

# Decolonising the Curriculum resources

A reflective evaluation of activities to support staff to decolonise the curriculum, 2021–24

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## Contextual statement

This report is a reflection upon and review of the Decolonising the Curriculum resources and associated activities of the Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group, 2021–24. The aim is to identify the impact on closing the awarding gap. This report will be used as a basis to inform planning for future work in this area, as well as other evaluation exercises.

This report is part of the first cycle of more robust evaluation in line with our new Access and Participation Plan. Therefore, we acknowledge that the evaluation still has limitations and we do not intend to over-claim the strength of any conclusions.

In particular, it is noted that this evaluation is based primarily on usage data. There were practical challenges to data collection, and it is acknowledged that the limited sample size of survey responses reduces the robustness of claims about the programme's effectiveness beyond immediate reactions. Nevertheless, the data here still provide valuable insights into engagement and the immediate perceived benefits of the programme. Future evaluations will aim to strengthen data collection, and long-term data will also become available.

## Executive summary

### The activity

The Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group was set up in 2021 following a recommendation of the Race Equality Review. The Working Group has produced two sets of guidance to support colleagues to implement decolonising the curriculum in their contexts. One of the tasks was to articulate an institutional vision for decolonising the curriculum, which is explained in the first resource (2022):

*‘decolonising the curriculum starts by reviewing your teaching and learning practices to make sure a diverse range of students are represented. It is far more than adding ethnic minority authors to your reading lists, it is embedding diverse viewpoints, experiences, beliefs, and frameworks throughout your teaching content and teaching methods. It is also making sure that assessment methods reflect the changes in teaching content (p. 4).’*

Additionally, the Working Group has supported a series of well attended workshops and showcases and has worked to promote the resources and the pedagogy of decolonising the curriculum.

### The evaluation

This report has drawn on multiple qualitative and quantitative data sources including surveys, engagement metrics and STEAP plans. These sources are used to evaluate the impact of decolonising the curriculum activities on teaching and learning and closing the awarding gap at the University.

### Main findings

This evaluation finds several impacts: all schools and a number of functions have engaged in relevant training sessions; multiple modules in a range of schools have embedded decolonising content or teaching; ongoing strategic investment in T&L enhancement projects through the PLaNT scheme is developing the evidence base for the efficacy of decolonising the curriculum; three schools have included decolonising the curriculum in their STEAP for academic year 2023–24; and students respond positively to decolonial approaches to teaching and learning. Reflections on the Working Group structure find that direct involvement in the project benefitted staff and students alike. Taken together, these activities will, in theory, help to close unexplained degree outcomes gaps that correlate with ethnicity and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

### Conclusions/recommendations

The report makes several recommendations for future and ongoing efforts to decolonise the curriculum at the University of Reading. These recommendations are to

enhance the reach of messaging; apply different evaluation strategies; produce more practical guidance; target select schools; seek to understand barriers staff face in implementing decolonising the curriculum approaches; maintain student involvement, and; preserve independence from usual University business. It is expected that implementing these recommendations will expand the reach and impact of decolonising the curriculum and better equip the institution to deliver pedagogical practices that narrow the awarding gap.

## Introduction

### Context

Decolonising the curriculum (DtC) is interpreted in different ways, but proponents generally recognise that a troubling and complex network of factors – such as racism and the legacy of colonialism and empire – continue to shape educational theory, practice and policy today (English & Heilbronn, 2024). The demand to decolonise university curricula can be traced to events here in the UK and globally in the 2010s. Following the NUS (National Union of Students) publishing a set of recommendations to enhance diversity and equality in curricula, students at UCL (University College London) released a video in 2014 with the title '[Why is my Curriculum White?](#)' It sought to raise awareness of white and Eurocentric bias in university curricula that 'made blackness invisible' (Peters, 2018, p. 254). The following year, the Rhodes Must Fall protest campaign led to the removal of the statue of British colonialist Cecil Rhodes from the grounds of the University of Cape Town in 2015. The movement gained renewed momentum in the UK via the Rhodes Must Fall Oxford campaign in June 2020, where campaigners demanded his statue be removed from Oriel College. The background to these efforts to remove statues of colonisers from university campuses was BLM (Black Lives Matter), an anti-racism movement that began in 2013 in the US. BLM gained international attention with the murder of African American man George Floyd in the US by police in May 2020. His murder sparked global protests that highlighted racism, discrimination, and inequality experienced by Black peoples.

