Decolonising the Curriculum Project:
Through the Kaleidoscope

Manifesto

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Summary

For full project findings and recommendations see p. 6.

1. Pedagogy and powerful learning experiences: The colour of our curriculum

We need a diversity of perspectives, particularly from scholars of colour and from the global south (including access to *reading lists from around the world*), so that our curriculum reflects and addresses a range of experiences and *promotes cultural democracy*, as well as developing *all* students into critical and analytical thinkers and leaders within their education.

2. Race, identity & belonging: Promoting inclusion / countering exclusion

It is crucial to align Kent's Well Being & Student Support with the *diverse student population* to improve and encourage students to develop confidence and *tackle barriers in help-seeking behaviours* (such as 'circle of fear') and in turn *promote our belonging*.

This could be best achieved for example at the *Kaleidoscope* Hub: a principled community space where students of colour feel able to access and develop strong networks of support and *sense of belonging* and find help to deal with racialisation on campus.

3. Student voice & co-production with academics: Stakeholders within the university

There was also a lack of awareness of '*Black Scholarships*' including for students in stage 3 looking ahead to *convert Masters or PhD programmes* and that lack of full funding for students from the global south is a major obstacle. This is part of a blockage in the *career pipeline for students of colour* at the University of Kent. This has posed limitations on students of colour progressing to postgraduate studies and subsequently into academic positions.

A *Student Staff Forum* should be created, where the University has the opportunity to discuss, feedback and offer advice and guidance on issues particularly on *incidents of discrimination and unequal treatment* on campus.

Methodology

Students under the guidance of Dr Suhraiya Jivraj (Senior Lecturer in Law)[1] applied for Ethics Approval via Kent Law School and gained individual (online) consent from all participants in the focus groups to use the qualitative data from the sessions for this research. The focus group leaders (FGLs) were all University of Kent mainly UG Kent Law School students based on Canterbury campus. They facilitated the following 'café' sessions on Canterbury campus during February 2019:

- International Students of Colour (Jasmyn Sargeant)
- Challenging Ableism & Racialisation (Lisa Shoko)
- Muslim Women's focus group x 2 (Wahida Ahmed and Hezhan Kader)
- Muslim Men's focus group x 2 (Ahmed Memon and Abdul Khan),
- Black Men's group x 2 (Anthony Otobo-Martins and Mekke Orie)
- SSPSSR students (Lisa Shoko)
- Open to all students focus groups x 3 (Joy, Mekke, Jasmyn, Anthony, Lisa)

A sample of eighty students from across the University of Kent Canterbury campus (inclusive of all departments and stages of study) attended the focus groups, with additional individual interviews and input from students who stated that they did not feel comfortable or 'safe' attending the group sessions. FGLs opened each discussion with questions including on the 'BME attainment gap', student experience on campus, in and outside the classroom and in relation to academic and pastoral support.

Focus group leaders and the Decolonise the Curriculum Project organising committee (17 students) drafted the Manifesto in early March 2019. The manifesto is underpinned by values of *social justice and co-production* inspired by Critical Race Theory (CRT)[2] and Decolonial Theory studied by a number of students within the project. LW623 Race, Religion and Law (convened by Dr Jivraj) and other critical studies (law) modules have been used as contextual frameworks and critical lenses within the 'kaleidoscope'.

The project has been led by the FGLs (as above) and facilitated by staff (Dr Suhraiya Jivraj (KLS) Sheree Palmer (KLS/SSP) and Dave Thomas (SSP). It has also been by the KLS Centre for Sexuality, Race & Gender Justice (SeRGJ) as its first intersectional and collaborative student project under its new name (previously Centre for Law, Gender & Sexuality) where organisational meetings took place in its common room in Eliot College. The Manifesto is in solidarity with the 'Framework for Powerful Student

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[1] Deputy Director of Education (Decolonising the Curriculum) and Co-Director Centre for Sexuality, Race and Gender Justice (SeRGJ).

[2] Ladson-Billings (2010) Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11:1, 7-24, DOI: 10.1080/095183998236863

Experiences at the University of Kent: Final Report'[3] and responds to the Student Success Project Phase II research strategy.[4]

Snowballing & participation

The focus groups were advertised throughout Kent Law School, departmental student support staff, Kent Union and student societies; for example, Kent Caribbean Union and the Islamic Society, as well as via word of mouth amongst peer groups. Some FGLs used Eventbrite as a sign-up method with a description on what the focus group would be about. These were advertised through *posters and social media platforms*, such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Kent Union (BME network and welfare officer) and individual student WhatsApp groups.

