

Participant information sheet

3-D University: How do universities' social composition, geography, and organisational culture mediate students' experiences?

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I am a researcher at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to participate in a research study about how students' experiences of university may be influenced by the social composition, location and layout, and organisational culture of their university.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to explore how students' university experiences vary depending on who they are and where they study. Universities differ in many ways, not least in terms of who studies there, where the campus is and how it is laid out, as well as in the ways in which universities interact with their students through teaching and other activities.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because I am specifically interested in understanding the views of different groups that may be in a majority or minority within their university. This includes, for example background elements such as social class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and domestic/international status. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to participate, this would involve taking part in a small focus group discussion, for 60-90 minutes, about your experiences of university. While I will be present, the conversation will be primarily involve you and the other participants in conversation around a number of open questions or prompts. The groups will consist of people with similar interests to you and may already be known to you.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will allow you to share and reflect on both your experiences of university as well as those of others. Furthermore, there is relatively little research

that compares how students' experiences of university compare, particularly around campus layout or interactions with staff, and your insights will contribute to understanding these topics much better. All participants will also receive a £10 voucher as compensation for their time.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you participate. Your involvement is entirely voluntary and will not affect the relationship with your university in any way.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time during your participation in this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know within six weeks of the focus groups, and I will, where possible, extract any ideas or information you contributed to the study and destroy/delete them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant from focus group discussions when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. If do you choose to withdraw I will look to disregard your views/contributions as much as possible.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is relatively unlikely that there are any disadvantages to your participation, other than the commitment of up to 90 minutes of your time. Please note, though, that some people's experiences of university are negative, particularly if they involve discrimination or marginalisation. If discussions of this topic are likely to distress you, you would be advised not to take part. If you become distressed during the discussions, you can withdraw from the project.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the focus group, only I, the researcher conducting this study, will have access to the ideas you share with me, except for a professional transcriber who will listen to the recordings and produce a written record of what you have said. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement.

All participants will have pseudonyms and any identifying information (such as your name and other information which could identify you) in the transcribed data will be removed – where this is possible – and not shared with others. Please be aware that the other focus group members will know who you are, but you will all be asked not to disclose information outside the focus group without the relevant person's express permission.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information you have shared for research purposes. This will include conference presentations, research reports, journal articles, and so on. I will only use anonymised quotes so that although I may use some of your exact words, you cannot be identified in our publications.

If anything you tell me in the focus group suggests that you or somebody else might be at risk of harm, I will be obliged to share this information with your university's support services. If possible I will inform you of this breach of confidentiality.

How my data will be stored

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) on a secure server. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact me directly:

Dr Richard Budd, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD.

Email: r.budd@lancaster.ac.uk

Phone: 01524 510625

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:

Professor Paul Ashwin, Head of Department, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD.

Email: paul.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk

Phone: 01524 594443

Sources of support

If you the focus group is distressing for you, you may benefit from approaching the student support services at your university.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.