The higher education sector as a whole has been slow to respond to these local and global reckonings with racism and the legacies of imperialism. A [2020 report from The Guardian](#) found that only 24 of 128 UK universities were committed to decolonising the curriculum. Calls to decolonise coincided with the OfS Office for Students [warning higher education institutions \(HEIs\)](#) to close the gap in outcomes between white students and those from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic ('BAME') backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> However, since the Guardian report was published, UK universities have increasingly responded in a range of ways to student demands for decolonising.

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<sup>1</sup> Various terms are used to describe race and ethnicity. The term BAME has known limitations, such as suggesting that BAME individuals form a single, homogeneous group. However, it is used here because it remains in use across the University and is the preferred term for reporting on the awarding gap within the sector.

Shain et al. (2021) note that ‘decolonising work has ... become strategically important for universities’ to demonstrate they are committed to ‘university-wide change towards eliminating racialised inequalities’ (p. 924). Efforts in this space have constituted ‘open letters as well as manifestos, zines, academic books, papers and exhibitions’ (p. 934).

## **Local context and rationale**

The University of Reading’s (UoR) degree awarding gaps – the difference in final undergraduate degree outcomes between various ethnic groups – are a driver for this work. The University’s awarding gaps are generally in line with those seen across the sector concerning ethnicity ([Haine, 2023](#), p. 2). Minority ethnic students (Black students, in particular), and students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds tend to experience greater barriers to participating in higher education. A core tenet for reducing continuation and awarding gaps is the development of inclusive curricula (see [Advance HE](#) website, including a [case-study at Reading](#)). Benefits of an inclusive curriculum include increasing students’ feelings of inclusion and belonging, especially for Black, Asian and racially minoritised students. Belonging is a contributor to student success (Pedler et al., 2022).

One component of the University’s inclusive curriculum design approach is work to enable the process of decolonising our curricula. The University of Reading has been at the fore to decolonise universities. In June 2020, the Vice Chancellor, Professor Robert Van de Noort commissioned the [Race Equality Review](#) (2021), which was co-led by Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Diversity and Inclusion, Professor Al Laville and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Parveen Yaqoob OBE. The aim of the review was to obtain a better understanding of race equality at the University for both staff and students. Among the themes explored was student experience and attainment, as exemplified by Recommendation 10 of the review, which recommended the development of a ‘programme to decolonise the curriculum:’

*Establish a ‘task and finish’ group, which includes students, staff and RUSU [Reading University Students Union; now RSU] Officers and leads on creating an institutional definition of ‘decolonising the curriculum’ (Objective 1), as well as preparing guidance on how to achieve it (Objective 2).*

Since the publication of the Race Equality Review (2021), opportunities have been provided for staff to develop their understanding and expertise in racial equity. Opportunities included bespoke workshops in academic schools and a regular programme of workshops and showcases on decolonising the curriculum/anti-racist pedagogy offered on CQSD’s (Centre for Quality Support and Development) T&L programme of events.

Approaches to DtC range from expanding the curriculum to include alternative, often overlooked perspectives to rethinking how we usually teach in universities. The University has adopted a holistic, student-centred understanding of DtC rather than offer an institutional definition. This broad approach allows schools, departments and

individuals to advance their own foci. Laville in the introduction to [Decolonising the Curriculum resource](#) (2022) advises colleagues that

*decolonising the curriculum starts by reviewing your teaching and learning practices to make sure a diverse range of students are represented. It is far more than adding ethnic minority authors to your reading lists, it is embedding diverse viewpoints, experiences, beliefs, and frameworks throughout your teaching content and teaching methods. It is also making sure that assessment methods reflect the changes in teaching content (p. 4).*

Evidence of the impact of curriculum reform on the ethnicity awarding gap and other awarding gaps at UoR is thus far limited, but we know this form of representation is desired by our students and we seek to contribute to sector understanding by initially reporting on staff capability to implement this type of curriculum reform and aspiring to reporting on the impact of the activity itself.

