

# A1: Decolonisation of Teaching & Learning

APP PAR Project Cycle 3 2021-2022

## Appendix: Staff Survey Questions

1. Background information		
Topic	Perceptions of decolonisation of teaching and learning	
Strand	A: Black British perspectives	X
	B: Disability/Mental Health perspectives	
Specific research question	Does a focus on decolonisation of teaching and learning provide more opportunities for a shared understanding of the connection between decolonisation and awarding gaps, that might be helpful for both students and staff?	
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2. Executive summary
<p>This project's aim was to understand staff members' perceived relevance of decolonisation across multiple disciplines on various aspects of teaching and learning practices. The findings of the research showed that STEMM disciplines face difficulties in implementing decolonisation teaching practices due to the nature of the content. While for Arts/ Humanities and Social sciences, classes are more discussion-based making it easier to establish a student-led environment. However, all disciplines raised concerns about the need for more protected time and training/resources for them to fully implement decolonisation initiatives. From the surveys and interviews, it is clear that there is a need for more decolonisation initiatives and general support from superiors or departmental staff to effectively implement the decolonisation teaching practices.</p>

3. Rationale
<p>In the University of Cambridge, institutional analysis has indicated that Black students are less likely to get a first than their White peers, commonly referred to as the awarding gap (BIT, 2020). This pattern can be noted at other higher education institutions, with the charity Advance-HE noting that there was a 10.2 percentage point awarding gap for first-class degrees between BAME students and their white peers, though the reasoning for this is initially unclear and multi-faceted. At the University of Cambridge, some steps have been taken to limit the pervasive nature of these awarding gaps (such as diversifying assessment styles) but it is clear more work is necessary to create a fairer and more conducive learning environment for all.</p>

Among colleges and universities in the United Kingdom, Black graduation rates are still the lowest out of all ethnic groups. In the past year, about 19.1% of Black students graduated with a first degree compared to 38.2% of White students (Gov. uk, 2019). This leaves a significant awarding gap between Black and White undergraduate students, therefore it is necessary to understand the factors behind these rates.

Many sociologists have suggested institutional factors and biases in the design of the curriculum (Liyanage, 2020) and the learning or teaching of students in the class which may affect their performances (Tran 2021). Most efforts in decolonisation have focused on curriculum review and little on teaching and learning. In a book by Tran, interactions between the student and teacher affect the outcome or the comprehension of the material by the student. In particular, there are structures of learning (including power dynamics, and narratives) that Black students find harder to navigate and this distress reduces the chances of graduation (Small and Winship, 2007). Additionally, decolonisation of the teaching and learning of STEMM disciplines is given less attention. This misjudgement can be caused by many reasons, with suggestions that the 'objective truth' inherent in science would somehow be above the widespread influence of colonialism and the social context created by imperialist histories (Dessent et al., 2021). Hence, we seek to understand the relevance of decolonisation across multiple disciplines on various aspects of teaching and learning - including the content of teaching as well as teacher-student dynamics. Using the TRAAC model (Teaching approach, Relationship, Activity and Assessment, and Content) by (Tran, 2021), we aim to answer these questions:

- What is the relevance of decolonisation across multiple disciplines on various aspects of teaching and learning in STEMM vs Arts/Humanities and Social Sciences? - Including teaching practices, student-teacher and student-student interactions, learning activities and assessment.
- Are decolonisation initiatives perceived as relevant to addressing the awarding gaps experienced by Black students, especially in the STEMM discipline?
- Do staff think that a focus on decolonisation of the curriculum and teaching and learning can help to create an inclusive learning environment and address the awarding gaps experienced by Black undergraduates?

