



Decolonising the Curriculum

Staff Guide

Keele University

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION3

NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND DEFINITIONS3

DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM AT KEELE UNIVERSITY5

WHAT IS DECOLONISATION?8

WHAT DOES ‘DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM’ MEAN?9

WHY IS DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM IMPORTANT?12

THIS ALL SOUNDS GREAT, BUT HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO ME?15

WHERE CAN I START?17

AREAS TO EXPLORE19

DIVERSIFY VS DECOLONISE.....22

FACULTY SUGGESTIONS24

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (FHSS)24

MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES (FMHS)26

NATURAL SCIENCES (FNS).....27

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER.....28

DTC AT OTHER HE INSTITUTIONS30

CONTACT US.....33

USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES33

REFERENCES41

Introduction

This guide is intended for staff across Keele University to increase their understanding of decolonising the curriculum. It should be used as a starting point and a reference point from which to implement measures within Schools and Faculties that aim to help decolonise the curriculum.

At the heart of decolonising the curriculum is the transformation of our curricula, to change what and how we teach and to assess the colonial histories that form large parts of our knowledge base today.

This is not a set of solutions for each module programme but a guide with suggestions and ideas for colleagues to think about when designing and updating module programmes.

The aim is to aid colleagues in engaging with the decolonise work and put into practice some of the suggestions made in this handbook. Decolonising the curriculum is an ongoing process that we are all collectively engaging in as an institution.

The decolonise the curriculum movement at Keele University is a joint effort of students and staff. At the grass-roots level the Decolonise Keele Network (DKN) is a consortium of students and staff committed to dismantling structural barriers within the institution.

This guide also serves as a reflection piece for colleagues to create change, and dialogue and ultimately put into practice the values that are at the core of what Keele University is about.

We would like to thank all staff and students, the Students' Union and the Decolonise Keele Network for their contributions to this guide.

Note on language and definitions

DTC - decolonising the curriculum.

REC SAT – Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team

FHSS – Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

FMHS – Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

FNS – Faculty of Natural Sciences

BAME – stands for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Throughout this document we use the term ‘BAME’, but we understand and recognise the issues surrounding the use of this term. We must be cautious not to homogenise the very diverse and real experiences of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues and students. We would advise to exercise caution when using the term ‘BAME’ and encourage colleagues to reflect and engage in the current conversations around the use of this term.

Colonisation – the process of settling and imposing control over indigenous people and/or an area. Three quarters of the world was engaged in colonisation for more than five centuries. Colonisation was more than just establishing control over indigenous people and lands it gave way to forced migrations, famine, violent extraction of resources, the wreckage of cultures, languages, identities and countries.

Decolonisation – on a wider scale (and not in relation to decolonising the curriculum), decolonising is often defined as the process of countries attaining political independence from their colonisers. It was a process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power. The term decolonisation is also now used to refer to “restorative justice through cultural, psychological and economic freedom.”¹

Epistemic Violence - “Western epistemic traditions claim detachment of the known from the knower. They rest on a division between mind and world, or between reason and nature as an ontological a priori. They are traditions in which the knowing subject is enclosed in itself and peeks out at a world of objects and produces supposedly objective knowledge of those objects. The knowing subject is thus able to know the world without being part of that world and he or she is by all accounts able to produce knowledge that is supposed to be universal and independent of context.”

White privilege - in her award-winning book ‘Why I Am No Longer Talking To White People About Race,’ Reni Eddo-Lodge defines white privilege as, “an absence of the negative consequences of racism. An absence of structural discrimination, an absence of your race being viewed as a problem first and foremost, an absence of ‘less likely to succeed

¹ <https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-decolonisation-131455>

because of my race. It is an absence of funny looks directed at you because you're believed to be in the wrong place, an absence of cultural expectations, an absence of violence enacted on your ancestors because of the colour of their skin, an absence of a lifetime of subtle marginalisation and othering – an exclusion from the narrative of being human.”²

Hegemony - a process where a particular social force goes beyond its narrow interests to universalise their project to other social forces and subaltern groups. It's often used as shorthand to describe the relatively dominant position of a particular set of ideas and their associated tendency to become common-sensical and intuitive, thereby inhibiting the dissemination or even the articulation of alternative ideas. The associated term hegemon is used to identify the actor, group, class, or state that exercises hegemonic power or that is responsible for the dissemination of hegemonic ideas.

Orientalism – is a term used to define the depiction of Eastern cultures by Western artists. However, the depictions are often steeped in stereotypes. Since the book published by Edward Said 'Orientalism' it has also come to be known as the lens through which the Western world views the East, a world that is painted and portrayed as backward, under-developed, and ultimately viewed under the Western gaze.

Decolonising the Curriculum at Keele University

There has been a combination of efforts from both students and staff here at the University, who have been working to decolonise the curriculum.

The Race Equality Charter

The Race Equality Charter looks to identify institutional barriers, work on dismantling these and advance race equality on a general level for both students and staff at the University. We have two action plans to roll out various initiatives and decolonising the curriculum is a part of these.

The Equality Charter Unit (ECU) began developing the Race Equality Charter (REC) in 2012 following the positive impact Athena SWAN has had for gender equality in Higher Education. ECU

² Eddo-Lodge, R, 2017, Why I Am No Longer Talking To White People About Race, p.86.

consulted on the concept of a race equality charter, developed a draft framework, and then consulted again with the sector. Following this development, they trialled the framework with volunteer institutions, resulting in 21 applications and eight institutions receiving a Bronze award (August 2015). There are currently 66 member institutions and 15 award holders (May 2020). Keele obtained a Bronze award following submission in 2019.

The REC provides a framework through which institutions work to identify and self-reflect on institutional and cultural barriers standing in the way of minority ethnic staff and students. It covers academic staff, professional services staff, student progression and attainment and diversity of the curriculum. As with Athena SWAN, REC is an evolving charter. Institutions are expected to start at Bronze level and progress to Silver. The award is at institutional level only, but actions must be owned and implemented at Faculty/Directorate level.

