



University of
Nottingham

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

All in!

**Regularising ethnic
presence in the
curriculum**

Project Outcomes report

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INTRODUCTION

This briefing summarises the key outcomes of the All in! project. The issues highlighted have emerged primarily from examining decolonising curricula in the disciplines of politics and philosophy at a single Higher Education Institute (HEI). Nonetheless, the reflections should be of interest to colleagues in other disciplines and HEIs.



1 ABOUT DECOLONISING CURRICULA

A number of pedagogical, methodological, strategic and pragmatic issues have arisen about what is entailed in decolonising curricula.

1.1 The term 'decolonising'

The term 'decolonising' (the curriculum) is contested. Some colleagues advocate its usage because decolonising conveys the political act of stripping curricula of its colonial and post-colonial elements especially in relation to race and racism. As the decolonisation momentum emerged from the anti-colonial movement in countries which had been colonised, they think that we need to interrogate further its meaning in countries that traditionally were the colonisers. Others object to its usage because colonialism and therefore decolonising are seen essentially as historical phenomena that occurred in the past, overseas and question its contemporary usage in the context of HEIs in the UK. The concern is that the use of the term 'decolonising the curriculum' implicates UK HEIs and their employees as passive or active contributors to historical acts of oppression and injustice such as the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism as well as contemporary global inequalities and injustices.

Arguably, just because the terminology is contested need not refrain us from its use. Collectively exploring the term 'decolonising' with colleagues and students can act as a powerful avenue for stimulating conversations about the subject, arrive at shared understandings and make decisions about the most appropriate term to use in given contexts. The All in! website has [a resource](#) with a selection of definitions of the term 'decolonisation' which can aid this process of mutual investigation and learning.

1.2 Pedagogical considerations

The process of exploring the subject of decolonising the curriculum as communities of practitioners offers an opportunity to reflect critically on existing teaching and learning practices and issues such as:

- The degree to which curriculum content, design and delivery is driven primarily by staff knowledge, interests, and expertise rather than a mapping of the core skills, knowledge, and understandings that students need to gain of a given discipline
- How we facilitate greater student-centred learning to maximise the social capital, life experiences and perspectives that students bring into the classroom particularly to stimulate discussion and awareness about equality, diversity, inclusion and minoritised experiences
- How the subject of equality, diversity and inclusion is integrated into whole teaching programmes not just as an add-on, in discrete modules only or, towards the end of a module or a programme
- How white normativity can be managed more effectively to enable a greater sense of belonging to be nurtured for racially minoritised groups in classrooms and beyond.

1.3 Diversifying learning and teaching resources

Teaching and learning staff need access to academic literature and resources that can enable them to learn about diverse contributors, apply this learning to their teaching and learning practices and, enhance student knowledge and experiences. Several pertinent questions emerge which may be more applicable to some disciplines than others:

- How can more BAME writers and thinkers be introduced and integrated into teaching and learning practices?
- How do academics manage ethnocentric bias in their curriculum planning and delivery and any perceptions that research and literature produced by Southern/Diaspora/BAME writers are not on par with the work of Western/European/white writers?
- How can staff be enabled to learn about the works of Southern/Diaspora/BAME writers who they may not have come across before and build their confidence and competence to deliver lectures and seminars and carry out assessments based on these works?
- Established canons – 'dead white males' - may be inevitable in some disciplines but how can these works be interrogated critically and interfaced with works by Southern/Diaspora/BAME writers?

1.4 Diversifying human resources (HR)

One of the challenges facing HEIs is ‘leaky pipelines’ contributing to the lack of Southern/Diaspora/BAME staff in academia. The lack of more inclusive ‘decolonised’ curricula at undergraduate levels can contribute to Southern/Diaspora/BAME students exiting the HE system and not pursuing higher qualifications or careers in academia. HEIs need to recognise that they have a role and responsibility to offer more inclusive undergraduate curricula and create conditions to help retain



Southern/Diaspora/BAME students and diversify academia. This also means reviewing staff composition and increasing the numbers of Southern/Diaspora/BAME academics to broaden the pool of knowledge, skills and experiences in a team, department, or school. This is not about employing staff from these backgrounds just to deliver the EDI elements of programmes but about acknowledging that their presence is integral to any HEI in this day and age. Such an organisational audit can help to develop a more sustainable HR strategy beyond just inviting Southern/Diaspora/BAME as guest speakers.

1.5 Pragmatic challenges

A key learning point has been about the practicalities of changing the curriculum and programme delivery. If programmes are to become more diverse, inclusive and even decolonised, what is taken out of the curriculum, what is added and what happens to anything else that remains to be covered? The second pragmatic challenge is the lack of planning and preparation time that teaching and learning staff have to review, identify additional resources and make curriculum changes. Thirdly, for new or relatively ‘junior’ staff there is the added constraint of not having full if any control over what is in the curriculum and not having the power and authority to make revisions before they start teaching. Even where team teaching is in place, an academic might find themselves teaching a module whose design and development was undertaken by other colleagues without them.