## **Overview of the initiative**

In early 2022, the DtC Working Group (hereafter, WG) was launched. The WG has had two phases, with a third planned for the 2025: the first phase (2021–22) was chaired by Professor Al Laville, and the second phase (2022–23) was co-chaired by Virendra Adhikari, RSU Mature Student's Officer. Through an open expression of interest call, the WG included members from across academic schools and functions, student inclusion consultants, and RSU sabbatical officers. This University-wide collaborative effort resulted in co-produced resources, webinars and showcases, and external publications. The most notable outputs so far have been two sets of guidance, [Decolonising the Curriculum resource 1](#) (2022) and [Decolonising the Curriculum resource 2](#) (2023). The first resource covers the themes of decolonising teaching content, teaching methods, and assessment methods. The themes included in the second resource are inclusive T&L environments, student-staff partnership approaches to decolonising the curriculum and decolonising research to inform decolonised teaching content. The resources are comprised of reflective questions and question-led approaches to help colleagues begin to decolonise their T&L, case studies of completed decolonising work in a range of disciplines, a FAQ co-created with students, and further reading and resources, including a list of podcasts. As described above, the resources are complemented by a series of webinars and showcases on DtC, supplementary material on the University of Reading website and other outputs, including conference presentations and articles.

## **Aim of the initiative**

The resources sought to complement and build on the [Promoting Racial Justice in Teaching and Learning](#) (2022), an edited collection of written pieces from students and staff produced entirely at UoR and made available digitally and in print. The principal

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aim of the DtC resources is to increase colleagues' academic confidence in how to decolonise their curricula. The first resource is particularly applicable to all academic schools and T&L support staff, and the second resource is applicable to all academic and professional services colleagues. The resources do not target students specifically, however making sure that staff are confident in decolonising practices and how to implement them in their curricula will theoretically have a positive impact on our target students (particularly for minority ethnic students).

The principal aim supports the University in our Advance HE Bronze Race Equality Charter action plan.

## **Link to Access & Participation Plan (APP)**

Objective E: Close unexplained degree outcomes gaps that correlate with ethnicity and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

## **Previous evaluation**

No prior evaluation of the Decolonising the Curriculum resources has taken place.

# **Methodology**

## **Research questions**

1. Has the resource contributed to self-reported staff awareness around decolonising the curriculum?
2. Has the resource contributed to self-reported staff knowledge of how decolonising the curriculum works in practice?
3. Has the resource contributed to self-reported staff confidence around decolonising the curriculum?
4. Does the DtC resource link to more mentions of decolonising the curriculum in school teaching and learning plans?

## **Methods**

A variety of qualitative and quantitative data sources have been identified to answer the research questions. Quantitative data sources are:

- survey data
- attendance at webinars and showcases
- website traffic data.

Qualitative data sources comprise:

- open text responses in surveys including webinar evaluations



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- comments from members of the DtC WG (staff and students) elicited during award applications
- decolonising-related activities undertaken by DtC WG members
- STEAPs (School Teaching and Learning Action Plans).

The survey and webinar evaluation data will be further explained and contextualised below.

#### *Survey data*

At the outset of this evaluation, a nine-question survey was intended to form the foundation of this report (see [Appendix 2](#)). The survey was comprised of questions on a Likert scale (1-5; 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'to a great extent') and open text questions. The plan was to primarily recruit participants from academic schools and more limited numbers of staff-facing and student-facing professional services colleagues. The survey was open between October 2023 and June 2024. Participants were approached by their school director of teaching and learning (SDTL) and / or respective unit lead. Despite wide and repeated advertising on relevant communication channels (a Staff Portal article, newsletters, messages to D&I-related Teams channels and notices sent via email), total number of responses (n=7) to the survey fell well short of expectations. Focus groups were also planned but an insufficient number of staff (n=2) volunteered to participate, so these did not go ahead.

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#### *Webinar and showcase data*

To support the development and promotion of the DtC resources, 10 webinars and showcases for staff have been organised and delivered between 2021 and 2024. These were supported centrally by CQSD; participants received a standardised 10-item questionnaire as a paper form (if attending in-person) or a Microsoft Form (if attending online) comprised of closed, Likert scale and open text response items. Of these events, analysis of collated feedback was possible for four events. Data for the other events is missing presumably due to the feedback questionnaire never being administered to participants, the questionnaire receiving no responses from participants, or the data being lost in moving storage systems.

