



# Evaluation report on cohort 1 of the Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence (ASPIRE)

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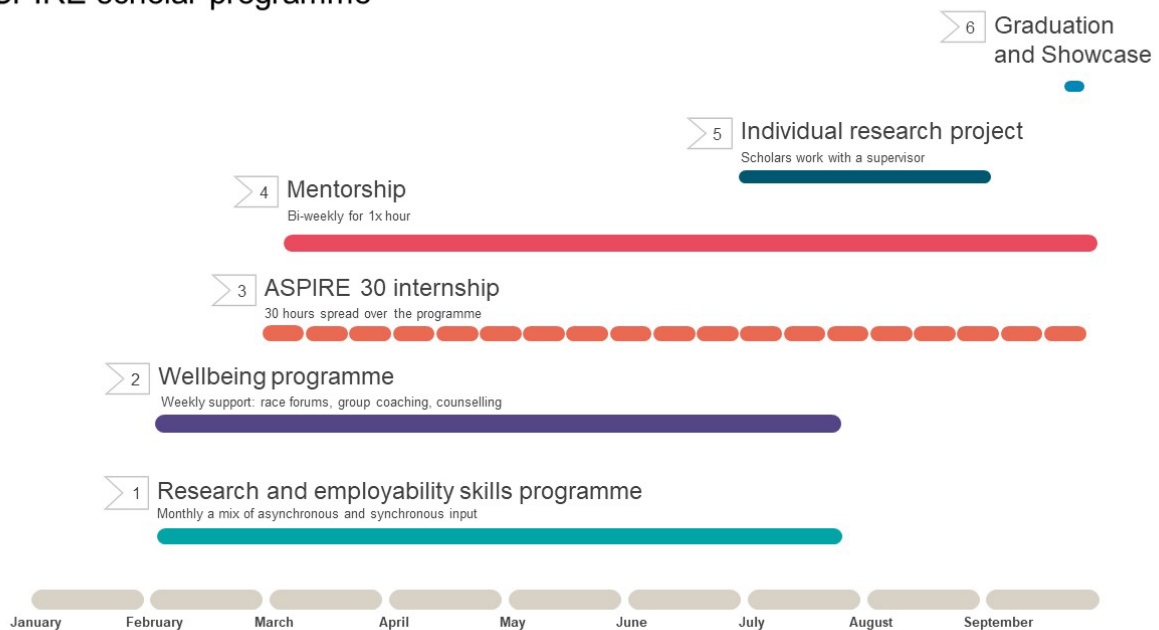


# 1. Executive summary

ASPIRE is a unique intervention and a new and innovative approach to address the Black PhD leaky pipeline. ASPIRE is a reciprocal teaching programme, designed to provide research mentorship and wellbeing to improve graduate outcomes and access to doctoral study for Black and Black heritage students.

Figure 1. Timeline of the ASPIRE scholar programme

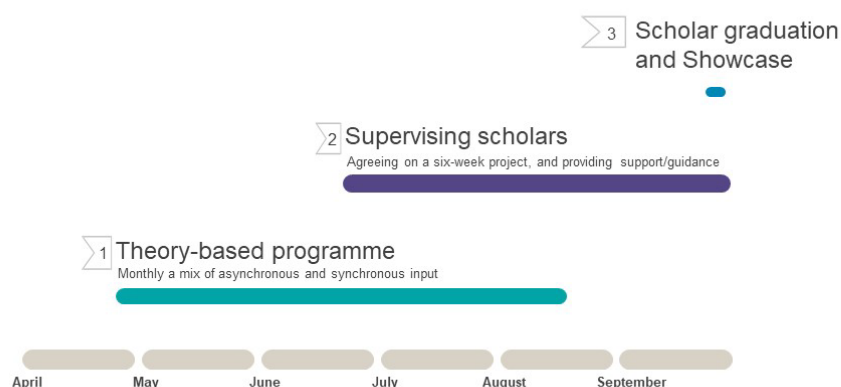
## ASPIRE scholar programme



ASPIRE is reciprocal in that it also develops the supervisory teams' understanding of the often-taboo subject of race and its importance to the Black experience.

Figure 2. Timeline of the ASPIRE supervisor programme

## ASPIRE supervisor programme



This evaluation uses a difference-in-difference design and focuses on evaluating both process and impact, with a theory of change model developed with the client to better target the evaluation. In addition, this mixed methods approach also includes interviews, listening rooms (a specialised informal paired interview aimed at removing interviewer bias), diaries and coursework, with a matched control sample.

## 1.1 Summary of the process evaluation findings

What worked well in the mentoring programme:

- + having a shared lived experience (meaning a shared Black or Black heritage background) led to strong mentor relationships
- + mentor relationships that thrived and are still ongoing where both the scholar and mentor were able to easily identify their shared background. Therefore, we recommend placing more emphasis on the mentor-mentee matching process to align scholars' goals with mentors' background and experiences
- + in addition, invested mentors (those who had a personal reason for taking part) offered wider wellbeing support to the scholars, which the scholars believed gave them the support they needed to continue with the ASPIRE programme when they felt overwhelmed.

What worked well in the ASPIRE programme:

- + the quantitative and qualitative research training delivered by the Q-Step programme developed scholars' confidence and their research skills. Research skills were viewed as invaluable by the scholars, to the extent that the scholars supported peers not on the ASPIRE programme with the research elements of their degree programme. This further boosted the scholars' confidence
- + the wellbeing element of the ASPIRE programme worked well, providing a safe space to discuss challenges, as well as addressing the loneliness that scholars felt. The scholars felt these spaces kept them focused on moving forward and improving themselves, and gave them the confidence to "kick down a few doors" (scholar 2)
- + The programme directors' energy, belief and passion for this project.

The ASPIRE 30 internship:

- + there were many challenges setting up the ASPIRE 30 internships and, as a result, fewer than 10 were made available for the scholars to apply for. Given that the internships were used as a strong persuasive element in the recruitment of scholars, scholars were disappointed that they were not able to benefit from a work placement
- + similarly, there was confusion over what the ASPIRE 30 programme was, with some scholars mistakenly believing that the internship was a full-time job, where they'd work 30 hours a week, relieving the financial burdens of being an international student.

What needs to be adapted or changed:

- + communication: juggling multiple modes of communication across different higher education institutions was challenging, and led to some supervisors, mentors and scholars missing key information. Steps have been taken by the project directors to address this issue
- + timing: the programme tapered off over the summer holidays, impacting engagement from the scholars, mentors and supervisors. Steps have been taken by the project directors to enable the programme to end before the summer break
- + reflection diaries: were onerous, particularly for non-native English speakers, and some scholars were self-conscious completing the diaries. Therefore, the reflection diaries will be reviewed and the consent process adjusted so it is retrospective
- + unequal mentoring experience: some scholars felt their mentor was not invested in them or the mentoring process, feeding back that their mentor was too busy for them. We examined the types of people who were recruited as mentors and found that both experienced academics and postgraduate research (PGR) students were recruited as mentors, leading to stark differences in availability and level of mentoring support available to scholars. As PGR students exhibited more buy-in and higher levels of availability, we recommend focusing on recruiting mentors from this group.

Challenges with data collection:

As outlined in the process evaluation, the ASPIRE programme tapered off and communication between the programme team and scholars deteriorated, which subsequently impacted post-programme data collection. To mitigate this in the future, Advance HE proposes attending the initiation event for scholars, supervisors and mentors, offering them the opportunity to sign up to the evaluation process directly. This will enable Advance HE to hold their contact details and reach out independently of the programme team.

## 1.2 Summary of the impact evaluation findings

### 1. The ASPIRE programme improved scholars' experiences

At the end of the ASPIRE programme, as evidenced at the showcase event, it was clear that the scholars had flourished, growing in both confidence and self-belief. This event gave the scholars the opportunity to share their ASPIRE journey through poetry, affirmation banners and other artefacts they created as part of the ASPIRE programme. They shared that they now see themselves as tenacious, brave, courageous and resilient.

### 2. The ASPIRE programme faced challenges with engagement

As reported in the process evaluation, there were issues around communication and timing that impacted scholars', mentors' and supervisors' engagement with the programme. Action has already been taken to address these two issues. However, in addition, we recommend considering the recruitment criteria carefully, as there was a disparity in the experiences of

those who had recently arrived in the UK and those who had lived in the UK for several years.

**3. The ASPIRE programme improved future study or career prospects of scholars**

The survey data collected at the start of the ASPIRE programme indicated that scholars lacked confidence and rated their skills as lesser than their peers (significantly lower than the control group). However, by the end of the programme, all the scholars who were interviewed, as well as those who completed the post-survey, indicated that they were in the process of either applying for doctoral study or graduate employment. Although at this stage we lack the quantitative data to support this finding, the data is indicative of the ASPIRE programme improving scholars' future study or career prospects.

## Wider context of the ASPIRE project

According to Office for Students (OfS, 2021), there was an awarding gap of 22.1% points (full-time) and 35.7% points (part-time) between Black and White undergraduates. However, in Advance HE's latest equality in higher education statistical report (Aldercotte, 2022), the Black, Asian and minority ethnic awarding gap for firsts and 2:1s is, slowly, starting to close. Similarly, the proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic academic staff at UK higher education institutions (HEIs) has been increasing steadily across the UK from 2003-04 to 2020-21. Also, the overall representation of individuals identifying as Black, Asian and minority ethnic has increased from 8.6% of all staff in 2003-04 to 16.3% of all staff in 2020-21 (Aldercotte, 2022). However, the general improvement in representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff was primarily among UK nationals, increasing from 5.4% of all staff in 2003-04 to 11.4% of all staff in 2020-21 (compared with the increase in non-UK nationals from 31.6% in 2003-04 to 33.6% in 2020-21). But, rather encouragingly, the improvements among UK nationals tended to be consistent across both professional and support as well as academic staff, and among academic professors (Aldercotte, 2022). Importantly, OfS (OfS, 2019) and the higher education (HE) sector more widely are committed to tackling the ethnicity degree awarding gap.

In 2020-21, there were a total of 15,345 full-time UK domiciled PhD students in their first year of study and just 4% of those students were Black (Aldercotte, 2022).

A combination of inequitable graduate outcomes and lack of funding for Black students and/or interesting projects typically undertaken by Black students, has led to a "broken pipeline" (Williams, Bath, Arday and Lewis, 2019). Overall, the representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff has remained relatively stable, though increasing to 16.3% of all staff in 2020-21 compared with 15.5% of all staff in 2019-20. While the proportion of Black, Asian and minority staff is similar across academic and professional and support roles, Black, Asian and minority staff are underrepresented at the higher academic levels. In 2020-21, Black staff remained underrepresented among professors (0.6% in 2019-20 and 0.7% in 2020-21; [Aldercotte, 2022]).

"You cannot be, what you cannot see"

Reshma Saujani

But it is not just about the injustice of an awarding gap or fewer Black students applying for or completing their PhDs, it is about their experiences at university. HEPI and Unite are currently working together to research Black students' experiences in university accommodation, and shared some preliminary findings in a "Living Black at University" webinar earlier this year (March, 2022). They revealed that more than half (54%) of Black students surveyed reported having been the victim of some form of racism in their accommodation, while over two thirds (64%) of all student respondents reported having witnessed acts of racism. Three-quarters of Black students reported some level of impact on their mental health due to racism. This was compounded by a lack of support and difficulties in finding Black counsellors who had the experience to understand the impact of racism.

Similarly, Wonkhe and Pearson explored students' experiences of belonging in a large-scale survey of more than 5,000 students (Capper and McVitty, 2022). Students with lower ratings of belonging were less likely to rate their course content as including varied, diverse voices, and less likely to say that their course was taught in an inclusive style.

However, there is hope for greater improvement in the representation of Black, Asian and minority staff in senior academic positions in the coming years, as shown in the pipeline of Black, Asian and minority ethnic postgraduate research students, increasing from 18.6% in 2019-20 to 19.9% in 2020-21 (Aldercotte, 2022).

### 1.3 What is ASPIRE?

The ASPIRE programme is designed by Black academics for Black students. ASPIRE is a unique intervention and a new and innovative approach. The programme centres health and wellbeing and compassionate conversations, building the confidence of Black and Black heritage students interested in doctoral study. It is reciprocal in that it also develops the supervisory teams' understanding of the often-taboo subject of race and its importance to the 'Black experience'.

The project is designed to develop the capabilities of Black students to navigate structural barriers to doctoral study and enhance pathways of opportunity through inclusive targeting.

The four key aims of the project are:

1. Develop an impactful, inclusive, targeted research mentorship and wellbeing programme designed specifically to meet the racialised needs of Black students interested in accessing doctoral level study.
2. Evaluate the ways in which structural barriers to the access of doctoral level study for Black students can be overcome through participation in ASPIRE.
3. Determine whether participation in ASPIRE leads to improved work-readiness of Black students to access doctoral level study.
4. Improve the understanding of postgraduate research (PGR) supervisors of the specific, racialised needs of Black students interested in accessing doctoral study and the ways in which Black students can be best supported.

Continuous improvement will lead to the development of a framework that can be adapted and adopted by other universities seeking to attract Black students into doctoral level study.

#### 1.3.1 Wider funding context

ASPIRE is part of a larger scheme from OfS and Research England, which has invested £8m in [13 projects](#). The projects are aimed at encouraging Black, Asian and other ethnic minority students to study after their university degrees and to continue their careers in research. The initiative stems from a report by the education consultancy Leading Routes, called [The Broken Pipeline](#). It revealed that, between 2016 and 2019, out of nearly 20,000 PhDs awarded by research funders, 245 were awarded to Black or Black mixed students, with 30 of those being to those from Black Caribbean backgrounds (Williams, Bath, Arday and Lewis, 2019).

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## 1.4 Programme philosophy

ASPIRE seeks to broaden access of opportunity to groups of students who often find themselves marginalised and framed into a deficit model. At the heart of the programme is compassionate pedagogy that focuses on students' strengths and capabilities, by providing equality of opportunity to support the development of diverse talent. The desire is to enhance the pipeline of talented Black and Black heritage individuals into rewarding roles in the academy and/or industry.

ASPIRE programme for scholars aimed to:

**Develop an impactful, inclusive, targeted research mentorship and wellbeing programme designed specifically to increase confidence and resilience of Black students interested in accessing doctoral level study.**

There were at least 25 different planned activities, which were outlined in the logic model. Some focused on enhancing scholars' work-readiness such as career training and a business simulation, while others focused on preparing scholars for a PhD, with activities including coaching and Q-Step. Q-Step is a funded programme based at 15 UK higher education institutions to address the quantitative research skills shortage. The key objective of the Q-Step programme is to make a step-change in quantitative social science training and to equip social science graduates with the necessary knowledge and skills needed for the contemporary economic and social climate we live in. <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/qstep/>

Figure 3. Work-readiness: theoretical framework that underpins the ASPIRE programme



ASPIRE is scaffolded around these capitals (Ugiagbe-Green and Southall, 2020; Ugiagbe-Green, Farr and Bale, 2021):

- + **Human capital:** the skills and knowledge of the graduate, as evidenced by their qualifications and experience (eg degree classification, degree subject, prior work experience)
- + **Social capital:** the graduate's network of personal and professional relationships, as well as their capability to form professional relationships (eg graduate having friends or family in their desired industry/sector)
- + **Cultural capital:** the graduate's embodiment of organisational professionalism (eg the way in which the graduate dresses or speaks)
- + **Identity capital:** the ability of the graduate to demonstrate self-reflexive understanding of their positioning in the graduate labour market field (eg having set career goals, being able to communicate one's skills and experiences in the language of the employer)
- + **Employment capital:** the differentiated occupational behaviours, judgments and moral orientations that are valued by employers (eg business acumen, situational judgement and ability to manage up)
- + **Economic capital:** the ability of a graduate to bear financial risks related to employment opportunities (eg whether or not there are financial barriers to geographical mobility or taking on unpaid work experience).

But, for the ASPIRE programme directors, this programme has personal meaning and drives them both above and beyond, as one of the directors shares below.

“It’s much more than just another research project, another intervention. It’s important because of the impact that it has for the people that have done the programme, but actually, for me it’s taught me a lot about myself. It has ignited a passion that’s always been there, but I’ve had this vision of ASPIRE for a long, long time, and obviously now it’s been realised and it’s [...] important to me that the values of ASPIRE and the intent and the integrity of the programme are maintained...it means for me it’s validation for the pain that has been suffering to get here. The constant people telling you that you can’t, that you won’t, that you shouldn’t. Yes, we’re here and we’re doing this work and it’s having the impact.”

Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green

## 1.5 ASPIRE programme design

The project team has an extensive background in researching and understanding the experiences of Black students in the academy. Together, their research covers the themes of ‘imposter syndrome’, stereotype bias, professional identity politics, and mental health and wellbeing issues. Additionally, their research has revealed students’ frustration with systemic barriers, such as a lack of personalised support, and not seeing themselves in the curriculum or represented by academic and staff support. These studies have informed the design of the ASPIRE programme, as well as the methods adopted in its evaluation (eg listening methods to be used to evaluate the process and impact of the programme).

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It is important to note that “there was also the racialised element” which was “purposely designed”. One of the programme directors put it simply that, “the idea of ASPIRE was **designed by Black academics and run by Black academics for Black students.**” It is important to consider that ASPIRE is designed as a reciprocal teaching programme to provide research mentorship and wellbeing to improve graduate outcomes and access to doctoral study for Black and Black Heritage students. It focuses on improving outcomes for Black and Black Heritage students but also on providing training for postgraduate supervisors in the specific, racialised needs of Black students interested in accessing doctoral study.

“The original idea was to have them [the supervisors] predominantly White, so get them to understand us, rationalise experiences of Black students and how it differs from our White folks. And to help them to shift their own pedagogy in terms of how the needs of the students are different and how we can tailor support to help those Black students.”  
(Programme director)

Briefly the roles are outlined below.

### Definition of roles in the ASPIRE programme

**Scholars** were Black or Black heritage, who have completed a foundation degree (or Higher National Diploma) or above. The recruitment criteria were open, welcoming applicants who were graduates or alumni from any discipline, or who were currently studying, or employed, unemployed, volunteering and/or taking a career break.

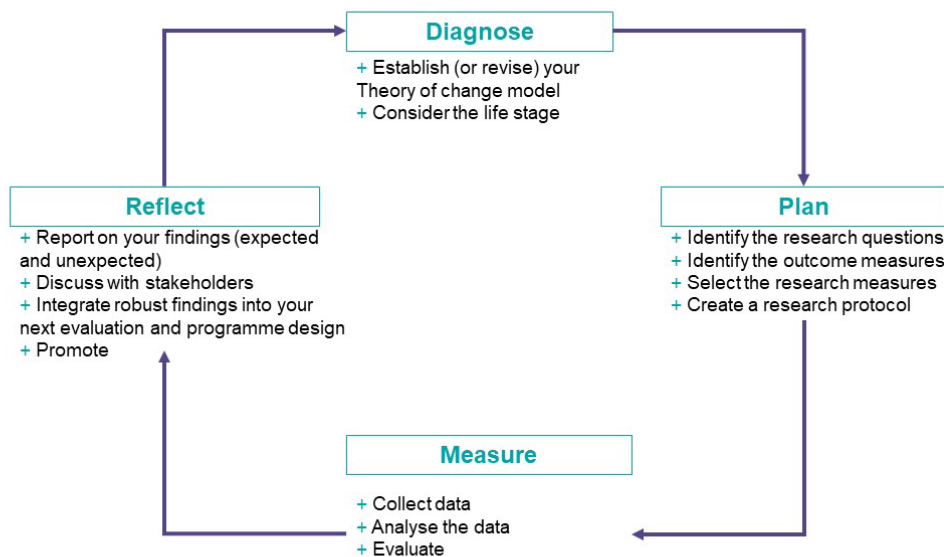
**Mentors** were Black or Black heritage PGR researchers and academics who are passionate about race equity in education. Mentors received a programme of professional development via engaging and action-based ASPIRE workshops. The workshops were delivered by the principal coach on the ASPIRE programme, Sheree Palmer SFHEA, whose role was to provide a “shoulder that scholars can lean on” (programme director). Being a mentor on the ASPIRE programme was a paid role.

**Supervisors** were experienced White academics working at either Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) or Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), who took part in the ASPIRE supervisor programme and supervised two to four scholars and their research projects. Being a supervisor on the ASPIRE programme was a voluntary, unpaid role.

## 2. Evaluation design

To accurately, fairly and consistently evaluate whether the ASPIRE programme builds confidence and resilience/work-readiness in Black students interested in pursuing doctoral studies, a theory of change (ToC) framework was constructed to identify specific and measurable outcomes and impacts. A ToC framework is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.

