Decolonising the curriculum: a health check.

Canterbury Christ Church University

Introduction.

At Canterbury Christ Church University we have a duty to ensure that our curricula are inclusive and provide the opportunity for all students to be recognised and achieve their potential. An inclusive and decolonised curriculum aims to foster a sense of belonging in all students, regardless of background. Moreover, it should amplify voices and perspectives that have traditionally been marginalised in Higher Education and society. In this way, we set to enrich our curricula through the addition of voices, perspectives and practices that have previously been omitted. Whilst there are commonalities between us, it is important to acknowledge that each student experiences university differently and this can be influenced by their race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age, class, disability, religion and nationality as well as other factors that have been evidenced to have an impact on student outcomes.

Ensuring that we have an inclusive, diverse and decolonised curricular will help to improve the student experience, develop critical skills and improve the retention and success of all students. It is important to recognise that decolonising is different from diversifying. To diversify the curriculum is to include a range of perspectives, learning strategies and assessments. Diversifying provides limited opportunities to challenge the hierarchies and inequalities embedded within the curricular and our

society. Decolonising the curriculum goes deeper. Decolonising provides us with an opportunity to critically reflect, dismantle our assumptions, unlearn, relearn and rebuild together.

Decolonising the curriculum goes beyond the reading list and the classroom, thus, it should not be carried out in isolation. To truly decolonise requires a paradigm shift in culture, mindset and practices. It is a shift that requires us to consider what is knowledge, how knowledge is acquired, how knowledge is valued, how knowledge is disseminated, what knowledge is included/excluded and why. Efforts should be made to acknowledge that knowledge is collectively produced regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, sexuality, religion or nationality. To decolonise we must dismantle our assumptions, embed new practices, a range of perspectives, and examine our own beliefs and professional practices. In this way, we begin to challenge social norms, enrich the student experience and enable students to challenge and explore themselves and the world around them. Efforts to decolonise the curriculum should be carried out continuously within the curriculum content, structure, delivery, assessment(s) and feedback strategies.

The Decolonising the Curriculum Health Check allows course teams to explore the diversity of their course/module(s) and to make regular, meaningful enhancements as part of a process of continuous improvement. Once you have completed the health check, use it to reflect and take action on how you can embed inclusivity, decolonise your course/module(s) and enrich the student experience.

The Decolonising the Curriculum Health Check is divided in to three sections that allow you to explore and identify areas for improvement:

- Course Level
- Module Level
- Staff Development

The health check can be completed by Course Directors and/or Module Leaders. Course teams may want to complete the health check with students to help gain an understanding of the student perception.

It is recommended that you use the health check during periodic programme reviews, validation of new programmes, modifications and during the Boards of Studies.

The health check asks questions which are designed to prompt thinking connected to race and ethnicity as part of the University's strategic commitments to addressing the ethnicity awarding gap. However, efforts should be made to ensure that the curriculum is reflective of all, including disability, class, sexuality, gender, religion, nationality and age. The impact of intersectionality should be considered.

The Decolonising the Curriculum Health Check is one element of inclusive practice, which also entails ensuring accessibility and supporting students with disability, mental health, from a range of marginalised backgrounds and other challenges. It is therefore, critical that you use this health check in combination with the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and both should be used continuously as a tool for enhancement and quality assurance.

Course level.

Course Level Questions					
	Course strongly meets criteria	Course somewhat meets criteria	No evidence of criteria on the course	Unsure	Additional Comments - please use this space to consider your answer and reflect on any actions to be taken
Do you have Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff in your teaching or support team?					
If yes to the above question, are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic members of staff involved in the learning and teaching of combined and single honours students?					
If yes to question 1, are the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic members of staff taking on extra responsibilities around the mentoring and support of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students? If the response to this question is yes, please consider the impact of these on that staff member.					
Do you use Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic guest speakers or sessional lecturers in your course?					

Identity, Belonging and Community

Course level.

