Executive summary

Below we have attempted to highlight the key points – and some key data – from each chapter of the book. We also have tried to summarise theoretical concepts, where relevant. However, this is not a comprehensive account of all issues addressed, nor should it be seen as representative of the text as a whole. Attempting to crystallise takeaway messages is a tricky task: it means some things – not least the messy 'human' bits (which are often the most interesting) – are necessarily lost. Nonetheless, we hope that this executive summary provides a useful accompanying document to the main text, as well as an indication of its core components.

Chapter 1: Relationships and Recognition

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the core thematic focus of the book and our theoretical lens. Our data seemed to tell a story of a programme trying to emphasise meaningful educational relationships in spite of many contextual constraints. In attempting to make sense of this, we applied the concept of 'recognition' – a core tenet of social justice theory through which writers have tried to articulate what it means to affirm, value and esteem other people. This theoretical approach felt particularly appropriate because the BASS programme defines itself as seeking to facilitate social justice and social change; it therefore seemed to make sense to use a core part of social justice theorising – the concept of recognition – to analyse the programme itself. We analysed our data in relation to various well-established articulations of recognition – exploring both the ways in

> "Higher Education has become individualised and […], you know, the marketisation of education has kind of promoted a sense in which individual customers are receiving services from an institution and the service providers that work at that institution. And if there is any way in which we are going to escape and transcend that model [...] it's through establishing a *community of learners*." (Luke, staff member)

which the programme can be seen to realise recognition as well as the challenges it faces in doing so.

Chapter 2: Recognition as Love, Care and Kindness

In chapter 2 we explored one of the most prevalent themes in our data, which related to participant descriptions of the programme as a space which emphasises love, care and kindness. Axel Honneth defines this form of recognition as "emotional concern for [people's] wellbeing and needs" (van Leeuwen, 2007:182). This manifested in several specific ways in the data, through references to:

The informal, non-hierarchical nature of student-staff relationships, which participants suggested enables students to feel comfortable approaching staff with their needs and concerns, whether academic or personal.

The programme's emphasis on valuing and talking about mental health in the community. The sense that such discussions are normalised seems to have made it easier for students to open up to staff, and to see staff concern for their wellbeing as authentic rather than tokenistic.

> "The staff, like, actually care about you as well. So it's not just the students but the community feel comes from the staff as well, like being able to kind of say how you feel, or if something's wrong, you feel comfortable doing that. [...] It's like a constant message that 'You can speak to us', sort of thing? [...] [T]he message is reiterated all the time." (Maya, student)

The importance of knowing one another. The opportunity to learn things about one another's lives – not just people's names, but their interests and needs and struggles – was seen as core to building emotionally meaningful relationships on the programme.

Dealing constructively with interpersonal conflict – in particular, building a 'working agreement' outlining principles governing community interactions.

Several challenges were identified in terms of building relationships based on love, care and kindness:

Consumerist framings of HE and student identity. Some participants felt that mutually caring relationships can be obscured by student demands around 'value for money' (demands which became particularly apparent during the 2020 strike action). It was suggested that these demands can undermine consideration for staff and do not tally with phenomena like love and kindness – which are about upholding inherent ethical values rather than pursuing commodified outcomes. Nonetheless, it is notable that a significant number of participants indicated strong forms of resistance to consumerist framings of their learner identity.

Lines of communication. It was suggested that when strong lines of communication are absent (which was, again, especially apparent during the strike), it can generate anxiety on the part of students, and erode their confidence in approaching staff about concerns. It was also suggested that a lack of face-to-face contact can lead to a reliance on electronic media, which are less conducive to compassionate communication. Finally, it was suggested that lack of communication erodes the possibility for building understanding across the staff-student divide – e.g. for helping students understand the realities of the institutional constraints faced by staff.

Institutional culture/set-up. Many participants suggested that the bureaucracy and anonymity of the College is not set up to care for them as students. Staff pointed to the way they sometimes feel complicit in 'symbolically violent' institutional practices such as standardised marking procedures.

Interpersonal conflict was highlighted as something which does not always have a clear procedure or 'place' within the programme community – particularly when students have concerns about specific members of staff. The Course Community Meeting (CCM) remit does not extend to conflict between individuals, but a small number of students felt that raising things informally through other routes – e.g. their personal tutor – had not led to necessary action/change.

