

## **Equity and Resilience in Higher Education.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This chapter explores the concept of resilience in the context of higher education. It discusses the significance of resilience for university students, arguing that although the term is commonly used and understood, there remain questions about the nature of resilience, its measurement and its desirability as a characteristic of student development. The lack of equity in student experience and the need for some students to be more resilient than others is also explored. The discussion subsequently questions the conventional emphasis on developing student resilience and it raises the possibility that universities demonstrate resilience by shifting the responsibility to be resilient away from themselves and onto individual students and minority groups. The chapter also offers an unconventional path for equitable support by proposing a resilience equation. Overall, the key idea emerging from the conversion is that a significant re-evaluation of the concept of resilience in higher education is required.

### **INTRODUCTION**

While the concept of resilience applies across diverse aspects of life, from personal development to global community responses to natural disasters, it is particularly relevant in the context of higher education. This chapter explores the dimensions of resilience, dissecting its meaning, relevance, and the ways in which it influences the lives of university students. It raises the questions: What precisely is resilience? Can one truly possess resilience without facing adversity or stress? What are the connotations of measuring resilience and most importantly, should universities aim to be environments where students need to develop resilience?

Resilience as a concept encompasses various interpretations related to its application in individual, community, and institutional contexts. Generally associated with navigating crises or stress-inducing events, resilience is approached from two primary perspectives: one defining it by the outcome of stress interaction and the other focusing on the process of learning and transformation (Kerr, 2018). While some view resilience as an inherent characteristic or personality trait (Chmitorz et al., 2018) others emphasise its nuanced nature, emerging from diverse variables observable during crises (Chmitorz et al., 2018; Saja et al., 2018). Central to understanding resilience is the concept of 'bouncebackability,' illustrating the preservation of characteristics during traumatic events (Horgan & Dimitrijevic, 2018; Khalili et al., 2015). Resilience can also however involve the ability to react and adapt to challenges, constituting a process of transformation (Aligica & Tarko, 2014). Somewhat confusingly then, resilience can be both the characteristic of changing and not changing.

One commonly cited definition of resilience is offered by the United Nations: "The capacity of a system, community, or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure" (UNISDR, 2009, p. 24). This definition illustrates the broad scope of resilience, encompassing not only individual coping strategies but also the dynamic nature of communities and societies as they respond to challenges.

This conceptualisation of resilience, often associated with and formulated to describe human responses to crises such as natural disasters, is also used in discussions of broader areas of human life, including the experience of participating in higher education. As the university experience entails academic, social, and personal challenges, resilience is assumed to be a necessary quality for success at, as well as an outcome of, higher education. Ahn and Davis (2020a) consider how complex students' university experience is, and how closely students' sense of belonging, retention, and resilience are intertwined. The often confusing terrain of coursework, peer relationships, and the process of self-discovery, constitutes the backdrop to the conventional idea of resilience as outcome of the student experience, framing the capacity for students to endure setbacks, adapt, and emerge stronger as paramount.

However, whereas demonstrating resilience is a virtue when considered in the context of a natural disaster, should we consider the ability of students to cope with the stresses of education as a virtue? Is this putting the responsibility for managing systematic problems on the individual and removing responsibility for instigating systemic change from institutions such as universities? Ahn and Davis (2020b) argue that

students' sense of belonging and experience should be investigated at the systematic and institutional levels. Thus, the development of resilience in university students is often considered a positive and necessary endeavour, while it might actually be a reflection of unresolved wider problems. Ahn and Davis (2023) for example point out the complexity of 'disadvantage' in higher education as a crucial factor influencing individual student's sense of resilience.