1.6 Managing change, resistance, and nurturing communities of practice

Decolonising the curriculum is a change management process requiring individual and collective efforts to reflect upon and reconfigure current teaching and learning practices. What we have learnt is that more convincing rationales and justifications need to be rehearsed and reiterated constantly to persuade academics to engage in the change process. As a change process, decolonising the curriculum offers a further vehicle to engage staff in debates about best practices and how teaching and learning can be realigned to integrate equality, diversity, and inclusion. Different institutions and disciplines will need to consider what works best for them and a ‘one size fits all’ solution may not be feasible in every case. As with any change management process, resistance, overt and covert, passive and aggressive is inevitable and this calls for change through dialogical, collegial processes rather than top-down impositions.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology that was used to trace the visibility of race and ethnicity in module titles and descriptions replicated the one that was used by Foster et al (2013)¹ to examine the representation of gender and sexuality. The process involved a systematic trawl of undergraduate politics and philosophy modules offered by top-ranked UK Universities based on their National Student Survey 2014 and Research Excellence Framework 2014 scores to ascertain the degree to which issues of diversity and equality were visible in module titles and descriptions. We were able to reaffirm the validity of this methodology as a means of tracing the visibility/invisibility of race and ethnicity in modules in given disciplines. Our findings show that adopting such a systematic methodology is vital to reviewing and spotting gaps in curricula, identifying openings for decolonising curricula and, considering how Southern/Diaspora/BAME voices can be integrated as a deliberate and disciplined practice intervention. A fuller description and critical review of our methodology will feature in two journal articles, one for philosophy and the other, politics.

3 STIMULATING AND SUPPORTING CHANGE

Staff in the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR) have begun to consider how to diversify or decolonise their modules and in some cases, changes have been made already. 'The Politics of Utopia' course was designed from scratch to try and embody the principles of 'diversifying' and 'decolonising' that we had been talking about in the All in! project. The course directly tackled the question a) of whether utopia was solely a Christian, Western and/or colonial concept and b) overtly 'decolonial' utopias (including a week on *Black Panther*); questions of racism in utopias (including in some famous feminist utopias); engaged with the critical work of one of the most famous African American political philosophers (Charles Mills); and designed weekly reading lists that were 'diverse' in that they included at least one woman and/or Southern/diaspora/BAME author. The assessment was designed to give some power to the students, and break down concepts of 'expertise' as they picked their 'utopia' to analyse. In 2019-2020, in one module 'Democracy and its Critics' an expert from the Malaysia campus was involved in introducing Islamic views of democracy and



compiling a list of useful reading for the lecture. For the coming year for the same module, plans are set to introduce a Muslim philosopher. As this module is one of SPIR's second-year constrained choice options, it will reach many students. Other colleagues in SPIR have been discussing ethnicity issues and Western lenses more explicitly in modules such as 'Gender and Development' and 'Politics of Ethnic Conflict'.

¹ Foster, E., Kerr, P., Hopkins, A., Byrne, C. & Ahall, L., 2013. The personal is not political: At least in the UK's top politics and IR departments. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 15(4), pp.566–585.

4 STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

We have been able to share our findings at many levels internally within UoN, from the various schools and departments that we have had contact with and made presentations, to the PVC for EDI, the REC group, the new PVC Education and Student Experience and the Vice-Chancellor. Team members have begun to present findings externally. A presentation was given recently to SAGE about decolonising publishing. There seems to be growing coordination in professional bodies such as the British International Studies Association and the Political Studies Association that could lead to the formalisation of a national network and project members hope to play a part in this.

5 AN ONLINE RESOURCE

The All in! website houses an accessible database of useful resources on diversifying and decolonising curricula, links to other HEIs pursuing curriculum decolonisation initiatives, a listing of HEIs with specialist centres on area, colonialism and post-colonialism studies and a set of 'Top Tips' for decolonising curricula. As well as acting as a resource base, the website is a knowledge sharing platform and a beacon for raising the profile of decolonising curricula, internally and externally.

6 A CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTION

To be published in a chapter in a forthcoming book², based on our research and analysis, we have constructed a heuristic framework with four lenses to enable teaching and learning practitioners to deconstruct and understand what is involved in decolonising the curriculum. Such a framework has the potential of enabling practitioners to understand better what is involved in decolonising curricula and frame their strategies accordingly.

7 OVERVIEW

This was a time-limited project which adopted a curriculum-based approach to diversifying and decolonising curricula in the disciplines of politics and philosophy. The methodology involved taking a practice-based approach which built on and learnt from what teaching and learning staff did already to arrive at alternative practices and other ways of doing. The methodology also included dialogues with students, participating in internal working groups and networks and, knowledge sharing with external organisations embarking on similar work. The project has been effective in highlighting the significance of understanding curricula as a critical lever for change towards greater diversity and inclusivity in HE and validating the experiences of racially minoritised groups.



² Chauhan, V., Fisher, A., Williams, H. & McCabe, H. (pending) Lenses of decolonisation: Transforming higher education curricula. In Byrom, T. (ed) *Universal design: Meeting the teaching and learning challenges in 21st Century higher education*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

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