Time was one of the most consistently mentioned challenges throughout the dataset. Time (or lack thereof) was considered to have a particularly significant impact on the possibility of building emotionally meaningful relationships. The need for more time to 'be together' was consistently highlighted by both students and staff. It was also suggested that quality of time is more important than quantity when it comes to relationship building, perhaps best exemplified by participants' emphasis on the small-group seminars as a space in which they feel able to express themselves and get to know others in depth (in comparison to lectures, which were considered more 'anonymous'). The importance of both physical contact and space was also highlighted as key. Among staff, concerns about time often manifested in concerns around workload (which in turn was linked to the impact and pressures of the marketisation of the sector). Some staff also pointed out that the programme's ethos and philosophy is *particularly* time-consuming; in light of this, some raised questions around its sustainability, and others raised concerns about the extent to which the philosophy could be truly realised given the context.

> "I think one of the biggest challenges is… […] the pressures on people's time. [...]. I know if I spent more time on [...] planning my sessions, on the [...] Course Community Meetings, on the democratic elements, [...] on having more time to read – so choosing better readings – on having more time to just engage with the students outside of formal class time, on having more time, crucially, to engage with my colleagues and to really reflect on what we're doing, to meet together, informally/formally, you know [...]. If we had more time, there's a huge amount more that could be done." (Rosa, staff member)

Chapter 3: Recognition as Equality and Partnership

In chapter 3 we explored another core recognition theme in our data, which related to perceptions that the programme actively pursues equality and partnership between students and staff. This articulation of recognition is deeply rooted in the work of Hegel, who (rather ironically, given his own racism and sexism) suggested that recognition is impossible

when predicated on inequality, because inequality is rooted in denigrating the humanity of 'the other'. Paulo Freire is among the most well-known thinkers to apply this principle to education contexts, and the connotations are significant: as one participant put it, treating each other as "human beings" (Rosa) who are part of a community of equals means challenging fundamentally hierarchical categories of institutional 'difference' – categories, indeed, such as 'students' and 'staff'. We argued that this commitment to recognition as equality and partnership must manifest not only in our day to day attitudes towards one another, but in our *institutional structures*. We suggested the programme pursues equality/partnership through two such institutional structures: a) quasi-democratic shared decision-making spaces (the Course Community Meetings) and b) learning oriented around 'engaged pedagogy'.

3a – Participatory democracy: Course Community Meetings

The CCM is a quasi-democratic discussion and decision-making space for raising and negotiating issues relating to the programme. They are led by a team of student facilitators, supported by staff, and happen at least twice per semester. Most decisions are made by majority vote. All decisions (except for those relating to CCM procedure) are considered recommendations until ratified by the staff team.

Many participants described ***the CCMs as contributing to a feeling that their voices genuinely matter on the programme.*** Often, this was contrasted with perceptions or experiences of other educational spaces where student perspectives are either not taken seriously or not elicited. Some participants also expressed a feeling that *the CCMs contribute to the deconstruction of traditional educational power structures,* helping to build more equal working relationships between students and staff.

> "[The CCMs are] where the students can actually have a voice, and how if we want to change something we can actually do that and discuss it with other people [...]. [W]e actually can co-create the course." (Selena, student)

Some participants – particularly staff – pointed to ***the importance of the CCMs occurring in a structurally recognised space.*** Not least given the severe time and resource constraints of HE, it was felt that having a delineated space for decision-making makes it easier to embed democratic values in the programme.

The importance of staff support for and investment in the CCMs was also noted as significant for their functioning and credibility.

A number of challenges were identified in relation to the CCMs:

A consumerist framing of HE and student identity was once again highlighted by participants. It was suggested that this can encourage a one-sided, demands-oriented form of engagement with the CCMs. It was argued that the CCMs should, instead, be grounded in people taking collective responsibility for deliberation and decision-making.