Furthermore, the concept of resilience when considered in the context of relationships between individuals, communities and institutions can often be competitive rather than complementary. A recent study (Mahon & Mahon, 2023) examining educational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that the resilience exhibited by educational institutions, particularly in the shift to remote provision, might be at odds with the resilience of minority communities and their ability to preserve their identity. The article argues that the resilience of institutions, exemplified by interventions including moving education online, may have negatively impacted the resilience of minority communities, especially those in remote areas with limited internet access or where the primary language did not align with the language of the online provision. Additionally, individuals facing challenges such as the inability to afford high-speed internet connections or modern computers may have experienced a compromise to their resilience as a consequence of universities' resilience efforts. Essentially, the study suggests that the resilience demonstrated by universities came at the expense of individual and community resilience, particularly within minority groups. The failure of universities to address systematic problems that require the development of resilience by individual students in order to succeed, may then be a further example of this competitive rather than complementary relationship.

In this chapter, the nuanced ways in which resilience is developed and manifested in the lives of university students is explored and the ethical considerations surrounding this development examined. The following discussion takes the form of an edited transcript of an online conversation between Mi Young Ahn (MYA), Stepen Elliot (SE), Dominic Mahon (DM) Ian Maxwell (IM) and Louise Younie (LY) in 2023.

## DISCUSSION

DM: The first question to address is the issue of why resilience is such a difficult term to define. I'd start by saying I think the reason for this is that it cuts across multiple different ideas. It can be adaptation, resistance and transformation. And those things often seem contradictory. Also, resilience can refer to one individual, or it can be about communities, or it can be about institutions. So, when we use the word resilience, we have the possibility for misunderstanding. I think for me, that's why it's difficult to define.

LY: And then there's what the word means in Latin, which is to spring back or rebound, which pushes you towards, not adapting but staying the same. And the meaning of the word in material science of how much a material can take before it breaks, being strong regardless of what is coming against you. So, our systems put pressure on the individual to be resilient rather than looking at the system and how it is impacting people.

MYA: But I guess one thing we all can agree is that this is happening when individuals face some kind of challenges and difficulties. So, it is not a normal or ordinary condition. It's some type of adversity or stress. A coping mechanism or reacting strategy.

DM: So, in order for resilience to exist, there has to be a stressor, and resilience happens as a response to that.

IM: Yes. That's an important way to come at it, I think. If resilience is predicated as a psychological quality, then things start getting complicated. It comes to share with other terms a metaphorical quality as well and an availability to be put to different purposes. It is concerning that discourses of resilience can sometimes be used to place the onus for coping with adversity on an individual rather than addressing a systemic issue. It becomes one's own problem, which can be addressed with a number of personal actions, like doing more yoga classes, when it's very clear that there are stresses which are systemic, which an

individual shouldn't be expected to cope with. I think of the Stoic tradition, in which you anticipate the worst, but hope for the better. My own research in this area has been with regard to actors. Quite often the stresses that are involved with actors are bound up with narratives about what it takes to succeed and having to put up with a certain level of stuff. That's where things become potentially damaging as well. We don't want to train people to be fearful. It's an interesting set of challenges.

DM: Is the danger then, that it takes our focus of changing systemic problems and shifts the responsibility for coping with those problems onto individuals rather than solving them?

LY: I did a keynote on Friday for clinicians who teach students in the hospital and in primary care, and the question that came to me from two different people was about flourishing. I talked about creative enquiry and explored the concept of shadow work. The question was, if we somehow try to help the students flourish at medical school, what happens when they hit the National Health Service? Are they going to be worse off because of the reality of working there?

SE: I think it also has to be accepted that whether someone is trained to deal with challenges or not, the challenges exist. As long as challenges exist, we have to address them either individually or systemically.

MYA: And also, I think we have to consider that this is actually happening 'in a university setting' which is very unique and specific and also even within the university kind of context we are facing a lot of variation. For instance, Louise, you mentioned a specific student group. But it seems resilience could be needed in almost any kind of students. Most people would assume that resilience is good because it's something powerful, something empowering, something effective. So, it is defined on a kind of neoliberal perspective. However, it doesn't seem to consider those marginalised students. What if I had lower resilience, for instance because I were a single mother, a mature student, or I had working commitments and I had to work so many hours per week to survive. Does that mean I am less resourced? Could I have a very high level of resilience or not?