Thirty-one participants responded to questionnaire across the four events. Only three open text response items of the questionnaire have undergone thematic analysis; the other items do not relate to the research questions.

Attendance data is retained for the 10 events. These datasets have been analysed to identify which schools and functions have attended webinars and showcases.



## Data collection

Concept/Domain	Instrument or method	How instrument/method was administered
<p><b>Awareness of DtC</b></p>	<p>Metrics that evidence reach, including attendance at showcases and website visitation, plus anecdotal feedback to staff.</p> <p>Survey items:</p> <p><i>To what extent have the resources improved your awareness of the importance of decolonising the curriculum?(1-5)</i></p> <p><i>Please tell us more about how the resources impacted your awareness.</i></p>	<p>Survey, attendance and email feedback</p>
<p><b>Knowledge around DtC</b></p>	<p>Survey items:</p> <p><i>To what extent have the resources improved your knowledge of how to decolonise curricula? (1-5)</i></p> <p><i>Please tell us more about the level and type of knowledge you gained from the resources.</i></p> <p>Webinar evaluation items:</p>	<p>Survey via email</p>

Concept/Domain	Instrument or method	How instrument/method was administered
	<p><i>Which aspect of this session did you find most useful, and why?</i></p> <p><i>What do you feel you learnt during the session?</i></p>	
<b>Confidence with DtC</b>	<p>Survey items:</p> <p><i>To what extent have the resources improved your confidence in planning and executing the next steps to decolonise your curriculum? (1-5)</i></p>	Survey via email
<b>Monitoring and analysis of academic school and annual teaching and learning strategies</b>	<p>Review of mentions of DtC in STEAPs</p> <p>Plus survey question:</p> <p><i>Have you made any changes to your practice as a result of engaging with the resources? [Please tell us more]</i></p> <p>Webinar evaluation items:</p> <p><i>What do you feel you learnt during the session?</i></p> <p><i>What actions will you take within your</i></p>	Email

Concept/Domain	Instrument or method	How instrument/method was administered
		<i>role/practice following this session based upon the information delivered?</i>

## Ethics and Data Security

Survey followed standard ethics procedures, with participants being made aware that results will be used for evaluation purposes and that data will be anonymised for any external reporting purposes.

Other data has been gathered from ordinary University systems and processes.

## Data analysis

Concept / Domain	Analysis performed	Evidence of impact
<b>Awareness of DtC</b>	Descriptive statistics and observational / reflective analysis.	Type 1 – theoretical / single time point evidence that supports our theories on [contributing to] reducing awarding gaps.
<b>Knowledge around DtC</b>	Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.	Type 1 – theoretical / single time point evidence that supports our theories on [contributing to] reducing awarding gaps.
<b>Confidence with DtC</b>	Descriptive statistics and observational / reflective analysis.	Type 1 – theoretical / single time point evidence that supports our theories on [contributing to] reducing awarding gaps.
<b>Monitoring and analysis of academic school and</b>	Thematic analysis. Descriptive / reflective analysis of teaching and	Type 1 – theoretical / single time point evidence that supports our theories

Concept / Domain	Analysis performed	Evidence of impact
annual teaching and learning strategies	learning strategies (mentions of DtC in STEAPs).	on [contributing to] reducing awarding gaps.

## Type of evaluation

This evaluation was conducted to Type 1, according to the Office for Students' Standard of Evidence classification. The survey, anecdotal evidence and STEAP (School Teaching Enhancement Action Plans) plans are single timepoint, and therefore contribute to evidence that supports or refutes our theory of impact. Future evaluation will aspire to Type 2 via a comparison to baselines.

## Limitations

The various types of data gathered to answer the research questions do not amount to a representative sample of the University. Focus groups or interviews would likely have also yielded more diverse perspectives on DtC initiatives, including unearthing individual initiatives connected to the resources and the activities of the WG.

Aside from the limited sample size, impact is difficult to track from a single survey without a comparison. As mentioned, future evaluation will endeavour to create a comparison via baselines. Future evaluation will also aim to gather student perceptions of inclusive curricula, to add another facet of impact evaluation and to gather data directly from students, who this work is ultimately intended to have a positive impact on.