Instrumental attitudes were raised as a separate challenge (though related to consumerism). Concerns were raised that some members of the community see the programme as simply about instrumental ends – such as getting a degree or 'good grades' – and thus less readily engage with non-credentialised aspects of the programme such as the CCMs. There was some suggestion that this problem can be traced to instrumental norms within the wider education system – which some argued the College in turn perpetuates with its strong focus on outcomes and academic competitiveness. There was some concern that students are forced into this mindset by wider socioeconomic pressures – such as a highly competitive job market and expectations around 'success'. Again,

> "I just feel like sometimes people see this course as… like just a course? But we're so much more than that, we're trying to actually like do things, to make it like better, like we're just not- like some people see it as [...] somewhere they wanna get their BA and kind just like wave goodbye to everyone else after that. But I feel like we're so much more than [that]." (Leanne, student)

however, there were themes of resistance in the data, with several student participants articulating their belief in the inherent value of both learning and community-building.

Wider educational attitudes. Though connected to the issues of consumerism and instrumentalism, this issue also goes beyond these two phenomena. For instance, some felt that the student passivity encouraged by much mainstream education makes it difficult for community members to feel like empowered agents who are able or willing to engage in collective deliberation and decision-making. It was also suggested that staff reproduce residual attitudes derived from wider norms – for instance, around 'authority' or 'normal practice' – which sometimes limit the extent to which they feel able to prioritise student-staff partnership, or take risks with 'unusual' approaches.

> "So King's is very ambitious but in a sort of- I would say in quite a conventional sense. So it sees itself as, like, an institution guided by ambitions for 'academic excellence' for example [...]. That kind of approach doesn't lend itself to experimentation or kind of devolving decisions, you know, beyond a certain point [...] [because of] a concern with image, a concern with reputation." (Luke, staff member)

Institutional culture/set-up was again raised as a core concern, with participants pointing to how the wider institution of the College is not especially democratic, and also has a broad remit to make decisions affecting the programme; this led to some frustration with the limited capacity of the CCMs to enact change, as well as concerns that the broader institutional culture was affecting the extent to which students can feel like empowered agents within HE.

Scope and conflict. Some participants suggested that the scope of the CCMs can be too narrowly practical and that there should be greater engagement with social and political issues – relating to both the programme and wider world. However, concerns were also raised about the extent to which the CCMs are equipped to deal with more challenging or sensitive discussions – perhaps because of a lack of familiarity with collective decision-making practices and attendant skills

around non-harmful conflict resolution and community accountability. It was suggested that more training and consciousness-raising was needed to generate a better context in which CCM discussions can take place. There was also some suggestion – linking back to the issues raised in chapter 2 – that the quality of underlying relationships is integral to the success of collective decision-making spaces, and that strengthening our relationships on the programme would thus strengthen our democratic processes.

> "I think when you're not sort of used to having accountability processes- [...] cos, like, in the communities that I'm in, if I do something wrong I expect to be called out like straight away, and, like, we'll have a conversation about it and then we move on. [But] I think for a lot of people, you know, these processes are very new [...], so people become very defensive when they're criticised on something, and then that sort of tension is what carries through." (Neve, student)

Time was once again considered a key factor, both for working through the complexities of democracy (especially conflict), and for engaging with the challenging social and political issues covered in the classroom.

3b – Learning and teaching: engaged pedagogy

The term 'engaged pedagogy' comes from bell hooks (e.g. 1994, 2010). It refers to classroom practice rooted in student-teacher partnership, in students' active, critical involvement in learning, and in emphasising the significance of the 'personal' in relation to the academic. Our data suggests that learning and teaching on the programme echoes this approach in several ways:

> "I guess previously we were just kind of fed information? [...] Like we would sit in the classroom and then there would just be like a teacher talking to us and preparing us for an exam. But [...] [here we're] given the material, [and] then we're given, like, an opportunity to kind of navigate it and figure out what it means and kind of come up with our own ideas from it." (Rachel, student)

Participants strongly foregrounded ***the programme's commitment to students' active engagement with their learning***, often comparing this to what Freire might call the "banking" model of education (1993:75) – in which students are seen simply as passive recipients of teacher-led content. Though large-group lectures and workshops do form part of the programme timetable, most of these are structured to invite student contributions and smaller-group activities or discussions. In addition, small-group seminars form a large proportion of the week's contact time.

An emphasis on student engagement was also mentioned in relation to assessment practices specifically; participants positively highlighted the level of choice and autonomy afforded to students in relation to their assignments.