IM: I'm just trying to think about the question about higher education. I don't know the extent to which this is the case in the UK system, but it seems to me that one of the really big problems that we have in higher education is that our students are competing with each other and, in many ways, this militates against building a sense of shared community or social capital, because so much of the emphasis in our system is about people seeking to distinguish themselves on what is not a level playing field, right? Because we know that certain people feel very at home at university while others don't. Where is the risk there?

Is it that resilience becomes a kind of naturalised category: some people 'have' it and others don't? Setting up the question of the resources an individual has when confronted with challenges implies a kind of autonomous capacity to deploy an inherent quality. It's like the discourse of the stiff upper lip, identified with certain kinds of people, certain classes, genders, ethnicity. These are narratives of resilience which seem to me to be quite damaging, frankly.

SE: Yes, I was thinking very much of the fact that in higher education, the institutions have been established over considerable time have been founded by the dominant culture. Yet, in modern times, in contemporary times, many students are coming from different backgrounds that are perhaps not aligned with the values or belief systems that have been established by the dominant culture over many, many years. I'm from a university where a significant number of the lecturers, those who carry the weight of responsibility for maintaining this institution, live and have been raised in the same cultural environment as the university. But you'll have students coming from all around the Globe, and there will be a certain number who, seeking to step outside of their social economic difficulties, who want to make advancements, find themselves in an environment where they don't fit naturally. Developing a sense of resilience maybe suggested or encouraged in order for them to manage the challenges that they're going to face on a daily basis. The glass ceiling is something that has much been talked about over the years, but at the university of Surrey, for instance, that glass ceiling may be more apparent than at another university that may be located elsewhere around the country. Recognising that there is this challenge, is it the

responsibility of the higher education institution to provide the resources for development of resilience or is this an individual thing the students need to develop before engaging with the university?

MYA: Yes, I totally agree with you. A couple of years ago, I conducted some comparative studies across three different universities in Wales to explore students' sense of belonging to their universities. The first one was a traditionally elite university, one of the Russell group, and you can imagine those students are quite proud of what they're doing. And then a traditional university founded by local people who wanted to have a higher education institution in their area, and finally a post 1992 institution providing work-based training, so very much a professionally oriented institution. From the qualitative data analysis of the 10 Words Question, we found out there were considerable differences- different economic backgrounds, different goals and different senses of belonging. So, it's interesting to see, even within or among universities, such a complex picture. That's why maybe it's so hard to define concepts like belonging and resilience.

DM: Stephen, am I right in thinking that a consequence of what you were saying is that if you are from the dominant demographic in the university you're allowed to be more of an individual, whereas if you're from a minority group, you're more associated with that community. Then your success or failure is associated with the group in a way that if you're from the dominant group, your success or failure is more associated with you as an individual?

SE: Yes, I think you're on to something there, that there is a different feeling for individuals who come from the dominant culture, who fit in without any need to make any adjustment. However, for someone from a minority background, the initial thing is to find a way to fit in. If you don't fit in, the struggle will be that much greater in terms of outcomes, whether you're going to be seen to be someone who can be moved along, who's going to be supported, or someone that's going to fall by the wayside because they have a set of needs that aren't readily supported. Some universities will have initiatives in place to try and plug the gap. Are those initiatives tokenism to some degree? Are there enough resources?

DM: Looking at resilience as adaptability, if you're from the majority culture, you don't need to demonstrate adaptability as you just automatically fit in. Whereas if you're from a minority community, you need to demonstrate resilience in the form of adaptability. You have to do something that other people don't, so if we want to talk about resilience as an outcome, it can often be something that applies to some students and not others.

