JASPAL SINGH: OK, great. Thank you very much. My name is Jaspal Singh. And I'm a lecturer in Applied Linguistics and English language here at the Open University. And I'm part of the steering committee of the Black History Month celebrations of the OU. And it's my great pleasure today to chair this session for you, talking about race and mental health by Rehana Awan and Mychelle Pride. So I'm just going to give you a very quick introduction to the two speakers, and then I'll give it over to them.

So Rehana Awan is a lecturer in equality, diversity, and inclusion implementation in the School of Computing and Communications. And she's currently studying towards her PhD with a thesis on student narratives and degree awarding gaps at the OU. She has been working at the OU since 2008 and has been instrumental in a number of scholarship and social impact projects here at the OU, including setting up the Race and Ethnicity Hub and chairing a group for mental health declaration for Black students and making key recommendations to the university. And I believe this project is what we will hear about today.

Rehana will be joined by Mychelle Pride, who is associate dean in Teaching Excellence in the Faculty of Well-Being Education, and Language Studies. Mychelle has responsibility for student success, including retention, student voice, teaching, access, participation, and success. And she chairs the teaching committee and leads teaching excellent initiatives. Mychelle's areas of scholarship and research interests are student mental health, student success, and practitioner-led and scholarly co-creation.

So with that being said, over to the two speakers. We are very excited to hear your talk on 'Talking about Race and Mental Health'.

MYCHELLE PRIDE: Thank you very much, Jaspal and Petra. And Rehana and I have just agreed that was really cringe-worthy. So thank you for those introductions, and we hope we can hold up to that. So yes, we are going to be talking about race and mental health. But as

you alluded to, Jaspal, we have 45 minutes and 45 people. So maybe that's one minute per person to talk about race and mental health.

But I did want to add a couple of things. The Black History month slogan says, 'Dig deep, look closer, think bigger'. And we would like everybody today to really, in this space, dig deep and think bigger. And the other slogan is around actions, not words. So we really want you to commit to taking action about race and mental health when you leave this session today. So really think about that as we go through. What action can you take in this space?

So I'm going to give you a little bit of context. And I'm going to start by setting some UK higher education context. And in the first instance, we're going to look at the likelihood of a part-time student completing their studies within six years. And this data was taken from the Office for Students, and the dashboard and the link is on the slide. So the link's on the bottom of the slide. So again, this is, how likely are part-time students with a mental health declaration to complete their studies within six years of starting their part-time course?

And on this slide, we've got a mental health condition disability check, and we've got a white ethnicity check. The banner here is in quintiles. In the very left-hand side, it's the lowest quintile. So it's the least likely to complete. And on the very right-hand side, it is the most likely to complete. And we can see here that students who declare a mental health declaration and are white, 68% of those students are in the least likely to complete space. Compared to 2% in the most likely to complete.

So already, we know mental health condition declaration has a huge impact on whether or not a student completes their qualification. And this is UK-wide data. Remember, UK-wide data. Now if we add the Black or Black British Caribbean ethnicity, that number goes from 68% to 72% in that least likely to complete quintile. And only 1% in the most likely to complete. So that's complete their qualification within six years.

And if we change the ethnicity again so we've still got the mental health, but we look at Black or Black British African ethnicity, 79% of those students are in the least likely to complete their qualification. And none of those students in the most likely to complete. So we've identified here that UK-wide students who declare a mental health declaration have very low likelihood of completing their qualifications within the six years of study. And if we add the ethnicity layer to that, that goes up. It's harder.

So what I'm going to stress here, because I think this is-- if you take nothing else today away, take this away. This is not about the student. This is about the institution. This is about the institution must enable and support the student to achieve. We have an ethical responsibility to this, and I feel very strongly about this. So we can't sit here and go, oh, we can fix the

student. It has nothing to do with the student. It is about what we as an institution can do. What changes can we make? What better support mechanisms can we put in place for our students to achieve their qualification?