A number of challenges were identified in relation to engaged pedagogy:

The core concern was about a ***lack of student engagement*** – both in terms of attendance and work preparation. It was suggested that these factors generate serious challenges for creating a classroom environment based on participation. For instance, when some people don't do prep, it means there's an imbalance in people's capacity to contribute meaningfully to the discussion (partly because seminar tutors end up leading the space by re-explaining content, rather than facilitating dialogue). Connectedly, it was suggested that student non-engagement limits the extent to which staff are able to see students as equal partners who are invested in a collaborative learning journey.

> "I've noticed some people being… too relaxed, about the course [...]. Yeah, it's easy to misunderstand that individuality and that freedom that we have in the course and take it for granted and be like, 'Oh yeah I don't have to do anything'." (Tia, student)

Several participants pointed to ***wider educational attitudes*** – particularly, again, the normalisation of passivity, hierarchy and instrumentalism – as

> "I still feel weird and good with this kind of freedom. At the same time [...] I feel like if I didn't have this kind of freedom I would miss it [...]. I think it's necessary and I think this is something that both students and teachers have to get used to, in a way?" (Susan, student)

an explanation for some students' non-engagement in the classroom. In response to this problem, some participants suggested people need more incentive to engage and recommended informal testing or greater oversight. Others, however, pointed out that the programme's ethos is oriented around self-direction and supporting an inherent love of learning. A number of students referred to going through a process of *un*learning aspects of their approach to education and discovering greater comfort with self-direction and agency.

Other, more ***specific and practical concerns around pedagogy*** were also raised by participants. A small number of student participants said they felt that there was too much emphasis on student opinions and personal experience, at the expense of engagement with literature. Some expressed a desire for slower, simpler language by teachers and for more structured input on breaking down difficult texts. Some referred to struggling with consolidating their learning on the programme – not least because of constraints on contact time. Although some participants, as discussed above, suggested more frequent assessment exercises as a solution, others suggested creative pedagogical approaches, such as using storytelling techniques, or tying critical discussion more specifically to reading material. It was also proposed that conversations about how to help people consolidate material could take place collectively. A final concern was centred around a perceived need to better connect academic content to 'real-world issues'. Although a number of participants felt the programme does a good job of building that bridge, some felt it could be given greater emphasis.

It was suggested that ***the above concerns underline the importance of equality and partnership in learning and teaching***; by building an environment in which people feel able to speak out about problems (and not just in the context of research projects!), the hope is that challenges

can be identified and addressed. And, indeed, there was some encouraging evidence of this in the data.

Chapter 4: The Context of Recognition on the Programme

Chapter 4 explored two further core themes in the data, which related to aspects of the programme which appear to *facilitate* the various forms of recognition explored so far. These were: 1) the ethos of the staff team and of the wider departmental culture in which the programme exists and 2) the size of the programme community.

4a – Recognition on the staff team

The programme team ethos was described by staff participants in ways which strongly echoed the recognition themes explored in relation to the programme as a whole. Staff spoke about what they perceived as a clear effort within the team to break down professional hierarchies and normalise equality in decision-making and also how meaningful relationships and emotional support are a core part of the programme team ethos.

> "So this team is kind of special for me, because although we have differences in our opinions, there are a certain set of first principles that are kind of like, 'No actually we're not debating those, 'cos they're kind of at the heart of what we do'. Around, like, treating people as people, around emotional wellbeing, around people's rights to actually not be subject to constant paternalistic surveillance or oversight, around the idea that intellectual rigor need not be traded off against personal experience and emotional engagement." (Joe, staff member)

We suggested it should not be seen as a coincidence that the staff team culture so strongly echoes that of the programme, but rather as a prerequisite. We suggested that staff can much more easily reproduce a resistant culture in their teaching practice and in their relationships with students if they feel accepted, valued, and cared for in their own workplace. This

notion of positive reproduction was echoed in the staff data – with many explicitly noting the significance of the staff team ethos for generating a culture on the programme as a whole – including students' enactment of it.

Some staff participants went beyond discussions of the programme team ethos and invoked the importance of both the wider culture of the School (ECS) and one of its research groups – the Centre for Public Policy Research – which was heavily involved in developing the BASS programme. This included particular reference to the role of senior staff, whose values and behaviour were considered crucial for enabling the programme ethos.