IM: I think that's absolutely right. There's also a contradiction between university as a site of personal transformation and a site of the accumulation of knowledge and skills. What if the student experience isn't one of transformation, but rather the assembly of a certain CV or set of resources which is predicated precisely on the individual not changing as they go through university? Arguably the framing of graduate attributes as the index of the outcome of a university education is not about a fundamental sense of transformation, but about an individual accumulating tools, at worst simply reinforcing a set of things, desires, aspirations and plans that they've come with.

DM: So, for some people the transformation is almost optional. If you're from the dominant culture or the majority, you have the opportunity to change or not change and it doesn't really matter so much. Whereas if you're not from the majority, then you're using a different sort of lens of resilience, where you're forced to adapt or forced to resist. If you come from outside the dominant culture, you're going to have to demonstrate a set of attributes that are different, and we don't take this into account.

LY: Within the medical field, I'm working in East London, and at our institution we've got massive widening participation and the desire to be a really inclusive place. I have a growing awareness myself that financially the times are changing and that more and more of our students are working and trying to study to pass their exams simultaneously. How can you compare one person who's just studying with those that are both working and studying? So reverse mentoring is an idea I'm hoping to take forward. There was a lovely project I heard about where students who consider themselves to be underrepresented, could bring

themselves forward, and be paired up with educators or paired up with each other to explore their lived experiences. What I'm hoping to do would be workshops to hear the voices that are usually not so well heard and those are usually people that are on the back foot and not part of the dominant culture.

I think this relates to flourishing as a concept. I've been promoting flourishing for the last five years or more, exploring it through creative enquiry methodologies with medical students and with clinicians. Clinicians and medical students who've had resilience rammed down their throat are generally quite relieved when we suggest that flourishing might be another way to think about things. Flourishing is a very old concept but has also received much investment and attention recently. It fits with Aristotle's 'eudaimonia', sometimes translated as 'happiness', or more recently translated as 'flourishing'. This can be juxtaposed with Aristotle's 'hedonia', which is like a having a chocolate bar to give you a quick fix of happiness. Eudaimonia relates more to meaningful engagement in life that brings about a sense of joy and purpose, more aligned with your values. We have the idea that resilience perhaps doesn't give a sense of growth through difficult times. One could arguably say university might be about the growth or the flourishing of students. And that, I think is different to resilience.

MYA: Louise, could you please tell us more about the operational concepts? Because it sounds like a flourishing is inevitably related to something like success. Because you know, if we found a student who's got the third class or let's say failed and then we can't just say these students are flourishing, can we? It's got to be something to do with success inevitably. How do we think about it?

SE: Yes, I was just thinking about the metaphor of growth, of flourishing and my mind went to some research done at Surrey University in 2020. One of the anecdotal responses from a student, was that they felt that their roots in South Asia, wouldn't be embedded in the soil of their experience such that they could flourish. They, in fact, had to step away from their culture and re-root themselves into a new environment, a different soil. They took that upon themselves to recognise that if they stuck with their roots and their culture, they were not going to flourish in this environment. They had to make the cultural adaptations necessary for success.

MYA: I was worried about this as the concept is inherently towards positivity. To flourish means something so nice, something very positive. But how about those students we are talking about, the most vulnerable students who have failed and failed? If they are resilient, they might just come back, but we're not probably using flourishing as a term to describe these students. The most vulnerable students who just failed and failed. We wouldn't say they flourish. It reminds us of success. I think that's the danger.

LY: I totally hear what you are saying. I normally use pictures for explanation and one that I have is of a Birch tree. I talk about it being an ecological concept. So rather than the resilience of bouncing back, to flourish is to bloom or blossom. But if when I look at the Birch tree, how well it's growing depends on the soil and the weather system. Is it raining? Is it windy? Is it stormy? Obviously, if there's a massive storm going on, it's going to be blown about. There are no leaves, but spring is around the corner. So, you can have a tree that looks like it's dead, but actually in the spring it will grow again and so I use that concept to try to say this is a more ecological model that I think is kinder to my inner life. It doesn't all focus on me being a material that can take just so much before breaking.