Figure 4. Theory of change stages



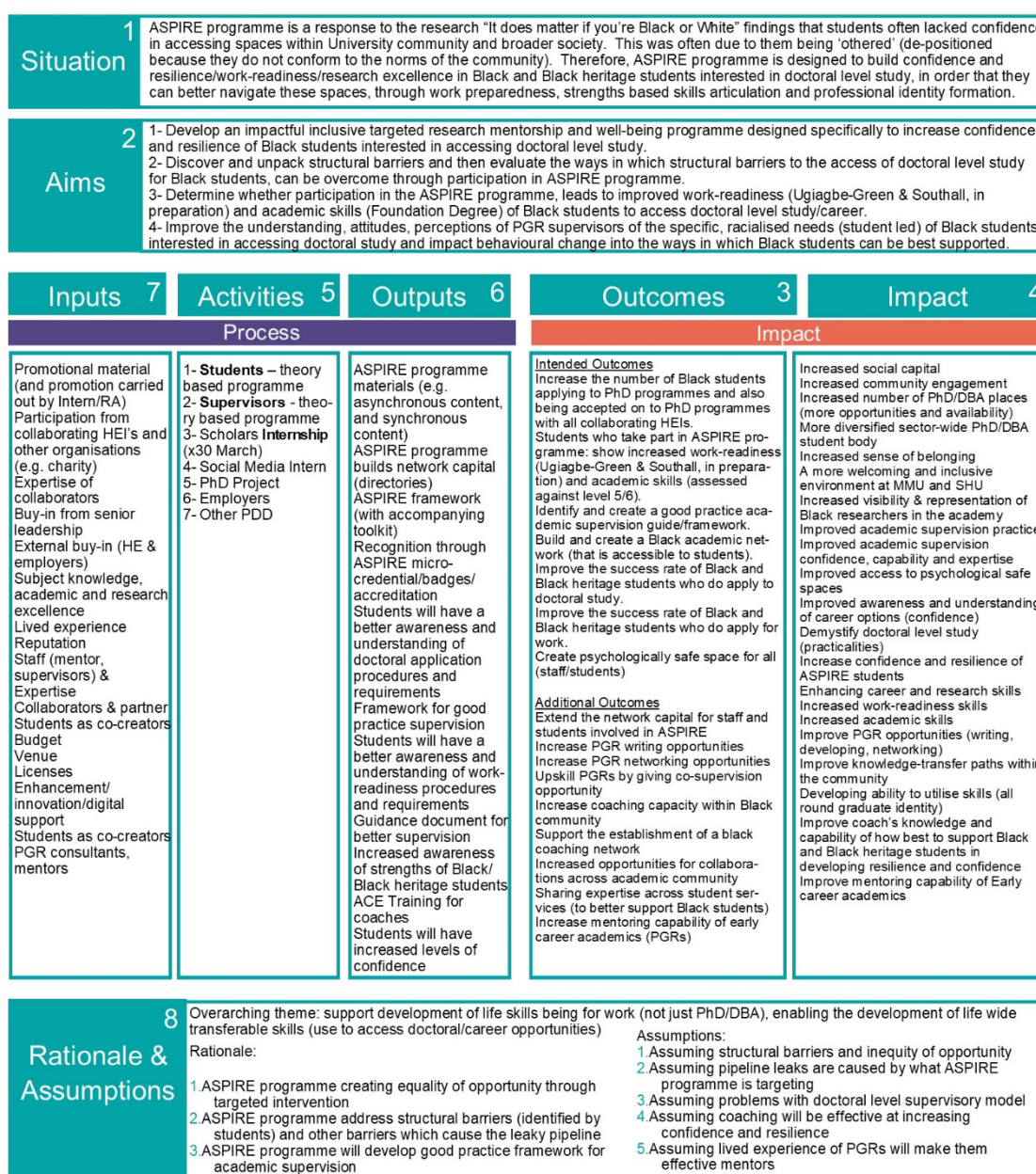
As illustrated in Figure 4, a ToC framework follows the four stages of diagnosing, planning, measuring and reflecting. These stages were followed to create a logic model that would describe the need the ASPIRE programme was trying to address, the changes it aimed to make (ie outcome and impact) as well as how it planned to achieve those (ie activities).

Creating a robust logic model allowed for the establishment of specific activities, outputs, outcomes and impact of the ASPIRE programme, which formed a baseline of the evaluation. To populate the logic model, an online workshop was held with programme directors and output shared with stakeholders for comment to fully understand the current context of the programme. Insights from the workshop were used to generate questions for discussion, which were then distributed to programme directors and stakeholders. The discussion questions included:

- + Are there any changes/additions to the logic model?

- + How do you anticipate the aims and objectives (which are outlined at the top of the logic model) of ASPIRE fitting into your own university context?
- + What do you think might be the barriers to implementing a programme designed to build confidence and resilience in Black students interested in pursuing doctoral studies?
- + What type of evidence do you think would be most persuasive to your university to continue supporting (and widening) the ASPIRE programme?

Figure 5. ASPIRE’s logic model



The image above outlines the theory that underlies how the ASPIRE interventions will bring about the desired change. This was used to develop an evaluation plan.

The evaluation uses a difference-in-difference design (a quasi-experimental research design to study causal relationships between the programme and outcomes) and focuses on examining both process and impact evaluation. An evaluation plan was designed to focus on three key areas:



The purpose of each stage of the evaluation plan is outlined below:

1. **Process evaluation** provides insight into what makes a successful mentoring programme, such as what works well, aspects which require adaptation or change and further information on what makes a successful internship.
2. **Impact evaluation** provides insights into whether the ASPIRE programme – focused on confidence and resilience/work-readiness for Black and Black heritage students – works to improve:
  - experiences (of Black and Black heritage students, staff, other students)
  - engagement (of Black and Black heritage students, staff, other students)
  - future study or career prospects (of Black and Black heritage students who take part in ASPIRE).
3. **Qualitative research** aimed to identify and evaluate structural barriers that exist for Black and Black heritage students seeking to access doctoral level study.

Research questions were developed to address each of the key areas and were divided into primary, secondary and process evaluation questions.

Table 1. Research questions for the ASPIRE evaluation

Research questions	
Primary research questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does the ASPIRE programme increase confidence and resilience in Black and Black heritage students?</li> <li>2. Does attending the ASPIRE programme improve doctoral applications among Black and Black heritage students?</li> <li>3. Does engagement with the ASPIRE programme increase Black and Black heritage students work-readiness for doctoral level study?</li> </ol>
Secondary research questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Identify the structural barriers that exist for Black and Black heritage students (via listening rooms)</li> <li>5. Does ASPIRE increase confidence/resilience more in Black and Black heritage female students (and any other groups)?</li> </ol>
Process evaluation research questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Was the ASPIRE programme delivered the way we expected?</li> <li>7. Does the ASPIRE programme address identified structural barriers?</li> <li>8. Are we targeting the right students?</li> <li>9. What was the cost effectiveness of the initiative?</li> <li>10. Are Black students (and all staff) in the region more aware of ASPIRE programme and its benefits?</li> </ol>

## 2.1 Data collection

A mixed-methods approach adopted a wide variety of data collection methods including interviews, listening rooms (a specialised informal paired interview perfect for removing interviewer bias), surveys, diaries and coursework. In addition, the quantitative data was paired with a matched control sample.

In reference to table 1 above: research questions 1-3 were primarily addressed by the data gathered from the scholars' pre and post surveys, with additional context from interviews with scholars. Research question 4 will be addressed using the data gathered from the listening rooms with the scholars and provided as a separate addendum. Research question 5 will be addressed by comparing the scholars pre and post survey data with matched controls when additional data has been collected. Research questions 6-10 were primarily addressed by the data gathered in interviewing scholars, mentors and supervisors with additional context from the survey data.

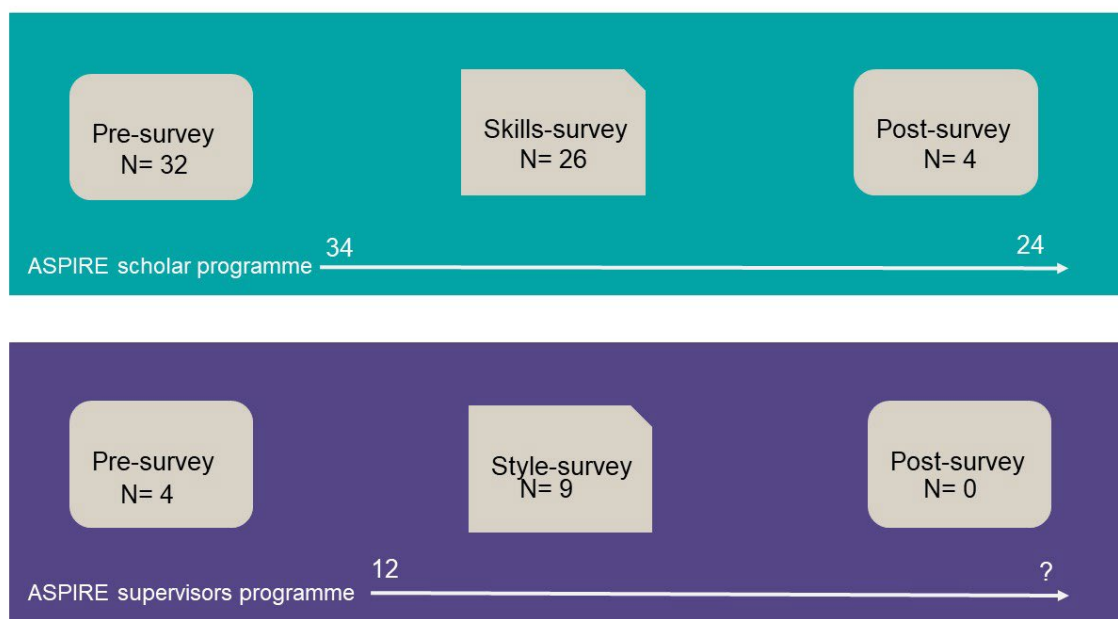
Table 2. Overview of data collection

Method	Total number
Surveys	15 scholars, 4 supervisors
<b>Pre-survey</b>	32 scholars, 4 supervisors
<b>Skills-survey</b>	26 scholars, 9 supervisors
<b>Post-survey</b>	4 scholars, 0 supervisors
<b>Matched control</b>	24 students, 5 academics
Interview	15 (scholars 9, supervisors 2, mentors 4)
Listening rooms	8 scholars
Diaries <sup>1</sup>	24 scholars

### 2.1.1 Surveys

A difference-in-difference design was developed to evaluate the ASPIRE programme, as shown below. Both ASPIRE scholars and ASPIRE supervisors had three surveys to complete.

Figure 6. Evaluation surveys with number of responses



Scholars and supervisors were able to complete the survey anonymously by generating a code at the start of each survey by responding to three questions:

1. What are the first three letters of your mother's first name?
2. What are the first three letters of the street on which you currently live?
3. On what day of the month were you born?

<sup>1</sup> Diary data will be analysed by the programme directors

For example, if a person's mother's name is HANNAH, they live on Main Street and were born on 18 January, their code would be: HANMAI18. This code meant that each response was tied to an individual without revealing their identity.

**The scholar (student) surveys aimed to gather insight into:**

- + aims of the programme: confidence, resilience, grit, work-readiness capitals (Ugiagbe-Green, 2020) and preparedness
- + process evaluation: satisfaction, what worked well, what needs to be adapted/changed
- + knowledge: of doctorate (funding, applications, life after PhD)
- + structural barriers: experience
- + sense of belonging
- + academic skills: writing, research, employability, critical thinking, speaking
- + demographics.

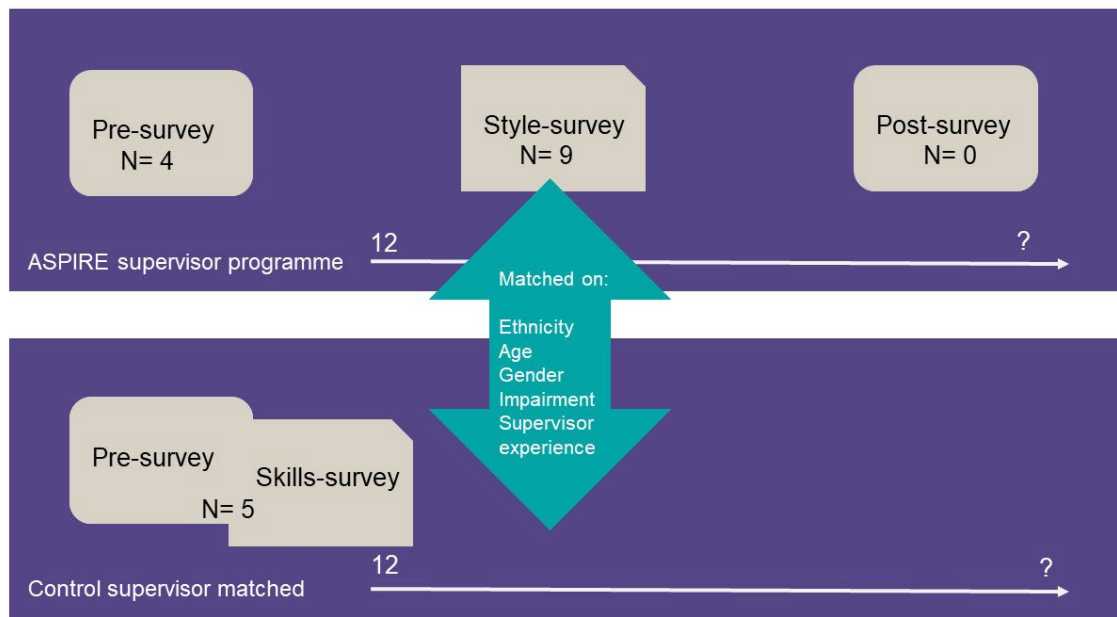
**The staff surveys aimed to gather insight into:**

- + supervisory style, career and role
- + selecting doctoral candidates
- + process evaluation: satisfaction, what worked well, what needs to be adapted/changed
- + perception of Black and Black heritage students' confidence, resilience, sense of belonging
- + understanding of Black and Black heritage students' experiences and barriers
- + improving access, exposure to issues (eg race equality)
- + confidence confronting racial justice
- + demographics.

Staff and students within Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University were asked to voluntarily complete many of the same questions as a control measurement. In total, 24 students completed the control survey, which comprised the same questions that the scholars completed in the pre-survey and skills survey. The control sample for the scholars were matched on ethnicity, age, gender, impairment and the subject that they were registered as studying.

As shown in figure 6 above, at this stage of the evaluation, after only one cohort of 24 scholars completing the programme and with only four complete responses to the post-survey, we cannot begin to answer the research questions through quantitative analysis. A similar issue occurred with the supervisor surveys, which were hampered by the University and College Union (UCU) strikes.

Figure 7. Evaluation surveys with number of responses and matching criteria



For the evaluation to be a success it is critical that we address the low response rate to the post-ASPIRE survey, so that we can evidence whether the ASPIRE programme is an effective intervention.

### 2.1.2 Exploration of low survey response rate

Interview data revealed that:

1. Communication deteriorated between the programme team and the scholars over the summer ahead of the showcase event.
2. Engagement with the scholars, supervisors and mentors tapered off over the summer holiday.

Unfortunately, this has impacted the ability of Advance HE to collect post-programme data.

Issues regarding the timing of the programme and communication have been discussed at length in the section [What needs to be adapted and/or changed](#) and [improving engagement](#). The issues above also impacted the events planned for September 2022 – as scholar 5 shared “it was really difficult to get engagement – even for, to encourage people to come to the showcase and RSVP.”

The survey with the highest response rate was the skills survey. The skills survey was linked to the skills workshop and all scholars were given class time to complete the survey. As

evaluators, Advance HE has taken this as a point of learning for the next round of data collection and, where possible, future surveys will be embedded within the learning (with both the scholars and the supervisors).

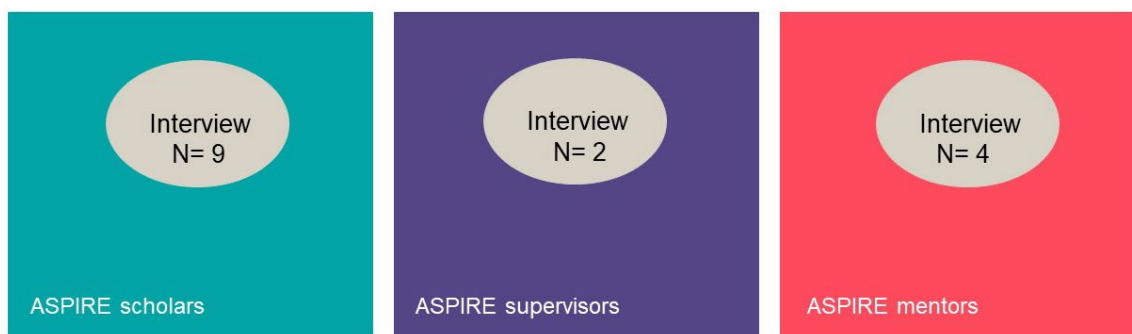
The supervisor surveys also suffered from a low response rate, but more likely because the surveys coincided with UCU strikes in autumn 2022. In response, programme directors did not send repeated prompts to complete the survey, and at the end of the programme an invitation to interview was sent to all supervisors. There was an overwhelming response to the request to interview supervisors. However, to keep time and costs manageable, only two supervisors were interviewed.

To address the poor response rate, the lead evaluation researcher will be a more visible presence to the next cohort of students, joining on the induction day and introducing themselves and the evaluation to promote buy-in to completing the surveys. Another way in which we can improve response rate is to reduce the number of questions in the post-survey, which contains 34 questions, gathering data for the process and impact evaluation. To reduce the burden on respondents, the last five questions examining scholars' motivation for doctoral study and work aspirations will be broken off into a two-minute survey. The post-survey will also be promoted prior to the end of the programme when the research project is underway, and the shorter two-minute survey will be promoted prior to the showcase.

In addition, the programme directors are aware of the timing and communication issues and have planned to shift elements of the programme to avoid the summer holidays, and a project manager has been brought on board by Sheffield Hallam University to reduce the communication burden on the programme directors.

### 2.1.3 Interviews

Individual interviews with ASPIRE scholars, supervisors and mentors were undertaken in September/October 2022.



In total, 15 interviews were carried out. Nine of these were with scholars, two with supervisors and four with mentors, as well as a recorded discussion with the programme directors. Interviews were facilitated online or face-to-face by an experienced researcher (Hannah Griffin-James). All interviews were audio-recorded using MS Teams' built-in software and stored securely on OneDrive. Interviewees received an email invitation and an MS Forms link to sign up to an interview. Those expressing interest were sent information

including details on confidentiality and withdrawal, and an MS Teams invitation, or face-to-face calendar invite depending on their preference. Participants were assigned a pseudonym and gave informed consent prior to interview.

## 2.2 Data analysis

### 2.2.1 Analysis of survey

**Scholar surveys:** the three surveys were merged and cleaned revealing that 15 scholars completed the pre-survey and skills survey. Cleaning revealed that two respondents completed the survey pre-survey twice and three respondents completed the skills survey twice. Overall, their second set of responses were more positive, contained more extreme responses and lacked variation. After close comparison, all respondents' second responses were removed. However, their first response has been retained in the analysis. The final responses were then analysed in SPSS (final n=15).

**Control survey** matched with ASPIRE scholars: the control survey was processed and cleaning checks carried out, with no data removed. The control sample comprised 24 UK-based students. The demographic responses were then compared to the ASPIRE scholars' responses, revealing that 83% identified as Black or Black heritage, and 17% identified as Asian. The control sample was comparable to the scholars, although the control had a younger age profile overall (minimum 20 years old, maximum 50 years old and average age 33 years old, with standard deviation 7.5 years), and more equal split across gender (54% women and 46% men). No one declared an impairment, health condition or learning difference that have a substantial or long-term impact on their abilities to carry out day-to-day activities.

Similar to the scholars, 75% of respondents in the control sample were registered as studying a taught master's, with a small proportion of respondents registered as studying a bachelor's degree (8.3%), integrated master's (4.2%), master's by research (8.3%) and one respondent did not give an answer.

As the demographic data of the control group matched well with the ASPIRE scholar demographics, this was merged into a final dataset that allowed comparison across the two groups.

**Supervisor surveys:** given the small numbers of supervisors who completed the survey, these will not be analysed at this stage, but will be included in later reports.

**Control survey** matched with ASPIRE supervisors: similarly, given the small numbers of supervisors who completed the survey, these will not be analysed at this stage, but will be included in later reports.

### Follow up

An ASPIRE LinkedIn account has been set up to maintain contact with the scholars who complete the programme, which we will use to distribute a short survey in two years' time

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with a key aim of identifying ASPIRE students' current circumstances (eg current employment).

### 2.2.2 Listening rooms

Four listening rooms have been conducted by Dr Francis Awolowo, which are currently being transcribed. Listening room data collection was delayed because of a lengthy university ethics procedure and high workload for the programme director that restricted their time on this project. To allow this report to be completed before the next cohort starts in January 2023, the listening room data will be analysed separately and presented as an addendum to this report. Advance HE will be analysing the data to better understand the structural barriers the scholars face and will build these findings into the next round of evaluation.

### 2.2.3 Analysis of interviews

Data was inductively, thematically analysed by an experienced researcher from Advance HE. Following data familiarisation, transcripts were descriptively coded to develop an initial coding framework, refined through iterative discussion and coding rounds. Data was imported into ATLAS.ti to support data management, and the coding framework was applied to all transcripts. Supported by research notes and discussion, the researcher actively sought themes reflecting relevant key patterns within and across the interviews. Themes were defined, described and labelled, and patterns have been discussed in the report.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Who were the scholars?

At the start of the programme there were 32 ASPIRE scholars. However, only 24 finished the programme. Retention is discussed further when considering recruitment for [improving engagement](#).

Using a combination of survey and interview data, the scholars' demographics are outlined below.

#### **Ethnicity**

Almost all of the scholars (31 of 32) described their ethnicity as Black or Black heritage. Given that the ASPIRE scholar programme is designed for Black and Black heritage students, it is interesting that one respondent answered no and, although there was the opportunity to describe their ethnicity, did not do so. This prompted me to examine their open comments, which revealed that instead of this being an error, the response may have been an attempt to criticise the ASPIRE programme.

*"I have to comment on the undertones of the ASPIRE programme. I feel as though the programme is focused on adapting Black individuals to fit into the White majority working world through adhering to ideals of White supremacy. Issues on presentability, intelligence and morals are too often used as markers to gain access to employment by adhering to social norms of the dominant culture. However, policing Black individuals to conform to standards that were never intended for us to meet will rarely protect us from violence or hatred." (Survey respondent)*

As this is an iterative process, their feedback was retained in the current analysis, to gain insight into how the purpose and target audience of the ASPIRE programme can be clarified further.

#### **Gender**

There were 20 women who started the programme and 12 men.