Not all students who signed up attended and some students stated that they did not want to participate, as they felt it was unlikely that change would come about in response to the Project. Some even feared being under some kind of "surveillance" from the university even though they were assured that their responses would be completely anonymised. Equally, some students did not want to be recorded. However, before the focus groups began, all participants were given information about the study, how their confidentiality would be protected and the right to withdraw. Participating students then gave written consent, including for data to be collected, through a recording device. *Trust in the focus group leaders and the Project emerged as a key issue to participation.*

Creating 'safe' café-style comfortable spaces was an important strategy employed to put participants at ease. This was critical, drawing on naturalistic methods, with open-ended questions ranging from social belonging at the university to academic support. This also allowed for spontaneous questions and discussion. The aim was to give participants a space where they felt comfortable to express their views and facilitate discussion around sometimes sensitive and difficult topics relating to race and racialisation in everyday life experiences, including hurdles in practising faith on campus. It was critical to allow participants freedom to safely express their ideas rather than simply interviewing them to draw out preconceived notions or expectations. Location and refreshments helped to create an 'atmosphere' that encouraged free conversation for students to voice their opinions and concerns. Part of these factors was to create an atmosphere of relatability and shared concern. For example, the first location of the first group discussion on Muslim male experiences was in the local mosque on Giles Lane where some Muslim students currently have their own sense of community. This approach of relating to the FGLs on a level of shared identity i.e. common faith, experiences and association with the mosque, received a positive response. This was clear also when students were asked if they would speak to anyone else approaching them to share their experiences, they replied:

> "No, we would not have even agreed to meet or speak to someone we did not personally know".

[3] https://www.kent.ac.uk/cshe/kent-login/A%20Framework%20for%20Powerful%20Student%20Learning%20Experiences%20final%20250119.pdf

[4] https://www.kent.ac.uk/studentsuccess/poster%20presentations/Festival%20of%20Projects_2018%20-%20SSP%20research%20FINAL.pdf.

Similarly, the general consensus amongst a lot of the female Muslim student participants was that they feel alienated, feel "targeted", feel a responsibility to be representatives for all Muslim women, and feel that little has been done to make them feel that they belong in this institution. The 'Challenging Ableism and Racialisation' and the SSPSSR Focus Groups[5] were both held in the Centre SeRGJ common room. In order to make the participants feel more at ease, we provided them with pizza and beverages which created a more conversational atmosphere, conducive for the sensitive topics that we wanted to discuss, for example the challenges of being a racialized student battling mental health. The students expressed that coming from a non-white background, they sometimes felt isolated because in some cultures, mental health is viewed as a weakness rather than an affliction or illness. The seating was arranged in a quasi-circle such that everyone was able to see each other, contributing to a natural and conversational environment.

Fluid terminology

Data from the focus group's highlighted that there was no one preference for the terminology to refer to the participants and their experiences. We therefore use BAME/BME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic); people/students of colour and minoritised people, interchangeably below. The underlying and key point is to highlight barriers to learning due to racialisation[6] whether explicit, implicit, embedded, individual, institutional or otherwise.

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[5] This focus group was added as an extra session to the original programme due to demand from SSPSR students who had attended the open ones but felt they needed a subject/department specific session.

[6] "Instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities. The concept therefore refers to a process of categorisation, a representational process of defining an Other (usually, but not exclusively) somatically" (Miles, 'Racism', 1989, p. 75).

Project findings and recommendations

1. Pedagogy and powerful learning experiences: The colour of our curriculum

Phase II of the SSP (EDI) Project research points to the "'White Curriculum' as a barrier to inclusivity that fails to legitimise contributions to knowledge from people of colour".[7]

- We need a diversity of perspectives, particularly from *scholars of colour* and from the global south (including access to *reading lists from around the world*), so that our curriculum reflects and addresses a range of experiences and *promotes cultural democracy*,[8] as well as developing *ALL* students into critical and analytical thinkers and leaders within their education.