IM: I'm always a bit nervous about ecological models because agency is very hard to find in them. An ecological system suggests a set of 'natural' forces acting upon each other. But it is an interesting model to reflect on. What is it to take a 17-year-old Chinese woman and pop her into a dreadful room in a student hostel in Australia in this strange part of the world and expect that person to flourish? It's really hard, isn't it? What soil can you bring with you?

SE: My mind's going to Duckworth Lewis. Now I'm wondering whether there needs to be something like the Duckworth Lewis Equation in order to measure resilience in terms of those who are part of the dominant cultural and those who aren't. To explain, Duckworth Lewis is a form of balancing a fair score in a cricket match, normally in a one-day game, where there's a finite number of balls to be bowled

and number of runs to be gained. If weather affects the game in the second innings, there may not be enough time for the same number of balls to be bowled to the team batting second.

So, the equation allows them to readjust the target for the second team batting dependent upon whether they have a number of sufficiently talented batsman still to play. I suppose you have to be aware of cricket to understand it, but it was an equation that looked at resources in terms of coming to an outcome that was fair. To have a level playing field. So, I'm wondering whether something like that could be considered in terms of looking at a student who comes from China and is studying in Krakow, or Wales or studying in Australia to establish what resources they arrive with in terms of experiences they have already gained or suffered and where their levels of resilience are to start with.

I'm just thinking about a client I had not so long ago who came from Hong Kong. In the midst of recent violent protests there she was seeing her friends go to jail. What level of resilience is within her as she comes from Hong Kong to a UK university? And then what does she have in terms of soil, in terms of resources that will help her to grow and flourish in a foreign environment when all the aforementioned are put together? Maybe someone can come up with a formula that can equate her level of resource against the value of resources available to others, to include scaling adaption, support, awareness and recognition by the institution itself.

LY: Well, I just wanted to say I really love this. I've never heard of it, and I looked it up quickly when you mentioned it. I love it as a concept and to bring it into talking about academia, talking about resilience is fabulous. But the question that emerged for me as you were talking was but why do we want to measure resilience? And there are people trying to measure flourishing as well, but why? Then, I'm thinking about the doctors who are being told to be resilient and to go out into the workplace.

MYA: I really want to add to something here because I'm a great believer in mixed methods and measurement is something I'm very interested in. For example, I try to measure belonging qualitatively and quantitatively. And when we can't find any perfect equation maybe we can establish and employ indicators. We try to consider as many kinds of variables as possible, such as students' demographic indicators, socio economic indicators, their educational background in terms of the secondary schools they attended and its regional elements. Are they coming from a region where most of the students are going to university or just only one or two percent are going? How about their parents? Did they actually study in the university or not? Understanding or measuring students' background is challenging, which often requires a comprehensive and complex approach; we have to consider many elements here.

DM: I feel as though we've moved onto the next question which was to do with how might you measure resilience. If universities are going to say that resilience is an outcome of education, which they often do, there should be some measurement of it. And I think Steven's idea of a Duckworth Lewis for that at least points out that it isn't a simple measurement. But I think we've agreed that the outcome should be fair, and in order to be fair, it needs to take into account multiple different variables that are not currently being taken into account.

SE: There is one other thing that we haven't included in the mix, which is neurodiversity. Also, a significant part of the experience of students in their ability to succeed and to flourish and to grow. This too has to be considered in terms of the outcomes and resilience.

DM: Yes, I couldn't agree with you more. That's an area where really it isn't a level playing field, especially when we consider the social model of disability and how people are disabled by institutions in many different ways. There should be a way of being fairer. To move on to the last question, can we assume a positive definition of resilience and how might that fit into this idea we've been discussing of a fair assessment or levelling the playing field?

SE: I'm not sure whether we have established a positive definition of resilience.

LY: Yes, I don't feel I'm quite at that point.

