Dear Students and Alumni,

I am Professor Vrinda Nayak, Associate Dean for Taught Students (Racial Equality and Inclusion) at the University of Exeter. I am currently overseeing a research project on “Understanding International Students’ Perspectives on Disability and Neurodivergence.” This study, conducted across multiple UK universities, aims to better understand the experiences and perspectives of international students regarding the disclosure of disabilities and neurodivergent conditions, as well as their engagement with support services whilst studying in the UK. Neurodivergence means having differences in the way our brain works, and, in some cultures, this is labelled as diagnosis of ADHD, Autism, or Tourette’s Syndrome.

The experience of our international students is very important to us, and we are committed to fostering an environment that enables all students to excel in their chosen academic pursuits. We acknowledge that international students come from rich and diverse cultural backgrounds and are not a homogenous group, each bringing a unique perspective and understanding. We also value the distinct ways that different cultures and languages shape how neurodiversity is understood and perceived.

In our universities, we support students who have disclosed disabilities or neurodivergent conditions through a variety of support services, including the creation of individualised learning plans and the implementation of reasonable adjustments. These support services are designed to promote equitable learning experiences. It is our observation that many international students may hesitate to seek support due to concerns about potential stigmatisation or a lack of awareness regarding their conditions.

The findings from this study will significantly contribute to the understanding of the challenges faced by international students, thereby giving educators and student-support staff the information they need to improve or provide other support structures.

I invite you to take part in this study by completing a survey that will require approximately 20 minutes of your time. Participation is entirely anonymous, and your data will be stored securely to ensure confidentiality. At the end of the survey, there will be an option to express your interest in participating in a focus group.

For further details about the project, please refer to the information available on our website.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to the improvement of the international student experience within UK higher education institutions.