- One way this can be initially operationalised is through *Reading Lists* centred on an understanding on *who* the reading list is for and *how* it is created. It is important to know what the purpose of the reading list is, and to ensure that there is an impetus on teachers to develop cultural competence[9] and knowledge of a range of perspectives.

- This is crucial to combat a narrow focus *privileging the 'white canon'* and perpetuating academics' fear of utilising other sources. We can promote academic 'risk-taking' i.e. encouraging students to depart from this narrow perspective and content. This can also be supported as part of the academic curriculum, for example though discussion outside the lecture/seminar space in areas such as the suggested Hub space (see below). These discussions could be student-led as with the KLS Decolonising the Curriculum Project discussion

"The only time we look at non-white material is in relation to colonialism (slavery/anti-slavery) or extremism and the material tends to be negative as opposed to positive." (focus group participant).

"We are not trying to erase history or knowledge but enrich it" (final year law student).

"It was literally white male theorists all the time and it was just boring because you cannot relate to it…it was just not relatable." (law student focus group participant).

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[7] https://www.kent.ac.uk/studentsuccess/poster%20presentations/Festival%20of%20Projects_2018%20-%20SSP%20research%20FINAL.pdf

[8] "Cultural democracy recognizes the human right of each ethnic / cultural group in a culturally diverse society to have equal access to life chances and sources of social power. Power means to have a "voice," that is, to have the capacity to define oneself as an active participant in the world rather than a passive victim" (Delores P. Aldridge (2000) On Race and Culture: Beyond Afrocentrism, Eurocentrism to Cultural Democracy, Sociological Focus, 33:1, 95-107)

[9] Thomas, D., Adewumi, B., Konadu-Mensah, C., Agyeman, E. (forthcoming) Students, the missing voice in Liberating the Curriculum: Students as co-producers of knowledge in a Reading List Review.

groups, including master-classes with leading academics such as Gurminder Bhambra.[10]

- The notion of a *one-size-fits- all student experience is outmoded*. Students report that they attend university with the hope of *achieving personal growth* but that the opportunities for enhancement including employability and so on, that are on offer can often feel daunting and unsuitable especially when students are struggling to keep up with study and other commitments.[11]

"I do not want to speak up in class because I do not want to be that one brown kid who talks. It feels like seminar leaders and lecturers are more social with students that look like them" (focus group participant).

- Lecturers should be more explicit about what is expected from students and *'how to succeed'* during obligatory sessions e.g. in *Induction Weeks*. These sessions could tackle university myths and *set up high expectations* with sufficient time slots allocated for current and past students of colour and other professionals in the field to talk about what has helped them on their journey of achievement in a variety of formats (e.g. masterclasses, podcasts and discussion forums).

- This is necessary to enable students to *see themselves reflected amongst (soon to be) graduates and to aim high*. It is also an important opportunity embedded into the curriculum for students to develop *trusting relationships* with academics and other students from all cultures and backgrounds.

When I speak, I feel like people are expecting a certain response. Everyone looks at me because of my hijab and have expectations. I often don't speak because I don't want to give people that satisfaction. I don't want to talk because you're not going to listen to (what) I have to say, you're just going to see what I have on my head. Besides, whatever I have to say, they're going to think is biased" (focus group participant).

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[10] See DecoloniseUKC Interview with Professor Gurminder Bhambra (first Professor of Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies in the UK) on www.decolonise.org.

[11] According to the UKC report outlining "A Framework for Powerful Student Experiences" (2019, n=1772).

1. Staff reported that they are frustrated with providing opportunities for enrichment and support that students do not take up. They believe some students are hard to engage. It would be interesting to find out to what extent are actually communicating effectively with students. Is the communication tailored to the student or is it a one size fit all model?
2. What do students want from their learning experiences at Kent? Students (20%) reported that they wanted to enjoy what they are learning.
3. How do hopes vary by background? BME students - more so than white students - reported that they wanted application-oriented? This means they want to learn things that they can apply to real world contexts, i.e. to achieve a job etc. Does the narrow perspective support this notion? BME students further reported that their hopes for university are not being fulfilled.
4. Students also reported that their most powerful learning experiences involved learning and thinking and those aligned with the achievement of their goals.