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5. Decolonizing the Undergraduate Chemistry Curriculum: An Account of How to Start (Dessent et al., 2021)

#### 4. Contextual information (literature review)

##### 1. Decolonisation of learning and teaching across multiple disciplines

Decolonisation of learning and teaching has led to a rethinking of interactions between students and teachers in a classroom. Many studies have been on the decolonisation of the curriculum but there is a need to decolonise how students are taught as attested by Mbembe, "*We cannot keep teaching the way we have always been taught...the student-teacher relationship has to change*" (Mbembe, 2015). A decolonised classroom is where different forms of intelligence exist and is student-centred. Oftentimes, it is difficult for Black students to connect with content and learning material materials to their lived experiences (Paul et al., 2021) and let alone to connect to the learning style often suited to the

European style of communicating (Hua, 2019). The nature of interactions in the classroom greatly affects how students understand the materials and even their approach to different social issues (Tran, 2021, p.60). Exploring the student-teacher interactions may help in finding solutions to bridge the awarding gaps and improve learning practices that are inclusive of all ethnic groups.

## 2. Differences in teaching and learning practices across disciplines

While many efforts have been toward the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences due to the nature of their courses (student-led approach), less work has been applied to the teaching standards in STEM disciplines. There remains the misconception that, because the sciences are striving towards a supposedly objective ideal, the teaching structure is beyond the social complexities that are more openly discussed in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The academic focus (Moeketsi and Ed, 2013) may appear to base itself less on approaches or realities that exist in a diverse world. However, it is important to note that this is a fallacy. Colonial legacies remain prevalent in the sciences from the way knowledge is generated and distributed, one example being the method in which genome-wide association studies (GWAS) are conducted, meaning that most people represented are of European ancestry; this has a direct effect on understanding diseases and targeting public health (BSI, 2022).

Though there is a need for more work on the decolonization of the material or knowledge shared in the classroom (Taylor et al., 2021). It is of equal importance that the teaching practices be inclusive to accommodate Black students. STEM disciplines still remain an untouched area often characterised by blindness, awareness of how to include materials that represent the majority and the practices to accommodate everyone (Bhopal, 2018; Wong et al., 2020). For instance, in medical studies, the diagnosis and case studies are often on white people perpetuating the legacy of institutional racial biases (Lokugamage, Ahillan and Pathberiya, 2020). This leaves Black and minorities in a place where they cannot relate or associate, therefore affecting their learning.

## 3. Conclusion

Decolonising for learning and teaching is relevant to all principles. The awarding gap for Black students is present in all disciplines, and it is therefore evident that targeted approaches that involve interrogating the content of the curriculum for all disciplines are necessary. Much of the discourse around decolonising has revolved around the Arts/Humanities and the Social Sciences, primarily because of the approaches taken, which has often been (as noted by Prof Nazira Karodia) to source alternative texts and excluded histories, then frame them as 'exotic influences on Western culture'. Other less tokenistic approaches for decolonising the Arts/Humanities curriculum also initially appear more tangible due to the nature of the course content, which lends itself more to reviewing the social, historical, and economic structures upon which society is built. In contrast, there appears to be a limited exploration of and more resistance to decolonisation within STEM disciplines because of perceived objectivity and the restrictive notion that science is entirely apolitical. Further exploration of staff perceptions of decolonisation across disciplines across the collegiate Cambridge is required alongside decolonial practices for teaching and learning.

STEMM discipline remains an unexplored area when it comes to decolonisation for reasons described above. However, with an increasingly globalised world, it is crucial that STEM fields create an environment where Black students feel welcomed, can comprehend the material and engage and above all relate to the materials taught in class, and in turn, limit the awarding gap.

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## 5. What do you hope to achieve with this qualitative research project?

This study expands on the the findings of the Cycle 2 student-led APP PAR project titled, “Representation in the Curriculum” by:

- exploring staff perspectives on decolonisation across multiple disciplines
- exploring decolonisation of teaching and learning beyond curriculum review and reform
- exploring whether decolonisation initiatives are perceived as relevant to address awarding gaps experienced by Black undergraduates at Cambridge.

This study is novel in its involvement of staff from multiple disciplines as well as its range of themes explored, such as awarding gaps and learning and teaching of disciplines in the classroom. The study intends to decipher/uncover ways to enhance teaching and learning practices that support teaching staff and is inclusive for all students.

