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02nd of September, 2026

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Testimonial for Dr Tilahun Mekonnen

I am delighted to provide this testimonial in recognition of Dr Tilahun Mekonnen's valuable contribution to the ASPIRE (Accomplished Study Programme in Research Excellence) programme.

Tilahun has been a generous and enthusiastic supporter of ASPIRE and has contributed to several of our activities aimed at inspiring and empowering Black students and doctoral researchers. In February 2023, he delivered an engaging session on "The Advantages of Being Disadvantaged," drawing on his research and lived experience to encourage participants to recognise how adversity can be transformed into resilience, purpose and determination. He returned in February 2024 to deliver another thought-provoking session, "Revisiting Resilience," further demonstrating his commitment to supporting researchers as they navigate the challenges of their academic and personal journeys.

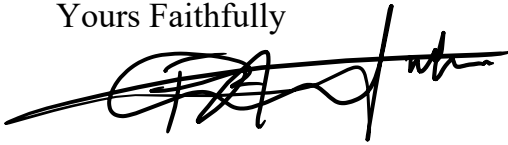
Tilahun also served as a panellist at our Black History Month event in October 2023, where he openly shared his experiences, engaged thoughtfully with participants, and responded to questions. His willingness to bring his authentic lived experience into these conversations added considerable value and provided participants with both encouragement and practical insight.

Beyond his contribution to ASPIRE, Tilahun has demonstrated a sustained scholarly interest in the experiences, challenges and opportunities of Black and ethnic minority and immigrant entrepreneurs in the UK and beyond. His engagement with business communities, institutions and industry professionals also reflects his commitment to connecting academic research with practice and enriching students' learning through real-world perspectives.

I have particularly valued Tilahun's willingness to give his time, share his experiences and use his academic journey to inspire others. His contributions to ASPIRE reflect the values of inclusion, resilience, mentorship and creating opportunities for others to thrive.

I am therefore very pleased to recognise his contribution and wish him every success as he continues to advance his work in this important area.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ifedapo Francis Awolowo', written in a cursive style.

Dr Ifedapo Francis Awolowo

National Teaching Fellow | Principal Fellow of Advance HE

Senior Lecturer, Sheffield Business School

Sheffield Hallam University

Founder and Lead, ASPIRE Programme