The charter is based on five key principles. Institutions that apply to be a part of the Charter commit to adopting these principles within policies, practices, action plans and cultures:

1. Racial inequalities are a significant issue within higher education. Racial inequalities are not necessarily overt, isolated incidents. Racism is an everyday facet of UK society and racial inequalities manifest themselves in everyday situations, processes and behaviours.
2. UK higher education cannot reach its full potential unless it can benefit from the talents of the whole population and until individuals from all ethnic backgrounds can benefit equally from the opportunities it affords.
3. In developing solutions to racial inequalities, it is important that they are aimed at achieving long-term institutional culture change, avoiding a deficit model where solutions are aimed at changing the individual.
4. Minority ethnic staff and students are not a homogenous group. People from different ethnic backgrounds have different experiences of and outcomes from/within higher education, and that complexity needs to be considered in analysing data and developing actions.

5. All individuals have multiple identities, and the intersection of those different identities should be considered wherever possible.

The Race Equality Charter student and staff action plans are monitored by the Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team (RECSAT), who meet 3 times a year.

Since obtaining the bronze award in February 2019 we have put into plan the following:

- Working with Faculties to embed decolonise work into curriculums
- Creating mandatory unconscious bias and race equality training for staff
- Relaunching the NeverOK campaign to include staff and student reporting of hate crimes on campus
- Creating race equality training for SU society committees

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of the different initiatives we are implementing

The Decolonise Keele Network (DKN)

A collective of students and staff working independently as a critical friend of the University, this group has been pivotal in advancing the work of decolonising the curriculum.

Keele's Manifesto for Decolonising the Curriculum was released jointly by Keele's Students' Union (SU), Keele Postgraduate Association (KPA) and Keele's University College Union (KUCU) on 23rd May 2018 and was officially launched on June 7th, 2018.

A core strategic working group came together following a call out at Keele's first public meeting on 'Decolonise' held on February 28th, 2018. This meeting was organised in response to the UCU's 'Day of Action on Racism'. The meeting took the form of a panel discussion on 'Decolonising the Academy: Why is my curriculum so white?'

The DKN have organised various events and activities to engage the students and staff with the decolonise work. The network has been involved in training other universities, spoke on a panel at a KISI conference and have also taken part in KIITE carousels.

You can find out further information about the [Decolonise Keele Network here](#) and to get involved please email the network on decolonisekeelenetwork@gmail.com.

What is decolonisation?

To understand decolonising the curriculum it is first important to understand decolonisation on a broader level.

On a political level, decolonisation refers to the process of nations and peoples undoing colonial rule. But decolonisation went beyond the physical retreat of colonisers from colonised lands.

Decolonisation is

- the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms
- delinking from the colonial matrix of power
- the process of humanising the dehumanised

Colonialism went far beyond military, political and economic domination, it meant an erasure and suppression of language, culture, religion and identity for many peoples.

Decolonisation meant the physical changing of flags and the retreat of colonisers, but it also meant the rupture from the socio-political and cultural influence of the colonisers. It saw nations and peoples reclaiming their heritage and identities.

Some countries were under colonial rule for many years and their ways of life were oppressed. The colonisers often reduced people from Asia and Africa to stereotypes and painted themselves as superior with other cultures being backward and primitive.

Edward Said's book, 'Orientalism', is critical piece in understanding how the West, through colonisation, painted a picture of the East. Through the media, film, literature and music we see non-Western cultures stereotyped and exoticised, even long after colonisation. This painting of the East creates a problematic binary, one where the West posits itself as superior, civilised and the

gold standard of how a nation and people should be, whereas the East is painted as inferior and uncivilised and in essence, needs saving from itself.

Here are some useful videos to help understand Orientalism:

- [BBC Ideas, Orientalism and power](#)
- [TRT World, Orientalism explained](#)
- [Al Jazeera, Edward Said – Framed the politics of stereotypes in the news](#)

What does 'decolonising the curriculum' mean?

Decolonising the curriculum refers to the process of addressing the colonial legacies that persist within Western forms of knowledge. It asks students and staff to critically reflect on the formation of knowledge, the views of the 'fathers' of modern knowledge, how this knowledge is taught and who it is taught by. Our curriculum posits the knowledge and traditions of white men from the global North as intellectually superior. Decolonising the curriculum seeks to question and transform this way of thinking as well as review how we teach within our University.

Decolonising the curriculum goes beyond issues of race and takes into consideration gender, disability, and sexual orientation when it comes to critically reflecting on knowledge.

An [Advance HE article](#) further talks about the problems with a colonial curriculum,

“A colonial curriculum is characterised by its unrepresentative, inaccessible, and privileged nature. Unrepresentative, because it selectively constructs teachings which exclude certain, oftentimes, crucial narratives. Inaccessible, because it consequently prevents many of its recipients from identifying with the narratives construed, whilst appealing to a historically favoured demographic. Privileged, because it ensures the continued participation, comfort and flourish of this select group of people, in both an academic and a wider societal

context. Sadly, and unacceptably, this all occurs at the detriment of a diverse range of marginalised voices.

What this suggests is that a colonial curriculum is also an inaccurate curriculum. That is, by virtue of its exclusionary and depreciatory tendencies, it simultaneously fails to provide the most truthful knowledge to those it caters to, whilst also discouraging many others from engaging with it. What such a curriculum can and cannot offer in terms of information, pedagogical practises and accessibility must be discussed if we want to ensure the most just education for the most amount of people.”³

When it comes to decolonising the curriculum at UK universities, we must acknowledge the Eurocentric nature of academia and the barriers this creates for students and staff on our campuses. We must critically reflect on knowledge production and how this has affected our curricula over time.

In tackling the issues within our curricula, we must address the problematic histories that have formed large parts of our subject areas, not necessarily to dismiss them, but to understand how colonial thought created and affects knowledge today and to educate our students on this. For example, numerous disciplines, such as Geography, Anthropology and Botany were directly promoted and funded by colonial enterprises and were designed with the intention to control and conquer other countries.