## 6. Methods: generation of evidence

This report is based on data collected through an online survey and two focus groups. The online survey was developed on Qualtrics and focus groups were conducted on Microsoft Teams.

Academic staff of the University of Cambridge were encouraged to participate in the online survey, and there was an option to express an interest in a follow-up discussion via a focus group at a later date.

The online survey had both open- and closed-ended questions making a total of 26 questions. 7 questions focused on learning and teaching, power dynamics and support for implementing decolonisation practices were analysed. The focus group had 5 questions which focused on exploring decolonisation initiatives.

The study targeted participants working at the University of Cambridge and faculty involved in the teaching of STEM, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines. The survey was shared with staff members of the University of Cambridge. The online survey was circulated by email to mailing lists of three cohorts (2019 - 2021, 2020-2021, 2021- 2022): Undergraduate Supervisor Training, PGCTLHE, and Teaching Associates Programme.

Focus groups were conducted for members who expressed interest in further discussion in the final question of the online survey. Participants had access to the consent form and the participant sheet in Qualtrics and indicated their consent before responding to the survey (or exiting the survey). None of the questions in the online survey was compulsory. Participants of the focus group were sent a consent form and participant information sheet prior to the date of the focus group. The focus group call was live transcribed for ease of analysis and was not audio or video recorded. Participants were made aware that they could choose to leave at any time as well as withdraw their responses by a certain date (prior to the start of analysis).

### **Demographics,**

The distribution of data collected is shown below in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

#### ***Online survey***

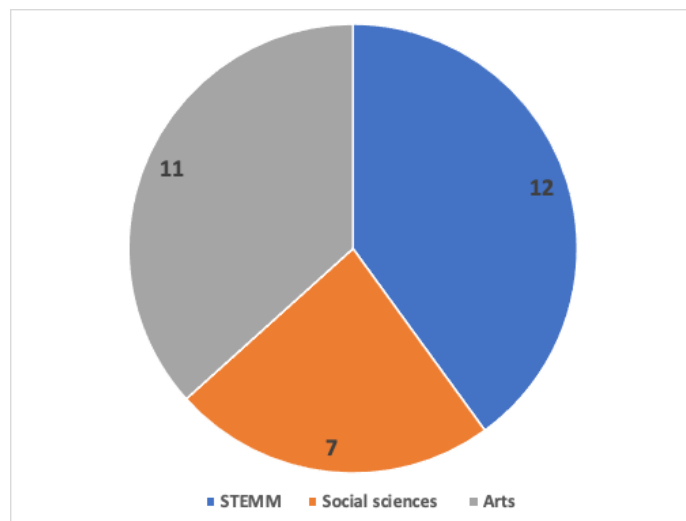
Total participants who responded to the online survey: 46

Final number of responses included in the final dataset after removing incomplete, and half-done responses: 30

No of participants from STEMM: 12

No of participants from Arts/Humanities: 11

No of participants from Social Sciences: 7



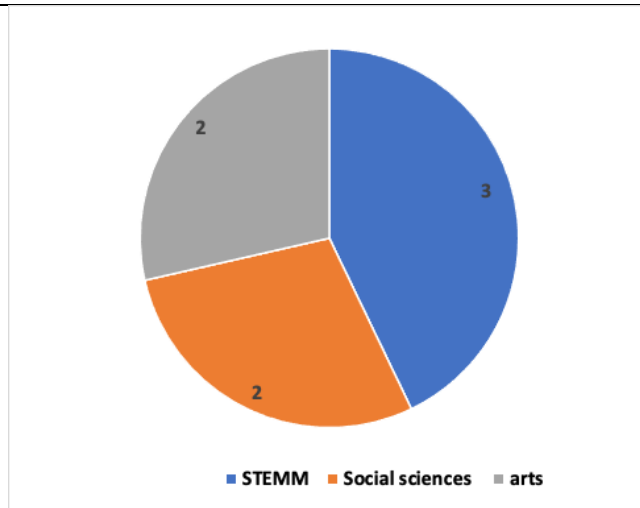
**Figure 1:** Distribution of disciplines of the participants from the survey.

