**Social Connectedness at University**

**Study Brief and Information Sheet**

**Researcher:**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr Sophie Homer, School of Psychology, University of Plymouth

**What is this study about?**

We are conducting online focus groups with students about experiences of university life, including personal and social experiences.

**What will happen during the focus group?**

During the online focus group, you will be asked about your social and personal experiences at university. You will be asked to consider your social connections, your social activities, and your engagement with others in and outside of university. You will also be asked about your perceptions of social connectedness and belonging, and, in relation to this, your perceptions and experiences of loneliness, isolation, mental health, and wellbeing.

The focus group will last no longer than one hour, and you will receive a £10 Amazon after participating. The Researcher will tell you how to claim your voucher at the end of the focus group.

**Will my participation in the focus group be anonymous and confidential?**

The study is a focus group, so the other members of the focus group will know that you are participating. However, we ask all focus group members to agree that they will not disclose other participants’ names, and that they will not discuss anything said during the focus group with anyone else afterwards. *Please keep in mind that you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, and please only share things you feel comfortable to share within the group.* Your name will only be collected by the Researchers for the purposes of gaining informed consent.

Focus groups will be audio recorded. The Researcher will let you know when they are about to begin the recording. The recording will be stored on secure university systems (OneDrive) until it has been transcribed.

All focus group data will be transcribed and anonymised, meaning that we will remove all names and identifiable information (for example, if you happened to mention someone else’s name or the name of the street you live on). Transcription will be done by an external company, but this company will comply with GDPR and university regulations.

Once the recording has been transcribed, it will be destroyed. Anonymised transcriptions will be stored securely on University systems (OneDrive) for ten years in line with University policy.

We may want to disseminate the data and analysis, including specific quotes from the transcript. We may disseminate the research by publishing it in academic journals and presenting it orally and/or via poster at conferences and events, including both academic and public events. We will not publish or present names or any identifiable information, and it will not be possible to link any of the analysis, or any individual quotes, back to you.

**Is there any risk?**

You will be asked to consider your social and personal experiences at university, including your experiences of social connectedness, loneliness and isolation. You will also be asked about mental health and wellbeing in relation to these experiences. For some, these may be sensitive topics. There is no pressure for you to discuss these topics if you do not wish to. If this is the case, please inform the Researcher that you have chosen not to participate and / or leave the Zoom meeting. If you do choose to participate, *please keep in mind that you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, and please only share things you feel comfortable to share within the group.* You can withdraw from the study at any time (see below).

**Can I withdraw?**

You may withdraw from the focus group at any time, without penalty. If you would like to withdraw, please inform the Researcher either verbally or via private chat. Alternatively, you can simply leave the Zoom meeting. If you would like to withdraw your data after the focus group, please inform the Researcher within two weeks. Please note that accepting payment for participating does not negate your right to withdraw your data.

**Will this affect my relationship with the University of Plymouth?**

No. Participation is entirely voluntary and participating (or withdrawing) does not affect your relationship with the University in any way. You can participate or withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relationship with the University or any staff, and without prejudice to any assessment of your academic performance.

**Who do I contact with questions or concerns?**

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Researcher, [Researcher name], in the first instance [Researcher’s email address].

If you do not feel that your issue has been adequately resolved, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr Sophie Homer: [sophie.homer@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:sophie.homer@plymouth.ac.uk)

If you still do not feel that your issue has been adequately resolved, you can contact the University of Plymouth, Faculty of Health: Medicine, Dentistry, and Human Sciences Ethics Committee at [FOHEthics@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:FOHEthics@plymouth.ac.uk) or on 01752 586992.

Thank you for your interest in this study. If you consent to participate, you will be instructed throughout and debriefed at the end.