2. Race, Identity & Belonging: Promoting Inclusion/Countering Exclusion

Phase II of the SSP (EDI) Project research quotes the University of Kent's Educational Strategy stating:

> "We will ensure that **our staff body remains diverse**, so that our curriculum reflects and addresses a range of perspectives. How can this be operationalised?"[12]

In addition, it also states:

> "Survey findings indicated that *BME students were less engaged* in campus life, yet the popularity of the University's African-Caribbean and Islamic Societies suggests that at least *some* students on campus have found a sense of identity and belonging on campus."

And asks:

> "Does Kent's range of student societies provide sufficient coverage for BME students on campus, or *do certain populations feel socially excluded*?"

- The *Kaleidoscope Hub* should be a principled community space where students of colour feel able to access and develop strong networks of support and *sense of belonging* and find help to deal with racialisation on campus.

- The Hub could run sessions specifically for LGBTQ+ students of colour and non-alcohol and halal/kosher (Freshers Week) events for those who do not feel comfortable within mainstream 'white' spaces. This could be publicised across campuses and promote *strong networks of support* especially for those wishing to access

"My whole time at this university, I have been alienated" (focus group participant).

"You're not welcome in societies if you don't drink (in initiations, for example)."

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[12] The rates of BME staff on campus as compared to white staff is very low i.e. 9% BME professors as compared to 76% white professors (See Kent EDI Report 2016 page 48 for further breakdowns). This is particularly shocking given the increasingly diverse student body for whom it is important to see themselves and their experiences reflected at different levels in the university. See also barriers in relation to promotion, race pay gap etc. here: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/feb/04/black-female-professors-report; https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/feb/05/talented-women-of-colour-are-blocked-why-are-there-so-few-black-female-professors; https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/nov/23/universities-must-tackle-the-big-ethnicity-pay-gap.

space and activities other than Kent Union or bars/pubs.

- It is crucial to align Kent's Well Being & Student Support with the *diverse student population* to improve and encourage students to develop confidence and *tackle barriers in help-seeking behaviours* (such as 'circle of fear') and in turn *promote our belonging.*

- This could be best achieved for example at the Hub which would also be a centre for the *Kaleidoscope Network* including a community of voices facilitating collaborative efforts and setting up different schemes of mentoring including:

  Staff to Student
  - o List of BME members of staff that are accessible to students.
  - o BME counsellors, mentors and health advisors (or trained in BME issues) even if only available for specific slots on campus.
  - o Student support through discussions on literature produced by staff of colour/from the global south and a list of 'critical race' learning/modules e.g. Race, Religion & Law available as additional options and publicised.
  - o Networks of BME staff should be utilized to support student development that would also link to (compulsory) academic classes on modules and encourage academic 'risk taking' (see above, to diversify the curriculum.

  Student to Staff
  - o Training new members of the Hub to be researchers and to collect data on student experience which is remunerated (as with this project).
  - o This would also facilitate students of colour to work collaboratively and become peer facilitators and change actors, develop employability skills and become leaders.

  Student to Student
  - o e.g. black and minoritised societies, reading, study groups aimed at, and specifically for, students of colour,

"They (staff) don't know where we are coming from - so I don't think that I can talk to them" (focus group participant).

"I don't use student support because there isn't anyone who can fully understand me or my situation." (focus group participant).

"I want to see more staff that look like us and for us to know who they are".

"I don't think I am comfortable talking to a staff who is not from my faith about any concerns I have when class timings or exams can clash with me practising my faith" (focus group participants).

> student-led discussions on reading list and teaching material.

Staff to Staff
- o Need for more academic and professional service staff of colour on campus.
- o Increase visibility in library collections with access to journals, research work not currently subscribed to by the library.[13]
- o Set up a race/racialized religion equality network to support staff.

- Develop a *Kent-specific Cultural Competence Workshop* led by Kent academic staff (Centre for Sexuality, Race, Gender Justice) in collaboration with the Runnymede Trust (Race Equality Think Tank) and diversity practitioners of colour including students and staff. This could be developed for both staff and students.

- Any staff enforcing the Prevent duty should undergo Islamophobia training to develop cultural competence in order to tackle racial profiling/biases and understand the impact of Prevent as a form of racialisation towards Muslim students in particular.[14]

"In order to fit in, I felt like I had to compromise my beliefs. I had to change the way I dress, the way I speak, even what I say" (focus group participant).