#### ***Focus group***

Total of 7 participants with each focus group having 3 and 4 participants, respectively. Focus groups were held in April 2022 and facilitated by the students researchers (authors of this report).

Focus group 1: 4 participants

Focus group 2: 3 participants



**Figure 2:** Distribution of disciplines of the participants from focus groups.

Since the project topic included sensitive topics such as racism and forms of discrimination and possibly created uncomfortable conversations. Participants' names and responses were anonymised and questions were not mandatory to answer. Participants had the option to respond to questions either by talking or writing in the Teams chat. The focus group was not audio or video recorded to make the conversation more free-flowing and comfortable. For participants who wished to share their personal experiences, permission was sought. Participants were permitted to opt-out at any time in case the conversations became uncomfortable for them.

## 7. Small project research findings

To explore the impact of teaching practices on awarding gaps experienced by Black students, a survey was sent to staff members and the responses were analysed for similarities and differences across disciplines and recurring themes were highlighted.

Overall, most of the participants (56%) were aware of the awarding gaps experienced by Black students at Cambridge, mostly anecdotally. Additionally, most of the staff members from Arts/Humanities and Social Sciences perceived the institutional patterns for the awarding gaps to be different between disciplines, while respondents from STEMM perceived the patterns to be the same between disciplines. Importantly, across disciplines, respondents stated that decolonisation was perceived to be 'of equal relevance to Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences and STEMM', while disagreeing that 'STEMM is more neutral and objective, so issues related to race are less relevant to the curriculum'.

### **Perceived role of decolonisation to address awarding gaps**

Most respondents felt that decolonisation initiatives within their disciplines can address awarding gaps. However, were uncertain about what these initiatives could be, wanted further information about existing data, and suggested that decolonisation could be one piece of a complex puzzle. Instead, participants seemed to point to the social-economic background as another factor that contributes to these huge awarding gaps. Those that can afford education, extra lessons and tutors will always be at an advantage. One participant commented, "*A crucial factor, therefore, is inequality of wealth and income distribution, which I am not sure that decolonising the curriculum would do much good in addressing*".

*"(...) My instinct would be that issues of decolonisation are relevant, but not among the most significant factor driving an achievement gap compared to say peculiarities of socio-economic background, the ease with which people settle into Cambridge's cultural norms or instead need to expend a lot of energy worrying about their wardrobe/gowns/manners etc, the extent to which certain schools prepare students for the rather unusual pedagogical style of Cambridge, etc (...)" (Staff, Social Sciences)*

It was evident that staff members from the social sciences and the arts/humanities disciplines had more developed understanding and language to elaborate on the role of decolonisation.

*"(...) Decolonisation, for me, is an important approach to making 'hidden exclusionary structures and practices' visible, so we can reflect on them (as educators in HE) and then challenge them through practice and curriculum transformation." (Staff, Social Sciences)*

*"(...) For me, decolonisation [sic] initiatives must reach deeply into the mythos, structures and practices of 'the university', examining hubris (eg 'it is possible to map everything'), detachment (eg: non-humane, non-biophilic ways of organising the institution, of teaching, of communicating and indeed conceptualising research). For me, this is not only about awarding gaps - although that is significant surface level change - but also broader conditions of possibility for sustainable and sustaining justice." (Staff, Arts/Humanities)*

Despite not having clarity about what decolonisation initiatives might be in STEMM, the need for decolonisation was recognised to create inclusive spaces for students.

