In UK higher education (HE) longstanding data indicates an awarding gap(1) which sees students from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds have on average an 8.8% reduction in their chance of being awarded a 2.1 or 1st class degree. Students studying for degrees in healthcare must navigate a dual learning environment of higher education institutions and clinical practice. Currently, there is a lack of evidence on how this impacts student success and no evidence specifically in radiotherapy education. This research aimed to explore the experiences of ethnically diverse students studying radiotherapy in placement and higher education settings and to understand how these experiences impact success and perceptions of the profession.

Results
38 students responded, 74% female and 26% male. 87% were aged 18-29 and were studying across nine HE institutions in England (North & South regions) Wales and Scotland. A range of ethnicities were represented (see Figure 1) with most respondents identifying as coming from a Black African background.

Qualitative findings
Within the academic and clinical placement setting, positive learning experiences were communicated in both the HE and placement environments. A passion for patient care, motivation to achieve a degree and being able to change the profession from within, led to most students feeling positive about their future careers. However, microaggressions and incivility combined with poor teaching and feedback methods were reported to have an impact on learning in the placement setting. Pressure to succeed from family and wider culture and pressure that students put on themselves due to time and money invested was also seen (figure 2).

"Being of an ethnic minority group makes the job harder because in reality, no matter how hard you try..... they will always have something negative to say and it will never be good enough"

"In the Pakistani culture, it’s kind of a big deal to go to university, getting compared to other children or relatives... this really affects the child mentally and puts further pressure on them"

I have felt welcomed and a part of the community. I have found people who are similar to me"

"I love my patients, I love making those bonds with them, getting to do that is my favourite thing"

Quantitative Findings
Students reported a lower sense of belonging in clinical placement than in the HE setting, with racial microaggressions indicated to be more common in the clinical environment. Overt acts of racism were rare but were still reported to have taken place whilst on clinical placement (see Figure 3).

Recommendations
Eradicating incidents of racism and microaggressions in radiotherapy education is critical. The development of proactive, anti-racist strategies and pedagogical initiatives, specific to the demands of clinical education are central to improving the student experience for Black, Asian and ethnically diverse students and reducing the awarding gap.

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References
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