And that's really important that you take that away today. It's about the institution and what the institution could and should be doing. And to add to that, success is not the opposite of failure. So you can remove all of the barriers. But unless you put enablers in place, you are still not doing what we should be doing for students. So we must think about, what enablers can we put in place for students with mental health conditions, particularly if they have this added intersectionality of ethnicity. Apologies, to ensure that they can complete and be successful.

I'm going to turn to some OU data. And the OU data is about declarations. And the reason declaration is important is because this is one way we can say, yes, we know that we can put extra mechanisms or extra support in place if a student has declared. And therefore, let's have a look at those declaration rates. So this slide here, the top line or the pink line is white students, and the bottom line or the blue line is Black students.

We have a five-year trend here, from 2017-18, up to '21-'22. This is the percentage of students disclosing a mental health difficulty by head count. And you can see these are like train tracks. They're not quite parallel. You wouldn't want your train to do that, really. Have a wonky left wheel. But the point is here there is a gap between the percentage of Black students declaring a mental health difficulty and of white students declaring a mental health difficulty.

And that gap, whilst it might be a tiny bit smaller in the last five years, it is not significantly smaller, and we are aiming to close it. And I'll come on to that to a second. To give you a context because we always get the question, how many is that 17,372 students who declared a white ethnicity declared a mental health difficulty this year. 526 Black students. When you put it all together, it's about 20,000 students at the Open University who disclose a mental health difficulty. And that's a huge number of students, and we really must be thinking about what we can do to better support these students.

So to bring us back to the slide deck, the Access and Participation Plan Target OUT_3 is to eliminate this gap in declaration rates between Black and white students with mental health difficulties by 2025. So I've shown you the data. But I think the data, whilst it's interesting, isn't the story. And the story is what our students are telling us. So we know we have to address this, but what does it mean for our students?

And I'm going to show you a video. This was a video created by Patrice Belton when she was a student. A series of videos by students for students, and I'm going to let her do the talking in this one.

So I think that's a lovely video from Patrice. And she graduated, and she's done incredibly well. And those were her own words. We didn't script it. That was entirely what she spoke to, and that was a topic that she chose. So I'm going to hand you over now to Rehana.

REHANA AWAN: Thanks, Mychelle. So as Mychelle mentioned at the start of the session, the Black History Month moment, the idea behind it is our actions are changes. That's the focus of it. So what have we been doing at the OU? And Mychelle and I, when we were talking about whether or not to do something for this session, we thought, well, we've talked about the task and finish group before. But actually, what we haven't had so we've had some action, which is the task and finish group that was set up.

But actually what we need to do is to shine a spotlight on this issue again. And as Mychelle said, we want to think about the actions that we need to be taking away from this. But it is important to note that in September 2020, we set up a task and finish group. It was set up by and-- that is the postman at the door. But I'm just going to ignore him. I don't know if you heard the doorbell go. And now the dog's going to start barking as well.

So it was set up under the Access and Participation Success Team. And it's part of the APP plan. So and as we know, Mychelle was talking about the gaps there between Black students declaring and white students. And what we know from white students is that students can be supported. And students who are supported with their mental health conditions are more likely to be retained and more likely to progress on to their next module of study. So therefore, supporting our students and knowing how best to support them is really important.

The other thing that was quite special actually about this task and finish group and something that I would really like people to reflect on is the fact that the make-up of the group was incredibly diverse. The reason that was is because we were able to draw on expertise from across the university and actually asked the staff network for Black and minority ethnic staff to look at their pillars and to recommend people that could join the task and finish group. And you'll see that there's a lot of credit given here to the people that led on the particular workstreams that we had, but also those that were involved in it.

One of the things that I'd really like you to think about when you're sat in a meeting, when you're setting up a task and finish group, if you're on a committee, when you're in your module teams, is to look around the room and to ask yourself, how many people look like me? Now if the answer to that is, do you know what, it's a really varied and different looking

room, then that's a brilliant tick. If the answer is, actually, everyone looks like me, because you're white, for example, then perhaps one of the things you need to think about is, how can we diversify this room? What power do I have to make that change? Who can I enlist, engage with, or help support to get to be at the table that you're sat at?