*"Decolonisation initiatives raise awareness for societal issues in general, which is lacking in many STEMM environments. This could lead to a better understanding for the reasons underlying the awarding gaps." (Staff, STEMM)*

Interestingly, most participants (60%) felt that there might be a 'hidden curriculum' within their discipline that could reward or marginalise different student groups. However, it is noteworthy that most participants from STEMM reported to not be encouraged to reflect on different perspectives/contexts that might be relevant to students in their course, as compared to their colleagues in Social Sciences and Arts/Humanities. Importantly, it was highlighted that the issue needed to be acknowledged and it was time to *"put into practice without adding additional burden to Black students and staff."*

### **Relationships within the classroom: power dynamics, inclusive discussions, teaching approaches**

In Humanities and Arts, classrooms are more student-focused though exams and assessments are teacher-led due to the content being delivered or assessed. The majority agreed on including the egalitarian practices in learning which include discussion, participation and collaboration between students and students are often encouraged to read beyond the syllabus: *"I encourage students to pursue their interests when they differ from the term plan I set them."* In terms of learning in the classroom, many pointed out the nature of content in Arts/ Humanities to be easier to work with in terms of diversifying reading lists and materials used in class.

*"The nature of my subject (music of the Islamic world, music and global history) makes this easier." (Staff, Arts/History)*

An interesting observation about decolonised curriculum and assessment was made by the respondent below:

*"I especially feel the conflict between my own wish to decolonise my teaching and the need to prepare students for examinations - ultimately, I reproduce the colonised canon because I do not want to disadvantage my students in their preparation for exams." (Staff, Arts/Humanities)*

The relationship between decolonised curriculum and decolonised assessments are yet to be explored, and this quote highlights the difficulties with explorations beyond the curriculum without doing the same for summative assessments.

The majority of participants further emphasised how inclusive interactions are crucial. One participant commented: *"I can understand how it might be perceived to have a white British man as an authority; figure discussing issues pertaining to non-white people."* However, overall, the classroom should be about students and their learning than power dynamics as cogently captured in this quote below.

*"We model just, egalitarian practices. We spend time interrogating terms like inclusion, opportunity, treatment to understand what they really do as concepts. We work to establish structural mechanisms (eg: whole-group co-creation of padlets or discussion pieces; student-led sessions) and cultural practices (eg: more appreciation than criticism; prioritising developing deep listening and epistemic humility across our team, as well as in a teaching setting) that not only signal but enable true collaboration and participation. We often explicitly signal ways for students to sit more ably with difference, discomfort and tension; and we teach ways to synthesise the power of personal experience and the voice we bring, with collective, structure-oriented action" (Staff, Arts/Humanities)*

In the Social Sciences, participants confirmed to have incorporated student-focused approaches in classrooms. While teachers make *"(...) content accessible for them, including by tailoring examples, language, etc. to be more familiar to them(...)"*, a respondent notes the importance of mutual trust between the staff member and the students.

*"What matters to people is the sense that they are interacting with someone whose heart is in the right place. If that person occasionally puts their foot in it that's fine - you'll talk through it with them because you know they're trying. The incessant politicization of human interactions, which is an unfortunate byproduct of some of the more hamfisted efforts at inclusivity, doesn't help build these sorts of relationships. Indeed, I find that it can undermine the patience, empathy, forgiveness, and steady work required to build relationships between people from diverse backgrounds." (Staff, Social Sciences)*

For some, the supervision spaces provide opportunities to foster participation, include diverse perspectives, and develop a rapport with the students from different backgrounds.

*"(...) I encourage students to share these perspectives and try to role-model empathic listening (which is critical for good pedagogy). If students have disagreements we try to hash them out, starting with understanding your interlocuter in good faith. All that said, when teaching undergraduates I think it is reasonable to think that you know a lot more than they do and they people need to walk before they can run (...) Discussion is part of that, and cultivating a desire to learn, but I wouldn't go so far as to give the students the impression that they already know much at all." (Staff, Social Sciences)*

*"The clause 'without making assumptions about cultural traditions or social backgrounds' seems a bit strict to me. I find that students often respond very positively to a teacher who very much shows an awareness of cultural traditions and social background. That makes the teacher appear empathic, worldly, and switched on." (Staff, Social Sciences)*

Supervisions are spaces to negotiate and challenge assumptions, for example, when *"White students 'expect' Black students to explain racial issues for them."* However, most participants reported unprotected time as a major constraint to incorporating inclusive practices in classes, *"Unfortunately,*



*due to the lack of time available for supervisors to prepare for their supervision, my options are limited.* Overall, the nature of learning in Social Sciences does provide room for diverse reading and more perspectives of people.