When it comes to DTC it is also imperative that we involve students in this process. DTC is about challenging how we do things on our campuses and including students in co-creating curricula can be a part of this. After all, the call to decolonise the curriculum originated from students, with the [Rhodes Must Fall Campaign](#), in South Africa. We have seen the call to DTC in many other UK institutions, including our own, with the Decolonise Keele Network. The push has come from students and students want to see real changes reflected in their curricula. To bring them into the conversation and be co-creators in this critical turning point in academia is crucial in ensuring that the work is done in a non-tokenistic way, but also, gives students that say in how and what they want to be learning and researching.

³ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/decolonisation-curriculum-conversation>

Decolonising allows for a wider world view to be included in what is traditionally taught at university and it also challenges the status quo which has been prevalent for years in academia. For example, the inclusion of alternative knowledges, such as alternative medicine, not as inferior or lesser but as a very valid tradition that is practiced today.

Decolonising the curriculum is about challenging and unlearning long-standing biases that we hold in academia. It involves having uncomfortable but necessary conversations that make institutions inwardly reflect on; what they believe to be authoritative knowledge, how this is conveyed to students and the impact that this has. It's also about empowering students and staff so that they are teaching and learning from authors that are representative.

A decolonised curriculum would bring questions of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and disability into the fore, rather than being taught as alternative theories or ways of thinking, it would centre them as main sources of knowledge on a level platform as the 'classical' canons. It would mean to transform our ways of thinking, transform our curricula and transform how we teach.

The Decolonise Keele Network defines decolonising the curriculum as a process of:

“identifying colonial systems, structures and relationships, and working to challenge those systems. It is not “integration” or simply the token inclusion of the intellectual achievements of non-white cultures. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial to the making of space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems. It's a culture shift to think more widely about why common knowledge is what it is, and in so doing adjusting cultural perceptions and power relations in real and significant ways.”⁴

Language and power

It's also important to mention the effects of language when it comes to decolonising the curriculum. When we think about academia, publishing research articles for example, a large

⁴ Keele Manifesto for decolonising the curriculum:
<https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityawards/raceequalitycharter/keeledecolonisingthecurriculumnetwork/#keele-manifesto-for-decolonising-the-curriculum>

majority of those we deem 'credible' are written in European languages, with English being a major one. However, even English can be excluding and marginalising.

Inherently, all languages limit our thoughts, concepts and ideas, English carries with it a hegemony which dominates and peripheralises other languages in the academic and educational arenas as part of the colonial legacy. There is inherent power *behind* language as well as the power *of* language when it comes to decolonising the curriculum.

To truly decolonise as an institution, we also need to look inward to work to also decolonise our own ways of thinking and teaching.

Why is decolonising the curriculum important?

As an institution of teaching and learning we must understand our complicity in upholding colonial legacies, how this has shaped what and who we take as authoritative knowledge and how this has ultimately marginalised and alienated students and staff. The status quo in academia must be ruptured to ensure that we are a University that critically reflects and acknowledges the very problematic histories that have formed swathes of our knowledge bases.

DTC is imperative in cultivating a new generation of critical thinkers who have; unlearned that Western 'classical' canons are the only and main form of authoritative knowledge, learned about a variety of topics from a range of authors, been taught in ways that are inclusive and accessible and are taught by a diverse range of academics. DTC benefits **all** students, not just our minority groups, as our students would be learning from a critically reflective curriculum. University is about receiving a well-rounded education and we want students to have a broader perspective when studying and researching with us.

Dr Katherine Haxton, Senior Lecturer in Chemistry at Keele University, in conversation with Advance HE about DTC suggested that,

"Many of the challenges facing humanity today will not be solved by Eurocentric practices and models of how the world works. We need new ways of thinking and approaching knowledge creation, curation and conveyance, and we need to embrace the complexity and challenge of dealing with the contradictions inherent in merging different systems of knowing. True globalization

of higher education should not involve propagating one system of knowledge at the expense of others, but rather embracing the diversity and allowing two-way flow of ideas and approaches. Genuinely inclusive higher education allows all students to see themselves and their cultural backgrounds reflected in the curriculum at all levels.”⁵

We all have a responsibility to ensure that our students have a critical understanding of the ways in which all knowledge is generated, and an appreciation of the fact that knowledge is never applied in a vacuum but rather within social and political contexts that are marked by unjust hierarchies that should be challenged.

Lord Lindsay, the founding Principal of Keele University, was very sceptical about disciplinary purity because he suspected that this would act as an obstacle to our educational programmes addressing effectively the major challenges of the day. The same principles can be applied when thinking about DTC, learning is never done in a vacuum, just as knowledge is not produced in one. Through the process of decolonising our curriculum we can encourage our students and ourselves to critically engage with knowledge, question why knowledge is taken as knowledge and come to understand the importance of grounding knowledge in its context. In a way, we can see DTC as an educational endeavour that embodies Lindsay’s beliefs about academia being a driving force for addressing current world obstacles. DTC would not only look at what we teach, but also how we teach. As an institution we welcome students from varying academic backgrounds and providing a holistic learning experience which includes a range of learning styles and innovative teaching is crucial to creating a decolonised curriculum.

There are differing opinions on the work of decolonising the curriculum and its effects on the BAME awarding gap. There are proponents that argue that the two are not linked and that decolonising the curriculum and the BAME awarding gap are separate endeavours with no bearing on one another. Whilst the two are separate in their endeavours there are other bodies of work, such as the UUK and NUS report ‘Closing the Gap’, which suggest there exist some links between the two.⁶

⁵ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/decolonisation-curriculum-conversation>

⁶ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf>

According to various reports, we know that minority students are doubly disadvantaged with respect to two key factors that typically impact negatively on the sense of belonging that supports them on a course. We know that a feeling of belonging, to a programme and an institution, is a crucial explanatory factor both with respect to attainment and student satisfaction. The first factor is that BAME students typically see a lower proportion of BAME staff among those who teach them and more generally in other professional roles within universities. Secondly, there are elements of the curriculum, its content and methodological approaches, with which BAME students may find it more difficult to identify themselves with than non-BAME students do. It is precisely those elements that this project is designed to bring to the surface, and the same applies to any disparities of experience with respect to differences of class, gender, sexual identity and orientation, and disabilities. The aim is to remove any obstacles to us having a fully inclusive curriculum, which is what is required if we are to dismantle colonialism in our subjects.⁷