## Findings

### Awareness of DtC

#### *Findings from the survey*

The mean response to the question related to awareness of DtC (response options of 1–5) was 2.86. Six respondents elaborated on their response. Two respondents claimed they were not aware of the resources but had awareness of DtC from other sources, and two remarked positively on the case studies. One respondent noted that while the resources are welcome, they noted they lacked 'concrete guidance which many need to get going.'

#### *Reach of Decolonising the Curriculum resources*

The two collections have received over 400 digital views since the first resource was released in 2022 (see Table 1). A total of 150 physical copies – 50 copies for

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Resource 1 and 150 hundred for Resource 2 – have also been distributed to schools, professional service units and individuals. Alongside the two collections, in 2023 a separate student voice website was produced for Student Essentials (the University’s student-facing website) which highlights student views on decolonising the curriculum. It has been viewed 176 times.

Table 1. Visits to digital Decolonising the Curriculum resources, 2022–24. Source: Siteimprove.

	Date range	Views	Unique visitors
<a href="#">DtC resource 1 (2022)</a>	01/01/2022 – 31/12/2024	246	181
<a href="#">DtC resource 2 (2023)</a>	01/01/2023 – 31/12/2024	182	144
<a href="#">Student voice resource (2023)</a>	01/01/2023 – 31/12/2024	176	120
<b>Totals</b>	01/01/2022 – 31/12/2024	604	445

### *Webinar and showcase attendance*

From 2021 to March 2024, 10 online or hybrid sessions were organised on CQSD’s T&L Programme. These sessions can be categorised into two types: practical workshops and showcases of colleagues’ decolonising practice. In total, the sessions have received 340 attendances (see [Appendix 3](#)). Further, three UoR All-Staff Briefings (hosted on Microsoft Teams) have centred on DtC or included decolonising themes, and two Staff Portal stories and an associated video uploaded to YouTube have covered the launch of the resources. See Table 2 for incomplete viewing figures for these items.

Analysis of workshop and showcase attendance reveals the majority of attendees are academic staff (n=272). All academic schools in the University are represented in this data. Attendance numbers are highly variable across the schools, ranging from 39 to 4. Of note, three schools with presences at the University of Reading Malaysia were represented at the sessions (n=7), demonstrating the initiative has reach beyond the UK.

Smaller numbers of professional staff attended the webinars and showcases (n=68). Ten functions are represented in the datasets. Of these, CQSD and the Library (inclusive of Study Advice) registered the highest attendance (n=41). Their

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overrepresentation in the data is likely a result of these two functions being central to supporting teaching and learning across the institution.

See [Appendix 4](#) for a breakdown of the attendance data.

In January 2024, joint RSU (Reading Student Union) and University student-focused workshops were held which included the DtC resources. These were attended by approximately 30 students. The workshops received 100% agreement from students for enabling a safe, collaborative, and respectful environment to explore DtC.

Table 2. Approximate view totals for All-Staff Briefings and their recordings on DtC, 2022–24. Figures are accurate to 12/12/24. Source: Corporate Communications.

	Date	Attendees	Views <sup>2</sup>
<b>Race Equality Review update session</b>	October 2022	300	Not available
<b>Inclusive teaching update</b>	January 2023	Not available	Not available
<b>Diversity &amp; inclusion update</b>	September 2023	750	238
<a href="#">DtC story on UoR YouTube account</a>	September 2023	NA	446
<a href="#">Launch of Decolonising the Curriculum resources (Staff Portal article)</a>	September 2022	NA	187
<a href="#">New Decolonising the Curriculum resource (Staff Portal article)</a>	September 2023	NA	317

### *Use and mention of the DtC resources across the University*

<sup>2</sup> Due to a recent change in how the University hosts recordings of Teams meetings, viewing figures for two of the All-Staff Briefings have been lost.