For respondents from STEMM disciplines, practical ways to incorporate inclusive practices were reported as being small group discussions, presentations for students to interact with each other, and providing opportunities to ask questions. However, the nature of content was perceived to not easily lend to decolonisation. For instance, echoing one participant, *“it's not always easy when you just need to learn a biochemical pathway...there isn't a perspective there, participation generally means making sure everyone has the opportunity to ask and answer questions. “Decolonisation initiatives were stated to be “Not relevant for physics without some serious time wasting.”* The STEMM curriculum is perceived to be prescriptive and therefore has less room for adjustments or enhancements.

*“(…) Where appropriate I have also raised topics related to diversifying and decolonising the curriculum and encouraged students to think about that context. I have given students opportunities to provide me with feedback so that they feel they have some more control over their learning. However, most of the time students expect me to come up with lesson plans and activities to do within supervisions or topics to discuss; perhaps because they are used to stronger power dynamics than I wanted to have within my supervision groups.”* (Staff, STEMM)

*“I try to tell them about scientists who are not cis white men, but there aren't many especially from the early 20thc which are a lot of the experiments they need to know. we talk about how skin colour might alter the presentation of different pathologies/physiologies, but there is a limited amount I think I can do to bring in global perspectives on physiological pathways and biochemistry.”* (Staff, STEMM)

*“(…) Certainly in STEM subjects, the issue of a power dynamic seems less relevant since the course and answers are quite well-prescribed and normally rest on science that has been known for decades or longer. It is extremely rare that a first- or second-year student would be able to contribute a genuinely novel idea to a STEM supervision - the dynamic is essentially always a case of the ‘all-knowing’ teacher directing the discussion.”* (Staff, STEMM)

Interestingly, it was noted that different teaching styles were adopted for the different groups of students, e.g., more hierarchical approaches for Asian students, and mindful participation opportunities so as to not add stress to minoritised students, e.g., women in STEMM. Conversely, a staff member noted that their identity also shapes their interactions with their students.

*“I am young, female, first generation academic, and not British. I know that some students do not take me seriously (written feedback on my lectures not being detailed enough to prepare them for exam, even if I am one of the examiners and I set the questions as well as marking them), while others love my more down to earth style (less grating feedback)”* (Staff, STEMM)

Echoing staff from other disciplines, while supervisions were deemed as spaces for decolonisation initiatives, supervisors did not feel like they had the time or were recognised for their initiatives.

*“I felt I could have done this more, but there is little to no guidance provided to supervisors with ideas for how to include more variety and the (low paid) workload increases dramatically to have to come up with this sort of thing by myself.”* (Staff, STEMM)

Perhaps the STEM curriculum or syllabus could be revised to put room for diverse interactions and innovations in the curriculum as recently demonstrated in the sector research (Dessent et al., 2022)<sup>1</sup>. Overall, all participants honed in on the need to cater for students individually regardless of race or gender and a possible way to implement this will be to reduce the class size to encourage more student-teacher interactions.

Across all disciplines, there was a sense of wanting to do better, enhancing their teaching practices, and addressing any biases that they might have. In relation to having ‘unconscious bias’ that might affect their teaching style, supervisors overwhelmingly said that it was possible to have unconscious bias, but it was important to be aware of it and ensure it does not affect their students.