In the Keele context, we know that we have a BAME awarding gap and working to reduce this is a large part of not only the [RECSAT Action plans](#) but also, the [Access and Participation Plan \(APP\)](#). There are numerous reports and data which evidences that there are several other factors which also affect the attainment of minority students at UK universities. These include a lack of representation in the wider university staff community, a lack of positive BAME role models, a sense of isolation due to racism and microaggressions on campus, poorer standards of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) prior to university as well as financial pressures.⁸ We, therefore, must work to implement DTC into our programmes so that we can ensure that students are reflected and represented in the curriculum, in a non-tokenistic way.

The Keele community is a global one and we all must work to ensure that our students and staff feel included and valued during their time with us. As we prepare the next generation of academics, we must ensure they receive a holistic educational experience and one that challenges them to think critically about the historical legacies of their chosen discipline. This is an endeavour that must be carried out by **all** staff. It cannot be understood as an agenda that we expect colleagues of minority backgrounds to take forward alone.

⁷ NUS and UUK, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority Student Attainment at UK Universities, Closing the Gap, <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf>

⁸ For further information please consult the NUS and UUK report: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf>

This all sounds great, but how does this apply to me?

We acknowledge that everyone is at different stages of understanding decolonising the curriculum and how it applies to them. To help, here are some questions, inspired by Sheffield University's 'Decolonising the curriculum: a guide for biosciences', that you may have surrounding DTC and how this applies to you and your field of teaching and research.

“I’m a good person and do my job to educate students on the subject I know. My intentions are good, and I should not feel guilty about the past. I’ve worked hard to get where I am, and I won’t apologise for that.”

It is not so much about being a good or bad person, well-meaning people can still cause harm unknowingly. The point is not to assign blame to anyone or groups of people but for all colleagues to understand the problematic legacy of the past, how it influences the present, as well as acknowledge (the potential) privilege in not having to think about race, gender, sexuality or disability acting as a barrier to various aspects of their lives.

The concept of decolonise may present a challenge of identity for some and this may bring up unsettling feelings and an instinct to become defensive. However, there is a need to sit with this discomfort, and understand privilege and how we may have benefitted from certain structures. No one is here to take away anyone's hard work, however, it is important that we all acknowledge that we may not have ever had to deal with aspects of our personal identities being a barrier for us in our studies or workplaces.⁹

“This topic is really important, and I agree with the work, but I don’t know enough, and I am worried about offending people. Can’t a colleague from a minority background cover this topic?”

It's great that you see the work as important and integral to teaching, however, there are many issues with burdening minority staff and tasking them with this type of work. It's important to take

⁹ University of Sheffield, July 2020, Decolonising the curriculum, a guide for biosciences, https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.909318!/file/Decolonise.pdf

the time to educate yourself on the context in which your subject area was developed. There are resources listed in this handbook on where to find out more about decolonisation in your field. It is not the duty of only our minority colleagues to understand colonial legacies within higher education and remaining unaware shifts the work onto colleagues from minority backgrounds who already face various, very real structural barriers within academia. Furthermore, those who identify as coming from a minority background are not the spokesperson for that entire community, we cannot homogenise their experiences and who is to say they have had any extra training on decolonising the curriculum? This work must be a collective effort by **all staff**.

“Decolonise work only applies to Humanities subjects, and I do not want to bring politics into STEM”

Science and STEM are not apolitical, and DTC does apply to STEM, especially if we analyse where our knowledge comes from and how certain disciplines operate. If this is an area where you would benefit from learning more there are plenty of resources listed in this handbook that can help you understand why there is a need to decolonise STEM subjects.

If you take health inequalities for example, we know that Black women are nearly five times more likely to die in childbirth than white women here in the UK ¹⁰. There are structural issues here and there are reports which indicate that black women are treated differently to their white counterparts by some medical staff in hospitals.

In Biology, renowned statistician, R.A. Fisher, is celebrated and referenced widely in the field. However, whilst his ideas and concepts have become central, he also held deeply racist views. In his book, ‘The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection’, he dedicates three chapters to colonialism, eugenics and white supremacy.¹¹

These examples prove that whilst STEM subjects are typically seen as fields devoid of the influence of politics and colonialism, this is incorrect, and these fields have historically helped to reinforce stereotypes and structural inequalities.

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-47115305>

¹¹ <https://njoselson.github.io/Fisher-Pearson/>

Where can I start?

The Decolonise Keele Network has written a manifesto on what it would mean to decolonise the curriculum:

1. “Decolonising the curriculum means, first of all, acknowledging that knowledge is not owned by anyone. It is a cumulative and shared resource that is available to all. Knowledge (and culture) is collectively produced and human beings of all races, ethnicities, classes, genders, sexual orientations, and disabilities have as much right as elite white men to understand what our roles and contributions have been in shaping intellectual achievements and shifting culture and progress.
2. Decolonising the curriculum is to recognise that knowledge is inevitably marked by power relations. Our universities exist in a global economy of knowledge, with a definite hegemonic centre, reflecting hierarchies of race, class, and gender. At the top of this hierarchy sit the knowledge institutions of the global North, databanks and research centres supported by the wealth of European and North American powers. This hegemonic position is not just a matter of the wealth of the global North. Our world is still shaped by a long colonial history in which white upper-class men are at the top of social hierarchy, most disciplines give disproportionate significance to the experiences, histories and achievements of this one group.
3. Decolonising is about rethinking, reframing, and reconstructing the current curriculum in order to make it better, and more inclusive. It is about expanding our notions of good literature, so it doesn’t always elevate one voice, one experience, and one way of being in the world. It is about considering how different frameworks, traditions and knowledge projects can inform each other, how multiple voices can be heard, and how new perspectives emerge from mutual learning.
4. Decolonising is not just about bringing in minority ethnic writers and texts, but also how we read ‘traditional mainstream’ texts. Decolonising is far more nuanced than just replacing authors, and it is more than just the topics covered in a course. It concerns not only what is

taught and how it is critiqued, but how it is taught, which gives rise to an understanding of decolonisation that addresses how academic literacies are experienced.

