**Taking steps to decolonising our curriculum - LJMU**

Nicola Koyama – Chair Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group

Co-Director of the Research Centre in Evolutionary Anthropology & Palaeoecology

School’s Equality Coordinator

School of Biological and Environment Sciences

Events of the past year have turned a spotlight on plans and promises to address racial inequality within academia. There has been a surge in publications highlighting racism in academia and calling for action, for example, from Advance HE, Universities UK, the NUS and high profile science journals.

One obvious and stark example of inequality within universities is the long-standing ethnicity awarding gap (more widely known as the BAME Attainment Gap). In July 2020 the Office for Students1 reported the percentage of home students awarded a good (first or 2:1) degree in England was 22 percentage points lower for black students than for white students. Understanding and reducing this gap has been a focus for UK universities over the last 20 years but it is still very much apparent. In recent years, student movements have campaigned for a key action to help address the gap: to decolonise the curriculum.

Decolonising the curriculum is a concept developed from decades of social science research, particularly from researchers from the ‘Global South’2 and one highlighted by the Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE) as a response to the ethnicity awarding gap back in 2008. Currently, actions to decolonise curricula are widely supported by national organisations such as Advance HE, Universities UK, Higher Education Policy Institute and the NUS, with renewed calls gaining momentum in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Whilst there is much debate about whether universities within the UK, a country with a history of colonial oppression, can adopt a decolonial approach, it is an opportunity to re-examine what we teach, why we teach it how we deliver it, and how we address inclusivity.

LJMU’s commitment to a decolonial approach is reflected in its Access & Participation Plan (2020-2025) stating a decolonised curriculum will be developed over this five year period. Viewing programme curricula with a decolonial lens is entirely subject-specific, and whilst development of generic teaching and learning material can support this, what’s needed is action by every staff member to engage with a process of critical self-reflection and review their module content and pedagogical approach. Within the sciences, this is particularly challenging with many unfamiliar with this perspective. From my own discussion, there is a willingness to act but many are unsure how to proceed.

Working with the LJMU EDI Manager Moni Akinsanya and her team, and with the strong support of our School Director, Jason Kirby, the School of Biological & Environmental Sciences started, in 2020, to increase staff and student awareness about decolonial thought. We are beginning to make changes to what we teach and how we deliver it. This was approached initially with a department talk (from myself, the School EDI Coordinator) along with the creation of a repository of subject-specific resources. This was followed by a open, public seminar series of international, subject-specific guest speakers to engage wider discussion and exchange ideas between staff.

Recognising the need for wider awareness and support across the university, Moni Akinsanya and I founded the LJMU Decolonising The Curriculum Working Group in February 2021 to better coordinate activities, facilitate progress and share good practice. The group’s vision is

“To spotlight privilege, inequality and to decolonise the systems of thought, working practices, curricula and cultures within the university”

We represent staff from all Faculties and importantly, connect with departments across the university:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Decolonising The Curriculum Working Group Members | | |
| Chair (Biological & Environmental Sciences) | | Nicola Koyama |
| EDI Manager | | Moni Akinsanya |
| Academic representatives | Education  Art & Design  Justice Studies  Humanities & Social Sciences | Judith Enriquez  Javier Pereda  Dominique Walker  Ross Dawson |
| Business | Olatunde Durowoju  Jane Eme-Power |
| Civil Eng & Built Environment  Computer Science & Maths  Engineering  Astrophysics | Denise Lee  Atif Waraich  Christian Matthews  Stacey Habergham-Mawson |
| Nursing & Allied Health | Andrea Newman |
| Psychology  Public Health Institute | Anna Law |
| Pharmacy & Biomolecular Sciences | Shaqil Chaudary  Kehinde Ross |
| JMSU | | Lila Tamea |
| Academic Registry Representative | | Helen Summers |
| Teaching & Learning Academy Representative | | Liz Clifford |
| Doctoral Academy Representative | | Victoria Sheppard |

Current key actions include

- contacting Heads of Department to engage support

- securing internship funding from the Teaching & Learning Academy to

* design and construct a decolonising the curriculum microsite to increase awareness within and outside the university and to connect and support staff and students (Kehinde Ross, Nicola Koyama)
* carry out whiteness in the curriculum audits (Shaquil Chaudry, Denise Lee, and also Ian Sadler, Tori Sprung)

- advising on the inclusion of a decolonial approach in curriculum design guidance (Curriculum Design Policy and Inclusive Practice Policy) and in programme validation and review with the Teaching & Learning Academy and Academic Registry respectively

- providing a university repository of resources through creation of a dedicated module on Canvas

- monitoring associated workload and campaigning for workload recognition as we recognise that the burden of equality and diversity action can fall upon individuals from minority backgrounds

An approach to decolonise the curriculum is not restricted to just what we teach and how we deliver material but should extend to developing an outreach strategy to target recruitment of underrepresented groups, ensuring those groups have visible role models, hiring diverse academic and operational staff, allowing students to see themselves reflected in their curricula, providing culturally-appropriate pastoral care and supporting progression within academia. Going forward the Working Group will support all of these areas and crucially, will campaign for positive action to increase the percentage of Black and Asian staff at LJMU.

References

1. [Office for Students (2020) Degree attainment: Black, Asian and minority ethnic students](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-students/)
2. [Moosavi, L. (2020). The decolonial bandwagon and the dangers of intellectual decolonisation. *International Review of Sociology*, *30*(2), 332-354.](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03906701.2020.1776919?casa_token=g9xLJs99TdEAAAAA%3Af1feaaz6ksj4wErQUnrT6E59bCi03ghus_Uuj1ETN7DIhZnId9mq4EfhznPfOLp70jfWKF4p7OxlVyk)