#### **Age**

On average, the scholars were 34 years old (standard deviation 8.7), with ages ranging from 20 to 60 years old (with age rounded to the nearest five years to protect identity).

#### **Impairment**

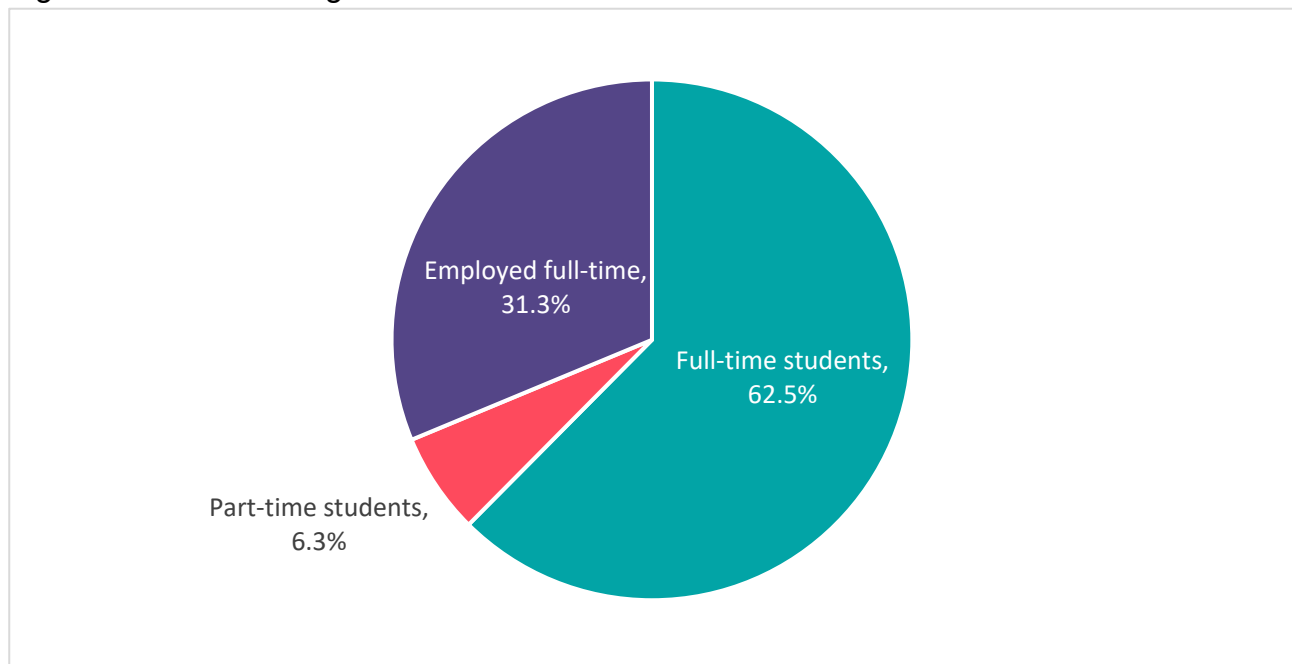
The majority (90.2%) of scholars did not have an impairment, health condition or learning difference that has a substantial or long-term impact on their abilities to carry out day-to-day activities. A small number of scholars reported having an impairment, health condition or learning difference, or refrained from answering this question (by selecting 'prefer not to

say'). Due to the small numbers involved at this stage, the percentages of these response options will not be disclosed.

### Student status

The majority (62.5%) of scholars were full-time students, with a further 31.3% employed full-time and 6.3% studying part-time.

Figure 8. Chart showing student status



Looking more closely at the types of students, 43.8% of all the scholars were undertaking a taught master's, with 31.3% undertaking a taught master's in the same discipline of business and management. Including those currently in work, a large proportion (40.6%) of scholars were from the discipline of business and management, with the next largest proportion (25.0%) from the social sciences, followed by 15.6% from education and teaching, and 12.5% from psychology, with small proportions from other disciplines. Considering the challenges that were experienced and reported around recruitment to the programme, within the programme directors' own discipline of business and management, they were very successful at recruiting scholars on their own programmes. Further discussion on subject background is in the process evaluation.

## 3.2 Process evaluation findings

The process evaluation outlined four key areas that Advance HE could provide insight into:

1. What makes a successful mentoring programme?
2. What works well?
3. What makes a successful internship?
4. What needs to be adapted and/or changed?

### 3.2.1 What makes a successful mentoring programme?

One of the main aims of the ASPIRE scholar programme that the logic model predicted was that the research mentorship and wellbeing programme would increase the confidence and resilience of Black students interested in accessing doctoral-level study. A key assumption outlined in the logic model was that “assuming lived experience of postgraduate researchers will make them effective mentors”. Using the data we have collected, we will look at this from two perspectives – the scholars and the mentors – and unpack this assumption.

#### 4.2.1.1 Are postgraduate researchers who have shared lived experience effective mentors to the ASPIRE scholars?

Many of the scholars mentioned the importance of having a shared lived experience with their mentor, and the novelty of working with a Black member of staff at university.

“I think because, well, with my mentor, having a Black mentor, again, I’m not used to working with any Black members of staff or, you know, at university and so on. So having someone who can really relate to me and understand me, you know, from that perspective, made all the difference. There was a lot of things that I knew she understood without me having to explain and unpick.” (Scholar 1)

Shared experience was important to scholars and these experiences have facilitated discussions about applying for a PhD. For example, scholar 8 shared with me that,

“the last time she [the scholar’s mentor] called me she asked me if I was interested in a PhD and I told her I have my excuse to it, that for now it’s not something I want to consider and the reason being that I have three boys. Back home I’ve always been a working lady. So, I’ve always left them in the hands of a carer and my mum. But here there is no one. So, I told her that I need to focus on them. And training boys in a strange land, if I have time for them I don’t want to lose them. So, I told her I want to have time for them.

She [the scholar’s mentor] called me later and she told me that it [the PhD] will give me more time if I consider it an option that it would be nice if I do it, that it will give me more time for the kids, to have with them. So, I told her OK, let’s see how it will go. We are still on that conversation to see how far it can take us and I think I’m actually considering it. But the major problem I have is having time for my kids.” (Scholar 8)

The relationships between the mentors and the scholars often went beyond academic support as their mentor “navigated [the scholar] through the academic and the social life, and also [how] I manage my mental health” (scholar 7). But, more than this, the shared lived experiences lay the ground for strong mentoring relationships where the scholars felt that “my mentor was actually there for me” (scholar 8), and exceedingly grateful for their research mentor because they were “able to tell her all my worries and I can tell you, I feel so blessed” (scholar 9).

Something that will be explored in the addendum using the listening room data is;

“I think working with, and this is going to sound really daft but actually working with quite a mainly Black heritage group, because I’d never done

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that before. So again, it was understanding that just because somebody's from Africa, they won't have the same experience as me as a West Indian. So that was really interesting, hearing about their experiences, you know, coming to the UK. So it was just understanding a bit more about my heritage as well on that side of stuff." (Scholar 2)

The impact of this mixed community on the scholars' experience of the ASPIRE programme will be discussed in further detail later in the report (in the section [Improve engagement](#)). In addition, we plan to explore this further using the listening room data.

There was a diversity of shared experience that the scholars identified, from shared previous careers "before they came into the UK" (scholar 7), shared temperament, for example, "A timid lady like me too, that came to the UK" (scholar 9), interest in being an entrepreneur rather than academic which enabled them to "talk about business plans" (scholar 5). These shared experiences put the scholars at ease, as they "just felt like I was seeing a replica of myself" (scholar 9). Although mentor 4 emphasised that "it's not about replicating myself [their mentor] as it were. It's about them [the mentee]. Their pace, their speed, them, yes." And within this supportive place, it enabled the scholars to learn from the mentors' previous experiences. For example,

"the mentor can talk about himself, how he has faced those issues, how I could have a dream and follow my dream and the other thing he tells me that whatever I believe in is possible. So, that information is needed. You prepare for the future." (Scholar 6)

The point scholar 6 is making above about believing in themselves and "encouraging me" (scholar 8), was echoed by all the scholars who had a positive relationship with their mentor. This was a very important point to the mentors themselves, saying "I think if I had, during my own master's, the kind of support they are getting, I probably wouldn't have made some mistakes that I made at that point" (mentor 3), or "in trying to mentor them so that they don't face the challenges we faced because we didn't have the opportunity of being mentored" (mentor 1). This idea of a "giving back" (mentor 2) to the Black community was mentioned by all the mentors, and they found it a "very rewarding experience" (mentor 3).

Having a shared lived experience was critical for developing a strong mentor-mentee relationship and, without these shared experiences, mentors and mentees felt they were "wasting their time" (scholar 5). Potentially, the importance of having a shared lived experience is driven by the assumption that mentor 2 articulates well below:

"I wouldn't say all Black people have the same challenges, we have different challenges, and understanding that I think you could help people that you think have similar challenges, [...] how I think you could contribute to their own development. Because you can identify with them. You kind of know what they could be going through and sometimes we just need someone to pull out our strengths, I think that goes to everyone irrespective of where you're from. And you could feel more confident talking to me as a Black person than you would do with another person. It's those kinds of things that I think I could contribute, like opening up to me and then I could say this is – OK, for example, I'm from Nigeria, so if I

have someone from Nigeria I kind of know what the struggles are. The question is I can understand where the person is coming from, and I think that could be used as a channel to help the person to get his full potential.” (Mentor 2)

Similarly to the scholars, the mentors themselves identified the importance of shared lived experiences, as “they tend to trust you”, and “open up more” as “they relate with academics who come from their own ethnic backgrounds” (mentor 3). Or, as another said, “It was easy for them to express themselves openly. It was easy for me to understand them as well because that’s also important to being able to mentor effectively” (mentor 4). Importantly, “if somebody is open with you, then they also believe that – if you can get there, they can also get there” (mentor 3). Building confidence and a strong “inspirational” relationship “because they look up to you as a role model” (mentor 3).

Picking up on this mentor’s point about role models, scholars were asked how important they believed having a role model was when applying for a doctorate, with 82% rating having a role model is quite/very important. Role models for applying for work were similarly important with 74% of scholars responding that having a role model is quite/very important for applying for a job. Given the importance of role models, it is positive to see that 74% of scholars reported that they have a role model.<sup>2</sup> As scholar 2 says, representation is really important:

“I wish I’d had it [the ASPIRE programme] earlier in my life because I just think it’s amazing that, you know, “Oh, yes, I can be an academic if I want to.” Because actually I’ve not seen very many black academics.”

#### 4.2.1.2 *Dual aspect of the ASPIRE programme: preparing for 1) doctoral study or 2) employment*

Critically, this applied to both supporting scholars with the transition into employment as well as applying for a PhD position. For example, mentor 3 shared the unique position Black students are in when getting sponsorship to stay.

“Something that is very peculiar, especially within this environment for Black students, is getting sponsorship to stay. So it’s a conversation employers shy away from a lot of times. Because we have been through that process, we tell them, we advise them, you know, if you look for a list of employers and they’re not on the Home Office sponsorships list, obviously you don’t want to go for that kind of employer because the reality is they would less likely sponsor you. So you don’t want to go through the interview process and at the end of the day, they don’t sponsor you.”

Given the dual aim of the ASPIRE programme to ready scholars for either a PhD or employment, it is important to consider the scholar’s goals when matching scholars with mentors. In particular, some mentors were well versed, having previously worked in industry for a number of years in different roles, or had set up their own businesses, as well as

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<sup>2</sup> n = 23 question asked in the scholars skills survey

recently completing their PhD. For example, mentor 3 had four mentees and “initially two had the PhD aspiration”, and this mentor was well positioned to support both kinds of scholar “even up to a point when I was discussing how to negotiate salaries”. In contrast, other mentors, were “into academics, so I think I could share my experience in that regard, that being in the field, getting a job and all that” (mentor 1). This led to scholars receiving unequal experiences of mentoring, as expressed by mentor 2, below.

“Two of them I have their contact and they have my contact, the other two they don’t. They have my email, not my mobile [...] So, for the ones that I have [my contact] I think I have a stronger relationship with them which is, for one in particular, it is because she wanted to do a PhD, and that kind of aligned with my own – with what I do and my interests.” (Mentor 2)

However, it is clear that, overall, the mentors have gone above and beyond to provide wider support to their mentees, becoming their mentees’ dissertation supervisor (mentor 3), and being available when needed – eg “if you have any questions, even outside of the scheduled Zoom or Team hours, feel free to drop me a line” (mentor 3) as well as “making it known that I can be easily reached by them at any time. So when they get into a spot” (mentor 4). Importantly, many of these mentor relationships have not ended, rather the mentors have left the door open for a continued relationship (mentor 2, mentor 4).

Returning to the scholars’ perspective of mentoring, overall the scholars described a very positive experience of working with their mentor. For example, “the mentoring aspect of it is another treat for us” (scholar 7). Some scholars specifically mentioned the novelty of “having a Black mentor [...] I’m not used to working with any Black members of staff or, you know, at university” as “having someone who can really relate to me and understand me, you know, from that perspective, made all the difference” (scholar 1). The uniqueness of the ASPIRE research mentorship was articulated by the scholars “actually I’ve not seen very many Black academics” (scholar 2). This is important because of the previous research carried out by the ASPIRE team before the bid identified that “You cannot be, what you cannot see” (Reshma Saujani). The ASPIRE programme provided scholars with the opportunity to “see” Black academics and identify with them as role models.

Qualitatively, the research mentorship was effective in encouraging the scholars to believe in themselves, for example “when [...] I met with my mentor, I knew I was set for a change, for a transformation in my life” (scholar 9). It is challenging to measure the effectiveness of mentors who have shared lived experiences without being able to compare the pre-and-post survey as the take up from the post survey was particularly challenging. However, it is clear from speaking to the scholars that having shared lived experiences removed the burden that scholars usually experience in explaining their unique context. As scholar 1 says, “there was a lot of things that I knew she understood without me having to explain and unpick.” Also, the scholars who had good relationships with their mentors felt “more confident, self-assured” and pushed themselves “to speak” up (scholar 1).

### 3.2.2 What works well?

In addition to building confidence and resilience among Black and Black heritage students, the ASPIRE programme has two focused purposes, centred around providing:

1. Research mentorship and training
2. Wellbeing support for scholars

Research mentorship has been covered in depth in the previous section, [What makes a successful mentoring programme](#). In this section, insights into what worked well with regards to the research training and wellbeing support that the scholars received are presented.

#### 4.2.1.3 What works well in research training?

The Q-Step aspect of the ASPIRE programme was highly praised by the scholars when discussing their experiences of the ASPIRE programme.

At the start of the ASPIRE programme, 75% of scholars<sup>3</sup> rated their ability to conduct quantitative research as average, below average or poor. However, by the end of the programme there was a distinct change, with many scholars commenting on the advantage that the Q-Step programme gave them.

“The quantitative block was very intense but we learnt so much in a short space of time. Even if we didn’t understand all elements of the block, having the opportunity to use SPSS and explore the process provides a strong advantage for those preparing for postgrad research. I think Simon made the real difference – he was an excellent facilitator. The Q-Step certificate is also a bonus!” (Scholar 1)

Many scholars also praised the team and how the sessions were delivered (eg scholar 1, 3, 5, 8). Not only did the Q-Step programme give the scholars the basics in quantitative and qualitative research, it boosted their confidence – as scholar 3 shared “now I feel I’m a step ahead of my course mates because just as I got to know that on”. In addition, scholars’ peers were aware of the training the scholars were received and the scholars became “gurus” among their peers. As scholar 9 shared: “before I knew it, I was teaching others how to go about it [quantitative analysis]”; the pride scholar 9 has for their new skills and the opportunity to share these skills is palpable. More so, this is a great example of the impact that the ASPIRE programme can have to the wider community, as scholar 9 shared:

“every Black person in class, they were just coming to me because they heard, “You are ASPIRE scholars. They said you are very [knowledgable], you are a guru, you are well-rounded in it [quantitative research].” (Scholar 9)

#### 4.2.1.4 What works well in wellbeing

From the outset of the programme, Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green and Dr Francis Awolowo created a safe space for the scholars to flourish, as a survey respondent wrote,

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<sup>3</sup> n = 32 (pre-survey)

“Being part of Aspire allows/gives 'permission' to be who you are - really - even though we do not all have the same experiences we 'understand' each other because we are Black/Black Heritage” (Survey respondent)

The safe space was extended to the ASPIRE supervisor programme:

“I actually found the face-to-face sessions really helpful [...] you needed that interaction and also that, for me, a kind of safe environment to say things that maybe you wouldn't necessarily say otherwise.” (Supervisor 1)

Critically, the focus on creating a safe space, while providing wellbeing support via the charity [Hope Bereavement Support](#), and coaching from the mentors who were trained to build “a safe place to talk about anything and know that you're not being judged” (mentor 4), strengthened scholars' confidence.

“And that's where I think the confidence comes in because I think sometimes you don't have the safe spaces to talk about some of these things or explore your creativity [...] But for me, I thought that's what made the programme stand out, was those elements that Iwi and Francis were really adamant on including and the kind of, the wellbeing side of things.” (Scholar 5)

The race forums are a further good example of what worked well in wellbeing as they gave scholars a safe space for “offloading what you're feeling because it is emotional, you know, dealing with stuff all the time” (scholar 2). Scholar 4 described them as “like a little secret club” where if they'd had a bad day they knew “at the end of the week” there was this “safe space where you could talk about what people say about race...but there wasn't a feeling that the other person is uncomfortable”.

“The race forums were brilliant, it is very rare you have the opportunity to share lived experiences with peers outside of your personal community, who can 100% relate to and understand the differences in the Black experience. To share and feel validated is rare.” (Scholar 1)

Again, scholars made the connection between these safe spaces providing the room for them to flourish. Acknowledging the “barriers” while “building your own confidence in yourself and your self-belief” so you can “keep focused on what you're doing...even if it means kicking down a few doors” (scholar 2). But, more than that, these spaces helped the international scholars with loneliness (scholar 6), and provided support while they negotiated cultural differences (eg difference in lecturers being willing to chat and share their phone number), creating a valuable support network.

#### 4.2.1.4.1 Mentors providing wider wellbeing support

Notably, some mentors also provided wider wellbeing support. For example, scholar 8 shared that their mentor helped them to navigate school allocation appeal process for scholar 8's children. This wellbeing support was particularly meaningful for others, such as scholar 7, who shared that “a lot of students are going through a lot of things, so it's really

affecting them. They don't have anybody to speak to. They don't have anybody to share what they are passing through. Nobody to talk to". This was echoed by scholar 1 when they shared the importance of having access to counselling: "one-to-one counselling is a fantastic addition to the programme, especially when you come from a culture of not talking about difficulties. Some don't have the access to counselling either so to have that as part of the process is brilliant."

#### 4.2.1.4.2 The programme directors' energy and belief in the programme

Every scholar I spoke to wanted to pass on my thanks to Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green and Dr Francis Awolowo who "sacrificed their time" (scholar 7) and went over and above for the scholars, "we can't pay them what they've done for us, we can't pay them" (scholar 7). "The support from the senior leadership team was great" (scholar 4), when questioned to explain further what they meant, scholar 4 shared:

"Iwi, bless her, I think she was on call 24/7. If I messaged in the middle of the night she would respond. But then the next day we would tell her off for responding. She should be in bed. She was so instrumental, and I think we all reached out to her at different times of the day, I know I did, and if she couldn't get back to you she would send an email to say, you know, I'm looking into that kind of thing, and you can tell it's genuine for her. It's a passion. [...] I think we almost get that pastoral care, that additional pastoral care." (Scholar 4)

The passion, energy and belief from Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green and Dr Francis Awolowo was palpable.

"there was a point where myself and Iwi were practically working on the project on a daily basis, even weekends. I didn't anticipate that, I didn't know I had a capacity for that." (Dr Francis Awolowo)

Without a doubt, both Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green and Dr Francis Awolowo went over and above to deliver the best experience to the scholars. And there is a drive to keep building on this success, expanding their network and bringing in more people to make the ASPIRE programme sustainable.

### 3.2.3 What makes a successful internship?

Although we set out to understand what makes a successful internship, the project team faced many challenges setting up the ASPIRE programme and building external relationships where scholars could gain a week's work experience. Due to these challenges, only a few external internships were available to the scholars, and this was a point of frustration for the scholars.

Many of the scholars shared how they were "looking forward to finding new opportunities and experiences through the programme" (survey respondent). The ASPIRE programme directors intended each scholar to be able to undertake a paid 30-hour internship called

ASPIRE 30 with an employer. This formed a key part of the recruitment advertisement (see Appendix A), as shown in the excerpt below:

“In addition to these weekly learning activities, you would undertake a paid 30-hour internship (ASPIRE 30) with an employer. You will have a workplace mentor and a point of contact within the ASPIRE project team to support you during your internship. The internships available on ASPIRE 30 span a wide range of sectors including STEM, business, education and arts and humanities. At the end of the ASPIRE programme, you would do a six-week research project or project on behalf of an employer (live client brief), that will enhance your employability skills and your preparedness for the graduate labour market and/or doctoral level study.”

For scholars, the opportunity to have a paid internship in industry was an important reason why they applied. As one survey respondent shared, “I’m hoping that first-hand experience in industry will help me prepare me for my future career. In addition, it will be a fantastic opportunity to network and connect with potential employers” (survey respondent). Four scholars explicitly mentioned, “the internship” in the survey and 22% of the survey respondents<sup>4</sup> selected the internship as something they were looking forward to.

Unfortunately, the ASPIRE 30 programme was not available to all scholars, as there were “fewer than 10” opportunities (scholar 8).

