

<b>Committee:</b>	Education Committee
<b>Title of paper:</b>	Decolonising the curriculum
<b><u>Classification:</u></b>	Restricted to Education Committee members, University and Students' Union staff.
<b>Action required:</b>	For discussion, approval and recommendation to Senate
<b>Sponsor(s):</b>	Professor Madeline Eacott, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)
<b>Author(s):</b>	Professor Madeline Eacott, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and USG Race Inclusion Champion Dr Hannah Gibson, Co-Chair of the Race Equality Self Assessment Team and project lead on 'Decolonising the curriculum at Essex: anti-racist pedagogy, and learning and teaching for all'
<b>Date of paper:</b>	25 September 2020

<b>1.</b>	<b>Purpose of the report</b>
<p>The paper sets out the context for decolonising the curriculum and recommends that the University takes action to ensure that the curriculum supports success for every student from every background.</p>	

<b>2.</b>	<b>Executive summary</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A key commitment of our Education Strategy is to provide a transformative education to every student from every background.</li> <li>2. Despite some previous work to ensure an inclusive curriculum, the university still has significant ethnicity gaps in both award outcomes and satisfaction scores.</li> <li>3. A recent listening exercise identified the curriculum as a major area of concern to our BAME students.</li> <li>4. The paper proposes that each department has a plan to decolonise its curriculum and that resources and support to facilitate this is provided.</li> </ol>	

<b>3.</b>	<b>Resource implications (financial and staffing)</b>
N/A	

<b>4.</b>	<b>Legal and regulatory considerations</b>
N/A	

<b>5.</b>	<b>Equality impact assessment</b>
<p>The purpose of the paper is to increase equality in outcome and satisfaction.</p>	

<b>6.</b>	<b>Consultation undertaken/required</b>
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An early draft of the proposals was shared with the Tackling Racism Working Group. Versions of this paper were shared with DDEs, Executive Deans, Deputy Director of People and Culture and the Head of EDI.

<b>7.</b>	<b>Analysis of risk</b>
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<b>8.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
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Education Committee is asked to recommend the following for approval by Senate:

1. All departments to have an action plan to decolonise their curriculum with a timescale for completion. Plans to be submitted to the Deputy Dean (Education) by June 2021.
2. A series of resources be developed to support departments to decolonise their curricula.
3. A series of events to support departments in decolonising their curricula be held.

# Decolonising the curriculum

## Introduction

1. Eliminating success gaps is one of the KPIs of the 2019-2025 University Strategy. In 2018-19, 84.7% of white students obtained a good degree at Essex while for BAME students the proportion was 69.3%, an award gap of 15.3%. A joint report published in May 2019 by UUK and the NUS (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #Closingthegap) suggested that nationally the gap is 13%.
2. Analysis of the 2020 NSS results also showed an ethnicity satisfaction gap. While 82.8% of white students and 85.7% of Asian students agreed with the statement *Overall I am satisfied with my course*, the proportion of Black students agreeing was 76.2% representing a satisfaction gap of 6.6%.
3. In an email to all staff on June 3rd 2020, the VC acknowledged the serious issue of racism in the university and launched a listening exercise to inform further work. The listening exercise was open to all students, staff and alumni. The need to decolonise the curriculum emerged strongly as one of four themes arising from the listening exercise.
4. The content of the curriculum and how it is delivered and assessed could contribute to both the award gap and the satisfaction gap. Decolonising the curriculum is part of our efforts to ensure that education at Essex offers a transformational education to every student from every background.

## Previous work

5. Previous recent work at national level includes the 2015 NUS *Why is my curriculum white?* campaign and the 2019 joint report from UUK and the NUS entitled *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #Closingthegap*.
6. At Essex, the 3-year curriculum review of 2014-2017 included *Inclusive Curriculum (including global community and outlook and equality and diversity)* as one of its themes. As part of the work of the review, the Achieving Potential project was established in 2016 to provide coordination and direction to address any significant award gaps. This involved an Achieving Potential Steering Group concentrating on educational issues relating to achievement differentials, such as ensuring an inclusive curriculum and developing a growth mind-set, and an Achieving Potential Toolkit. Nonetheless Essex still has a significant award gap and the curriculum was still identified as a major theme in the recent Tackling Racism listening exercise.
7. Recognising the strategic importance of inclusivity in our teaching, in 2019-20 two projects were funded from the Education Strategic Funds. One project aimed to create resources to decolonise curricula at Essex while the other sought to diversify images used in lectures.
8. Dr Hannah Gibson and Dr Kyle Jerro, in collaboration with Samira Diebire (SU Black Officer 2019-20), have set up an informal working group on decolonising the curriculum and anti-racist pedagogy which has been meeting since spring 2020. There is a mailing list of 63 members. They have developed a reading list and resource list on Talis which has been shared with departmental inclusivity leads, and an active anti-racist reading group.
9. A series of blog posts about decolonisation of the curriculum have been featured in Essex Weekly and Essex Spirit, with 5 published to date and others planned.
10. Some departments have already made good progress in work to decolonise curricula. For example, LiFITS has been addressing the issue and as a result over the last 3 years

has consistently had an award gap of under 10% and in 2018-19 the gap was eliminated. A number of departments have recently convened working groups to address the issue, including Law, EBS, Sociology and Psychology. There is however a wide range in how advanced departments are in their progress on the issue.