Course Level Questions					
	Course strongly meets criteria	Course somewhat meets criteria	No evidence of criteria on the course	Unsure	Additional Comments - please use this space to consider your answer and reflect on any actions to be taken
Identity, Belonging and Community — Does the course induction incorporate information that may be beneficial to students from a range of cultural, religious, racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation and social economic backgrounds? e.g. location of prayer rooms, university societies, Pride					
Do you have student representatives or ambassadors from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds?					
Do you have student representatives from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds at all levels of study?					
Does your course design, development and assessments involve collaboration and input from students from a range of diverse backgrounds (race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability)?					

Course level.

Course Level Questions					
	Course strongly meets criteria	Course somewhat meets criteria	No evidence of criteria on the course	Unsure	Additional Comments - please use this space to consider your answer and reflect on any actions to be taken
Identity, Belonging and Community — When carrying out outreach work with schools and colleges are efforts made to reach out to schools and colleges with significant Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student populations?					
Does the curriculum explore and acknowledge our complex and intersectional identities?					
Criticality — Do you engage with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic external stakeholders (as External Examiners, REF Critical Friends, etc)?					
When working with internal and external collaborators, are there any efforts made to incorporate Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic professionals from your discipline?					
Cultural Capital — Does the course explore how the progression of the discipline is depicted including voices that are included/excluded?					

Module level.

Module Level Questions

	Module strongly meets criteria	Module somewhat meets criteria	No evidence of criteria on the module	Unsure	Additional Comments - please use this space to consider your answer and reflect on any actions to be taken
Does your module allow students to explore how their own identity impacts on the subject discipline or society? e.g. social economic, ethnicity influence outcomes and perspectives					
Do you use learning and teaching approaches that incorporate Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in a positive light? e.g. do your case studies avoid stereotyping?					
Does your module help to foster good relationships in students and develop compassionate learners?					
Does your module encourage discussion from students with diverse backgrounds and include topics where personal experience and views can be discussed either in the classroom or through online media?					

Identity, Belonging and Community

Module level.

Module Level Questions					
	Module strongly meets criteria	Module somewhat meets criteria	No evidence of criteria on the module	Unsure	Additional Comments - please use this space to consider your answer and reflect on any actions to be taken
Identity, Belonging and Community — Does your module offer a range of assessment formats to support the diversity of your student body?					
Do the assessments provide opportunities for students to draw upon their own cultural background?					
Criticality — Does your module create opportunities to discuss different perspectives within and outside the UK related to race and ethnic diversity?					
Does your module explore the impact of race and ethnicity within the subject discipline, the industry and/or society?					

Module level.

Module Level Questions					
	Module strongly meets criteria	Module somewhat meets criteria	No evidence of criteria on the module	Unsure	Additional Comments - please use this space to consider your answer and reflect on any actions to be taken
Criticality Does your module develop students' critical thinking and awareness of different perspectives on issues around diversity in race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, sexuality, gender, class?					
Does your module have a reading list and resources that contain a diverse range of authors from different races, ethnicities and perspectives?					
In your current practice do you provide opportunities to challenge stereotypes (e.g. race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality, gender)					
Do the assessments provide opportunities to develop and prepare students for real-world task and working with diversity and difference?					

Module level.

Module Level Questions					
	Module strongly meets criteria	Module somewhat meets criteria	No evidence of criteria on the module	Unsure	Additional Comments - please use this space to consider your answer and reflect on any actions to be taken
Criticality Do the assessments choice/ medium provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their strengths e.g. assessment choice?					
Cultural Capital Does your module explore data, scholarly research and theories that relate to race and ethnic diversity?					
Do the scholars and the scholarship used within the course rely on colonial assumptions? If so, do you provide students with the opportunity or material to challenge these assumptions?					
Do you explore the cultural and intergenerational knowledge of your students, different communities and cultures within your subject discipline					

Staff training and development questions.