*“By definition it is difficult to be aware of unconscious bias. I think it is easy to become frustrated with students whose presentation, spelling, handwriting etc is poor, which may correlate with socioeconomic background.”* (Staff, STEM)

*“I am sure that I do, as everyone does. I have not done any test though, so I am just assuming the worst about myself and try to self-police”* (Staff, STEM)

*“There are some groups that I'm not at all familiar with. Prior to arriving in Cambridge, I had spent barely any time with people of British ancestry, and even less with people from Caribbean backgrounds, for example. I'm inevitably a bit awkward around the unfamiliar, but I try to push through this in an open hearted and open minded way to build a connection so that I'm less awkward in the future. I am also conscious of the probability that someone from a marginalised background will be having a relatively hard time of it at Cambridge, so I try to keep a slightly closer eye on these students and check in with them more directly.”* (Staff, Social Sciences)

*“In discussions about issues like race or gender in the discipline, I find myself turning to students who are in minority groups. I want to make sure they have a chance to speak, but balance that with not assuming anything about their life experiences, or putting the pressure on black students to push back against biased ideas and practices”* (Staff, Arts/Humanities)

### **Perception on enhancement opportunities for decolonisation initiatives**

When asked what could be done to encourage and support them and their colleagues to diversify their research/literature, “*examples of good practice*”, “*roadshows to departments*”, discussions at various meetings, role of leadership, “*open conversation with students*” and “*mandatory staff training for existing staff*” were stated as examples for enhancing decolonisation initiatives.

*“Some kind of department-based or course-based handbook for supervisors with suggestions for learning outcomes, marking schemas, examples of what work or certain standards looks like, examples for activities for supervisions especially including aspects of decolonising the curriculum and diversifying assessment etc”* (Staff, STEM)

*“(…) That said, I would love to see a genuine move in Cambridge to co-created, community and practice-based learning. I would love to see a serious conversation on power dynamics as they play out in ideas of what it means to be an academic, and in the processes by which*

<sup>1</sup> Caroline E. H. Dessent, Ruhee A. Dawood, Leonie C. Jones, Avtar S. Matharu, David K. Smith, and Kelechi O. Uleanya (2022). Decolonizing the Undergraduate Chemistry Curriculum: An Account of How to Start. *Journal of Chemical Education*. 99 (1), 5-9. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.1c00397>

*academic staff are promoted, valued and recognised. Bullying, for example, is still a major issue in many contexts across our University. This, along with many other examples - deep prejudices around ethnicity, race and class; disparities in attainment; student unhappiness; staff desolation - suggests that as an institution we are singularly unskilled at talking about and living well with power, even as we either critique it as part of our profession or hold it by virtue of our position.” (Staff, Arts/Humanities)*

But several complexities were also raised.

*“(…) the main thing that frustrates me is how responsibility for decolonising undergraduate [sic] supervisions is being shuttled back and forth between Faculty and Colleges.” (Staff, Arts/Humanities)*

While “*there is no pressure to change and no reward for doing so*” was a sentiment that was shared by some respondents, others felt that the existing structures were “*quite rigid, one can only do so much given the limited number of lectures, huge number of students.*” Additionally, it was noted that while supervisions are spaces for such initiatives, it might not have a direct impact on the summative examinations.

*“Yes, especially when leading curriculum redesign with decolonisation in mind, but still having to work with colleagues who do not see this area as a priority in their teaching. E.g. in Tripos papers that are taught not by one lecturer, but by a group of us, it is difficult to embed this across the whole paper (some of us often have to settle for engaging with this in only our own couple of lectures/topics instead of more consistently across the whole paper, because not everyone teaching in that paper is willing to do the same).” (Staff, Social Sciences)*

*“(…) While I have quite a lot of discretion in how to design supervisions, at the same time I am aware that I must prepare students for a centrally set exam, which sets a limit to how much time I can devote to decolonising and dismantling the power structures [sic] in the classroom and in the teaching materials.” (Staff, Arts/Humanities)*