5. Decolonising means identifying ways in which the university structurally reproduces colonial hierarchies; confronting, challenging and rejecting the status quo; and reimagining them and putting alternatives into practice for the benefit of our academic integrity and our social viability.
6. Decolonising the curriculum means 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.
7. Decolonisation is not a project over which one group can claim sole custodianship. Non-white and white academics and students are in this together. This will involve conscious, deliberate, non-hypocritical and diligent interest by both non-white and white members of the university in all knowledge systems, cultures, peoples and languages.
8. Decolonising requires sustained collaboration, discussion and experimentation among groups of teachers and students, who themselves have power to make things happen on the ground and think about what might be done differently. The change will take different forms in different universities and disciplines. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.
9. Decolonising is thinking about how students experience the university differently. Race, gender, disability and class all demonstrably impact student attainment and experiences of exclusion from the university environment. These are linked to the university's historic identity and mission, as well as wider structural inequalities within society.
10. Decolonising requires the courage to admit that any knowledge could and should be open to challenge and question, regardless of its original power relations. This is the only way to avoid the mere 'displacement' of one curriculum coloniser by another.

11. Decolonising is about how we can ensure a system where all those who engage with the university to make their living, or to study, can do so under conditions of dignity, respect and security.”¹²

Areas to Explore

Here are some further examples of initiatives that colleagues can look to implement within their modules.

1. Reflecting on reading lists and references: are these fully representative of the diversity of the communities for which our subjects have relevance? It is important to note that a diverse range of references should not only be applicable when topics about marginalised groups are being covered. For example, in English, are we using a diverse range of authors (e.g., diverse in terms of race, abilities, gender and sexuality) in our references and suggested reading lists?

2. Reflecting on *case studies*: Are the case studies we use fully reflective of the variable experiences that people with different identities may have of the same phenomena? For example, in medicine, are we using diverse patient pictures to show how different illnesses/diseases present themselves on different skin colours? It's also important to avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes and narratives in any examples.

In Conservation Biology, we know that biomes have been misclassified due to the colonial legacy. Ecosystems such as the tropical grasslands in India are classified as degraded ecosystems.¹³

3. Reflect and research the history of your discipline. In what context was it developed and do any key theories or knowledge forms take their roots in colonialism or in racist ‘scientific’ assumptions? Think about the ‘key players’ in the field, who were they, what was the political climate at the time? For example, research in the early 20th century on malaria was

¹²<https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityawards/raceequalitycharter/keeledecolonisingthecurriculumnetwork/#keele-manifesto-for-decolonising-the-curriculum>

¹³<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25621956>

intertwined with Britain's colonialism as the work was largely motivated to protect British agents engaged in colonising other communities.¹⁴

The aim of this action is not to rid the discipline of these important theories/breakthroughs, but rather to acknowledge the historical context that has produced the knowledge we centre in academia today, and to test it for bias with a critical consciousness.

4. Can you critically reflect on the ways and means used to identify and analyse information in your discipline? Are there specific approaches to methodology in your discipline that contain both conscious and unconscious bias? Is there any tendency to assume a race/gender/disabled-blind approach, which may fail to acknowledge some key underlying differences of experience rooted in structural inequalities?

Health Sciences - in Counselling and Psychotherapy, psychoanalysis is often used to help clients understand patterns of behaviour. However, the approach is incompatible with faith and limits patients to instincts alone, without considering spiritual realities.¹⁵

5. Reflect and research the classical 'canon' that is taught in your subject. Think about the method and order topics within your discipline are taught, and ask if there are hierarchies of identity with respect to those take to be authoritative sources of knowledge?

For example, in International Relations Theory, students are often taught Realism and Liberalism first and for the longest period and then the other '-isms' (e.g., Marxism, Feminism, Post-colonialism) are taught altogether in one lecture or then or not taught at all and only included in the optional reading list.

6. Reflect on the ways in which knowledge in your subject could be used to further race-based inequalities or to maintain neo-colonial global relations. Are there examples in your subjects of ways in which companies or governments may use research outcomes to gain benefits that are exploitative of people from post-colonial communities? Is there scope to consider the *application of subject knowledge* and its possible misuses and abuses to bolster power

¹⁴ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(09\)62081-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(09)62081-X/fulltext)

¹⁵ Garcia, H and Miralles, F. 2017, Ikigai: the Japanese Secret to a long and happy life.

relations that are connected to the enduring impact of the historical legacy of racialised colonialism?

Warwick University also set out some useful ideas for decolonising methodology:

1. “How do assumptions about power affect what we select as problems for research; who pays for this research; and what purposes does the research serve? A critique of research practice might take on the neo liberal globalisation agenda in higher education, institutional reliance on private money and an over eagerness to put knowledge at the service of the highest bidder.
2. What relationship does the researcher have with those being researched? An indigenous standpoint is that the researcher is accountable, and those doing the research must give back to the communities they study... In contrast, dominant research paradigms prize distance from those being research often for reasons of objectivity and bias.
3. Extending the point above, research should have an action orientation, and researchers should work with the communities they study to collaboratively seek change...
4. Who conducts the research? Decolonising researchers argue that indigenous communities are often un / underrepresented in academic research communities and hence their voices and concerns are not heard. Non-indigenous researchers can research indigenous communities but this will call for a more critical analysis of their own standpoints and more collaborative way of working. Radical voices would argue that there are limits on non-indigenous researcher involvement and researchers should not ‘talk about what they don’t know’ .
5. Are bodies of knowledge distorted? Decolonisation researchers seek to explain how discourse affects the way we look at subordinate groups, as for example Said in discussing dominant, sometimes, romanticised versions of orientalism in the context of Arabic studies or, earlier, Fanon in discussing culture, psychotherapy and violence in the particular context of the struggle for Algerian independence. We should be aware of such distortions and consider alternative or ‘counter-hegemonic’ sources. These counter narratives might have to be actively sought out.