“ASPIRE 30. Like I said, I sort of seen that and thought, “Oh, I’d like to do that. I’ve planned my own wedding, I can plan, I’ll do that one.” There weren’t many opportunities available so I don’t know, again, it’s the first year, kind of how it works.” (Scholar 1)

This “discouraged” (scholar 3) the scholars as a big part of the expectation of the ASPIRE programme was the opportunity for an internship. Indeed, one of the international students was counting on the ability to use the internship to earn an income: “we never knew it was going to be 30 hours. We thought was going to be 30 hours per week. So, many people have planned on it” (scholar 8).

### 3.2.4 What needs to be adapted and/or changed?

Overall, the ASPIRE scholars’, supervisors’ and mentors’ expectations were managed well by the programme directors, with many framing any issues as “little hiccups” (scholar 1) that are to be expected in the “first run through” (scholar 1). With this in mind, we shall discuss key elements of the programme that multiple participants highlighted as somewhat problematic.

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<sup>4</sup> n = 32 (pre-survey)

#### 4.2.1.5 Communication

One key piece of feedback from the mentors was that they requested accessible communication (ideally in advance) about their role, and when activities were planned. As mentor 2 shares below;

“It would be good to have a bit of information, to know when what is happening, I think we struggled, I’m not just speaking for myself now, I’m speaking for all the mentors that were my friend, we were struggling knowing what is going on with the Aspire in terms of timetables.” (Mentor 2)

This is something that the programme directors have identified as an area of improvement for subsequent cohorts. However, it is important to acknowledge that the lack of clarity stemmed from the programme being under development while also being implemented. Also, the scholars reported that they were frustrated by their mentors’ and supervisors’ lack of knowledge of their role.

“I know all that information was provided because I saw it myself and I read it, but I did feel like although my supervisor was supportive, he wasn’t very clear on exactly what I was supposed to be doing and, in some cases, what he should be offering.” (Scholar 1)

Although scholar 1’s understanding seems to counter what mentor 2 described, it seems to be more around an issue of clarity and access to where the guidance documents were stored. As scholar 5 shared, “because both of them [mentor and supervisor] weren’t too sure about what the process was, the guidance wasn’t clear”. Although the information was available on [PebblePad](#),<sup>5</sup> not all mentors were familiar with this software, which caused issues accessing information (mentor 2). However, all mentors were very understanding that this was the first run of the programme and that it was run “with limited support, admin support. So I think in terms of the communication, just to carry those scholars and the mentors along, because sometimes the scholars get communication before the mentors are aware, but I think that’s been worked on” (mentor 3). Specifically, regarding communication, some of the scholars shared their displeasure at how they were spoken to, in particular the tone of written communication. Scholars described that towards the end of the programme the communication changed, and that some of the email communication came across as threatening, “threatening me that if you don’t do this you will not get the certificate”<sup>6</sup> and “sending emails sometimes they use harsh words which gets mad at people, we are not

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<sup>5</sup> PebblePad is an online learning platform, loosely an updated version of Moodle or Blackboard.

<sup>6</sup> ASPIRE is a strong ongoing community of Black and Black heritage scholars, PGRs, academics and wider support staff who know each other well and are likely able to identify quotes. Interviewees were made aware of this and consented to share with only partial anonymity. As a responsible researcher, to avoid adding tensions to this community, quotes where interviewees were noticeably uncomfortable have not been shared, and pseudonyms removed to protect the community where necessary.

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kids”.<sup>7</sup> This has been noted by the programme directors and steps have been taken to avoid this situation arising moving forward.

#### 4.2.1.6 *Timing*

Similarly, scholars found participating in the ASPIRE programme over the summer holidays challenging, either with childcare or work commitments (scholar 4, scholar 8) and their engagement with the programme tapered off. As scholar 5 shared, “everybody dispersed and then everything also kind of shut down a bit because people weren’t engaging as much”.

Indeed, there appeared to be a natural drop off in engagement from the supervisors and mentors over the summer break in July and August. Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green shared that,

“a couple of scholars came to me directly that unfortunately weren’t getting what they needed to out of the supervisory relationship. Which, as Francis suggests, if we move the time it might work a bit better because some of that came I’m sure from timing and commitments that people had, etc.”

The programme directors also explained that there were challenges with supervisors attending the supervisor training portion of the ASPIRE programme. As supervisor 1 shares below, they were only able to attend one of the group workshops.

“Unfortunately, I think there were a couple of other sessions that I simply couldn’t attend, basically, just through being busy with other things. And so, and I think there was a suggestion, I think they were recorded and I was supposed to kind of, you know, listen in to them and so on and so forth. But I found them hard to kind of find them on the system and so on.”  
(Supervisor 1)

In response, to a probe question which asked supervisor 1 to expand on “the perpetual problem of busy academics” and “how the ASPIRE programme could address this” they suggested “condensing the sessions, if you like, into maybe a half-day [...] with reasonable notice”. Their response indicated that there was a lack of “clarity” about how many and how frequently they would be expected to attend face-to-face training sessions and that online sessions were not “clear” or “easy to access”.

In addition, the ASPIRE programme was designed to scaffold confidence, with the responsibility shifting from the programme directors to the scholars. As scholar 4 said, over summer

“the communication tailed off a little bit because I feel towards the end it was passed on to ourselves and the supervisors to do, which is fine, we are adults we can do that but you kind of find that sometimes when that element is removed, like if Evie or FutureLearn was removed the onus is on us to keep chasing.” (Scholar 4)

For the scholars, the programme moved from lots of face-to-face workshops, classes and events that were organised for the scholars at the beginning of the programme, to being responsible for organising meetings themselves and producing work individually with the support of an assigned supervisor.

Another issue raised by every scholar interviewed was that the ASPIRE programme tapered off towards the end, with scholar 1 describing the “final block...was a little bit haphazard” with “a lot of blurred lines” with the result that “a lot of scholars disengaged in this last block”. Scholar 7 shared that “towards the end of the programme, you see the attention and the energy is zero”, and scholar 4 suggested “because again it [the ASPIRE programme] was during the holidays you kind of park it to one side” (scholar 4). The impact of this has been discussed at length in the Evaluation design section with accompanying recommendations to avoid similar issues occurring in subsequent cohorts.

Understandably, using different platforms for communicating to different groups (eg scholars, mentors and supervisors), and the challenges of working across different higher education institutions is a teething issue from the first cohort. To alleviate some of this strain, Sheffield Hallam University has invested in a project manager, who will be able to manage the communications around activities and events between mentors and scholars.

#### *4.2.1.7 Reflection diaries*

Scholars and supervisors were asked to reflect on their practice once a week and fill in their diary on PebblePad using seven guided questions. One prompt (see Appendix G for further detail) reads:

Do I feel that my time on this week has been well spent? If not, how could I have used my time more sensibly? Or should this week have been designed differently? Which parts of the week represent the time best spent? Which parts could be thought of as time wasted?

Many of the scholars who were interviewed mentioned the reflection diaries. Some found “that was so useful for accountability, it gave me that structure as well”, and indeed will “use [them] going forward” (scholar 4). However, the non-native english speakers had a different experience with the diaries where they found the weekly diary entries to be onerous “I just keep writing and writing”, and they found the prompts “repetitive” and “boring” (scholar 8).

Also, scholar 5 shared that “I’ve done previous work with OfS so I was aware of, kind of, the importance of being given funding” and that this knowledge meant they were self-conscious when they were writing their reflection diary as they didn’t want to lead the funder to reconsider supporting the ASPIRE programme. To avoid this issue in the future, I advise moving the consent process for the reflection diaries to the end of the programme when all of the reflection entries are complete. Currently the consent process is completed prior to the first entry is made to the reflection diary, by moving the consent process to be retrospective, this would remove the potential bias expressed by scholar 5. However, it is likely that this will reduce the amount of diaries entries that are shared.

#### *4.2.1.8 Unequal mentoring experience*

Five of the nine scholars interviewed had a successful relationship with their assigned mentor and “we’ve all had a lot of support from mentors and some supervisors – some more

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than others, unfortunately” (scholar 1). It is worth mentioning that two of these five had originally been assigned mentors who were too busy to meet, but they were able to swap with mentors who were invested in them and were “fabulous” for them (scholar 8). Importantly, four out of five of these successful mentorships are ongoing, suggesting that the programme has created a lasting relationship.

However, this was not the case for all scholars. Two of the nine scholars interviewed had difficulties with their assigned mentor and, when asked, they did not seem to be aware of any procedure or way in which to approach the programme directors formally to change mentors.

Although many of the issues seemed to be around “logistics” (scholar 3), or mentors who “dropped out of the programme” (scholar 5), a common experience was that the scholar felt that their mentor was too busy for them. This was echoed by four of the nine scholars who were interviewed – and in these instances the scholars gave the impression that their mentor was not invested in them. For example, scholar 4 said that “I personally did not get the impression that she was there for the duration of the whole thing”; and scholar 2 felt that their mentor did not want to work with them, as they were “intimidated by me”, because they felt that their mentor assumed that they “already knew it all” as they were not a student and more experienced, which meant that “I didn’t feel that I got much out of it [mentoring]” (scholar 2). This is an important consideration for recruiting mentors for subsequent cohorts, as a shared belief in the importance of investing in the scholars is important for a successful relationship.

Some scholars internalised the rejection from the assigned mentor “and I know that I can be quite, not difficult but I can be quite, you know, challenging as well about stuff” (scholar 2). Indeed, the difference in experiences led some scholars to rely on their own resources, as evidenced by scholar 5 who accessed “a mentor through work”.

A good example of the inequality of mentor-mentee relationship can be seen through these two quotes from mentors.

“We’d talk, I’d share my experience and I understand that it’s professional, I can’t be buddies with them. We would talk. For one of them we’re from the same country and all that so we would share experiences back there but not really a buddy thing, no.” (Mentor 1)

“But at the end of the day some of my mentees are more like my buddies, and those ones that were not – that you find you don’t mentor, they came to me and said, “Oh, I’d like to have a chat with you about this, this is what I want to do.” (Mentor 2)

The stark difference in attitude towards mentoring meant that mentor 1 had a perfunctory attitude towards mentoring sessions: “I think we have a mandate to use one hour, so we kept by that. They are also busy, so am I, so we tried to make it as short as possible, but we did want to get something out of our discussion, like an action point for the next meeting”. Whereas mentor 2, shared that they “met frequently” and “Out of the meeting then I do follow up, I don’t just leave it to go, or if you have a problem, I will follow up with that.”

Given that both mentors completed the same training, instead of this being simply a difference in their attitudes towards mentorship, this discrepancy between their approaches to mentoring may stem from differences in their current academic position. Specifically, mentor 1 completed their PhD a few years ago, whereas mentor 2 is still working towards completing their PhD. While the qualitative data from mentors from this first year is insufficient to truly test this possibility, it may be beneficial for future cohorts to focus on recruiting current PGR students as mentors. In contrast, the interested Black and Black heritage PhD holders may be better suited for the position of supervisor.

### 3.3 Impact evaluation findings

The impact evaluation will provide insight into whether this ASPIRE programme (focused on confidence and resilience/work-readiness for Black students) works to:

1. Improve experiences (of Black students, staff, other students)
2. Improve engagement (of Black students, staff, other students)
3. Improve future study or career prospects of Black students who take part in ASPIRE

#### 3.3.1 Improve experiences (of Black students, staff, other students)

The creative element, of making an affirmation banner as a team, was incredibly meaningful for some of the scholars; as sewing a square for the banner provided an outlet to express in a concrete way who they are now at the end of the programme. Scholars were specifically asked to “tell us what defines you” or “What do you think you have, now that you are almost done with ASPIRE?” (scholar 9). This gave the scholars an opportunity to reflect on their journey through ASPIRE and who they are now at the end of the programme. Scholar 9 (in the quote below) shared the profound change they felt after taking part in the ASPIRE programme and were moved to tears when expressing how proud they are of themselves.

“the only word that came to my mind was tenacious, ‘Hmm, I will go for it.’ Even if it doesn’t look like it would happen, ASPIRE has taught me to forge ahead. If I keep forging ahead, there’s actually something at the end of it. So that was the only thing I could see to describe myself, and when I made it on a very beautiful piece of cutting and [unintelligible 00:29:09], I was like, ‘It looks beautiful. That is me.’ I saw myself on a beautiful piece.” (Scholar 9)

Although in the process evaluation findings it was indicated that the creative stream suffered from lack of buy-in from supervisors and, similarly, some of the scholars did not place any value in the creative elements and disengaged – it is important to share that these creative elements can be a powerful means for scholars to explore the impact of the ASPIRE programme.



The banner was displayed at the showcase event at the end of the programme. Briefly, the showcase event was organised by four scholars, and gave a platform for the ASPIRE scholars to celebrate and demonstrate what they have gained from taking part in ASPIRE. It also included a small awards ceremony where scholars received their certificate for taking part. The ASPIRE programme's two patrons – Professor Charles Egbu and Alison Lowe, OBE – also attended the event.

At the event, scholars used the artefacts, such as their sewn square in the affirmation banner to explain to attendees at the showcase their journey through ASPIRE. After the event scholar 1 emailed to share "I hope you enjoyed the evening and were able to 'feel' how much this has meant to many of the scholars, this journey/process and certificate means more to me than even my masters [...] – just for perspective."

Scholars also had a writing poetry session, which were entered into an ASPIRE competition. Charlene Shaw has given her permission to share her winning poem here:

## Chrysalis

ASPIRE chose to lead the way  
Earnest and Valorous,  
Speak loud and proud, advocate and say  
Black empowerment flourish, coz we're here to stay

Through this Lens we now see  
That we  
Are who we're meant to be  
I now see ME ...with a PhD?  
Who really holds that key?

The imposter held my hand for far too long  
False and insincere  
Whispering in my ear  
That cloud of doubt now detached, I am strong  
Enlightened  
I'm free

A curtain of hope, the show begins  
Belief reveals a stage of planted seeds within  
Watered, nurtured  
And inspired to grow

A new act, we set the scene  
Unrestricted, released from the now distant, deep abyss  
Visible for all to see  
It's time  
Let's transition from the Golden Chrysalis

By Charlene Shaw (ASPIRE 2022)

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### 3.3.2 Improve engagement (of Black students, staff, other students)

It is possible that issues with timing and communication had a knock-on effect on the community. For example, when the programme tapered off over the summer, it affected engagement with the creative stream of programme.

“It was more the creative stuff which I don't think people kind of engaged in a lot. And possibly because it's the wrong time, because a lot of people were doing their dissertations and stuff.” (Scholar 2)

The creative elements included cooking with your supervisor, writing poetry and sewing an affirmation banner. Engagement was not helped by a lack of buy-in from supervisors. For example, the cookery activity was to give a recipe to your supervisor “who would go away and cook it and then take a picture. My supervisor didn't cook, he wasn't going to do it, so I thought, “Oh, OK.” So in the end, I did it. [Laughs] I just sent it” (Scholar 2).

Or that these elements were viewed as optional and “not relevant” (scholar 3), because some scholars could not see how it would directly help them reach their career aspirations. The lack of buy-in undermines the scholars' growing confidence to build and strengthen their network. Successful engagement with the creative elements depended on whether the scholars had a particular interest in poetry, cookery or sewing – and led to really meaningful engagement (eg scholar 9, discussed at length above).

To improve engagement with the creative strand, clearly outline how these activities would contribute to building a strong network and the role the scholar's network has in their future aspirations. For example, scholars and mentors – and scholars and supervisors – could pick one creative thing to do together. This would involve them identifying a shared interest and may reduce the perception of the demand on their time as it would be a creative element they enjoy and they would benefit from sharing the task; thus making them more likely to engage.

The programme directors recognised that cliques had developed within the ASPIRE scholar community. As scholar 5 voiced, “you'd turn up to some sessions and there'd be one or two or three, four engaging [...] it was frustrating for not, having the same voices constantly in the room”. One approach to discourage cliques could be to include team building exercises at the start of the programme. Another approach would be to closely consider the recruitment criteria for the ASPIRE scholars, for example examining how many scholars are students and what and where they are studying to avoid drawing scholars from a single population and encourage the building of a wider cohesive community.

#### 4.2.1.8.1 Recruitment:

Part of the recruitment strategy was to share that:

“This incredible package of opportunity and support is worth c.£10,000 per student, but it is available to you for no fee!”

This was an effective strategy, “we are made to understand the value and in terms of time and in terms of cost involved for each scholar” (scholar 7), but it did directly lead to some tensions.

“Selection of candidates –I can't speak for others' expectations but I felt some valued the programme more than others and it showed in their level of engagement and respect for the facilitators. On occasion, I found the behaviour of some scholars quite disrespectful.” (Scholar 1)

Others internalised this and felt guilty for taking up space on the programme that someone else could have benefited from:

“We were never really clear, in the end, that the space was for somebody like us, that works already, you know, doesn't necessarily want to do a PhD in this moment in time. Or might not ever want to do it. But wanting to learn skills, transferable skills, employability skills, that's going to help with their career and their CPD. That's how I saw it but I don't know if that's the heart of the programme, I don't know whether that's the funding mandate. So that was always on our mind; like, “Gosh, is it for us, are we here, are we supposed to be doing the programme?” (Scholar 5)

In this first round there did seem to be an issue with retention, with 34 scholars starting the programme and 24 completing the programme. Although data was not collected on scholars' reasons for dropping out of the programme, scholars were asked in the post-survey if they had considered leaving the ASPIRE programme, and if yes to please explain their answer. One scholar shared that “there were moments when I felt that work-life balance was becoming difficult. Thankfully I have supportive employers but if not the hours of commitment could become challenging to manage.” Similarly, scholar 7 indicated that their peers left the programme two months in due to the timing, not receiving an internship and the amount of effort involved over and above their degree programme. These comments indicate that the advertised programme did not align with scholars' expectations. Indeed, the programme directors plan on doing “more of the strategic stuff, the business engagement, the providing the opportunities, for the internships”. It is likely that increasing the number of ASPIRE 30 internships that are available will improve continued engagement with the ASPIRE programme.

From speaking with the scholars in the interviews and more widely at the showcase event, they felt that most of the scholars from Sheffield Hallam University were newly arrived Black

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international students, undertaking taught master's in business and finance. Whereas the scholars connected with Manchester Metropolitan University were more likely to have been in the UK for at least four years or more.

“I feel like there was some divisions in terms of, you know, the Sheffield cohort versus non-Sheffield cohort maybe. Or the people that are university students versus the ones who work. So there was a bit of that, maybe.” (Scholar 5)

“Also the cohort itself, so again I think it's something that they should consider who they're recruiting, or what applications they're accepting, because a lot of us come from different walks of life. We've got undergrad students, postgrad, professionals [...], those that have done study and, you know master's twice. And I think it's nice to have quite a mixed group because you kind of hope that there'd be some interesting dialogue and discussion among everyone. But then sometimes the differences make it difficult and I think this time there was a large proportion of scholars who were accountants or doing the accounting project – sorry, an accounting undergrad or postgrad. And so they kind of, sort of, stayed together, let's say, and it kind of created a bit of a divide among the cohort. So I guess, yes, just a little bit more thought into who they're recruiting and who they feel is suitable for this programme going forward, does that make sense?” (Scholar 1)

This disparity is important when considering that the ASPIRE programme aims to prepare scholars for doctoral study or graduate employment. There are differences between the financial support available and financial constraints (eg sponsoring work visas) international students face when applying for doctoral study or work. For example, scholar 8 shared that their doctoral journey could not continue for the sole reason that as an international student they “cannot access the loan, so that money becomes a barrier” to applying for a doctorate. This is not to say that these challenges cannot be overcome but rather that careful consideration is needed about how to support these two different groups.

Another side effect of the disparity was voiced by scholar 7, who shared that they felt alienated from the other scholars, as they did not feel there was a cohesive team. They expressed that “the community [spirit] was very low” and the scholars did not “have an interest in participating in the group projects”. Scholar 7 also shared that there was a financial barrier created by the different backgrounds – international and UK – as well as an unwillingness to travel and meet up with other scholars because of the financial implication. From what scholar 7 shared there seemed to be different considerations needed for Black international students (and, in particular, those who have recently arrived in the UK), which led to an issue with curating a community, because of the language barrier, cultural differences and lack of a UK-based support network.

“So, when I came there was a bit of a culture shock because the food I eat, generally it's different where I am coming from, the cold weather, and also

I found it difficult integrating. When you come to a new community they will not accept you. But I stayed in Manchester first. I had difficulty making friends.” (Scholar 6)

More than this, the split across the two institutions (Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University) caused overwhelm for some of the students who were trying to balance course assessment demands with travel. They were organised students doing their best, but the timings of events (and financial costs associated with attending them) placed additional strain on them, rather than allowing them to excel (scholar 1 and mentor 4, respectively).

Given that international scholars were not the original intended target population for scholars on the programme, understandably the disparity voiced by some of the scholars had not been considered in detail in the development of the ASPIRE programme. The disparity in the scholars’ experience of the ASPIRE programme needs addressing in the following round, with the clear recommendation from the qualitative data being to improve the amount of consideration paid to the recruitment criteria for scholars. In particular, creating a cohort of scholars who are primarily students currently studying at Sheffield Hallam University and are not new to the UK (this year) would address some of this key issues.

### 3.3.3 Improve future study or career prospects of scholars

At the start of the ASPIRE programme, scholars were asked to indicate their interest in and knowledge about undertaking doctoral study.

Findings revealed that, overall, most scholars (75.1%) had knowledge of the requirements of doctoral-level study with only 25% reporting that they had no or very little knowledge of the requirements of doctoral-level study. However, 43.8% scholars reported that they had very little or no knowledge of the financial cost of undertaking a doctorate, with 34.3% reporting that they had some knowledge of the financial cost. Exactly half of the ASPIRE scholars reported that they have no knowledge of taking out a loan for pursuing a doctorate, and 65.6% reported that they have no or very little knowledge of scholarships, bursaries or studentships for pursuing a doctorate. Taken together, these suggest that the scholars recruited to this first cohort of the ASPIRE programme would benefit from additional training about how to fund doctoral study.

