**Discourses they live with: religious students in UK higher education**

The relationship between ‘secular’ UK higher education institutions and the presence of religious students on campus is an uneasy one, giving rise to three competing, challenging and, at times, contradictory discourses. In this paper critical discourse analysis is used as a theoretical perspective and methodological orientation to explore these discourses across the websites and policy documentation of UK higher education institutions. Building on these findings, narrative interviews with religious students are used to show how the tensions, contradictions and ambiguities inherent in such discourses are experienced 'on the ground' by individual students.

The first discourse relates to the place of religion on the secular campus (Author, 2012, 2016). Most institutions position themselves as wholly secular and retain a strong commitment to secularity. However, higher education is not, nor even has been, a wholly secular institution; rather it is complexly both. The whole sector revolves around a Christian calendar with term times broken up by Christmas and Easter Universities. Across many universities, Theology and Divinity courses continue to recruit and thrive, with Islamic studies now offered across a range of universities. In addition HE institutions are required to recognise religious students as a ‘protected group’ under equality legislation. Nonetheless the purported secularity of the UK university campus predominates in debates around access, retention and student success, so that consideration of religion is frequently relegated to little more than required responses to legislative requirements. The second, contradictory discourse relates to the fact that diversity on campus is a cause for 'celebration', yet religious diversity is largely ignored (Author, 2014). Having students from India and Pakistan might be portrayed in highly visible ways for example, but the fact that these same students are also Muslim, Sikh, Christian, or Hindu may largely be ignored. In contrast, when Muslim religious students’ presence is made visible within such discourses it is often conflated to concerns over the growth of religious fundamentalism on campus. This leads to the final concern: that religious students pose a threat to universities. This discourse predominates, however, at the same time as all religious groups having reported, variously, a rise in xenophobia and threats of violence, and criticism and censure in attempting to undertake legitimate religious activities. In addition, Muslim students in particular, face what they regard as intolerable levels of monitoring and surveillance, a consequence of the legislative requirement placed on universities under the Government's anti-radicalisation strategy, Prevent. In exploring these discourses a hybrid approach to Discourse Analysis was employed, drawing on elements of both Critical Discourse Analysis and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. In presenting data from the websites and policy documents, followed by the students' narratives, the paper makes visible how the discourses around religion play out in ways which are at best vague or unhelpful and at worst have implications for belonging and fitting in on the one hand and for equity and social mobility on the other.