### **Key themes from the focus groups**

During the focus group, participants further highlighted the initiatives they have managed to implement in teaching. Ideas were brought forward on the nature of teaching at the university, specifically how easy it is for the Arts/ Humanities to implement these practices; “*Naturally, we do seminar-based teaching. A lot is student-led and discussion-based helps a lot of in terms of pedagogical practices.*” There was also a discussion of power imbalances between postgrad students and those holding permanent positions within the faculty who had more scope and could also train their colleagues. One participant commented: “*Real gatekeepers are those behind curriculum development and whole faculty development who do not embrace– leaving it to those at bottom of the hierarchy, undergrad students or supervisors to do work without professional development attached to it, funding/time.*” Therefore to reduce awarding gaps experienced by Black students at the University of Cambridge, there is a need for more work, institutional support, pressure to introduce decolonisation initiatives and protected time for taking the training.

For the participants from the Social Science, decolonisation entails: “*lived experience of a broader range of backgrounds, diversifying reading lists, and also including unconscious bias training*”. The majority have incorporated the decolonisation initiatives in their classes, including the creation of seminars and online training to equip the staff. Often, this is possible due to the nature of learning, for social sciences, “*we are very interdisciplinary so coordination and connections with other disciplines*” help with exposing

students to various lenses of learning. The majority of participants reported to have incorporated decolonisation practices in place which they deem could be improved if more support from senior leadership

For STEM, misunderstanding of what decolonisation entails was highlighted. While in non-STEM fields, it was reported to be easier to understand and implement these initiatives, *“but in physiology (natural scientists, medics, vets), not sure how to do it”*. Learning material in science is focused mainly on Eurocentric material, for instance, *“clinical trials are done on white people, and there are differences in participation from different communities”*, further highlighting how rigid the STEM field is. The rigidity of the content emanates from having decisions regarding curriculum development made by superiors who are not involved in teaching, *“I follow what I am told to do by doctoral supervisor and unsure as to how to incorporate these conversations”*.

Some were concerned with where to go for resources since little information is provided by the university and the need for more protected time. In closing, all participants endorsed that diversifying the assessment and teaching methods could reduce the awarding gaps experienced by Black students at the University of Cambridge as *“Diversifying the assessment format can be a way to acknowledge differences in study skills.”*

## **8. Outcomes of research/implications for Cambridge practices and processes.**

The report brings forth the diversity of perceptions and challenges experienced by staff to embed decolonised practices in their teaching and learning. Specifically, we report the STEM field to have difficulties in understanding what decolonisation entails in their context and ways to put that into practice. Arts/Humanities and Social sciences have incorporated decolonisation initiatives though there is room for improvement and more support from those in positions of power. Additionally, the report has shown how teaching and learning practices can contribute to the awarding gaps and the need for decolonisation in this aspect of education. Overall, there was an enthusiasm for change and enhancement, echoing Mbembe (2015), there is a need for creating an inclusive environment where different forms of learning exist.

## **9. RECOMMENDED ACTION/FUTURE DIRECTION**

1. From the survey and focus group, it would seem more support from those in positions of power and departmental staff is needed to implement decolonisation initiatives. The majority reported to lack of resources and training on implementing teaching practices that are diverse.
2. There is a need for more protected time and recognition. While the majority of participants highlighted the importance of training on decolonisation, the time taken to learn is not compensated, hence most of the staff members are not able to take that time to learn or to do training.
3. Increase in initiatives such as EDI within departments but allowing more student representation. This gives students the institutional power to be part of the decisions making concerning classroom learning and teaching and be able to voice out their concerns.
4. In the focus group, it was clear that staff members gained further knowledge and were able to support one another (albeit through our limited time) via discussion and sharing experiences. This could be expanded into an open forum, where staff members may discuss their techniques for the decolonisation of teaching and learning. This could be separated by discipline, alongside each area

(Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, and STEM) also receiving top-down guidance and support from superiors in the process of decolonising their respective curriculums.

### [Appendix: Staff Survey Questions](#)