6. How is research methodology itself distorted by a dominant tradition? Here it is argued that methodology is derived from western enlightenment assumptions about individualism, the separation of mind from body and rationalism. This tradition puts positivist or pseudo-scientific approaches on top when it comes to carrying out research. Other cultures have different traditions as Smith (1999) discusses in looking at indigenous communities in New Zealand. The indigenous viewpoint is to see view 'land, body, mind, and spirit as interconnected' and this poses a radical critique of the assumptions made in dominant research pedagogy."¹⁶

Diversify vs Decolonise

One initiative on the path of DTC is diversifying reading lists and whilst this is a positive step towards creating a more inclusive curriculum, we need to go beyond this. Decolonising the curriculum is not the same as diversifying the curriculum.

DTC looks at the power structures that have created hierarchies of knowledge and looks to dismantle these, whereas diversifying the curriculum upholds the current structures without addressing the key issues within our forms of knowledge. We will not achieve genuine decolonisation of our curricula if we are not ready to get to the root of the biases within historical processes of knowledge production and dissemination in all our disciplines.

In conversation with various academic from several institutions, Dr Caroline Garaway Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at University College London, suggests on this topic that:

"Our University has embraced the 'inclusive' curriculum as its institutional aim to "improve the experience, skills and attainment of all students, including those in protected characteristic groups, by ensuring that all students, regardless of background are able to participate fully and achieve at equal rates". Learning from experiences at Kingston, the policy is very much aimed at reducing the proven BAME attainment gap within the university and is said to be achieved by "allowing all students to relate to and engage more with academic material and assessments". This requires a diversification of reading lists beyond white dead men and a diversification of assessments and more opportunity for

¹⁶ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/current/socialtheory/maps/decolonising>

formative work. Whilst not specifically relating to the curriculum it also requires more BAME role models within academia itself.

In my experience people often don't fully see how this is different from the decolonising the curriculum agenda particularly because, in many ways, it leads to some of the same things in practice (diversifying reading lists, paying attention to pedagogical practice and assessment). Discussing this at UCL, some students and staff favoured 'decolonisation' over 'inclusivity' because an 'inclusive curriculum' or 'diverse curriculum' suggests that 'outsiders' could 'join the club' and that their views 'could be incorporated' rather than a far more radical questioning of the canon itself and the cultural authority that it is imbued with. It is the questioning of the moral authority of the canon itself which I think is at the heart of the difference.

Critics say that an inclusive curriculum attempts to take politics and power out of the equation. To decolonise, not just to diversify, recognises that knowledge is marked by power relations in which straight white hetero upper class men, still have disproportionate prominence. If we question the canon and its historically contextualised origins; then, rather than pretending we have a generic identity, questions of class, caste, race, gender, ability and sexuality are exposed and open to discussion...and the canon open to change. Put this way the aim of a decolonized curriculum, unlike an inclusive one, is about much more than the attainment of individual students at any one University, as important as that is. Instead, and ultimately it is about transforming society, about breaking down structural inequalities and institutional racism and as centres of knowledge production, higher education should be leading the way on this."¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/decolonisation-curriculum-conversation>

Faculty suggestions

In this section we will set out some more practical examples of how our colleagues can work to implement DTC within their own modules.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of suggestions and other ideas on how to decolonise the curriculum are welcome.

Here are some ideas that can be carried out by all Faculties including:

- Creating a channel on Microsoft Teams dedicated specifically to sharing DTC resources
- In line with the memo released October 2020, creating inclusive Staff-Student working groups to review modules and help create diverse reading lists.
- Best practice sharing with colleagues within your Faculty and/or School.
- Attend conferences about decolonising your subject.
- Where possible, offer research pieces/dissertations/ end of assessment essays/final year projects on decolonise themes
- Spend a seminar where you talk about decolonising your subject with students
- Do students sit on module approval committees? It would be good if students commented on new modules before they got to approval stage (thus incorporating ideas of co-creation) -perhaps managed by Student Voice Representatives? - To look specifically at DTC amongst other student concerns.
- Recognition of DTC work in each School – e.g., a School prize for the best dissertation which is based on/ informed by DTC etc.
- Review the geographical bias in research outputs when researching in partnership with academic colleagues from the Global South – it's important to listen and amplify the voices of indigenous academics.

Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS)

It's often thought that Humanities and Social Sciences are the 'most simple' to decolonise, however, we have to be careful not to fall into the trap of just creating a diverse reading list, there needs to be total overhaul in thinking about the 'critical canons' of Politics, Law and Business.

Examples:

- International Relations, the teaching of IR often begins with the teaching of the idea of the modern sovereign state. Can we challenge this and look further back to the Empires, such as the Mughal, Ottoman and Chinese etc and look at interactions. What order do we teach IR theory? Liberalism and Realism are often the first IR theories to be taught, this sets them up as the default, can we subvert this and start with the critical theories? Do we mention colonialism when we talk about IR?
- In English Literature what are the 'Classics'? What characterises a novel to be part of the 'Classics'? Where have most of the 'Classics' been produced?
- In Law, can we analyse and acknowledge the disparity in the criminal justice system? Can we critically analyse laws that have been known to discriminate against various groups? Are there any pieces of research that can look further into laws that discriminate?
- In History, could we introduce oral history projects which allow students to celebrate and research more into their heritage and present their findings through film, poetry and other artistic expressions?
- In Film Studies can we discuss with students the portrayal of disabled individuals by abled body actors? Or Trans men and women being played by cis actors? Can we discuss the disparity and centralising of Hollywood films and the stereotypes that are often pandered to in Western cinema? Is there a piece of research that can be done on translating cinema across cultures?
- In Business, are we analysing the practices that take root in colonial practices linked to slavery? Which businesses have profited from slavery? Could there be discussions about free markets and cheap labour which has led to real inequalities for garment workers in countries such as Bangladesh?

Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS)

When it comes to Medicine and Health, some often feign that this discipline doesn't need decolonising, and this is where we find the first barrier. A most recent and topical example of the deep-rooted colonial mindset in the Medicine and Health field comes from the comments made by French doctors around testing the COVID-19 vaccine in Africa.¹⁸ It proves we have a very long way to go in decolonising this field.

Examples:

- Case studies using patients from varying cultural groups could be used, to educate students on the demographic differences they will see when treating patients. There is a body of work called *Mind the Gap: A Handbook of Clinical Signs in Black and Brown Skin* by Mukwende, Tamony & Turner.¹⁹
- Is the language used gender neutral?
- When we talk about the NHS are we discussing its history and how people from Britain's former colonies were encouraged to join as doctors, nurses, porters, cleaners and so on? And how today the NHS has introduced upfront charging for anyone not classified as "ordinarily resident," whose details may be shared with the Home Office if debts are incurred.²⁰
- A characteristic that reflects the effects of Euro-centric thought, and that persists as a pervasive characteristic in nursing thought, is the emphasis on empirics, and the presumption of "objectivity" in part because it is removed from the vicissitudes, the contamination, of everyday experience.²¹
- DNA pioneer James Watson recently lost his honorary title over racist comments. Are there other thinkers and contributors to the field that are known to have views that do not align with our current understanding of equality?

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-52151722>

¹⁹ <https://www.blackandbrownskin.co.uk/mindthegap>

²⁰ <https://rdcu.be/b8Tli>

²¹ <https://nursology.net/2020/01/14/decolonizing-nursing/>

- Is there a piece of research that can be done on the unequal impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities?
- Can we talk about health inequalities in general – e.g., infant mortality rates amongst Black/Asian/White communities
- Having both male and female mannequins as teaching aides.
- Using diverse photos – different racial backgrounds, gender-nonconforming, disabled people, women etc.
- Are we allowing space for cultural religious difference? For example, exploring the health effects on people who are fasting.
- How has the history of your subject been implicit in othering communities?

Natural Sciences (FNS)

Like the other sciences, Natural Sciences is another discipline where it may not be immediately obvious on how decolonisation is applicable to this field of study and research.

Examples:

- Psychology – “A decolonial turn for psychology would mean moving away from the assumption that the individual is the central unit of analysis in ways that overlook people’s social, economic and political contexts.”²²
- Maths – Introduce different topics such as Ethnomathematics and critical mathematics, the former looking at mathematics in cultural artefacts and practices and the latter uses maths to critique society.²³

²² <https://theconversation.com/decolonising-psychology-creates-possibilities-for-social-change-65902>

²³ <https://theconversation.com/yes-mathematics-can-be-decolonised-heres-how-to-begin-65963>

- Biology – think about concepts such as wilderness and wastelands, these are terms often referred to as places uninhabitable by ‘civilised’ humans but were in their eyes ‘uncivilised’ indigenous people lived.²⁴
- Decolonial computing, as a ‘critical’ project, is about interrogating who is doing computing, where they are doing it, and, thereby, what computing means both epistemologically (i.e. in relation to knowing) and ontologically (i.e. in relation to being)"

“Practitioners and researchers adopting a decolonial computing perspective are required, at a minimum, to do the following: Firstly, consider their geo-political and body-political orientation when designing, building, researching or theorizing about computing phenomena; and secondly, embrace the ‘decolonial option’ as an ethics, attempting to think through what it might mean to design and build computing systems with and for those situated at the peripheries of the world system, informed by the epistemologies located at such sites, with a view to undermining the asymmetry of local-global power relationships and effecting the ‘decentering’ of Eurocentric / West-centric universals. Decolonial computing is a very recent proposal at the fringes – or rather, periphery (borders, frontiers, margins) – of computing. It is presently somewhat under-theorised, informed by a commitment to decolonial praxis and what might be described as an ‘open-source’ technopolitical orientation, asymmetries of power notwithstanding. It invites participation and contribution to its development while simultaneously being wary of co-option into the computing mainstream.”²⁵

Questions to consider

Here are some questions to consider when think about DTC in the context of your academic field:

- Where are the main sources of knowledge coming from that I am recommending students to explore further?
- How has the subject I teach contributed to ‘othering’ communities?

²⁴ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333046168_Decolonizing_field_ecology

²⁵ <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/2930886>

- Where do we take most knowledge from and how was that produced?
- What are the structural barriers I am unknowingly putting in place by teaching this topic/method?
- Are there important narratives I am not including as part of teaching and in extra reading?
- Is the language I use inclusive?
- What were the views of popular thinkers, academics, theorists etc in the field? Would those views be accepted today?
- Have I ensured I include a wide variety of case studies that isn't limited to the Global North?
- If I engage with research with colleagues from institutions in the Global South on a topic about their community, am I sure to not overshadow their lived experiences and their research?
- Is the academic space I provide for students inclusive? Have I thought about religious celebrations and festivals which will affect a student's ability to attend a lecture/seminar?
- Is my material accessible? Is the language accessible, is it available in larger print, is it suitable for screen readers?
- Do I acknowledge the effects of systemic/institutional racism and how this plays out in my institution?

- Would I know what to do if a slur was used in class. How would I think I would react?
- Do I know where to signpost students if they need support?
- How does my own behaviour contribute to coloniality in the world?²⁶
- What are the biases I myself may hold that I have to work to unlearn? - [Harvard implicit bias test.](#)

DTC at other HE institutions

There are several institutions in the UK who are also working to decolonise the curriculum.

- BCU has a BA course on Black Studies.²⁷
- UCL Medicine School procured melanoma stickers to use on darker skins, since melanomas may be harder to detect on darker skins.²⁸
- The University of Nottingham has created a [Decolonising guide for Medicine.](#)²⁹
- UCL, there is an entire module at dedicated to decolonising law, they even include a topic on university endowments linked to colonialism and slavery. It's important not to shy away from 'difficult' questions.³⁰
- University of Leeds created a Black British History module.³¹
- UCL hosted a [decolonising the curriculum week.](#)³²

²⁶ Sultana, F. Decolonizing Development Education and the Pursuit of Social Justice.