Similarly, 43.8% of scholars had no or little knowledge about what they would need to do to improve their chances of successfully being granted a job or doctoral candidate position, with the same proportion of scholars having no or little knowledge about where to find advertisements for doctoral positions. The majority of the ASPIRE scholars responded that they believed that their degree programme had prepared them for work (50.1%) and further study (75.1%) (responding “quite a bit” and “very much”). Almost all (81.3%) of the scholars had undertaken activities to plan for their future career, and all thought that it was either quite important or very important at this stage of their life to undertake career planning.

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Although we have limited data from the end of the programme, there does seem to have been an improvement in scholars' future study and career prospects.

For example, all four scholars<sup>7</sup> who responded to the post-survey indicated that they are interested in doctoral study, and one has begun submitting PhD applications, with two scholars planning on submitting applications in the next month. The other scholar responded that they are actively looking for full-time work.

Similarly, all of the mentors interviewed shared the individual success stories of their mentees (ie scholars). For example, one scholar got a distinction in their master's and, before they had completed their course, they had been offered "a job with this big bank" (mentor 3). It is important to note that two of the ASPIRE scholars Oyenike Akinlabi (MSc Accounting and Finance) and Sopefoluwa Oluyide (MSc Forensic Accounting) both graduated with a distinction as well being awarded the best student in their respective courses.

#### *4.2.1.9 What were the scholars looking forward to?*

In the first week of the programme scholars were asked to share in the pre-survey what they were most looking forward to about the ASPIRE programme. The question was posed twice, first as an open-ended question and later as a similar, closed question. The open text answers revealed that the scholars were aligned in what they wanted from the programme, answering that they were looking to become more confident, strengthen their skills and access opportunities as well as become "a member of a collective cohort of Black scholars. I have NEVER experienced this before, it feels uplifting and elevating" (survey respondent).

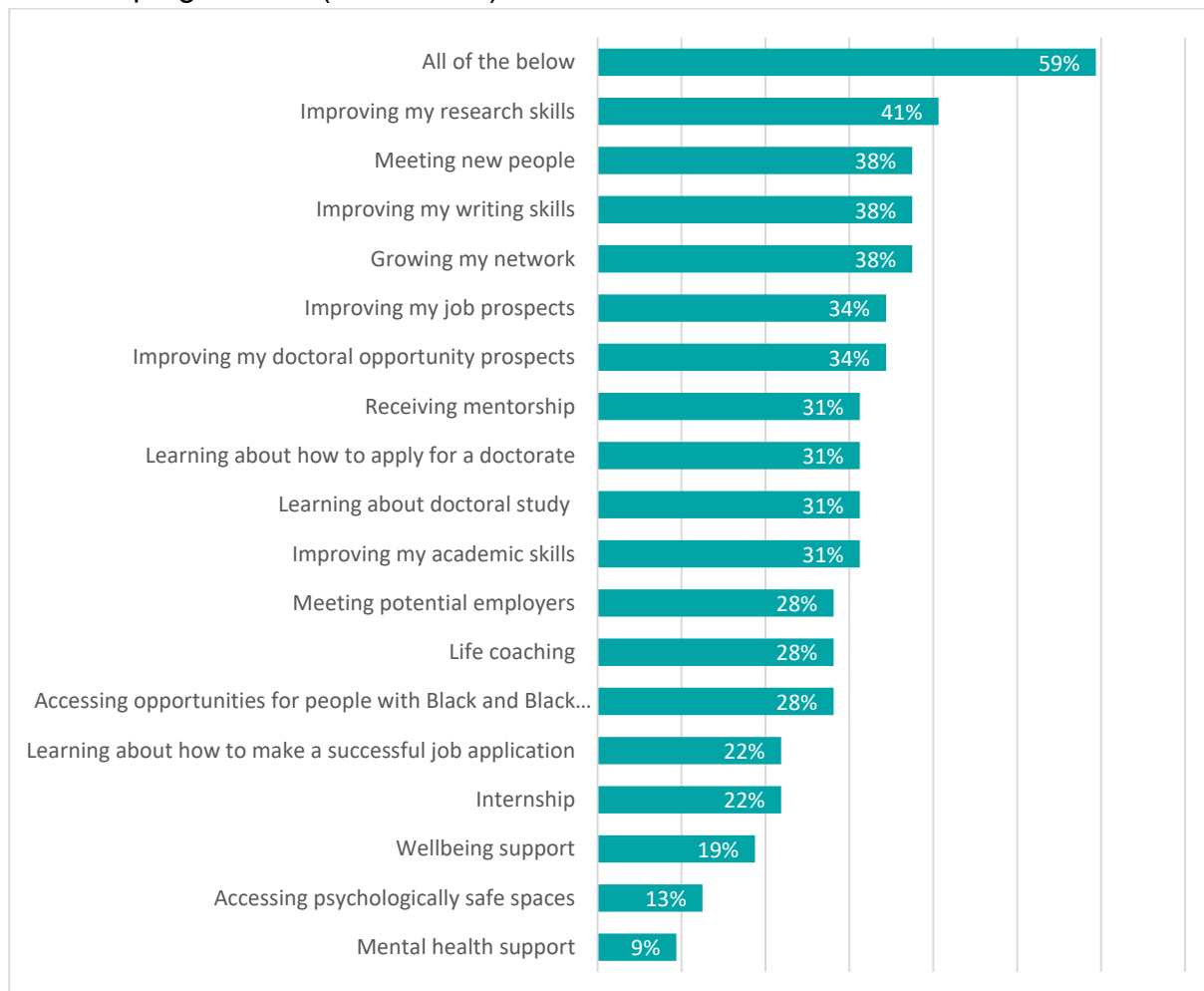
The open text comments were mirrored in the closed question, with the top three responses about skills and meeting new people.

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<sup>7</sup> One completed the pre-survey, two completed the skills survey but not the pre-survey and one didn't complete either the pre-survey or skills survey.

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Figure 9. Responses to the question: what are you looking forward to most about the ASPIRE programme? (multi-select)



#### 4.2.1.9.1 Confidence

Specifically, the ASPIRE scholars identified that they were lacking confidence; one survey respondent shared that they wanted to “achieve Black excellence not only at the workplace but also to be able to overcome certain barriers that has knocked my confidence down.”

The wider research literature recognises that Black students’ identity impacts their performance and contributes to feelings of self-doubt (Wallace and Ford, 2021). This is unsurprising as previous research by the programme directors titled “It does matter if you’re Black or White” found that Black students often lacked confidence to develop their network capital and benefit from peer support.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Advance HE has collected data on scholars’ perception of their social capital and sense of belonging with the intention of comparing scholars’ perception pre-ASPIRE with post-ASPIRE. These data will be retained and reported on in following rounds of evaluation.

Previous research has shown the importance of the link between identifying as Black or Black heritage on students' confidence. The link is thought to be driven by students' experiences of discrimination and racism which can intensify self-doubt (Wallace and Ford, 2021). As a key outcome of the ASPIRE programme was to improve scholars' confidence, it was important to first establish the scholars' previous experiences of racism at university in the past year. Overall, 72% of the scholars<sup>9</sup> shared that they had experienced one or more instance of racism in the past year at university, breaking down into the following instances:

31.3% had experienced **tokenism** in the past year

43.8% had experienced **individual racism** in the past year

37.5% had experienced **institutional racism** in the past year

40.6% had experienced **microaggressions** in the past year

31.3% had experienced **monoculturalism** in the past year

Given the high levels of racism that scholars experienced in the previous year at university, it is not entirely surprising to see that these respondents also reported high levels of self-doubt, which is to be expected according to the literature. Notably, the scholars reported statistically significantly higher levels of racism (specifically individual, institutional and microaggressions) than reported by the control sample. Indeed, when speaking with the scholars it was clear that the scholars linked their desire to improve their skill set with their desire to become more confident, as one survey respondent wrote, "the ability to be able to articulate myself clearly and concisely, orally. Growth in self-confidence."

Overall, when the scholars' survey responses were compared to the responses of the control sample, the scholars were significantly less confident in their skills than the control sample. For example, while the scholars agreed on average that they could:

Follow their study plan ( $M=3.6$ ,  $SD=.83$ ,  $t(37) = -3.42$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Take effective workshop notes ( $M=4.0$ ,  $SD=.59$ ,  $t(37) = -3.13$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Manage their time effectively ( $M=3.8$ ,  $SD=.76$ ,  $t(37) = -3.39$ ,  $p<.001$ )

The respondents in the control group tended to agree more strongly with these items. ( $M=4.6$ ,  $SD=.72$ ;  $M=4.6$ ,  $SD=.65$ ; and  $M=4.6$ ,  $SD=.65$ , respectively).

Given the small sample sizes, caution is needed when looking for significant differences between the two groups. However, it worth noting that scholars rated themselves less able on all skills (including writing, research, technical, speaking) and significantly more anxious compared to the control, also suggesting lower levels of confidence in this group.

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<sup>9</sup> 16% of scholars did not report experiencing racism in the last year and a further 13% responded that they would prefer not to answer.

Turning to look at the qualitative evidence gathered through interviewing scholars, mentors and supervisors, the contrast in confidence levels for the scholars at the start of the programme compared to the end is clear. With scholars sharing that the programme has boosted their confidence (scholar 5), similar sentiments were shared by all nine scholars about how their “confidence grew” (scholar 4) when they were asked about their skills development in ASPIRE. Increasing the scholar’s confidence and self-belief has encouraged the scholars to apply for promotions at work (scholar 1, scholar 5), and to apply for more senior roles on completion of their postgraduate degree (mentor 3, who spoke about their mentee).

By the end of the ASPIRE programme, the scholars have flourished, growing in confidence and self-belief. As one of the programme directors shared,

“The impact the programme is having on the lives of not only the scholars, even the mentors and the supervisors have been a joy for me. They are working on a project of this scale that has such a remarkable impact that people are really blessed as a resource of the programme...It has brought some more visibility for Black people particularly in Sheffield Hallam University which wasn’t there before ASPIRE.”

Dr Francis Awolowo

With further cohorts of the ASPIRE programme we hope to quantitatively evaluate whether the ASPIRE programme directly builds confidence, adding to the qualitative evidence that suggests this is the case.

#### 4.2.1.9.2 Skills

Specifically, scholars were hoping to strengthen their writing skills, research skills, and use of data analysis software. Many scholars shared their desire to develop skills that would help them prepare for pursuing a doctorate, including wanting more instruction on how to write research proposals and navigating the hidden elements of the PhD application. As one scholar shared:

“I want to do a PHD and have tried to navigate the system (mainly using my own resources). I have been told that my project ideas are very good but there was always a ...BUT – but not understanding what the but is.” (Survey respondent)

Ahead of the academic writing workshop, the scholars (n = 23 at this stage of the programme) completed the skills survey. Scholars indicated on an agreement scale their academic writing, critical thinking and reading, teamwork, research skills and communication skills.

To target the workshop appropriately for this cohort, the percentage totals of ‘definitely disagree / disagree’ and ‘strongly agree / agree’ were shared with the workshop leader. These indicated that **scholars wished to work on research skills**, with 61% rating their ability to cite literature as ‘not at all / very little / to some extent’. Scholars also wished to work on their **independent study skills**, with 65% rating their ability to take effective lecture notes as ‘neither agree nor disagree / mostly agree’, and 13% struggling to arrive on time for

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classes, workshops, appointments and meetings. Scholars' responses also indicated that they wished to work on their **academic writing skills**, with 56% responding 'mostly disagree / neither agree nor disagree' that they could write a logical and well-structured research proposal and, critically, **74% rating themselves as 'a little to very anxious' about writing**. With anxiety around writing high, a specific anxiety around writing workshop was included. In the survey, scholars' responses indicated that they did not require support with teamwork, critical thinking and reading, or communication skills.

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the ASPIRE programme was strongly driven by the passion of the programme directors Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green and Dr Francis Awolowo, which enthused the scholars to challenge themselves. The programme gave the scholars the support and space to flourish and develop the skills needed for further study or a graduate career.

Moving forward, developing clarity about the ASPIRE programme's dual aims and who would benefit most from the programme is important, as well as ironing out the practical issues of communication and timing of the programme.

Although there are things that could be improved on as recruitment begins for the second cohort of scholars, there is no doubt that for each scholar who completed the programme in the first round, the experience has been "life-changing" (scholar 1). There is every intent to keep developing the programme so that it can be sustained to make a meaningful difference to the Black PhD pipeline.

"They've upped my aspirations. They have made me realise there is nothing whatsoever I cannot achieve. My colour can never stop me. My gender can never stop me... sincerely, I just want to appreciate everybody that has brought this thing together. They've actually changed – and not just me. They've changed a whole lot of people. If they can change me, they have not changed me, they have changed my generation and I know my generation would be grateful to them." (Scholar 9)

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## 6. Appendix

### 6.1 Appendix A: recruitment promotional materials for ASPIRE scholars

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University**



#### **Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence: ASPIRE**

Hello!

We are Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Dr Francis Awolowo (Sheffield Hallam University).

We are leading the ASPIRE programme; an amazing package of support and opportunity, specifically for Black and Black heritage students. The programme is open to Black and Black (mixed) heritage students (Level 5 and above), graduates and alumni from any subject discipline, who are currently studying, employed, unemployed, volunteering and/or taking a career break.

This incredible package of opportunity and support is worth c.£10,000 per student, but it is available to you for no fee!

**For this reason, we will only select students to come onto the programme who prove themselves to be highly motivated and committed to the programme and own their learning and development.**

The ASPIRE project (one of 13 projects selected for funding by the UKRI/Office for Students), has had some great coverage across the BBC on their various platforms - [Universities to combat race bias in research](#).

The information on the UKRI website is here - <https://www.ukri.org/news/improving-minority-ethnic-groups-access-to-postgraduate-research/>

#### ***What?***

The ASPIRE programme, is a 6-month programme of exciting, interesting & thought-provoking weekly workshops, activities & synchronous and asynchronous classes. These classes cover professional & personal development, academic writing, employability, research skills (quantitative and qualitative) and project management.

In addition to these weekly learning activities, you would undertake a paid 30-hour internship (ASPIRE 30) with an employer. You will have a workplace mentor and a point of contact within the ASPIRE project team to support you during your internship. The internships available on ASPIRE 30 span a wide range of sectors including STEM, business, education and arts and humanities. At the end of the ASPIRE programme, you would do a 6-week research project or project on behalf of an employer (live client brief), that will enhance your

employability skills and your preparedness for the graduate labour market and/or doctoral level study.

Students will develop an e-portfolio of evidence that can be used to create your own personalised website to showcase your developing skills and achievements to potential employers and/or Universities offering PhD places.

At the heart of everything we do on the ASPIRE programme is compassionate pedagogy. This essentially means our teaching practices are compassionate and focus on you, as a unique individual, and your unique experiences and needs. Talking about your racialised experiences, is front and centre of conversations within our ASPIRE community, facilitated by our “Talk about race forums.”

On the programme, there are lots of safe psychological spaces for reflection and dialogue about your learning experiences. We provide safe spaces of health and well-being support operated by qualified and experienced therapists. We use expert coaches to facilitate group coaching sessions. You will be partnered with an experienced postgraduate researcher, post-doctoral academic or early career academic to mentor for the duration of the ASPIRE programme. The programme also has a small pool of work-based buddies currently working in different sectors, from whom you can seek advice and support, particularly during your ASPIRE 30 internship.

Students will take part in a cookery club, online journal club (a bit like a reading club) and contribute to the ASPIRE playlist and project digital story. There are lots of online network events with professional bodies, employers, and postgraduate award funding agencies. These opportunities will enable you, to expand your networks and professional contacts, to open access to doctoral level study and/or employment opportunities.

Students will experience lots of support in their ASPIRE learning journey. Students will produce a reflective diary, a research poster, an assessment (for those eligible for accredited RISE points), a research report and a poem. All of which you can scaffold & use in your personal/professional e-portfolio to demonstrate evidence of your learning, skills, capabilities, and competences on ASPIRE. Showcasing your talent using your ASPIRE e-portfolio, may enhance your chances of accessing graduate employment and/or a doctoral offer.

### **Where?**

ASPIRE is delivered via a hybrid (combination of face to face and online activities) programme as a closed course on Future Learn. The programme is accredited by and affiliated with Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University.

### **When?**

The programme runs from start of February to the beginning of August. There will be a break for Easter. Those eligible to be awarded RISE points will do an assessment in May.

The ASPIRE showcase event, to which employers, professional bodies, universities, and our programme patrons, will be in attendance. All ASPIRE students will be required to attend the showcase, where certificates of achievement and prizes will be presented to students.

### **Next steps**

We will be holding an online event on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2021 for any Black and/or Black heritage students who are interested in applying for a place on the programme. Applications will close 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022. Please send an email expressing your interest to Dr Francis Awolowo (co-lead) of ASPIRE on [i.f.awolowo@shu.ac.uk](mailto:i.f.awolowo@shu.ac.uk). You will then be sent the online details of the event where we will provide more information about the programme and how you can apply for a place.

Good luck!

**THE ASPIRE TEAM**



# ASPIRE

Are you a Black or Black mixed heritage person in the UK, thinking about making a **positive change** in your life or career?

**ASPIRE** is a fully-funded opportunity to develop yourself; a movement to showcase the very best of Black talent. Achieve your personal and professional goals with **ASPIRE**.

Next cohort begins 31st January

## WHAT

- Join a 30-strong community on a **6 month journey** valued at over **£10k**: workshops, clubs, collaboration and more
- **Develop life-wide** skills that will help you better navigate systems and structures - whether that be **industry** or **higher education**
- A range of targeted **opportunities** will be available to **ASPIRE alumni** including a number of funded PhD positions

## HOW

Contact **ASPIRE** project lead, Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green [i.ugiagbe-green@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:i.ugiagbe-green@mmu.ac.uk) by 19th January 2022 for further details and how to apply.

## 6.2 Appendix B: recruitment promotional materials for ASPIRE mentors

{LinkedIn Post}

Try again!

\*Apologies for cross posting\*

Calling all coaches

[#ASPIRE](https://lnkd.in/dXVJ2PWU) (<https://lnkd.in/dXVJ2PWU>) is a life changing programme that enhances the life opportunities of Black and Black (mixed) heritage people.

Our inaugural (2022) cohort and growing ASPIRE community is thriving as we enter the phase of the programme that focuses on developing the research excellence of our scholars. We seek to develop good practice in relation to academic supervision, through the adoption of coaching principles and co-creation.

As such, we now have 25 funded places for coaches interested in accessing high quality professional development. This opportunity, will enhance your coaching skills and your potential to work in the higher education sector.

Coaches will receive an excellent programme of professional development via x2 engaging and action-based [#ASPIRE](#) workshops delivered by Principal coach on the [#ASPIRE](#) programme, [Sheree Palmer SFHEA](#).

More specifically, this professional development opportunity will enable you to be involved in coaching an academic supervisor, who themselves will be supporting [#ASPIRE](#) scholars.

This means that you will be directly working in and with our community, to enhance the support received by [#ASPIRE](#) scholars during their research journey.

It really is great work!

Please get in touch with me, if you are interested and would like more details!

[#ASPIRE](#) [#Coaching](#) [#Professional](#) [#Development](#)

Your document has finished loading

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## 6.3 Appendix C: interview schedules

### Scholar's interview

#### Introduction

- Introduce me and my purpose
  - If at any point you'd like to stop the recording please raise your hand
  - This interview is independent and as much as possible I will be confidential. However, the programme directors or others involved in the programme may be able to identify you because of shared experiences.
  - Start the recording and have verbal confirmation of reading the participant information sheet, and I've double checked they've given online consent through Jisc.
- 
- Why did you apply to take part in the ASPIRE programme (how did you find out about it?)
    - + Belief about work
    - + Belief about phd and how this will help with work

#### Thinking now about you and your long-term goals

- How does the ASPIRE programme fit with your goals?
- Thinking about your future work or study opportunities, how do you feel?
- What are your plans for the future?
  - What is next for you now the ASPIRE programme has come to an end?
  - What are your dreams, hopes for a future career?
- How might taking part in the ASPIRE programme helping me in the longer term?
  - Network / Writing / Anxiety / Research skills

#### **Process...**

#### Thinking now about the practicalities of the programme itself

- What was your experience of the ASPIRE programme...
  - + How did the ASPIRE programme meet your expectations?
  - + What was the best bit of the ASPIRE programme?
- What skills did you want to develop by taking part in the ASPIRE programme?
  - + MOTIVATION,
  - + non-credit bearing,
  - + platforms/organisation,
  - + number of activities per week
- What advice would I give to a friend about to start on the same ASPIRE programme?
  - + TIME: How much time would I suggest that it would be worth putting into it?
  - + CHALLENGES: What pitfalls would I advise to be well worth not falling into?

- + What type of person do you think the ASPIRE programme would benefit most?
- If there was anything I could pass on to the team to make improvements for next year what would you suggest (anon)
  - + boring or tedious?
  - + worthwhile?
  - + How could the ASPIRE programme be re-designed to be more stimulating and interesting for me?

## **Impact...**

Thinking now about you and your long-term goals

- How does the ASPIRE programme fit with your goals?
- Thinking about your future work or study opportunities, how do you feel?
- What are your plans for the future?
  - What is next for you now the ASPIRE programme has come to an end?
  - What are your dreams, hopes for a future career?
- How might taking part in the ASPIRE programme helping me in the longer term?
  - Network / Writing / Anxiety / Research skills
- Are there any other comments you would like to make in relation to the ASPIRE programme that you feel we have not covered?