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[13] This work has already started by PGRs in the KLS Decolonising Research Collective.

[14] See the NUS guidance to Student Union Officers on the Prevent strategy here: https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/students-not-suspects-building-your-campaign-against-prevent

3. Student voice & co-production with academics: Stakeholders within the University[15]

- Participants reported that there was a severe *under-representation of black academics or BME success* on campus (outside of the Inspirational Speakers Scheme) and seeing 'yourself represented' did make a big difference to engagement in academic life.

- There was also a lack of awareness of *'Black Scholarships'* including for students in stage 3 looking ahead to *convert Masters or PhD programmes* and that lack of full funding for students from the global south is a major obstacle. This is part of a blockage in the *career pipeline for students of colour* at the University of Kent. This has posed limitations on students of colour progressing to postgraduate studies and subsequently into academic positions. The provision of a number of *postgraduate scholarships specifically for students of colour* (similar to the Vice Chancellor's 50th Anniversary Scholarships) would be a proactive way to increase the number of students of colour transitioning to postgraduate studies and subsequently into a career in academia.

- Most participants (outside of KLS) were unaware of the role of Student Success officers and their remits on how to help BME students.

- It was widely felt that there was a dire lack of student consultation on BME issues and if this was happening via KU this was insufficient and other student-led channels should be created with a senior member of staff acting as a race champion or via a student-staff forum.

- A *Student Staff Forum*[16] should be created, where the University has the opportunity to

> "The student body on campus is diversifying exponentially, currently at around 38% and rising, so we are stakeholders of this university, yet we do not feel as though our voices are being heard sufficiently by the people who can effect change" (final year law student).

> "Everyone needs a Sheree, so why doesn't everyone know and get support from people like Sheree (KLS SSP Officer)" (black male law student).

> "I felt really upset and disturbed when I saw a

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[15] According to the Kent EDI Report 2016/17 "the student BME population has increased year on year since 2011-12 to 24.58%. Among the UK-domiciled student population at Kent, 12.69% identified as Black, much higher than the ECU national benchmark of 6.70% (Chart 30). Students who identified as Black represented 36.29% of the UK-domiciled BME population" (Chart 31 on page 55). It also states: "At Kent, BME students comprised 25.68% of undergraduate students and 18.93% of postgraduate students." Although focus groups for this project were not held at Medway there is clearly a need to conduct research there as there is a significantly higher BME student population at the Medway campus (36.84%) than the Canterbury campus (21.93%) and these figures are from 2016 it is likely to be higher now.

[16] https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jan/08/universities-must-listen-more-closely-to-their-bame-staff-and-students.

discuss, feedback and offer advice and guidance on issues such as:

- o Assessment patterns, including presentations
- o Acknowledgment of controversial incidents on campus
- o Developing a Students of Colour Guide to Succeeding and finding culturally accessible support.
- o Equal Treatment by staff, particularly Campus Security for implementing policies by undergoing cultural competence training (see above). This could combat any student perception that they may be acting as an "arm of the police in their behaviours and practices".
- o Consulting on welfare/conduct issues particularly in relation to Inclusive Learning Plans (ILPs) and discipline which are perceived as unhelpful in obtaining support from teachers.
- o Training staff to identify and deal with discrimination in the classroom, e.g. Racism/Islamophobia and in relation to International Students
- o *The Student Staff Forum* supported by the Executive Group's Race (and Intersectionality) Champion would provide a direct channel of communication as not all students want to be represented or feel adequately included by the student union.
- o The forum would also further indicate *institutional responsibility*, accountability and transparency as well as bridge (communication) gaps between students and senior leadership particularly about racism on campus.

student being escorted out of the building in case he 'got aggressive'. He hadn't done anything other than ask staff a question and it felt like he was being targeted or having assumptions made about him because of how he looked" (focus group participant).

"ILPS are not looked at by staff so we constantly have to re-explain ourselves or be forced into silence as its easier that way" (focus group participant).

"In recognising that the University is a community, we need the leaders of the community (senior management) to be held accountable" (focus group participant).

"The University is a community and so it needs to act for the voices that are not adequately heard. Students are not interested in tokenism but being full citizens at the University" (focus group participant).