²⁷ <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/courses/black-studies-ba-hons-2021-22>

²⁸ <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2018/10/18/diversifying-and-decolonising-the-medical-curriculum/>

²⁹ <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/medicine/documents/edi/appendix-2-decolonising-and-diversifying-the-medical-curriculum.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/study/lm-master-laws/modules-2019-20/decolonizing-law-laws0224>

³¹ <https://leedsforlife.leeds.ac.uk/Broadening/Module/HIST2565>

³² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-historical-sciences/news-events/events/decolonising-curriculum-week-2019/decolonising-curriculum-events-programme>

- SOAS have a module on Decolonising World Politics and have created a '[Decolonising SOAS Toolkit](#)'.³³
- UCL allows students to take a study component which looks at mental health from an indigenous perspective.³⁴
- The University of Sheffield has created a [guide for staff on decolonising biosciences](#).³⁵
- Decolonising DMU – **International Relations** - “created a student-staff reading group and read Akala’s book, *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*. Lecturers participated, but the majority of the group were students – mostly BAME students, though white students joined too – and academic roles were effectively reversed. One academic acted as the student leaders’ administrator, organising room bookings and refreshments, running the mailing list and adding new members. The students provided the intellectual leadership and decision-making. They opened, led and facilitated each discussion. 15-20 regular attendees met fortnightly on a Thursday evening for two hours to discuss a chapter from the book. In this relaxed space, controlled by students, they led the discussions of race and racism, as well as class, gender, sexuality and much more.³⁶
- Decolonising DMU - **Psychology** - “As part of their second-year research methods module, Level 5 psychology students complete an assessed qualitative research report using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is a new approach to students, so two workshops are dedicated to practicing IPA on an existing dataset. These workshops presented an opportunity to incorporate further inclusivity within the Psychology programme by focusing on a topic that takes into account our learners’ identities, experience and history: the Hajj Pilgrimage. Hajj is an annual pilgrimage that should be undertaken by all able Muslims at least once in their lifetime. Diaries written by pilgrims are analysed and discussed by students in the workshops, with a range of socially, culturally and globally relevant mixed media resources provided on Blackboard, and a tutor available to support students’ learning. In terms of best practice, this approach highlights the suitability and

³³ <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/files/2018/10/Decolonising-SOAS-Learning-and-Teaching-Toolkit-AB.pdf>

³⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32029542/>

³⁵ https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.909318!/file/Decolonise.pdf

³⁶ <https://decolonisingdmu.our.dmu.ac.uk/staff/toolkit/work-with-tutors/>

adaptability of research methods training for embedding inclusivity into programme curricula. Topics can be chosen to reflect the demographics of the cohort, and changed easily from one year to the next by using readily available data (e.g. online diaries, blogs, public datasets etc.). Therefore, research methods training is an excellent opportunity for educators to enable more students to see themselves reflected in their learning.”³⁷

- Decolonising DMU – **Criminology** - “Ensuring that education is fit for purpose to engage diverse groups, means reflecting a holistic representation of diversity within teaching materials and media. Keen to develop a multi-centric representation of diversity for recruitment, induction and teaching purposes; animated scenarios, talking head signpost activities and lecture materials were developed and embedded within teaching and outreach activities. This innovative approach aligns with research which reflects that avatar based media has the power to instill avatar empathy and understanding but becomes more relevant if the observer can relate to the avatar delivering the message. Avatar role models and academic guides have an ability to inspire all students without resorting to stereotypes and other influences more typically represented in the media. Most important however is ensuring that colleagues fully understand the opportunities provided by these methods which is why dissemination is such good practice.”³⁸
- Decolonising DMU – **English Language** - “Students were given the opportunity to demonstrate their learning by reflecting on their own everyday linguistic experiences with a module that includes writing about their own ‘linguistic observations’. As the focus of this is on the students’ own experience, it is sensitive to the students’ own socio-cultural identity and history. For example, bilingual and international students have written pieces commenting on linguistic differences between the languages they speak or some of the misunderstandings they have encountered as non-native speakers of English. Students have also reflected on slang uses specific to their own dialect and social group. Students are encouraged to work in inclusive and engaged manner with their peers, with peer feedback and collaboration, as students can learn from each other’s experiences.”³⁹
- Decolonising DMU- **Pharmacy** - “A cross-school DMU global trip was organised and students from courses in the Schools of Pharmacy and Nursing and Midwifery participated.

³⁷ <https://decolonisingdmu.our.dmu.ac.uk/staff/toolkit/work-with-tutors/>

³⁸ <https://decolonisingdmu.our.dmu.ac.uk/staff/toolkit/work-with-tutors/>

³⁹ <https://decolonisingdmu.our.dmu.ac.uk/staff/toolkit/work-with-tutors/>

This intense 9 day trip to Hong Kong included visits to the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences, the Taipingshan Medical Heritage Trail, the School of Pharmacy, University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong University School of Chinese Medicine, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, and the Po Lin Monastery & Big Buddha with additional free time for students to explore the culture and sights. The trip was well evaluated and gave students a greater insight into what are described as “alternative” or “complementary” therapies in the West but are in more commonly used in the East, and an opportunity to hear different perspectives from other members of the multi-disciplinary teams working within the NHS and private sector in the UK.”⁴⁰

Contact us

If you would like to get involved further with Decolonising the Curriculum in your Faculty please email the Race Equality Charter Co-Chairs, Professor Shane O’Neill s.t.oneill@keele.ac.uk or Dr Ray Amith on s.r.amith@keele.ac.uk or the Race Equality Officer, Hinna Sheikh, on h.sheikh@keele.ac.uk

Useful links and resources

General

- ‘Colonialism had never really ended’: my life in the shadow of Cecil Rhodes, Guardian, January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/jan/14/rhodes-must-fall-oxford-colonialism-zimbabwe-simukai-chigudu>
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