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

## **Mentor interview**

Introduction

- Introduce me and my purpose
- If at any point you'd like to stop the recording please raise your hand
- This interview is independent and as much as possible I will be confidential. However, the programme directors or others involved in the programme may be able to identify you because of shared experiences.
- Start the recording and have verbal confirmation of reading the participant information sheet, and I've double checked they've given online consent through Jisc.
- Why did you apply to take part in the ASPIRE programme (how did you find out about it?)
  - + Belief about work
  - + Belief about phd and how this will help with work

Thinking now about you and your long-term goals

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- How does the ASPIRE programme fit with your goals?
- Thinking about your future work or study opportunities, how do you feel?
- What are your plans for the future?
  - What is next for you now the ASPIRE programme has come to an end?
  - What are your dreams, hopes for a future career?
- How might taking part in the ASPIRE programme helping me in the longer term?
  - Network / Writing / Anxiety / Research skills

Thinking now about the practicalities of the programme itself

- What were your experiences of the ASPIRE programme?
  - How did these match your expectations?
  - What was your involvement in the ASPIRE programme?
- What skills did you want to develop by taking part in ASPIRE programme?
  - ...and what did you gain most from being a mentor?
- What type of person do you think the ASPIRE programme would benefit most?
- Could you tell me a bit about the research supervision?
- What did this involve? How did it work?
  - Buddying?
- What were your experiences of working with the **scholar**?
- What were your experiences of working with a **supervisor**?
- If there was anything I could pass on to the team to make improvements for next year what would you suggest (anon).

Thinking now about you and your long-term goals

- How does the ASPIRE programme fit with your goals?
- Thinking about your future work or study opportunities, how do you feel?
- What are your plans for the future?
  - What is next for you now the ASPIRE programme has come to an end?
  - What are your dreams, hopes for a future career?
- How might taking part in the ASPIRE programme helping me in the longer term?
  - Network / Writing / Anxiety / Research skills
  
- Are there any other comments you would like to make in relation to the ASPIRE programme that you feel we have not covered?

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

## Supervisor Interview

Introduction – same as above.

- How did you get involved in the ASPIRE programme? Tell me a bit about yourself
- Could you tell me about your experience with programme?
  - + Organisation
  - + expectations
- What did your role as a supervisor involve?
- What did you think of the training from the ASPIRE programme?
  - + timing of programme
  - + amount of time
- In your opinion, and experience what could the ASPIRE team do better to support the scholars?
- After your experience supervising on the ASPIRE programme would you take part again? (or recommend it to scholars, and supervisors)

## 6.4 Appendix D: scholar pre and post survey questions

### Pre-Student Survey ASPIRE

The ASPIRE (Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence).

AdvanceHE

Welcome

The ASPIRE programme focuses on developing your strengths and capabilities. It centres on you as an individual to provide opportunities to develop skills through networking, sharing lived experience, mentoring and creative connections. The overall aim of the programme is to help you develop life wide skills to access opportunities in the labour market and/or doctoral level study. This means enhancing skills but also helping you to better navigate systems and structures that we know advantage other racialised groups.

With this in mind, Advance HE have been commissioned to evaluate the ASPIRE programme. To do this we will ask you to respond to questions about your experiences, then you will be asked to answer the same questions again at the end of the ASPIRE programme.

The survey covers 4 sections looking at:

Aims of ASPIRE

Work-readiness and preparedness for doctoral study

Sense of belonging

Questions about yourself

By completing this survey, we will use your answers to feedback to the ASPIRE project team about what worked, and what didn't to improve the ASPIRE programme for the next cohort of students.

Data confidentiality

All personal data and information that you share will be held confidentially by Advance HE in accordance with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018. At no point will the information you provide be shared in a way that would allow you to be personally identified.

All information about participants will be handled confidentially by the researchers.

Participants will not be personally identifiable in any report arising from the research.

Participation is voluntary.

The ASPIRE programme team will only see aggregate level data where the proportions are large enough for individuals not to be identified.

The survey has been designed so that you can save your responses and finish later. The survey is not saved automatically, but you can choose to save your responses and finish the survey at a later stage by clicking on the 'save' button located at the bottom of each page. To return to the survey and pick up where you left your responses, you will have to either

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bookmark the 'finish later' URL in your browser, or request Jisc to email you the 'finish later' URL, generated once you click the 'save' button.

While we hope that you answer the survey in full, you are free to stop answering questions at any point or skip any questions without an asterisk (\* denotes questions that must be answered to continue in the survey). You can withdraw your consent at any time in the future by closing your browser or contacting [insights@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:insights@advance-he.ac.uk)

#### Privacy Notice

*Please read this [Privacy Notice](#), which sets out how any personal data you submit as part of this survey will be utilised and protected by Advance HE, and your rights as a data subject. We will not directly identify you in our report to Sheffield Hallam University, Manchester Metropolitan University, ASPIRE project team. However, you may be indirectly identified by information you provide, such as your department.*

*In order to participate, please tick below to confirm that you have read and understood the Privacy Notice and statement above.*

*I confirm*

#### Alternative format

If you would like to receive the survey in an alternative format, please contact Hannah Griffin-James, [hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk), 0330 041 6201.

#### ID

At the end of the ASPIRE programme we will ask you to complete this survey again to assess overall as a cohort of students whether there have been any changes in skills, knowledge, understanding, confidence and resilience.

In order to anonymously link your survey responses across the ASPIRE project please provide the following to create a self-generated 8-digit anonymous code:

What are the first three letters of your \*mother's first name?

What are the first three letters of the street on which you currently live?

On what day of the month were you born?

For example, a person whose mother's name is HANNAH who lives on Main Street and was born on 18<sup>th</sup> January their code would be: HANMAI18

\*Alternatively, if you cannot or do not wish to use the first three letters of your mother's first name, please use the first three letters of the first name of another person. Remember this is the code we will ask for again in our other surveys for the ASPIRE programme.

You will be asked for any further comments on the topics covered, to enable staff to gain a better understanding of what has gone well and what has worked less well. **Please do not**

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**identify yourself or other individuals (including staff) in your comments.** If you have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised within the survey, please contact *the ASPIRE team*.

	No	Yes
Would you describe your ethnicity Black or Black heritage?		

Insert routing: if answer yes Black/Black heritage will go to next question, and skip ethnicity.

(If no) How would you describe your ethnicity or ethnic background? *not required
Arab
Asian – Bangladeshi or Bangladeshi British
Asian – Chinese or Chinese British
Asian – Indian or Indian British
Asian – Pakistani or Pakistani British
Any other Asian background
Black – African or African British
Black –Caribbean or Caribbean British
Any other Black background
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White or White British and Asian or Asian British
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White or White British and Black African or Black African British
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White or White British and Black Caribbean or Black Caribbean British
Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background
White – English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British
White - Irish
White - Roma
Any other White background
Any other ethnic background
Not known
Prefer not to say

\*New Page\*

This set of questions will ask you about things that are important to preparing for work or doctoral study.

Evaluation of aims of programme

<b>Confidence</b>					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I am able to do things as well as other people					
I believe I have a lot to be proud of					
I have a positive attitude about myself					
Overall, I am pleased with how hard I work					
In the future, I'm confident that I can do an excellent job					
I expect to achieve most of the things I want in my life					
Overall, I look at the positive side of life					
To what extent do you agree or disagree that...	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Thinking about a job interview (or an interview for a doctoral position). To what extent do you agree or disagree that...					
I can talk about my skills to a potential employer in a persuasive manner					
I can talk about my work experiences to demonstrate my capability to fulfil a role					
<b>Resilience</b>					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Not like me at all	Not much like me	Somewhat like me	Mostly like me	Very much like me
I am able to adapt to change					
Things happen for a reason					
I am in control of my life					
I recover quickly from stressful events					
I am sure I will have no problems behaving professionally in my					

future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
I am sure I will be able to dress appropriately in my future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
I am sure I will be able to speak appropriately in my future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
I can deal with adverse situations, learn from them and move forward in a positive way					
I finish everything I start					
I struggle to stay focused on projects that take more than a few weeks to complete					
I don't give up easily					
I have overcome setbacks to achieve a goal					

Knowledge

Please rate your level of knowledge about...	None	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
Requirements for doctoral-level study					
<b>Funding:</b>					
Financial cost of undertaking a doctorate					
Loans for undertaking a doctorate					
Scholarships/Bursaries/Studentships for undertaking a doctorate					
<b>Applications:</b>					
What key information to include in a job and doctoral application					
Where to find advertisements for doctorate positions					
What you need to do to improve your chances of successfully being granted a job or doctorate position					
<b>Life after the PhD:</b>					
What types of roles you can get when you have a doctorate					

The types of skills you develop when undertaking a doctorate					
The level of pay you can expect if you hold a doctorate					
The amount of jobs for candidates who have a PhD					

In the past year have you experienced...at university?	No	Yes
Tokenism		
Individual racism		
Institutional racism		
Microaggressions		
Monoculturalism		

If you have any additional comments about your experiences either in your degree programme or ASPIRE programme, please write them here:

Open text

No comment

Work-readiness/Preparedness

On a scale of...	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
To what extent, do you think your degree programme has sufficiently prepared you for you for <b>work</b> ?				
To what extent, do you think your degree programme has sufficiently prepared you for you for <b>further study</b> ?				

*What if anything, are you most looking forward to about the ASPIRE programme?*

Open text

Nothing

*What has been the one most positive aspect of the ASPIRE programme so far?*

Open text

On a scale...	Don't know	1... Not at all familiar	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10... Very familiar
I am familiar with the roles and responsibilities of my future job/study											

I am familiar with the rules and regulations of my future job/study																				
I am familiar with the software/hardware/tools of my future job/study (e.g. SAGE, SPSS, word)																				
I can confidently use the acronyms and key terminology expected of me in my chosen industry/sector																				

<b>Do you know what industry/sector your job or further study you'd like to do in the future? (e.g. finance, business, social care)</b>					
Yes					
No					
	No		Maybe		Yes
Have you undertaken any activities to plan your future career?					
<b>On a scale...</b>	<b>Not at all important</b>	<b>Not very important</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Quite important</b>	<b>Very important</b>
How important do you think it is to undertake career planning at this stage of your life?					

<b>(If yes) Do you currently work (or have worked previously) in the industry/sector your job/further study you'd like to be in</b>	
Yes	
No	

<b>How many...</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3-5</b>	<b>5-9</b>	<b>10+</b>
(If yes) Do any of your friends or family work in the industry/sector your job/further study you'd like to join					
<b>Thinking about these people in your network, are they mostly (please select one answer)</b>					
A first-degree connection (e.g. a mentor - someone you can ask for support)					
A second-degree connection (e.g. a friend of a friend – someone you've spoken to about work, but couldn't reach out for support without further building the relationship)					
A third-degree connection (e.g. someone you met at an event – you've spoken with about your background but not about work, and neither person would consider this a strong connection)					
Combination of all 3 types of connection					
I don't know					

**Evaluation report on cohort 1 of the Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence (ASPIRE)**

Dr Hannah Griffin-James

On a scale...	1... Not at all confident	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10... Very Confident
How confident do you feel improving upon these connections or finding new connections										
How confident are you that you will be successful when you apply for a doctoral programme in the next year?										
How confident are you that you will be successful when you apply for a work placement?										
On a scale...	1... Not at all motivated	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10... Very motivated
How motivated are you to apply for a doctoral programme in the next year?										
How motivated are you to apply for a work placement?										
How motivated are you to apply for a job in the same industry/sector as your degree?										
On a scale...	1... Not important	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10... Very important
How important do you think aspiration is to succeed in a research career?										
How important do you think your identity is to succeed in a research career?										

	No	Maybe	Yes
Would you work unpaid for 6 months, if you thought it would improve your job/doctoral prospects?			
Would you undertake an unpaid doctoral position?			
Would you move to a new city for a job/doctoral position?			
Would you move to a new country for a job/doctoral position?			

On a scale of...	Very poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent
Please rate your current ability at research in <b>general</b>					
Please rate your current ability at <b>quantitative</b> research					

Please rate your current ability at <b>qualitative</b> research					
Please rate your current ability at <b>mixed-method</b> research					

To what extent do you agree or disagree that you...	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Admit my mistakes					
Always apply maximum amount of effort to work/university tasks					
Always meet work/university deadlines					
Always try to be my best self					
Are adaptable					
Are curious					
Are prepared for meetings					
Can act, instead of reacting, at work/university					
Can find out what I need to know for a work/coursework task					
Can manage my time well					
Can spot and take advantage of opportunities that others pass by					
Can suggest creative solutions					
Do things without being told					
Have a high degree of professionalism					
Hold yourself to a high standard of work					
Learn from my mistakes					

If you have any additional comments about the things you wish to gain from the ASPIRE programme, please write them here:

Open text

**Sense of belonging**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your department (or School) at University:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
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**Evaluation report on cohort 1 of the Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence (ASPIRE)**

Dr Hannah Griffin-James

I can really be myself in the department					
Other students in the department take my opinions seriously					
Other staff and students in my department know I do good work					
Sometimes I feel I don't belong in this department					
In my department I am treated with as much respect as other students					
In my department there is at least one member of staff who I can talk to if I have a problem					
It is hard for people like me to be accepted in my department					
I feel proud of belonging to the department					

<b>What are you looking forward to most about the ASPIRE programme? (multi-select)</b>
All of the below
Accessing opportunities for people with Black and Black heritage
Accessing psychologically safe spaces
Growing my network
Improving my academic skills
Improving my doctoral opportunity prospects
Improving my job prospects
Improving my research skills
Improving my writing skills
Internship
Learning about doctoral study
Learning about how to apply for a doctorate
Learning about how to make a successful job application
Life coaching
Meeting new people
Meeting potential employers
Mental health support
Receiving mentorship
Well-being support
Other (please specify)

Questions about yourself

<b>What is your sex?</b>
Man
Woman
Prefer not to say

<b>How would you describe your gender?</b>
Female

Male
Non-binary
In another way (specify, if you wish)
Prefer not to say

<b>What is your age?</b>
Number (limiters 16-99)
Prefer not to say

<b>Do you have an impairment, health condition or learning difference that has a substantial or long-term impact on your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?</b>
Yes
No
Prefer not to say

<b>Are you currently registered as studying:</b>
Full-time
Part-time

<b>Are you registered as doing a:</b>
Foundation certificate
Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) or Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)
Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND)
Foundation degree (FdA, FdSc)
Bachelor degree (e.g. BA, BSc, BEng)
Integrated Masters
Taught Masters (e.g. MBA, LLM, MSc, MEng)
Master by research

<b>Outside of the ASPIRE programme, how have you had contact with staff this term?</b>
Mostly or completely virtually/online
A mixture of in-person and virtually/online
Mostly or completely in-person

<b>Please select which of the following most closely matches your primary area of study:</b>
Medicine and dentistry
Subjects allied to medicine (including nursing, pharmacy, physiotherapy, biomedical sciences)
Biological and sport sciences (including biology, zoology, hair and beauty, exercise science)
Psychology
Veterinary sciences
Agriculture, food and related studies (including animal science, forestry, food production)
Physical sciences (including physics, chemistry, forensics)
Mathematical sciences
Engineering and technology

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Computing
Geography, earth and environmental studies
Architecture, building and planning
Education and teaching
Social sciences (including sociology, politics, social work)
Law
Business and management (including marketing, HR, economics, accounting, tourism)
Media, journalism and communications
Language and area studies (including English and Welsh)
Historical, philosophical and religious studies (including archaeology)
Design, and creative and performing arts
Combined and general studies

*Thank you for taking part*

Thank you very much for your time in completing this survey if you have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised please contact the ASPIRE programme leaders Dr. Francis Awolowo ([I.F.Awolowo@shu.ac.uk](mailto:I.F.Awolowo@shu.ac.uk)) and Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green ([I.Ugiagbe-Green@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:I.Ugiagbe-Green@mmu.ac.uk)).

*If you have any further comments or queries about the survey please feel free to contact the Advance HE researcher leading the evaluation at [hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk)*

*Many thanks for your responses.*

## Post-Student Survey ASPIRE

The ASPIRE (Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence).

Advance HE

### Welcome

Congratulations on completing the ASPIRE programme.

To assess whether the ASPIRE programme has enhanced your skills and also helped you to better navigate systems and structures that we know advantage other racialised groups; we are asking you respond to questions about your experiences on the APSIRE programme and to answer the same questions that you completed at the start of the ASPIRE programme.

The survey covers 4 sections looking at:

Evaluation of ASPIRE programme

Confidence and resilience

Work-readiness and preparedness for doctoral study

About your future

By completing this survey, we will use your answers to feedback to the ASPIRE project team about what worked, and what didn't to improve the ASPIRE programme for the next cohort of students.

### Data confidentiality

All personal data and information that you share will be held confidentially by Advance HE in accordance with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018. At no point will the information you provide be shared in a way that would allow you to be personally identified.

All information about participants will be handled confidentially by the researchers.

Participants will not be personally identifiable in any report arising from the research.

Participation is voluntary.

The ASPIRE programme team will only see aggregate level data where the proportions are large enough for individuals not to be identified.

The survey has been designed to save your responses as you go. As long as you use the same computer, you can exit and return to the survey at a later time to complete it.

While we hope that you answer the survey in full, you are free to stop answering questions at any point or skip any questions without an asterisk (\* denotes questions that must be answered to continue in the survey). You can withdraw your consent at any time in the future by closing your browser or contacting [insights@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:insights@advance-he.ac.uk)

Privacy Notice (for special category data – race)

*Please read this [Privacy Notice](#), which sets out how any personal data you submit as part of this survey will be utilised and protected by Advance HE, and your rights as a data subject. We will not directly identify you in our report to Sheffield Hallam University, Manchester Metropolitan University, ASPIRE project team. However, you may be indirectly identified by information you provide, such as your department.*

*In order to participate, please tick below to confirm that you have read and understood the Privacy Notice and statement above.*

*I confirm*

Alternative format

If you would like to receive the survey in an alternative format, please contact Hannah Griffin-James, hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk, 0330 041 6201.

ID

At the start of the ASPIRE programme we asked you to complete this survey to assess overall as a cohort of students whether there have been any changes in skills, knowledge, understanding, confidence and resilience.

In order to anonymously link your survey responses across the ASPIRE project please provide the following to create a self-generated 8-digit anonymous code:

What are the first three letters of your \*mother's first name?

What are the first three letters of the street on which you currently live?

On what day of the month were you born?

For example, a person whose mother's name is HANNAH who lives on Main Street and was born on 18<sup>th</sup> January their code would be: HANMA18

\*Alternatively, if you cannot or do not wish to use the first three letters of your mother's first name, please use the first three letters of the first name of another person. Remember this is the code we will ask for again in our other surveys for the ASPIRE programme.

You will be asked for any further comments on the topics covered, to enable staff to gain a better understanding of what has gone well and what has worked less well. **Please do not identify yourself or other individuals (including staff) in your comments.** If you have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised within the survey, please contact *the ASPIRE team*.

This set of questions will ask you about things that are important to preparing for work or doctoral study.

Evaluation of programme

Elements of programme

How satisfied are you with the ASPIRE programme in terms of:	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Accessibility of the resources					
Amount of effort require to complete programme					
Amount of hours of work required					
Amount of support available					
Applicability of content					
Asynchronous training (i.e. learning on your own schedule)					
Coaching					
Digital storytelling					
Format of lectures					
Learning online					
Listening rooms					
Mental health and wellbeing sessions					
Mentorship					
Networking sessions					
Programme content					
Programme delivery					
Quality of the resources					
Reflective diaries					
Talking Heads					
Use of case studies					
Use of FutureLearn for teaching content					
Use of Pebblepad					

Please rate how beneficial to your career goals the following were as part of the ASPIRE programme?	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
Accessing opportunities for people with Black and Black heritage				
Accessing psychologically safe spaces				
Growing my network				
Improving my academic skills				
Improving my doctoral opportunity prospects				
Improving my job prospects				

Improving my research skills				
Improving my writing skills				
Internship				
Learning about doctoral study				
Learning about how to apply for a doctorate				
Learning about how to make a successful job application				
Life coaching				
Meeting new people				
Mental health support				
Receiving mentorship				
Reflective diaries				
Well-being support				

	No		Yes	
Did you access the psychological safe spaces (e.g. listening rooms)				
	Not at all beneficial	A little beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Very beneficial
How beneficial were these psychological safe spaces?				

**Knowledge**

Please rate your level of knowledge about...	None	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
Requirements for doctoral-level study					
<b>Funding:</b>					
Financial cost of undertaking a doctorate					
Loans for undertaking a doctorate					
Scholarships/Bursaries/Studentships for undertaking a doctorate					
<b>Applications:</b>					
What key information to include in a job and doctoral application					
Where to find advertisements for doctorate positions					
What you need to do to improve your chances of successfully being granted a job or doctorate position					
<b>Life after the PhD:</b>					
What types of roles you can get when you have a doctorate					
The types of skills you develop when undertaking a doctorate					

The level of pay you can expect if you hold a doctorate					
The amount of jobs for candidates who have a PhD					

Coaching

On a scale...	Not at all	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
How useful was the group coaching?					
How useful was the individual coaching?					
Do you think you benefited from the coaching?					

<b>What was the best thing about coaching?</b>
Open text
Nothing

<b>What was the worst thing about coaching?</b>
Open text
Nothing

Writing

	No	Yes
Did you learn any useful strategies for managing anxiety about writing?		
<b>Open text response</b>		
Which was the most helpful strategy for managing your anxiety about writing?		

