, don’t worry! So, I just kind of wanted to sum up, and we’ve kind of touched on this a little bit anyway throughout, but about kind of what the benefits of diversity are in the Medical School environment, so, does anyone want to add anything else about what students from different backgrounds can bring, particularly to medical education and thinking about the future as well, when you’re in clinical years as doctors, like what’s the value of diversity?

P?F: I think it’s important to learn how to understand different opinions and different values and cultures, and also to learn to maybe tolerate them, if your opinion is completely different or if you’d a completely different way of doing something or even a treatment in Medicine, so, I think it’s just important to learn that other people might be completely different and might not agree with you, that’s all, but you still kind of work together and you can still communicate well and still achieve something beneficial for, I don’t know, the team or the patient or whatever context it is, so, that you kind of learn how to work with people that you might just be completely different to.

P?M: And it’s also interesting to talk like to different people, because obviously they’ll have different political opinions and this sometimes makes really interesting. For example, I love our house where I live; there’s like we are six people from all different nations, and we have discussions, it’s always like very intense. I’m not gonna lie, we have very different opinions, but it’s also funny, you know, we learn from each other.

P?F: Yeah. And it’s so much easier to kind of talk to people on your own degree, that for example on the backgrounds, on the internet, it just makes it easier, yeah, than cope on your own, you learn about different ethnicities.

P?F: I think in general; we should really appreciate diversity in the Medical School in general. I mean, for us, even, I would not even say that the German culture is the same as the English or the British culture, and there you can even tell so many ways the differences, so, you actually learn in so many ways.

P?F: And I think you become more open, and when you’re, say your whole life in your home town and you work in the same hospital, you might think that’s everything, but when you travel and like us here, you are educated in a different Country, you learn about new culture and environment, and then you can pick up things, take them back home with you, and yeah learn, then give your knowledge to someone else and just, yeah, opens up your mind.

P?M: And also, by the variety of food!

P?F: Oh yes, pizza, so British!

P?M: In a more professional sense, having the contacts with other Countries makes co-operation and collaboration easier, makes different approaches to, I don’t know, maybe different procedures easier, or not easier, I don’t know. I mean for us, it was quite surprising how the GP practices here are handled and how Medicine is actually practiced, because it’s completely different; we have many highly specialised doctors in Germany, so, when we know that oh, I have a skin problem, I should go to a dermatologist, then here, it’s a complete difference, and you just go to the GP, no matter what, for whatever you need, which, we had to learn, and I think there is also benefits in that, so, that’s something I will take back to Germany and implement perhaps, where possible.

P?F: I feel like it’s cool, because you’re forced to learn. I guess, so much things that I know we’ve talked about, and I talk to my friends, and they’re like oh really, okay, that’s what you do, this is what you think. I mean, whereas, well I think I’m really interested people, and I want to know about what life is like in like India or Japan, just read it up, but it’s only people who are keen, and who want to learn, and who want to be open, and I feel like if you’ve got people around who are different, it’s a natural thing that happens.

P?F: And I think it enables you to be a team player in the future, not only to a patient or a treatment or a procedure, but you have to work in a team to provide the best healthcare possible, and if you’ve gone through university all on your own because you’ve had the best grades and just studied and that, that was your approach at university, which is fine, you won’t be, you know able to engage in a medical team in that way that we are kind of forced to, and learn to, which is quite important.

P?F: I think that’s also the reason why we have so many different groups. I mean it’s not like one group stays for every, let’s say a subject, we have like in so many ways, different groups, which is basically, as you’ve said, we’re forced to get out and talk to others.

F: Okay. Does anyone have anything else they want to say? No, alright, cool. I’ll stop the recording then.