MYA: I think there are several ways of doing it. For instance, even though we might think some students might need a higher level of support, actually individual students might think, 'I'm OK, I'm happy'. On the contrary, maybe someone who's doing quite well academically, could still be mentally struggling. So, one issue is 'can we identify individuals?', but also the next question will be 'can we reach all of them?' So, there are some issues to consider at the individual level, but the second part would be from the systematic or institutional approaches, we know that certain types of students are more likely to require a higher level of support. So, maybe we need to talk about how we can support students on the institutional point of view.

IM: We think a lot about assessing students and giving them feedback, and building models of assessment that don't rely simply on essay writing. We try to find ways to build tasks that are not simply tailored to people's strengths, because we also want to challenge, we also want to push. And we are, in turn being pushed: what's happening at the moment is pushing us to think about what it is to assess at all. This has led us, I think constructively, to scaffolded assessment tasks in which students are able to work their way towards a final presentation or final piece of work. Careful group work. I let the students set the criteria for peer evaluation and we'll spend a lot of time asking what do you expect of other students in a group context? Why might those expectations be problematic? How else can we frame this? And I found that really useful. So, certainly, we need to move towards more nuanced ways of thinking about what assessment is, while retaining the core idea that we also want to use assessment tasks that challenge and extend.

LY: If we're thinking about how to build resilience or maybe flourishing, as a systems thinker, I think that the relationship between the parts is more important than the individual parts. So, if we can do something that builds connections and trust and valuing each other by 10% more. for example, across the whole institution, you will automatically be connecting with other people. How do we enable those connections, those relationships, especially in the digital world? How might we create informal spaces where students can meet, hang out, connect with their educators with each other and so on. So that's where I want to be really focusing energy.

MYA: I'm not sure if we're talking about the same kind of relationship, but my previous research proved that the most important part in terms of student sense of belonging is social interaction, social engagement. For instance, if students are struggling academically, they failed, and then they think, OK, can I survive or not? But if they have one person to rely on, who could be academics, colleagues, or anybody within or outside of universities, they're the one person who can kind of support those students and then they can somehow cope and survive.

IM: All the data in Australia about student experience skews towards the small regional relatively isolated campuses rather than the massive urban universities, simply because students feel invested in a place rather than, you know, another building on a big campus. So that's absolutely right. What is at stake is a sense of place, isn't it? And of course, part of that is bringing a part of your own place with you.

MYA: And in that sense, I agree with Ian's approach, like encouraging group work, because that will give some students an incredible opportunity to build up some connection and interaction with peers, especially to those students who are quite shy, and nervous to even start to talk. Then group work is a very good opportunity, not only to learn how to cooperate, but to socialise; 'Why don't we just have coffee together to talk about our group work?' Something like that.

IM: A couple of years ago I was doing a unit of study on Avant Garde experimental theatre and I started off the class with a very broad range discussion about taboo and transgression in different societies. A Chinese student emailed me overnight to ask why everybody thought abortion was taboo in China, commenting that they talked about it all the time. It was a really interesting moment, and she literally just told me that none of the stuff I was talking about made any sense to her. It was a great moment for me because I ended

up having a long exchange with her that night, in which I asked her if she knew of any strange art in China? And it was amazing because it delivered me lecture content for the next two weeks. And it helped me realise that I'm not a content provider. Rather, I'm a thinking facilitator, and I must sometimes take a little bit of a risk in a sense of the content of what I teach in order to seize those opportunities when they come up. But of course, the rigidity of the structures of the university tend to work against any such practice.

DM: I think you brought us back to one of the starting points for me. I'll sit in a strategy meeting or senior management presentation, and it will be stated that the institution wants students to be more resilient, but the conversation never moves to how, or what that means or what the implications of that might be. I think that what we've explored today demonstrates that it's not a simple picture and it doesn't make sense to merely list resilience as an outcome of the process of higher education.