Benefits/Not so "great's"

<b>How do I see taking part in the ASPIRE programme helping me in the longer term?</b>
Open text
Nothing

<b><i>What if anything, is the one area in which your experience of the ASPIRE programme could be improved?</i></b>
Open text
Nothing

<i>What advice would I give to a friend about to start on the same ASPIRE programme?</i>
Open text
Nothing

<i>How much time would I suggest that it would be worth putting into it? Please give your answer as hours per week.</i>
Hours per week (number restricted, 0-80hours)

<i>What was the most boring or tedious part of taking part in the ASPIRE programme?</i>
Open text
Nothing

<i>Have you considered, for any reason, leaving the ASPIRE programme?</i>
Yes
No
Prefer not to say

<i>(If yes) What was the main (or most recent) reason that led you to consider leaving the ASPIRE programme</i>
Open text

<i>(If yes) Have you considered, for any reason, leaving your degree programme?</i>
Yes
No
Prefer not to say

Confidence and Resilience

Confidence					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I am able to do things as well as other people					
I believe I have a lot to be proud of					
I have a positive attitude about myself					
Overall, I am pleased with how hard I work					
In the future, I'm confident that I can do an excellent job					
I expect to achieve most of the things I want in my life					

Overall, I look at the positive side of life					
Thinking about a job interview (or an interview for a doctoral position). To what extent do you agree or disagree that...	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I can talk about my skills to a potential employer in a persuasive manner					
I can talk about my work experiences to demonstrate my capability to fulfil a role					
<b>Resilience</b>					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Not like me at all	Not much like me	Somewhat like me	Mostly like me	Very much like me
I am able to adapt to change					
Things happen for a reason					
I am in control of my life					
I recover quickly from stressful events					
I am sure I will have no problems behaving professionally in my future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
I am sure I will be able to dress appropriately in my future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
I am sure I will be able to speak appropriately in my future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
I can deal with adverse situations, learn from them and move forward in a positive way					
I finish everything I start					
I struggle to stay focused on projects that take more than a few weeks to complete					
I don't give up easily					
I have overcome setbacks to achieve a goal					

Work-readiness/Preparedness

Do you know what industry/sector your job or further study you'd like to do in the future? (e.g. finance, business, social care)					
Yes					
No					
	No		Maybe		Yes
Have you undertaken any activities to plan your future career?					
On a scale...	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral	Quite important	Very important
How important do you think it is to undertake career planning at this stage of your life?					

On a scale...	Don't know	1... Not at all familiar	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10... Very familiar
I am familiar with the roles and responsibilities of my future job/study											
I am familiar with the rules and regulations of my future job/study											
I am familiar with the software/hardware/tools of my future job/study (e.g. SAGE, SPSS, word)											
I can confidently use the acronyms and key terminology expected of me in my chosen industry/sector											

Please rate how much the ASPIRE programme has improved your...	Not at all	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
Ability to apply knowledge of research to real world problems					
Academic writing					
Confidence					
Critical thinking					
Employability skills					
Empowered you to grow your social network					
Grown your network					
Knowledge of employability					
Mental health					

Presenting skills					
Research skills					
Resilience					
Wellbeing					
Work preparedness					

Please rate how anxious you feel about the following...	None	A little anxious	Mildly anxious	Somewhat anxious	Very anxious
Attending network events					
Building up your network					
Presenting					
Reflection on study skills					
Talking to new people					
Writing					

On a scale of...	Very poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent
Please rate your current ability at research in <b>general</b>					
Please rate your current ability at <b>quantitative</b> research					
Please rate your current ability at <b>qualitative</b> research					
Please rate your current ability at <b>mixed-method</b> research					

To what extent do you agree or disagree that you...	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Admit my mistakes					
Always apply maximum amount of effort to work/university tasks					
Always meet work/university deadlines					
Always try to be my best self					
Are adaptable					
Are curious					
Are prepared for meetings					
Can act, instead of reacting, at work/university					
Can find out what I need to know for a work/coursework task					
Can manage my time well					

Can spot and take advantage of opportunities that others pass by					
Can suggest creative solutions					
Do things without being told					
Have a high degree of professionalism					
Hold yourself to a high standard of work					
Learn from my mistakes					

If you have any additional comments about how you have developed your skills as part of the ASPIRE programme, please write them here:

**Sense of belonging**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ASPIRE programme:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I can really be myself in ASPIRE					
Other students in ASPIRE take my opinions seriously					
Other staff and students in ASPIRE know I do good work					
Sometimes I feel I don't belong in ASPIRE					
In ASPIRE I am treated with as much respect as other students					
In ASPIRE is at least one member of staff who I can talk to if I have a problem					
It is hard for people like me to be accepted in ASPIRE					
I feel proud of belonging to ASPIRE					

**About your future**

	No	Yes
Are you interested in doctoral study?		
In the past month how many applications have you submitted?	number	
In the next month how many applications are you planning on submitting?	number	
	No	Yes

Are you actively looking for work?		
(if yes)	Part-time	Full-time
What kind of work?		
In the past month how many applications have you submitted?	number	
In the next month how many applications are you planning on submitting?	number	

Are you a recipient of...	No	Yes
Funding from Manchester Metropolitan University or Sheffield Hallam University (e.g. a scholarship, studentship, etc.)?		
Are you planning on applying for Phd candidate funding from the ASPIRE programme?		
Did you complete an internship as part of the ASPIRE programme?		

*Thank you for taking part*

Thank you very much for your time in completing this survey if you have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised please contact the ASPIRE programme leaders Dr. Francis Awolowo ([I.F.Awolowo@shu.ac.uk](mailto:I.F.Awolowo@shu.ac.uk)) and Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green ([I.Ugiagbe-Green@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:I.Ugiagbe-Green@mmu.ac.uk)).

*If you have any further comments or queries about the survey please feel free to contact the Advance HE researcher leading the evaluation at [hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk)*

*Many thanks for your responses.*

## 6.5 Appendix E: supervisor pre and post survey questions

### PRE Supervisor Survey

The ASPIRE (Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence).

AdvanceHE

Welcome

The ASPIRE programme focuses on improving your awareness of the racialised needs of Black and Black Mixed heritage students interested in accessing doctoral study, and change the ways in which Black and Black Mixed heritage students can be best supported to access doctoral study.

These questions have been designed to assess your understanding, attitudes, and perceptions as a PGR supervisor to the specific, racialised needs of Black and Black Mixed heritage students interested in accessing doctoral study.

The survey covers 7 sections looking at:

Aims of ASPIRE

Perceptions of Black and Black Mixed heritage students

Understanding of Black and Black Mixed heritage students

Knowledge of specific barriers for Black and Black Mixed heritage students

Exposure to racialized issues

Confidence supporting Black and Black Mixed heritage students

Questions about you

By completing this survey, we will use your answers to feedback to the ASPIRE project team about what worked, and what didn't to improve the ASPIRE programme for the next cohort of supervisors.

Data confidentiality

All personal data and information that you share will be held confidentially by Advance HE in accordance with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018. At no point will the information you provide be shared in a way that would allow you to be personally identified.

All information about participants will be handled confidentially by the researchers.

Participants will not be personally identifiable in any report arising from the research.

Participation is voluntary.

The ASPIRE programme team will only see aggregate level data where the proportions are large enough for individuals not to be identified.

The survey has been designed so that you can save your responses and finish later. The survey is not saved automatically, but you can choose to save your responses and finish the survey at a later stage by clicking on the 'save' button located at the bottom of each page.

---

To return to the survey and pick up where you left your responses, you will have to either bookmark the 'finish later' URL in your browser, or request Jisc to email you the 'finish later' URL, generated once you click the 'save' button.

Privacy Notice (for special category data – race)

*Please read this [Privacy Notice](#), which sets out how any personal data you submit as part of this survey will be utilised and protected by Advance HE, and your rights as a data subject. We will not directly identify you in our report to Sheffield Hallam University, Manchester Metropolitan University, ASPIRE project team. However, you may be indirectly identified by information you provide, such as your job role and department.*

*In order to participate, please tick below to confirm that you have read and understood the Privacy Notice and statement above.*

*I confirm*

Alternative format

If you would like to receive the survey in an alternative format, please contact Hannah Griffin-James, hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk, 0330 041 6201.

ID

At the end of the ASPIRE programme we will ask you to complete this survey again to assess overall as a cohort of supervisors whether there have been any changes in understanding, attitudes or perceptions of PGR students specific racialised needs.

In order to anonymously link your survey responses across the ASPIRE project please provide the following to create a self-generated 8-digit anonymous code:

What are the first three letters of your \*mother's first name?

What are the first three letters of the street on which you currently live?

On what day of the month were you born?

For example, a person whose mother's name is HANNAH who lives on Main Street and was born on 18<sup>th</sup> January their code would be: HANMAI18

\*Alternatively, if you cannot or do not wish to use the first three letters of your mother's first name, please use the first three letters of the first name of another person. Remember this is the code we will ask for again in our other surveys for the ASPIRE programme.

You will be asked for any further comments on the topics covered, to enable staff to gain a better understanding of what has gone well and what has worked less well. **Please do not identify yourself or other individuals (including students) in your comments.** If you

have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised within the survey, please contact *the ASPIRE team*.

Aims of programme

What is the main reason you are taking part in the ASPIRE programme?
To learn how to be a better supervisor
To build my network
To improve the opportunities for Black and Black mixed heritage students
To update my supervision practice
To learn about the structural barriers facing Black and Black mixed heritage students
Other (please specify)

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of the ASPIRE programme					

If there were no restrictions in place (related to the pandemic and you could choose) how would you prefer to engage with the ASPIRE programme?
Mostly online
Mostly in person
A blended or hybrid approach combining online and in person

Thinking of your current view of the ASPIRE programme as a whole, please rate whether each attribute is true or false.	False	True
The course is well organised		
The course is running smoothly		
The online resources have been well organised		
I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. live sessions, Podcast, MS Teams) when I needed to		

The workload on the APSIRE programme is manageable		
The course will improve my supervisory practice for Black and Black mixed heritage students		

Explore impact of staff perceptions towards black and black mixed heritage students

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Increasing the diversity of doctoral candidate populations would improve the <b>quality of research</b> at my university					
Increasing the diversity of doctoral candidate population would improve the <b>academic culture</b> at my university					

*Selecting doctoral candidates*

Please rate the following elements level of importance when choosing a doctoral candidate to work with.	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral	Quite important	Very important
Ability to manage complex projects					
Ability to take on board feedback and edit work					
Academic background and experience					
Alignment of research interests					
Candidates attitude					
Candidates communication and interpersonal skills					
Candidates skills set/knowledge					
English language proficiency					
Exhibits curious and original thought					
Good personality fit					
Passion for topic					

Previous familiarity with a candidate					
Quality of application					
References					

Career/Role

As a supervisor how often in the past year have you...	Not applicable	Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Co-authored a paper with a student for publication					
Collaborated with a student to gather data					
Discussed students future career					
Ensure my students understand the hidden curriculum					
Ensure that my students build a strong network					
Ensure that my students have the research skills needed to succeed in work and academia					
Open my network to my students					
Provide advice on pursuing academic careers					
Provide advice on pursuing an alternative to an academic career					
Support my students in publishing					
Supported a student in applying for funding for them to undertake further study					
Supported a student in applying for funding to continue in their doctoral position					
Written a reference for a student to undertake a non-academic job					

Written a reference for a student to undertake a research post					
--	--	--	--	--	--

Confidence & Resilience

Perception of Black and Black mixed heritage students confidence					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Black and Black mixed heritage students...					
Are able to do things as well as other people					
Believe that they have a lot to be proud of					
Have a positive attitude about themselves					
Are pleased with how hard they work					
Are confident that I can do an excellent job					
Expect to achieve most of the things they want in their life					
Look at the positive side of life					
Thinking about a job interview (or an interview for a doctoral position). To what extent do you agree or disagree that Black and Black mixed heritage students...	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Can talk about their skills to a potential employer in a persuasive manner					
Can talk about their work experiences to demonstrate their capability to fulfil a role					
Perception of Black and Black mixed heritage students resilience					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree

Black and Black mixed heritage students...					
Are able to adapt to change					
Believe that things happen for a reason					
Are in control of their life					
Recover quickly from stressful events					
Are sure that they will have no problems behaving professionally in their future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
Are sure that they will be able to dress appropriately in their future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
Are sure that they will be able to speak appropriately in their future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
Can deal with adverse situations, learn from them and move forward in a positive way					
Finish everything they start					
Struggle to stay focused on projects that take more than a few weeks to complete					
Don't give up easily					
Have overcome setbacks to achieve a goal					

Explore staff understanding of experiences of Black and Black mixed heritage students

How important is a sense of belonging to a department for a...	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral	Quite important	Very important
Black or Black mixed heritage doctoral applicant					
Black or Black mixed heritage doctoral candidate					

How often when considering a doctoral application ...	Never	Seldom	About half the time	Usually	Always
Do you consider elements that might improve access to <b>doctoral</b> level study for Black or Black mixed heritage students?					
Do you consider elements that might improve access to <b>job</b> opportunities for Black or Black mixed heritage students?					

Which ideas could you adopt to improve access to doctoral level study for Black or Black mixed heritage students?	Not relevant	Will not do	Unsure	Will do	Already do
Create a consistent, transparent PGR application process					
Make admissions data open access					
Create a welcoming and inclusive environment in my team					
Improve my supervision practice					
Support improvements to access psychological safe spaces					
Improve my awareness and understanding of career options for students					
Talk and write about the hidden elements of doctoral applications (i.e. "hidden curriculum")					
Talk and write about the hidden elements of doctoral study (i.e. "hidden curriculum")					
Improve opportunities for postgraduate students to write with me					
Improve opportunities for postgraduate students to develop their research skills					
Improve opportunities for postgraduate students to network					
Improve opportunities for postgraduates to practice teaching and other related tasks (e.g. marking)					
Improve opportunities for postgraduate students to share their job application materials with me for feedback					
Provide formal mentoring opportunities					

Provide opportunities to collaborate on publications					
Provide informal mentoring opportunities for Black or Black mixed heritage students					

Explore staff knowledge of specific barriers for Black or Black mixed heritage students

How likely do you think it is that an undergraduate or postgraduate student would experience the below within your department:	Not at all likely	Not very likely	Neutral	Quite likely	Very likely
Tokenism					
Individual racism					
Institutional racism					
Microaggressions					
Monoculturalism					

How frequently do you think an undergraduate or postgraduate student would experience the below within your department:	Never	Seldom	About half the time	Usually	Always
Tokenism					
Individual racism					
Institutional racism					
Microaggressions					
Monoculturalism					

Please rate how important you think developing the following elements are to a student's success	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral	Quite important	Very important
Ability to adhere to deadlines					
Ability to make a complaint					
Ability to reach out for support					
Amenable nature					
Confidence					
Grit					
Having a strong sense of belonging					
Positive demeanour					
Resilience					
Prepared to seek support from university services					

Please write here any additional comments about the above issues. \*optional

Open text
No comment

Explore staff exposure to issues – e.g. race quality

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
White people in the UK have certain advantages because of the colour of their skin (R)					
Race plays an important role in who gets onto a doctoral programme (R)					
Race plays an important role in who gets selected for a job (R)					
Black and Black mixed heritage students have the same opportunities as white students in the UK					
Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance of success at work					
Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance of succeeding in academia					
White people are more to blame for racial discrimination than people of Black and Black mixed heritage. (R)					

Explore staff confidence in confronting racial injustice

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements	Prefer not to answer	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I feel supported to enact good supervision						
I feel capable of addressing the racialised issues within my capacity as a supervisor						
I feel capable of addressing the racialised needs of my students within my capacity as their supervisor						
I feel confident tackling racism within my <b>department</b>						

I feel confident tackling racism within my <b>university</b>						
I fear the consequences of standing up to racism within my <b>department</b>						
I fear the consequences of standing up to racism within my <b>university</b>						

On the following scale...	Not at all confident	Not very confident	Somewhat confident	Fairly confident	Completely confident
How confident do you feel addressing the racialised needs of any Black or Black mixed heritage student you are supervising					

On the following scale...	Not at all supportive	Slightly supportive	Somewhat supportive	Fairly supportive	Completely supportive
How supportive do you believe your university is of addressing racialised needs of any Black or Black mixed heritage student you are supervising					

What one thing would make your role as a supervisor better? Please write freely and give as much detail as possible.					
Open text					
How confident do you feel supporting candidates from a Black or Black mixed heritage background to:	Not at all confident	Not very confident	Somewhat confident	Fairly confident	Completely confident
Accessing paid work					
Accessing voluntary work					
Accessing work-experience/Internships					
Build their confidence					
Build their grit					
Build their resilience					
Improve academic skills					
Improve their future career prospects					
Improve their future study prospects					
Sharing your network					

What one thing could you do to improve Black and Black mixed heritage students <b>experiences</b> of doctoral study?
Open text

What one thing could you do to improve Black and Black mixed heritage students <b>engagement</b> with doctoral study?
Open text

If you have any additional comments about improvements, please write them here:
Open text

Questions about yourself and your supervision

Please select your career stage from the list:
Early Career (or doctoral student)
Mid-career
Late career
Retired
Other

Select the total number of doctoral candidates you are the primary supervisor for:
1-2
3-5
6-10
11-20
>20

Select the number of doctoral candidates you are a member of the committee/second supervisor
1-2
3-5
6-10
11-20
>20

Select the number of doctoral candidates you are supporting informally
1-2
3-5
6-10
11-20
>20

<i>How many students have you seen through to successful doctoral completion?</i>
---

Raw number (min 0, max 100, number only)
--

<b>Overall what main route have your current doctoral students taken:</b>
<i>Directly from a previous HE academic qualification</i>
<i>Undertaking doctorate part-time</i>
<i>Employed but undertaking doctorate independently</i>
<i>Sponsored by an employer to undertake doctorate</i>
<i>Professional, but not currently employed</i>
<i>Government-sponsored</i>
<i>No prior HE academic background (no undergraduate or postgraduate degree)</i>
<i>Retired</i>
<i>Other (open text)</i>

<b>Select the total number of masters students you are the primary supervisor for:</b>
<5
6-10
11-15
>15

<b>In general, which discipline do you supervise:</b>
Medicine and dentistry
Subjects allied to medicine (including nursing, pharmacy, physiotherapy, biomedical sciences)
Biological and sport sciences (including biology, zoology, hair and beauty, exercise science)
Psychology
Veterinary sciences
Agriculture, food and related studies (including animal science, forestry, food production)
Physical sciences (including physics, chemistry, forensics)
Mathematical sciences
Engineering and technology
Computing
Geography, earth and environmental studies
Architecture, building and planning
Education and teaching
Social sciences (including sociology, politics, social work)
Law
Business and management (including marketing, HR, economics, accounting, tourism)
Media, journalism and communications
Language and area studies (including English and Welsh)
Historical, philosophical and religious studies (including archaeology)
Design, and creative and performing arts
Combined and general studies

<b>Which is the main type of doctorate that you supervise?</b>
--

<i>PhD by publication</i>
<i>PhD by thesis</i>
<i>Practice-based doctorate</i>
<i>Professional doctorate</i>

<b>How would you describe your ethnicity or ethnic background?</b>
Arab
Asian – Bangladeshi or Bangladeshi British
Asian – Chinese or Chinese British
Asian – Indian or Indian British
Asian – Pakistani or Pakistani British
Any other Asian background
Black – African or African British
Black –Caribbean or Caribbean British
Any other Black background
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White or White British and Asian or Asian British
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White or White British and Black African or Black African British
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White or White British and Black Caribbean or Black Caribbean British
Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background
White – English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British
White - Irish
White - Roma
Any other White background
Any other ethnic background
Not known
Prefer not to say

<b>Do you have an impairment, health condition or learning difference that has a substantial or long-term impact on your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?</b>
Yes
No
<i>Prefer not to say</i>

<b>What is your sex?</b>
Man
Woman
Prefer not to say

<b>How would you describe your gender identity?</b>
Female

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Male
Non-binary
In another way (specify, if you wish)
Prefer not to say

*Thank you*

Thank you very much for your time in completing this survey if you have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised please contact the ASPIRE programme leaders Dr. Francis Awolowo ([I.F.Awolowo@shu.ac.uk](mailto:I.F.Awolowo@shu.ac.uk)) and Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green ([I.Ugiagbe-Green@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:I.Ugiagbe-Green@mmu.ac.uk)).

*If you have any further comments or queries about the survey please feel free to contact the Advance HE researcher leading the evaluation at [hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk)*

*Many thanks for your responses.*

## Post Supervisor Survey

The ASPIRE (Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence).

AdvanceHE

Welcome

Congratulations on completing the ASPIRE programme.

To assess whether the ASPIRE programme has improved your understanding, attitudes, perceptions of the specific, racialised needs of Black students interested in accessing doctoral study, we will ask you to answer the same questions that you completed at the start of the ASPIRE programme.

The survey covers 5 sections looking at:

Evaluation of the ASPIRE programme

Perceptions of Black students

Understanding of Black students

Knowledge of specific barriers for Black students

Confidence supporting Black students

By completing this survey, we will use your answers to feedback to the ASPIRE project team about what worked, and what didn't to improve the ASPIRE programme for the next cohort of supervisors.

### Data confidentiality

All personal data and information that you share will be held confidentially by Advance HE in accordance with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018. At no point will the information you provide be shared in a way that would allow you to be personally identified.

All information about participants will be handled confidentially by the researchers.

Participants will not be personally identifiable in any report arising from the research.

Participation is voluntary.

The ASPIRE programme team will only see aggregate level data where the proportions are large enough for individuals not to be identified.

The survey has been designed so that you can save your responses and finish later. The survey is not saved automatically, but you can choose to save your responses and finish the survey at a later stage by clicking on the 'save' button located at the bottom of each page. To return to the survey and pick up where you left your responses, you will have to either bookmark the 'finish later' URL in your browser, or request Jisc to email you the 'finish later' URL, generated once you click the 'save' button.

While we hope that you answer the survey in full, you are free to stop answering questions at any point or skip any questions without an asterisk (\* denotes questions that must be

answered to continue in the survey). You can withdraw your consent at any time in the future by closing your browser or contacting [insights@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:insights@advance-he.ac.uk)

Privacy Notice (for special category data – race)

*Please read this [Privacy Notice](#), which sets out how any personal data you submit as part of this survey will be utilised and protected by Advance HE, and your rights as a data subject. We will not directly identify you in our report to Sheffield Hallam University, Manchester Metropolitan University, ASPIRE project team. However, you may be indirectly identified by information you provide, such as your job role and department.*

*In order to participate, please tick below to confirm that you have read and understood the Privacy Notice and statement above.*

*I confirm*

Alternative format

If you would like to receive the survey in an alternative format, please contact Hannah Griffin-James, [hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk), 0330 041 6201.

