Decolonising Framework – Key Principles

The implementation of a Decolonising Framework is vital in this period of global pandemic that has further highlighted and exacerbated structural educational inequalities (access to IT hardware/software and internet, quiet study spaces). Implementing such a framework is an integral part of the University’s commitment to reduce Degree Awarding Gaps and non-continuation rates.

Students from minoritised groups have highlighted sense of alienation partly caused by curriculum content, that either does not speak to their interests and lived experiences or worse is discriminatory and biased. Therefore, this framework also feeds into the university-wide Sense of Belonging work.

“I want modules that don’t have questions of race, disability or gender as an after-thought or a special week.”

“Discussions about decolonisation allow me to bring my real self to my studies, to know that my point of view is valued”

“Seeing myself as an active part of my research as is practised in decoloniality, rather than a passive commentator/analyst has made me much more engaged with my work and motivated me too! “

(Statements gathered through module reviews and conversations between students and staff engaged with decolonisation at Leeds)

However, “Decolonisation cannot be applied singularly to the curriculum or to the attainment gap. It feeds into, amongst other things, the very structure of the university, the experiences of students, staff and wider publics, knowledge creation and outputs, and stymied institutional cultures and mind-sets.” (Dr Rima Saini, LSE). It is for this reason that this framework will make recommendations that go beyond Learning and Teaching Practice to encompass wider university structures.

All academics, professional services staff must share equally the responsibility of this work and ensure that its implementation and monitoring is not placed disproportionately on those staff from minoritised groups that already suffer most from institutional racism and discrimination. Those colleagues with leadership positions are called upon to consider how they can use their influence to effectuate change and serve as role models.

Definition of a decolonial education

A decolonial education seeks;

To question the origins of the knowledge taught and the colonial legacies that are replicated within.

To challenge the presence of a hidden curriculum of assumed knowledge that unfairly disadvantages many.

To ask whose knowledges and voices are undervalued and silenced.

To work proactively to rebalance such unequal power dynamics.

It is one where the evaluation of the curriculum and pedagogical practices is an evolving and responsive process and has partnership between the staff and student body at its heart.

It aims to combat racial prejudices and discrimination and to challenge racialised privilege.

It is relevant and applicable to all disciplines across the university.

As well as addressing questions of curriculum and pedagogy, it also encompasses wider university structures and practices.

1. Learning and Teaching Practices

1.1 The University will support people to actively work to decolonise their curricula and educational practices to consider the legacies of colonialism, unequal power dynamics and discrimination that they may contain.

1.2 Decolonising work should be carried out in conjunction with students so that they have a sustained and meaningful input into curricula and pedagogy. However, students should not be solely responsible.

1.3 The University commits to support people to adopt decolonial pedagogy and assessment methods to empower staff and students to develop their own critical thinking skills and educational practice.

1.4 This Learning and Teaching work will be facilitated by schools and services and later reviewed through the inclusion of questions on decolonial practices in all university learning & teaching quality assurance mechanisms - including module/ program approval, feedback and evaluation methods and staff/student forums.

1.5 Decolonial pedagogy will be recognised and highlighted through the creation of a Leeds’ Decolonising Mark. This will be institutional level recognition of modules that offer a diverse and inclusive range of topics, case studies and reading list items to their students and/or are taught and assessed using decolonial pedagogy. The award will be visible in Minerva and on the Module catalogue to help inform student choice.

1.6 Decolonising learning and teaching practices will be supported by the Library. There will be an active purchasing policy of decolonial texts and resources. Skills@Library will foreground decolonial academic skills courses.

1.7 Training in decolonial pedagogy will be run by LITE and OD&PL to provide staff with the tools to decolonise their curricula and teaching practices.

1.8 Positive action policies should be applied to student opportunity programmes (Internships and Work Placements, Study Abroad, Scholarship schemes) and progression to certain academic programmes (Progression to Integrated Masters) based on an academic potential to achieve model.

1. Student Representation and Voice

2.1 A cross-institution Decolonising Student Advisory board will be formed (working with LUU), to be composed of two representatives from each faculty (from different year groups) plus three from the doctoral college (AHC, Social Sciences, STEM). Each representative will be paid for their work, which will include making recommendations on decolonising policies (following input from the wider student body) and organising and promoting student-led decolonising events.

2.2 An annual, internal, university-wide student-led conference on decolonial education and research will be organised and funded to highlight the range of decolonial student work and activism at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

1. Student Support

Decoloniality also seeks to address structural inequalities in all areas of student life and experience, for this reason, it is recommended that there should be;

3.1 Continued training of culturally competent advisors and counsellors and a review of online advice for cultural competency.

3.2 A review of student support mechanisms and procedures (including (Academic) Personal Tutoring) to reflect upon situations that disproportionately impact minoritised students.

1. Training

To support the Learning and Teaching reforms, there needs to be a reform of university-wide equality training;

4.1 For Staff – There should be an enhanced program of decolonisation training (including Anti-racist pedagogies and practice, Whiteness in the Academy, Allyship). This would be obligatory for anyone taking up an academic or SES Student Education leadership role and for all new staff (training to be introduced in the next 12 months) and for all module leaders, professional services and student support staff (training to be introduced in the next 24 months).

4.2 For Students – There should be obligatory training as part of annual induction/transition for all UG and PG students.

1. Reward and recognition

To recognise the work being undertaken;

5.1 Creation of a specific Decolonising the University category in the University’s Partnership awards (for both staff and students).

5.2 Acknowledgement of the value of decolonising work explicitly in university’s reward and recognition schemes, recruitment and promotion criteria.

1. University values and identity

6.1 The University will fund research into its links to colonialism, slavery and racism. These results should be acknowledged on the University’s external website and through an exhibition in Brotherton gallery.