IM: And since quite often, the discourse of resilience is placed around a kind of deficit model of the student as well. And maybe part of what we need to do is to turn that around a little bit so that the students are part of the resources with which we work.

SE: For me, something we didn't dwell on so much is that whatever universities do in terms of setting up initiatives is the need to avoid the tokenism. Tick boxing.

IM: That's right. And I think that's the deal with addressing the deficit model as well. We should think of the ways in which we can enhance and add, rather than trying to fix.

## CONCLUSION

**This conversation inspires** reflection on the dynamics of resilience in higher education and questions the desirability of resilience as an outcome of the higher education experience. Although resilience is a common term, it is actually a complicated concept and one that defies simple definition. If taken as the capability to adapt to difficult circumstances, then it does seem that more resilience is required from students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and cultures different from that of the university itself. A student that needs to work throughout their studies or one that has a learning disability or one that comes to the UK to study from overseas needs to demonstrate more resilience, and yet this extra burden is not acknowledged by universities in their discourses of resilience as an outcome of higher education. For equity to be attained, some levelling of the playing field with regard to acknowledging resilience needs to occur. The proposition of a resilience equation or scale, similar to the Duckworth-Lewis equation used to ensure fairness of outcomes in cricket matches emerged as a potential solution, offering a promising if unconventional path towards creating equity for students from diverse backgrounds. Clearly however, the main conclusion from this discussion is that universities need to rethink their conceptualisations of resilience as a student outcome.

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## BIOLOGICAL SKETCHES

**Dominic Mahon** is a Lecturer in Higher Education at the University of Surrey. He has extensive international higher education experience having worked previously at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Vietnam, Bilkent University in Turkey, and Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. He holds a PhD in Education from the University of Nottingham, where he explored how students develop graduate attributes and how universities measure, or fail to measure, their development. His research focuses on reshaping educational strategies and assessments to be practical, developmental, and inclusive, with a keen interest in transdisciplinarity and co-creating solutions with communities. His work explores playful and disruptive pedagogies, person-centred approaches, and innovative skill assessments, aiming to bridge disciplines and foster community-university collaboration.

**Mi Young Ahn** is a Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London. With a background in sociology and social policy, she is interested in students' sense of belonging in Higher Education, intersectional inequality, social class and mobility, social capital, and quantitative and mixed methods research. Her primary focus lies in examining educational inequality by applying mixed methods, which has led her to undertake several research projects such as students' sense of belonging and disadvantaged backgrounds at Bangor University; comparative study about locality and belonging across higher education institutions in Wales (SRHE funded); and racial inequality and student outcomes at University of Kent.

**Stephen Elliott**, formerly a Minister of Religion, is a Counsellor and Psychotherapist at the University of Surrey within the Welfare and Wellbeing department after gaining his degree as a mature student. Attached to the EDI team his role has been appended in the last three years with a special responsibility in matters of race, supporting mental health issues experienced by staff and students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Research undertaken in 2020 as well as vast anecdotal evidence legitimised the need for this unique position indicating the reticence Black students, in particular, have to engaging with traditional wellbeing services.

**Ian Maxwell** teaches and researches in the discipline of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney. He has enjoyed extended periods in various leadership roles, including Pro-Dean (Teaching and Learning), Head of School, and discipline leader, as well as a period chairing the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. His research includes historical work on Australian experiences of theatrical modernisms, and performance-led projects exploring performances originally developed by displaced, interned, and ghettoised victims of the Holocaust.

**Louise Younie** is a General Practitioner and Professor of Medical Education at Queen Mary University of London leading on faculty development and innovation. She has extensive experience with creative enquiry methodologies for humanising medicine, professional identity formation and human flourishing. She co-chairs the Royal College of GPs Creative Health Special Interest Group (SIG) (supported by the National Centre for Creative Health) and is a member of the Royal Society of Public Health Arts, Health and Wellbeing SIG, steering group. She holds a Principal Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy and has recently been awarded a National Teaching Fellow in recognition of this work.