The two sets of resources have had impact on:

- **Review and redesign of the University's portfolio of programmes and modules**, a project which ran from 2021 to 2024 – decolonising learning was threaded throughout 'Inclusion by Design' guidance (released mid-2022). Colleagues were directed to consult the first DtC resource for insight into how to critically consider who and what is centred in the curriculum.
- **DtC resources embedded into CQSD's Academic Practice Programme**, which prepares recently appointed academic colleagues to teach at the University. This has led to decolonising the curriculum-related assessment submissions and projects within the programme, including in the discipline areas of food science and politics and international relations.
- **Closing the awarding gap guidance and workshops** – decolonising curricula is considered an effective tool for closing awarding gaps that we have been able to promote to colleagues through the resources and are highlighted in the [Closing the Awarding Gap Toolkit](#).
- **Development of the [PLanT scheme](#) (Partnerships in Learning and Teaching) to include funding for up to five student-staff partnership projects per academic year with a specific focus on decolonising the curriculum**. This additional strand of the PLaNT scheme is funded from strategic funds until 2027/28. To date, nine projects have been funded across a variety of disciplinary areas, including in the areas of law, maths and meteorology, environmental science, and clinical language sciences. A more comprehensive overview of these projects is available in [Appendix 5](#).
- **An additional strand on decolonising research added to the core training programme for doctoral students**, Reading Researcher Development Programme.

A more complete list of internal activities associated with or influenced by the DtC WG, and the resources, is available in [Appendix 6](#).

#### *External publications, activities and awards*

The following external output of WG members between 2022–2024 has likely raised awareness and engagement with the DtC resources:

- Nominated as the only CATE (Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence) application the University will submit to Advance HE in 2024/25. This was a competitive process.
- Shortlisted for the Times Education Outstanding Contribution to EDI award (2024)
- University Collaborative Award for Teaching and Learning (2024)
- Commendation from Advance HE (January 2023)
- Advance HE (national seminars and article) (Laville, [2022a](#); [2022b](#); [Yang, 2024](#))
- Times Higher Education (national article) ([Laville et al., 2022](#))



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- British Psychological Society (national talk and article) ([Laville, 2023a](#))
- Talks at Royal Holloway, London ([Laville, 2023b](#)) and University of Southampton (Laville, 2024)
- International Federation of National Teaching Fellows, global seminar ([Laville, 2023c](#))

## Knowledge around DtC

### *Findings from the survey*

The mean response to the question related to knowledge of DtC (response options of 1-5) was 2.43. Five respondents chose to expand on their answer. One responded, 'the reflective questions prompted interesting discussions,' while another noted the resources led them to develop 'a more structural understanding' of decolonising the curriculum. The other responses indicate the responders had either not engaged with the resources or had not done so sufficiently to comment.

### *Findings from analysis of webinar evaluation questionnaire*

Thematic analysis of open text responses demonstrated that training events developed knowledge of decolonising theory and praxis. For one participant to the Decolonising Teaching and Learning Environments Showcase, they felt they had learnt 'the link between decolonization and power,' while another valued 'seeing examples from a variety of subject/s/areas, especially coming from a science background and seeing the geography talk.' Knowledge of how to apply decolonising approaches was also evident in several responses. An attendee to the Decolonising Science: Designing a New Module webinar noted the webinar 'gave me lots of ideas for my own work, e.g. assessment ideas.'

## Confidence with DtC

### *Findings from the survey*

The mean response to the question related to confidence (response options of 1-5) was 2.

## Monitoring and analysis of T&L strategies

### *Findings from the survey*

One respondent said they had made changes to their practice as a result of engaging with the resources, three said they had not made changes to their practice, and three said they were planning on making changes. Six respondents expanded on their answer. Two respondents said they had introduced case studies/vignettes into their practice, while another noted they planned to encourage their team 'to think about our

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staff-to-staff training content and use the DtC resources.’ Three respondents stated they were already decolonising their practice, but one felt limited by their discipline/subject (which was not named). The impact of these activities was not reported on.

#### *Findings from analysis of webinar evaluation questionnaire*

Thematic analysis of open text responses demonstrated that training events inspired colleagues to implement a number of different plans and actions. The most popular type of planned activity was changes to benefit students at the level of the module or service e.g. ‘I would like to embed intercultural awareness more in the way I approach and advise international students’ (attendee to Practical Steps Towards Decolonising the Curriculum 2) and ‘I’m going to integrate more student perspectives into my modules’ (attendee to Decolonising Teaching and Learning Environments Showcase). Several attendees also hoped implement school-level changes to practice, but these actions were more general in nature e.g. ‘I will chat further with colleagues to reflect on ideas for decolonising teaching.’