4b – Sheer numbers: why community size matters for recognition

Participants consistently highlighted the crucial importance of the small size of the programme community, in ways that have relevance for both recognition themes explored in the preceding chapters. For instance, it was suggested that having a small community makes it much easier to build depth of knowledge about one another's lives and, connectedly, to develop empathy. In relation to classroom practice and pedagogy, participants suggested that small-group learning was a crucial part of them feeling safe expressing themselves – evidently a core part of engaged pedagogy.

> "I think a thing that would be important [for the programme] is to keep a relatively small number of students? [...] [T]hat would be […] essential [...] for the kind of identity of the programme. [...] [It's] not just that, you know, staff are [...] caring and kind and available but also, like, the [...] small size of the programme, right, makes this kind of interaction possible. And in a sense more- more human, right?" (Belle, staff member)

It was noted that participants' emphasis on the importance of small-group learning for participation raises questions around how comfortable students feel expressing themselves in the larger-group context of CCMs. While concerns about this were not raised explicitly in the data, some participants did point to people feeling "shy"

in CCMs, as well as to people feeling less comfortable speaking when a large number of *staff* are present. There was a call for greater experimentation with "creative techniques" (Rosa) to help people share their opinions and ideas in CCMs, including breaking into groups that are smaller in size.

Chapter 5: Enacting Recognition Through the Politics of Difference

Chapter 5 had a different theoretical focus – and to some extent a different format – to the rest of the text. The themes of recognition explored in the preceding chapters all focus on ideas about how we should treat *everyone*, regardless of their positionality or identity. We related this to Charles Taylor's notion of 'the politics of universalism'. Yet Taylor and other theorists have challenged the idea that 'universalist' principles go far enough in realising recognition, particularly for those who start out in a position of marginalisation. Taylor lays out an alternative vision of recognition, grounded in what he calls the 'politics of difference'. This approach asks us to attend to the lived experiences of marginalised groups, and recognise that specific forms of affirmative action may be required to ensure equitable recognition. Chapter 5 focused on the critical questions raised by the politics of difference in terms of our programme and HE practice more broadly, drawing on themes around marginalisation in our dataset. Thus, while the first four chapters are, by and large, about adopting a particular articulation of recognition and describing – albeit critically – the ways in which the programme may or may not manage to realise it in practical terms, this chapter sought to more explicitly problematise how we *define* recognition.

5a – Class, 'race' and critical consciousness

In 5a Samira Salam explored how our data appeared to indicate limited critical consciousness within the community about the way that students' race and class positionality affect their lived experiences of the programme.

A large number of participants focused on nationality and gender as core demographic features of the programme; comparatively few extended their analysis to race and class. Some participants acknowledged that the demographic of the programme community is predominantly middle-class, and an even smaller number referred to the predominance of 'whiteness'.

However, it was argued that this differs from evidence of critical consciousness. Firstly, very few participants, in discussing these demographic factors, acknowledged how minority groups on the programme might be impacted, nor how their own positionality might affect their perceptions. Secondly, those who did directly acknowledge the significance of race and class positionality were, almost exclusively, students identifying as working-class and/or Black, Brown or an ethnic minority. These participants described forms of race and class-based exclusion along the following lines:

> "Sometimes [with where I come from] – like, people don't understand like the struggles? […] Like, I don't really think about class a lot, like, 'Oh I'm working-class' but […] when you see like people with Macbooks for example [laughs] and, like, just other stuff and they're just talking about it like it's normal. It's not normal for me." (Ali, student)

Feeling that they didn't 'fit in', including references to 'imposter syndrome' or the feeling that others did not share the same life experiences and background.

Feeling excluded from social events, for instance due to their prohibitive cost, or because they take place in spaces in which people did not feel comfortable.

Feeling excluded in the classroom, for instance due to comments from peers which invalidate lived experience of marginalisation, or due to the dominance of certain voices (e.g. those from Western middle-class backgrounds).