ID

At the end of the ASPIRE programme we will ask you to complete this survey again to assess overall as a cohort of supervisors whether there have been any changes in understanding, attitudes or perceptions of PGR students specific racialised needs.

In order to anonymously link your survey responses across the ASPIRE project please provide the following to create a self-generated 8-digit anonymous code:

What are the first three letters of your \*mother's first name?

What are the first three letters of the street on which you currently live?

On what day of the month were you born?

For example, a person whose mother's name is HANNAH who lives on Main Street and was born on 18<sup>th</sup> January their code would be: HANMAI18

\*Alternatively, if you cannot or do not wish to use the first three letters of your mother's first name, please use the first three letters of the first name of another person. Remember this is the code we will ask for again in our other surveys for the ASPIRE programme.

You will be asked for any further comments on the topics covered, to enable staff to gain a better understanding of what has gone well and what has worked less well. **Please do not identify yourself or other individuals (including students) in your comments.** If you

---

have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised within the survey, please contact *the ASPIRE team*.

---

Aims of programme

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of the ASPIRE programme					

What is the most important thing you've gained from taking part in the ASPIRE programme?
Open text
Nothing

Thinking of your current view of the ASPIRE programme as a whole, please rate whether each attribute is true or false.	False	True
The course was well organised		
The course ran smoothly		
The online resources were well organised		
I was able to access course-specific resources (e.g. live sessions, Podcast, MS Teams) when I needed to		
The workload on the ASPIRE programme was manageable		
The course improved my supervisory practice for Black and Black mixed heritage students		

---

**Evaluation report on cohort 1 of the Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence (ASPIRE)**

Dr Hannah Griffin-James

How satisfied are you with the ASPIRE programme in terms of:	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Abuntu session					
Accessibility of the resources					
Amount of effort required to complete programme					
Amount of hours of work required					
Amount of support available					
Applicability of content					
Asynchronous learning					
Coaching					
Format of lectures					
JEDI workshop					
Listening rooms					
Mental health and wellbeing sessions					
Mix of teaching resources					
Networking sessions					
Programme content					
Programme delivery					
Quality of the resources					
Race equity training					
Reflective diaries					
Talking Heads					
Use of case studies					
Use of FutureLearn for teaching content					
Use of MS Teams					

What one thing would you suggest the project team do to improve the ASPIRE programme?
Open text
Nothing

**Explore impact of staff perceptions towards black students**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Increasing the diversity of doctoral candidate populations would					

improve the <b>quality of research</b> at my university					
Increasing the diversity of doctoral candidate population would improve the <b>academic culture</b> at my university					
ASPIRE has created sufficient opportunities to discuss my supervision practice with other supervisors (in-person or virtual/online)					
ASPIRE has encouraged me to be the best supervisor I can be					
I have appropriate opportunities to give feedback on my experience					

*Selecting doctoral candidates*

Please rate the following elements' level of importance when choosing a doctoral candidate to work with.	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral	Quite important	Very important
Ability to manage complex projects					
Ability to take on board feedback and edit work					
Academic background and experience					
Alignment of research interests					
Candidate's attitude					
Candidate's communication and interpersonal skills					
Candidate's skills set/knowledge					
English language proficiency					
Candidate exhibits curious and original thought					
Good personality fit					
Passion for topic					
Previous familiarity with a candidate					
Quality of application					
References					

Career/role

---

As a supervisor how often in the past year have you...	Not applicable	Never	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Co-authored a paper with a student for publication					
Collaborated with a student to gather data					
Discussed students future career					
Ensure my students understand the hidden curriculum					
Ensure that my students build a strong network					
Ensure that my students have the research skills needed to succeed in work and academia					
Open my network to my students					
Provide advice on pursuing academic careers					
Provide advice on pursuing an alternative to an academic career					
Support my students in publishing					
Supported a student in applying for funding for them to undertake further study					
Supported a student in applying for funding to continue in their doctoral position					
Written a reference for a student to undertake a non-academic job					
Written a reference for a student to undertake a research post					

**Confidence & Resilience**

<b>Perception of Black and Black mixed heritage students confidence</b>					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Black and Black mixed heritage students...					
Are able to do things as well as other people					

Believe that they have a lot to be proud of					
Have a positive attitude about themselves					
Are pleased with how hard they work					
Are confident that I can do an excellent job					
Expect to achieve most of the things they want in their life					
Look at the positive side of life					
Thinking about a job interview (or an interview for a doctoral position). To what extent do you agree or disagree that Black and Black mixed heritage students...	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Can talk about their skills to a potential employer in a persuasive manner					
Can talk about their work experiences to demonstrate their capability to fulfil a role					
<b>Perception of Black and Black mixed heritage students resilience</b>					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.  Black and Black mixed heritage students...	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Are able to adapt to change					
Believe that things happen for a reason					
Are in control of their life					
Recover quickly from stressful events					
Are sure that they will have no problems behaving professionally in their future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
Are sure that they will be able to dress					

appropriately in their future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
Are sure that they will be able to speak appropriately in their future role (as a doctoral student/an employee)					
Can deal with adverse situations, learn from them and move forward in a positive way					
Finish everything they start					
Struggle to stay focused on projects that take more than a few weeks to complete					
Don't give up easily					
Have overcome setbacks to achieve a goal					

Explore staff understanding of experiences of Black students

How important is a sense of belonging to a department for a...	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral	Quite important	Very important
Black or Black mixed heritage doctoral applicant					
Black or Black mixed heritage doctoral candidate					

How often when considering a doctoral application ...	Never	Seldom	About half the time	Usually	Always
Do you consider elements that might improve access to <b>doctoral</b> level study for Black or Black mixed heritage students?					
Do you consider elements that might improve access to <b>job</b> opportunities for Black or Black mixed heritage students?					

Which ideas could you adopt to improve access to doctoral level study for Black or Black mixed heritage students?	Not relevant	Will not do	Unsure	Will do	Already do
Create a consistent, transparent PGR application process					
Make admissions data open access					
Create a welcoming and inclusive environment in my team					
Improve my supervision practice					
Support improvements to access psychological safe spaces					
Improve my awareness and understanding of career options for students					
Talk and write about the hidden elements of doctoral applications (i.e. "hidden curriculum")					
Talk and write about the hidden elements of doctoral study (i.e. "hidden curriculum")					
Improve opportunities for postgraduate students to write with me					
Improve opportunities for postgraduate students to develop their research skills					
Improve opportunities for postgraduate students to network					
Improve opportunities for postgraduates to practice teaching and other related tasks (e.g. marking)					
Improve opportunities for postgraduate students to share their job application materials with me for feedback					
Provide formal mentoring opportunities					
Provide informal mentoring opportunities for Black or Black mixed heritage students					

Explore staff knowledge of specific barriers for Black students

How likely do you think it is that an undergraduate or postgraduate student would experience the below within your department:	Not at all likely	Not very likely	Neutral	Quite likely	Very likely
Tokenism					
Individual racism					
Institutional racism					
Microaggressions					
Monoculturalism					

How frequently do you think an undergraduate or postgraduate student would experience the below within your department:	Never	Seldom	About half the time	Usually	Always
Tokenism					
Individual racism					
Institutional racism					
Microaggressions					
Monoculturalism					

Please rate how important you think developing the following elements are to a student's success	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral	Quite important	Very important
Ability to adhere to deadlines					
Ability to make a complaint					
Ability to reach out for support					
Amenable nature					
Confidence					
Grit					
Having a strong sense of belonging					
Positive demeanour					
Resilience					
Prepared to seek support from university services					

Please write here any additional comments about the above issues. *optional
Open text
No comment

Explore staff exposure to issues – e.g. race quality

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
White people in the UK have certain advantages because of the colour of their skin (R)					
Race plays an important role in who gets onto a doctoral programme (R)					

Race plays an important role in who gets selected for a job (R)					
Black and black mixed heritage students have the same opportunities as white students in the UK					
Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance of success at work					
Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance of succeeding in academia					
White people are more to blame for racial discrimination than people of Black and Black mixed heritage. (R)					

Explore staff confidence in confronting racial injustice

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements	Prefer not to answer	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I feel supported to enact good supervision						
I feel capable of addressing the racialised issues within my capacity as a supervisor						
I feel capable of addressing the racialised needs of my students within my capacity as their supervisor						
I feel confident tackling racism within my <b>department</b>						
I feel confident tackling racism within my <b>university</b>						
I fear the consequences of standing up to racism within my <b>department</b>						
I fear the consequences of standing up to racism within my <b>university</b>						

On the following scale...	Not at all confident	Not very confident	Somewhat confident	Fairly confident	Completely confident
How confident do you feel addressing the racialised needs of any Black or Black					

mixed heritage student you are supervising					
--	--	--	--	--	--

On the following scale...	Not at all supportive	Slightly supportive	Somewhat supportive	Fairly supportive	Completely supportive
How supportive do you believe your university is of addressing racialised needs of any Black or Black mixed heritage student you are supervising					

What one thing would make your role as a supervisor better? Please write freely and give as much detail as possible.

Open text					
How confident do you feel supporting candidates from a Black or Black mixed heritage background to:	Not at all confident	Not very confident	Somewhat confident	Fairly confident	Completely confident
Accessing paid work					
Accessing voluntary work					
Accessing work-experience/Internships					
Build their confidence					
Build their grit					
Build their resilience					
Improve academic skills					
Improve their future career prospects					
Improve their future study prospects					
Sharing your network					

What one thing could you do to improve Black and Black mixed heritage students **experiences** of doctoral study?

Open text

What one thing could you do to improve Black and Black mixed heritage students **engagement** with doctoral study?

Open text

If you have any additional comments about improvements, please write them here:

Open text

*Thank you*

Thank you very much for your time in completing this survey if you have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised please contact the ASPIRE programme leaders Dr. Francis Awolowo ([I.F.Awolowo@shu.ac.uk](mailto:I.F.Awolowo@shu.ac.uk)) and Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green ([I.Ugiagbe-Green@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:I.Ugiagbe-Green@mmu.ac.uk)).

*If you have any further comments or queries about the survey please feel free to contact the Advance HE researcher leading the evaluation at [hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk)*

*Many thanks for your responses.*

## 6.6 Appendix F: skills questions

### Scholar Skills Questionnaire

The ASPIRE programme aims to support you in both your personal and professional development, focusing on 3 key objectives:

Increasing employability knowledge

Improving academic writing

Developing research skills

This survey will ask you to rate your own skills in these areas and whether you believe the ASPIRE programme has supported you in developing these skills.

### Data confidentiality

All personal data and information that you share will be held confidentially by Advance HE in accordance with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018. At no point will the information you provide be shared in a way that would allow you to be personally identified.

All information about participants will be handled confidentially by the researchers.

Participants will not be personally identifiable in any report arising from the research.

Participation is voluntary.

The survey has been designed so that you can save your responses and finish later. The survey is not saved automatically, but you can choose to save your responses and finish the survey at a later stage by clicking on the 'save' button located at the bottom of each page. To return to the survey and pick up where you left your responses, you will have to either bookmark the 'finish later' URL in your browser, or request Jisc to email you the 'finish later' URL, generated once you click the 'save' button.

While we hope that you answer the survey in full, you are free to stop answering questions at any point or skip any questions without an asterisk (\* denotes questions that must be answered to continue in the survey). You can withdraw your consent at any time by contacting [insights@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:insights@advance-he.ac.uk) and providing your 8-digit anonymous code (which you will create after reading the Privacy Policy).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The following questions have been adapted from a number of sources and, especially, the skills questions from the Dr Jenny Reeve at Manchester Metropolitan University with permission.

### RESEARCH ETHICS AND STORING DATA

Advance HE has robust research ethics and data storage policies, copies of which are available to participants on request. All personal and/or special category data are held securely in accordance with the Advance HE Privacy Policy.

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## Privacy Notice

*Please read this Privacy Notice, which sets out how any personal data you submit as part of this survey will be utilised and protected by Advance HE, and your rights as a data subject. We will not directly identify you in our report to Sheffield Hallam University, Manchester Metropolitan University, ASPIRE project team. However, you may be indirectly identified by information you provide, such as your department.*

In order to participate, please tick below to confirm that you have read and understood the Privacy Notice and statement above.

I confirm

## Alternative format

If you would like to receive the survey in an alternative format, please contact Hannah Griffin-James, hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk, 0330 041 6201.

You will be asked for any further comments on the topics covered, to enable staff to gain a better understanding of what has gone well and what has worked less well. **Please do not identify yourself or other individuals (including staff) in your comments.** If you have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised within the survey, please contact *the ASPIRE team*.

## Anonymous ID link

In order to anonymously link survey responses across the ASPIRE project please provide the following to create a self-generated 8-digit anonymous code:

What are the first three letters of your \*mother's first name?

What are the first three letters of the street on which you currently live?

On what day of the month were you born?

For example, a person whose mother's name is HANNAH who lives on Main Street and was born on 18th January their code would be: HANMAI18

Please generate an 8-digit anonymous code

\*Alternatively, if you cannot or do not wish to use the first three letters of your mother's first name, please use the first three letters of the first name of another person. Remember this is the code we will ask for again in our other surveys for the ASPIRE programme.

Once you click 'next' you will be directed to the first section of the survey.

Increasing employability knowledge					
On a scale of...	Not at all	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much

Please rate how much the ASPIRE programme has increased your knowledge of employability					
When working in a team...	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I can work effectively as part of a team to complete tasks					
I can build effective working relationships with peers					
I can build an effective working relationships with my supervisor					
I am able to lead a team					
I listen to other members of the team and respond appropriately					
I value other team members opinions					
I take other team members opinions into consideration					
I cooperate with others easily					

If you have any additional comments about your employability skills, please write them here:

Improving academic writing					
On a scale of...	Not at all	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
Please rate how much the ASPIRE programme has improved your academic writing					
Which areas of your academic writing have improved...	Not at all	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
Ability to cite literature					
Ability to write an argument					
Able to demonstrate critical thinking in writing					
Confidently selecting a tense to write in					
Grammar					
Sentence structure					
Spelling					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree

			nor disagree		
I am able to use feedback e.g. constructive criticism to improve my work					
I arrive on time for classes, workshops, appointments and meetings					
I can create an effective study plan					
I can follow my study plan					
I can manage my time effectively					
I can prioritize my workload					
I regularly reflect on my own learning					
I take effective lecture notes					
I take effective workshop notes					
Please rate how anxious you feel about the following...	None	A little anxious	Mildly anxious	Somewhat anxious	Very anxious
Attending network events					
Building up your network					
Presenting					
Reflection on study skills					
Talking to new people					
Writing					

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I can correct any grammatical, punctuation or spelling errors in my work					
I can identify any grammatical, punctuation or spelling errors in my work					
I can plan and organise the content of an assignment					
I can write a logical and well-structured brief for a client					
I can write a logical and well-structured essay					
I can write a logical and well-structured research proposal					

I can write in well-structured paragraphs					
I can write in well-structured sentences					
I know how to write effective introductions and conclusions					

If you have any additional comments about your writing, please write them here:

<b>Critical thinking</b>					
On a scale of...	Not at all	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
Please rate how much the ASPIRE programme has improved your critical thinking					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I can develop my own perspective on a topic					
I can evaluate the strengths of an argument					
I can evaluate the weaknesses of an argument					
I can question the relevance of the information that I read for my assignments					
I can question the truth of the information that I read					
I can select evidence to support my argument					
I can use data to make predictions from data, or extract patterns from data					
I can use figures to make a chart or graph					
I can use sources effectively to make a strong argument					
I can use sources effectively to show that I am well-informed about a topic					

If you have any additional comments about your skills, please write them here:

<b>Speaking</b>					
On a scale of...	Not at all	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
Please rate how much the ASPIRE programme has improved your presenting skills					
On a scale of...	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral	Quite important	Very important
How important do you think it is to practice speaking with strangers?					
How important do you think it is to practice speaking with important people in your area of study?					
How important do you think it is to gain experience presenting to an audience?					
	No		Yes		
Do you have any role models?					
How important do you think role models are for...	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral	Quite important	Very important
Applying for a doctorate					
Applying for a job					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I can speak confidently to my peers					
I can confidently present my academic work to my lecturers and peers					
I can confidently talk about my work to family and friends					
I can confidently talk about my work to potential employers					
I can confidently talk about my work to my mentor or supervisor					

I can adapt the way I speak for different activities depending on the setting					
I am able to listen actively and effectively					
I can explain new concepts or processes to people					
I can use charts, diagrams or images when explaining a challenging idea					

If you have any additional comments about your skills, please write them here:

--

<b>Developing research skills</b>					
On a scale of...	None	Very little	To some extent	Quite a bit	Very much
Please rate how much the ASPIRE programme has improved your ability to apply knowledge of research to real world problems					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I can find information from a range of different sources (e.g. journals, books, media)					
I can use information from a range of different sources (e.g. journals, books, media) to write an argument					
I know how to find relevant books in my degree subject					
I know how to find relevant journals in my degree subject					
I know how to format a reference list to show the sources I have used in my work					
I know how to paraphrase or summarise other people's ideas in my own work					
I know how to reference and quote other people's ideas in my own work					
I know how to write a reference list to show the					

sources I have used in my work					
I understand what plagiarism is, and how and why to avoid plagiarism					

If you have any additional comments about your skills, please write them here:

Thank you very much for your time in completing this questionnaire. If you have a complaint or need support with any of the issues raised within the survey, please contact the ASPIRE team.

*If you have any further comments or queries about the survey please feel free to contact the Advance HE researcher leading the evaluation at [hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:hannah.griffin-james@advance-he.ac.uk)*

*Many thanks for your responses.*

## 6.7 Appendix G: diary questions

### Students Learning Diary

Reflection is a commonly used method to promote learning and greater independence in learning by bringing learning itself to consciousness and making it explicit (Watkins, 2001).

#### **Advantages**

- + In your reflections you will revisit what you have learned which is likely to lead to improvement and in-depth learning.
- + Actively processing your learning through reflection can make your own understanding of what you've learned clearer (Gibbs, 1991).
- + Reflection will give you an opportunity to document your learning journey.
- + Your reflection can provide references and suggestions for future students (e.g. highlighting ideas that you found tricky where the programme can add more support).

#### **Disadvantages**

Time-consuming. Although 30 minutes each week feels like a lot! Research shows that engaging regularly in structured reflection leads to a deeper understanding and better application of subject matter knowledge and increased knowledge of social agencies, increased complexity of problem and solution analysis, and greater use of subject matter knowledge in analysing problems (Eyler and Giles, 1999).

Structured reflection doesn't suit everyone. Remember this is your learning diary, although the ASPIRE programme leaders will read it, you can structure your answers the way that makes the most sense to you, and use language you are comfortable with.

#### **But what does Reflection actually mean?**

You're collecting information about your own learning, and analysing and evaluating this new information. The process of analysing and evaluating your learning can help you identify your own behaviours and underlying beliefs which may lead to changes and improvements in your approach to becoming ready for work, or applying to doctoral study. A common misunderstanding about reflection is that it is simply sharing feelings or voicing opinions. Honestly, poor reflection can fit this description. Therefore, we have devised some structured questions to guide you through the reflection process, this will support you in producing high-quality reflections. If you have questions, the University of Edinburgh has lots of helpful information here <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflection-toolkit/producing-reflections/ways-reflecting/written> and The Higher Education Academy here [ESCalate Resource: Evidencing Reflection: putting the 'w' into reflection](#)

#### **References**

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Gibbs, G. (1991). *Improving student learning – the CNAA project*. In: Students at the centre of learning, ed. Brown S pp 17-21.

Watkins, C. (2001). *Learning about learning enhances performance*. London, UK: Institute of Education School Improvement Network.

### Instructions

The following reflective learning log prompts follow Chang (2019) framework looking across, a) content, b) learning process, c) value of learning. We ask you to please **spend a minimum of 30 minutes, every week reflecting on the past week.**

Date Completed Reflection (XX/XX/XX) \_\_\_\_\_

This past week: Monday's date (XX/XX/XX) \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Reflect on content*

What did I actually achieve during the ASPIRE programme this week? Which were the most difficult parts, and why were they difficult for me? Which were the most straightforward parts, and why did I find these easy?

Please type your answer here....

100-150 words approx.

What was the best thing I did? Why was this the best thing I did? How do I know that this was the best thing I did?

Please type your answer here....

50-100 words approx.

What else have I got out of taking part in the ASPIRE programme this week? Have I developed other skills and knowledge, which may be useful elsewhere at another time? If so, what are my own learning outcomes from taking part in this programme?

Please type your answer here....

50-100 words approx.

#### *Reflect on learning process*

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What worked least well for me? Why did this not work well for me? What have I learned about the topic concerned from this not having worked well for me? What have I learned about myself from this not having worked well for me? What do I plan to do differently in future as a result of my answers to the above questions?

Please type your answer here....

100-150 words approx.

What are the three most important things that I think I need to do with this topic at this moment in time? Which of these do I think is the most urgent for me to do? When will I aim to start doing this, and what is a sensible deadline for me to have completed it by?

Please type your answer here....

- 1-
- 2-
- 3-

Most urgent:

Deadline:

50 words approx.

*Reflect on value of their learning*

Do I feel that my time on this week has been well spent? If not, how could I have used my time more sensibly? Or should this week have been designed differently? Which parts of the week represent the time best spent? Which parts could be thought of as time wasted?

Please type your answer here....

100-150 words approx.

Overall, how has the ASPIRE programme helped (or hindered) my motivation this week to learn more about work-readiness/doctoral study? Has it encouraged me, or disillusioned me?

Please type your answer here....

50-150 words approx.

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