The BME Network is there to support. But obviously, we're only a small set of people on the steering group. But there are other people across the university as well as externally that we can draw on to do that. So I think diverse representation actually was a huge strength of the group, because we were able to draw on the voices of those with lived experience, as we heard from Patrice, who was also a key member of the group.

So we had student representation. We were also very lucky on the group that a number of us are also ALs. So there was also an AL perspective there as well. Also incredibly important. So again, going back to the idea that this is thinking about our actions, what is it that the task and finish group achieved? So in the 15 or so months that we were set up, we achieved a lot. What we didn't achieve, and we were very clear about this at the beginning of the group, was that we would not be able to close any declaration gaps. Simply because we didn't understand why they existed in the first place.

So a lot of our time was spent on gathering information and data. And I think Mychelle's data is incredibly powerful, which is why we wanted to reiterate again the situation for all students and how important adequate support for students is. We're not saying that we're not providing that for students. I think that's really important to say. But what we wanted to do is shine that spotlight back on the issues.

So in terms of activities, the group created an awareness of the gap across the university, both formally and informally, through a number of networks. We did this through seminars. So Darren organized a seminar with Nkasi Stoll from Black People Talk. And that was attended by about 100 colleagues. Probably many of you that are here today have also attended that. We had a mental health declarations workshop at the last Black History Month as well, where the staff research was presented. So one of the work packages that was set up looked very much at language and communications and spoke with staff and Black staff to find out their view on why students were unlikely to declare.

We also presented at the task and finish lead group. We presented a faculty meeting. We had a seminar for internal colleagues in December 2021, drawing on a lot of the resources and presenting the scholarship project that took place. The scholarship project got written up as a journal article in the Widening Participation Lifelong Journal. And informally, members have fed into other areas, like the Black and minority ethnic staff network. We had meetings with the PLA senior managers as well.

We contributed to the AL Toolkit on Mental Health. We created the animation, which hopefully many of you have seen, where I was a critical reader on a mental health badged open course that was being rewritten. And we added a page, the Race and Ethnicity Hub. Manny wrote a report based on the scholarship that he carried out with Black staff. And also there was a focus group with the PLAs as well to gain their view. And the PLAs actually then have added into their work, finding out about students with mental health and trying to support them with a view to increasing declarations. The animation also featured in the student newsletter that goes out.

So we did a lot of work around gathering and disseminating the information from the task and finish group. And we also have an extensive list of recommendations. You'll notice that I'm using the present tense of "have." Now the reason that I'm doing that is because despite the group being disbanded in December '21 and 10 months since, we're still working on how to move these recommendations forward within the institution.

And we met very recently, actually, with the accessibility director Kiera to talk about how we might go about embedding this work into business as usual. Because of course, it's no longer part of the APS group in that sense. We set up as a task and finish group. We have found lots of things out, and we have made some recommendations. But really, how do we take these forward?

Now what I thought would be quite interesting and you see this whole list of recommendations here. So we've got the idea of the possibility of setting up another working group to support the embedding of this work. We're thinking about how we might deliver the recommendations. There's a well-being indicator tool that was set up around the time that also could do with a review, particularly using the equality impact assessment tool.

Also thinking about, how can we ensure that there are ongoing conversations about mental health and ethnicity and how they work together? Hence us being here again today. But how do we also widen that focus from declarations and thinking about specific study problems as well? And the list goes on a little bit. We need to build trust. How do we go about doing that? How do we develop cultural competence in a staff that is predominantly white? How do we engage diverse student voices in what we do?

And particularly when those students are going to feel marginalized and less confident to contact us. And how do we create culturally sensitive messaging? Particularly when those messages aren't necessarily being created by those with lived experience. So thinking about the entire student journey and, how can we make it better for students? How can we make this a safe university for students to want to come to us and to declare?
So there's work still to be done.