		Yes	No	Unsure	Additional Comments-please use this space to consider your answer and reflect on any actions to be taken
1	Do you feel that you have a good awareness of different ethnicities and cultures including cultural calendars and how these may influence on a student's learning?				
2	Do you feel that you have a good understanding of the barriers in society in relation to different ethnic groups?				
3	Do you feel comfortable talking explicitly about race?				
4	Do you feel comfortable dealing with any controversy that may result from talking about race within the classroom?				
5	Are you comfortable dealing with the issues of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students? e.g. personal issues at home that may be culturally related				
6	Do you ever expect Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students or staff to provide information and/or advice relating to race?				
7	Do you feel or have you ever felt that your own ethnicity has had an impact on your student body?				

Staff training and development questions (continued).

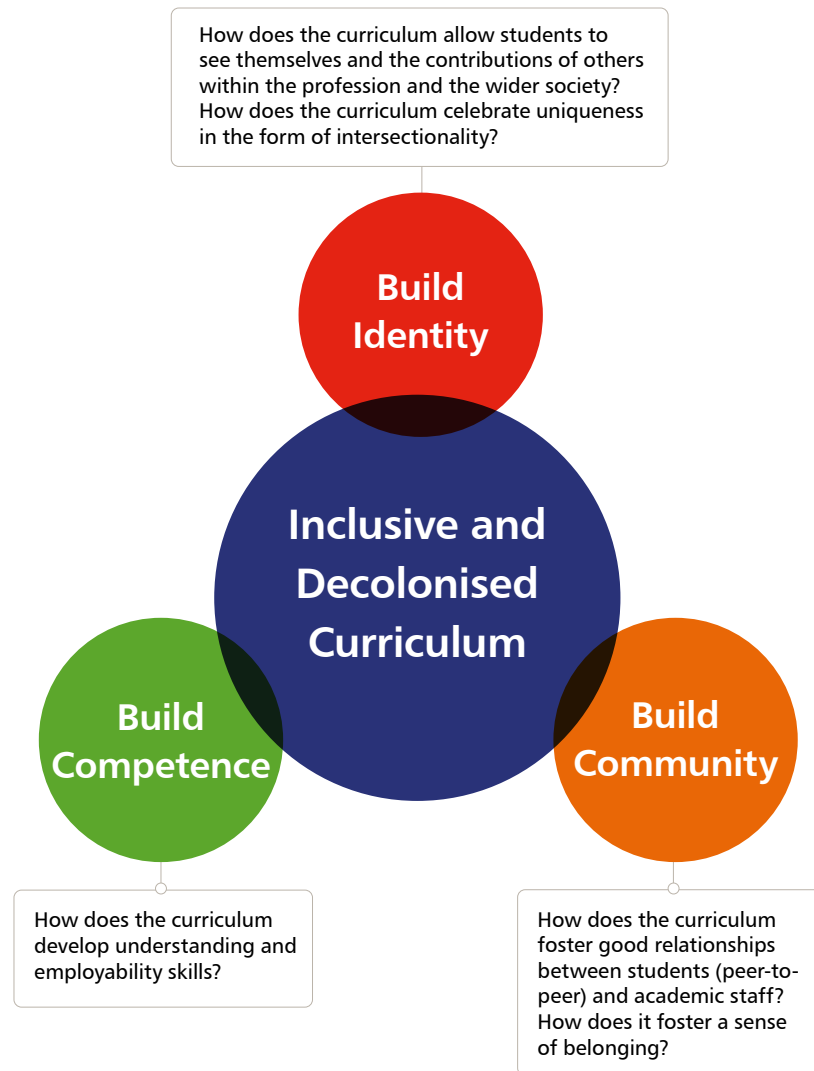|		Yes	No	Unsure	Additional Comments-please use this space to consider your answer and reflect on any actions to be taken
8	Do you feel that you have a good understanding of the data relating to the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic attainment gap both at University, on your course and sector level?				
9	Do you know the attainment gap for your modules/programme?				
10	Do you monitor the attainment of your PAT students during their academic journey?				
11	Do you have a good awareness of the issues within your subject discipline relating to ethnicity in the wider context (nationally and internationally)?				
12	Do you consider how marginalised groups can see themselves reflected in positive ways in your own research?				
13	If your course includes placements, do you feel that you have a good understanding of the experiences encountered by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students on placement?				
14	Do you feel confident to address issues of race and racism with external stakeholders (e.g. placement providers)				

Understanding and using the checklist.