## **Decolonising the curriculum at Essex**

11. A key aim outlined in our Education Strategy is to provide a transformational education for every student from every background and to eliminate any outcome gaps. We aim to ensure that all departments have plans in place to decolonise their curricula to support our strategic goals. Resources and support will be put in place to facilitate this.
12. There is not a single definition of what is meant by decolonising the curriculum. As an example Keele University's *Decolonizing the Curriculum Manifesto* defines it as:

“creating spaces and resources for a dialogue among all members of the university on how to imagine and envision all cultures and knowledge systems in the curriculum, and with respect to what is being taught and how it frames the world.’.
13. In their blog in Essex Weekly in 2020 Dr Hannah Gibson and Dr Kyle Jerro wrote:

“The term ‘decolonisation’ means different things to different people [...] we are using it to highlight the link between present-day racial inequalities and broader historical processes of colonialism. In the context of education, it is based on the observation that global histories of Western colonial domination have impacted on – and limited – what is considered knowledge and whose knowledge is recognised. This has in turn affected both what we teach and how we teach. By decolonising the curriculum, we seek to engage with what are in many instances the problematic historic origins of our disciplines, unpack diverse bodies of knowledge and approaches to learning, and to explore ways to make education as equal and just as possible.”
14. For some, particularly in the sciences, the term “decolonising the curriculum” may appear to have little resonance with their discipline. However, acknowledging the history of the field, how it may have contributed to unequal systems, who makes up the ‘canon’ and how inequalities are maintained by this can be helpful approaches across disciplines. Terms such as “developing an inclusive curriculum” may be preferred by some, although others believe that the term “inclusive” suggests being allowed to be included and is therefore othering. Here we are using the term decolonisation of the curriculum broadly to mean examining what we teach, how we teach, and how we assess to ensure that success is equally available to every student from every background, with particular regard to differences of race, ethnicity and culture.
15. The following principles for decolonising the curriculum at Essex are proposed:
  - i. The curriculum should support every student from every background to achieve success and so must be inclusive.
  - ii. The curriculum should be defined by academics as experts in their field. In defining the curriculum, there should be recognition that a global history of domination has impacted on, and limited, what is considered knowledge and whose knowledge is recognised. This in turn has historically affected what and how we teach. In recognising these effects, we seek to define a more inclusive curriculum.
  - iii. A review of the curriculum should involve students, including those from marginalised groups.
  - iv. A review of the curriculum should include:
    - a. all modules at all levels

- b. consideration of which bodies of knowledge are considered to be core/compulsory and which optional
- c. consideration of the content of what is taught, including examples used and recommended reading.
- d. consideration of how the curriculum is taught, including language and images used.
- e. consideration of how students experience, and thus engage with, the curriculum differently on the basis of their race and ethnicity, and how they can provide feedback on their experience.
- f. consideration of the methods of assessment used: do some types of assessment privilege some groups over others?

## Recommendations

1. All departments to have an action plan to decolonising their curriculum with a timescale to completion. Plan to be submitted to DDE by June 2021.

Action Owner: DDEs

Where work on decolonisation is already advanced/complete, this plan can simply outline ongoing/completed work. This will present an opportunity to share good practice with other departments. Where the work is complete, departments should offer evidence of its impact, if available. While plans are to be submitted to DDEs by June 2021, this should not preclude working on actions before this date. The expectation is that a revised curriculum is in place for AY 2022-23 at the latest.

2. A series of resources be developed to support departments to decolonise their curricula.

Action Owner: Head of EDI, People and Culture.

Some resources already exist, including the Achieving Potential Toolkit and the reading list and resources list on Talis. These will be reviewed and developed as necessary and brought together at a single point of access. As examples of good practice emerge, they will be added to the resources available.

3. A series of events to support departments in decolonising their curricula be held.

A seminar series in autumn term co-convened by Hannah Gibson and Colin Reilly is already planned. This is a joint project between University of Essex and University of the Western Cape (South Africa) looking at decolonising the university. Webinars will be held every 2-weeks alternating between 'internal' and 'external speakers' and will be open to students and staff. Sessions on decolonisation are taking place at the Education Away Day and the Senior Staff Conference in Autumn term. Other events might include: the autumn meeting of the Directors of Education Network meeting to include discussion and sharing of good practice across departments; a bespoke meeting of departmental Inclusivity Leads on the issue in Autumn term; a session at the Annual Good Teaching Conference in spring devoted to examples of good practice.

Action Owner: Head of EDI, People and Culture.

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**25 September, 2020.**