Several possible actions were identified, namely:

a. Ensuring that social and community events do not exclude people on the basis of their positionality, by considering factors such as cost, caring responsibilities, and cultural/religious factors.
b. Fighting for better access to HE for students from working-class and/or ethnic minority backgrounds (though it was noted that 'Widening Participation' schemes should not be a tick-box exercise but attend to the complexities of intersectionality).
c. Generating greater critical consciousness through our pedagogy. It was argued that at the same time as recognising the uniquely valuable contributions of people with lived experience, we need to avoid relying on those who are already facing intersectional marginalisation to educate people. We need to develop critical consciousness amongst everybody, regardless of who is actually in the room.

5b – The effects of institutional and societal structures on access to HE

In 5b Eleni Koutsouri argued that pursuing meaningful recognition requires 'making space' for voices which are usually sidelined. It was suggested that this means we need to think about not only who gets a voice in the room and how, but who gets into the room in the first place. Otherwise, the relative homogeneity in the demographic of the cohort risks the reproduction of silencing certain narratives, which could have a detrimental effect on our efforts to centre critically reflexive approaches to learning. The nature of the cohort demographic was related to wider inequalities in HE access, and a number of reasons for these inequalities were explored, drawing primarily on secondary literature. For instance, it was highlighted that:

> "The makeup of our course reflects, wider, higher, problems within higher [education] institutions, [...] in that, you know, you're more likely to go to university if you're white middle-class, and that's reflected on our course in terms of the demographic in the room." (Rebecca, student)

Many students feel alienated by the elitism, demographic imbalances, and often discriminatory practices of HE institutions; this exacerbates the lack of representation of BAME and working-class students and practitioners. This was also linked to sector marketisation and the way that competition – especially among 'elite' institutions – means attempts to widen participation are not always in universities' financial or reputational interest.

Wider educational inequalities affect who can even apply to university, and educational attainment is strongly affected by the intersecting forces of socioeconomic inequality and systemic discrimination.

5c – The politics of difference in the classroom

Finally, in 5c we grappled with the role of learning and teaching in relation to the politics of difference. Drawing on participant data around safety, freedom of speech, and harm in the classroom, we explored the question of which voices should be foregrounded and/or challenged in the classroom in the name of recognition. Various authors provided their own responses in the form of opinion pieces:

Minkyung Kim called for ***a general commitment to 'openness' in the classroom*** to enable all students to feel recognised and valued as well as to learn to become democratic citizens. They argued, based on participant data, that the programme's commitment to kindness is sometimes misconceived as conflict averseness, and that openness in the classroom can help to overcome this. To facilitate openness, they suggested teachers adopt an approach called 'procedural neutrality', whereby they present their own viewpoints alongside justifications for *contrasting* positions. Some limitations and weaknesses of the idea of openness were explored, though it was suggested that these could be overcome through teachers' interventions. For instance, it was suggested that traditionally marginalised voices can be presented with equally strong conviction by staff, that inappropriate ethical conduct could be prevented through the co-creation

of a 'working agreement' with students, and that teachers should seek to promote reflexivity.

SooYeon Suh argued that while diversity in the classroom can enrich learning, it does not necessarily lead to the deconstruction of social divisions and marginalisation. They argued that the roots of marginalisation are deep-rooted – stemming from collective histories to the present day – which have led to the reproduction of powerful forms of exclusion in society, including in HE. Suh called for ***greater levels of dialogue in the classroom to allow marginalised voices to be foregrounded*** and suggested this would help facilitate greater empathy with and understanding of difference. They emphasised that this must be pursued hand in hand with kindness and reflexivity; it was suggested this would enable people to critically reflect on how the threads of colonial histories, in particular, have come to define HE. They also suggested it would also enable the community to foster shared values around how to handle conflict without silencing or diminishing anyone's validity in the space.

Tope Mayomi and Freya Aquarone suggested that the right to freedom of speech comes with an attendant responsibility: to consider others. They argued that suggestions (from participant data) that staff should strive for 'neutrality' or 'manufacture debate' in order to generate greater diversity of discussion in the classroom too often lead to the reproduction of marginalisation. Instead, they delineated a baseline for who should be 'heard' in the classroom, grounded in the philosophical premise that your views do not deserve equal recognition if they are predicated on the non-recognition of others. Drawing on principles of transformative justice, they suggested that ***we must develop forms of collective accountability and trust*** – for instance, around how to take others into consideration when we express our perspectives, and how to challenge the reproduction of harm.