Once you have completed the health check review the outcome of each section and identify areas where the course/module does not address race and ethnicity in addition to other protected characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and class. Consider how staff can be supported to ensure the content, assessments and delivery of the curriculum is diverse and representative of the student population and the wider society. Start by identifying areas where you have ticked unsure, no evidence of criteria on the course/module and then progress to areas where the course/module(s) only somewhat meets the criteria.

It is recommended that you take into consideration how you will build identity, community and competence within your course. Note, that this relates to both students and staff. It is recommended that you start by focusing on how you build identity and community in the first instance. Once this has been established then consider how you aim to build competence.

For additional guidance on how to take the health check forward and information on decolonising the curriculum staff development workshops please contact LTE-ADMIN@canterbury.ac.uk

How does the curriculum allow students to see themselves and the contributions of others within the profession and the wider society? How does the curriculum celebrate uniqueness in the form of intersectionality?

Build Identity

Inclusive and Decolonised Curriculum

Build Competence

Build Community

How does the curriculum develop understanding and employability skills?

How does the curriculum foster good relationships between students (peer-to-peer) and academic staff? How does it foster a sense of belonging?
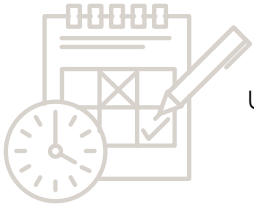
Once you have evaluated and reflected on your current curriculum and practices, using the table below reconsider and embed new practices that are accessible to all, reflective of our society, promotes a sense of belonging, critical reflection and education for social justice.

It is highly recommended that the student voice is incorporated. This can be achieved through co-creation or consultations with students.

	A curriculum that builds identity, belonging and community	A curriculum that provides criticality	A curriculum that explores cultural capital	A curriculum that builds competence and allows students to see themselves in the world
The Course Concept				
The Course Content				
The Delivery				
The Assessments and Feedback				

Adapted from Kingston University

Using the table below set out your priorities.

Priority	Activity	Actions	Impact	Output/measure of outcomes	Actionee	Estimated completion date

Practical tips.

- Set time aside to continuously review and reflect on the curriculum and consider all aspects of the curriculum (concept, content, delivery, assessments, feedback and placement experience)

- Ensure that you include a range of perspectives and voices

- Ensure that you are considering all marginalised groups and the impact of intersectionality

- Provide students with intrapersonal and interpersonal activities. Use learning activities and assessments to challenge assumptions and broaden student's understanding of the subject discipline, profession and the world

- Use learning activities and assessments as an opportunity to build allyship and collective solidarity

- Collaborate and co-create with students and external stakeholders. Consider the use of compassionate pedagogy

- Understand the diversity of your students and provide opportunities for them to share their lived experiences

- Educate yourself on race, racism and privilege. Engage with and embed staff development workshops.

Useful resources.

- Canterbury Christ Church University Closing Our Gap Blackboard page: https://learn. canterbury.ac.uk/webapps/blackboard/content/listContentEditable.jsp?content_id=_1956359_1&course_id=_9875_1

- Advance HE Decolonisation of the curriculum- a conversation

- Decolonising the University by Gurminder K Bhaambra, Dalia Gebrial   and Nişancıoğlu (2018)

- Dismantling Race in Higher Education; Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy by Jason Arday (2018)

- Decolonising the curriculum Meera Sabaratnam

- Navigating the 'Decolonising' process: Avoiding pitfalls and some Do's and Don't's by Harshad Keval (2019) Discover Society

- UCL Inclusive curriculum checklist

- Kingston University Inclusive Curriculum framework

- Decolonising SOAS

- https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jan/30/students-want-their-curriculums-decolonised-are-universities-listening

- Wonke HE How not to decolonise your curriculum

Contact information.

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