#### *Findings from STEAP analysis (2023–24)*

Closely related to knowledge around and confidence with DtC is explicit integration of the resources and decolonising approaches within STEAPs (School Teaching Enhancement Action Plans). STEAPs set out the T&L priorities for schools during an academic year. For the academic year 2023–24, decolonising is explicitly mentioned in STEAPs from three schools: Henley Business School, Law, and Institute of Education. A further four schools have EDI objectives listed in their STEAPs.

#### *Examples of practice across the University*

There is good evidence of decolonising the curriculum approaches being practiced within teaching and learning practice across the University, namely:

- Widely embedded within the School of Law and the Charlie Waller Institute teaching. Both schools have membership on the DtC WG.
- A range of DtC efforts are occurring at the module-level across UoR, as evidenced through case studies published in the two sets of resources. Specifically, explicit DtC-informed teaching is occurring in psychology, languages, economics, speech and language therapy, law, mathematics and meteorology, and geography and environmental science.

Available module evaluation data strongly suggests that students respond positively to the incorporation of DtC approaches into learning design and teaching practice. This is illustrated by module feedback for a module in the School of Psychology and Language Sciences, ‘Culturally Sustaining and Decolonisation Practices in Speech and Language Therapy.’ Thirty students have enrolled on the module so far, and it has

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averaged the mean of 4.71/5 on student evaluation surveys. The impact of the DtC approach is illustrated by this anonymous student comment:

*‘This module has created a space where power structures are eradicated and we, as students and Vishnu as lecturer, share the space as co-learners. The impact this has on engagement with the subject content is profound. We are not forced to learn in one way and see one perspective, but are encouraged to find our own perspective and understanding of the content, whilst sharing and learning from others.’*

More information about these T&L activities and an indication of their impact on student or staff learning can be found in Appendix 5.

## Reflections on the working group

Reflecting on practice is critical to decolonising higher education. Hayes and colleagues (2021) tell us that ‘reflexivity may well be a precondition for carrying out decolonial work effectively, regardless of the context and positionality from which one works’ (p. 897). The below reflections on elements of practice will expand understanding of staff and student experiences of decolonising the curriculum work at the University and are instrumental for informing future collaborative efforts in this area.

### Structure

A common criticism of institutional responses to the challenge of decolonising the curriculum movement is they can become mired in managerialism, which may risk making decolonising education efforts tokenistic, superficial or exploitative of staff and student goodwill (Shain et al., 2021). From the outset, the DtC WG was collaborative and fair in its organisation and complexion. The approach to defining decolonising the curriculum and compiling the guidance was decided by the staff and student members of the group and without managerial input. Listening exercises – opportunities for every member of the group to speak at length on their positionality and ideas about decolonising, should they want to – were at the centre of this methodology, as Chair Al Laville highlights: *‘As decolonising the curriculum means different things to different people, the working group has engaged in **listening exercises** with colleagues to establish a vision for decolonising the curriculum at the University’* (Decolonising the Curriculum resource, 2022, p. 4).

This open and collaborative approach was welcomed by academic members of the group, as highlighted below by quotes captured as part of the application process for the University Collaborative Award for Teaching and Learning (2024):

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- *'I found the multidisciplinary nature of the team collaborative was particularly beneficial and ensured that the resources not only captured unique viewpoints and were widely applicable but also were grounded in theory.'*
- *'The safe nature of group added to how supportive it was. [The safe space] allowed us to bring personal experiences and learn from the process as we went.'*

Student members also reported positively about the 'lateral' approach taken in the group's meetings:

- *'I never felt it was "teacher speaking to student", we were all equals putting forward ideas.'*
- *'I really liked how collaborative it was when staff came to work with us.'*
- *'Regardless of whether our feedback was negative or positive, it was received respectfully. Doing this made me feel that my opinions were valued.'*
- *'Writing the FAQs was a crucial task because it was an indication that our student voices were heard.'*

#### Impact on members' knowledge and confidence

The activities of the group appear to have enhanced the knowledge, practice and confidence of members. This is supported by comments offered up by professional and academic members of the WG as part of the application process for the University Collaborative Award for Teaching and Learning (2024):

- *'Being part of this collaborative and interdisciplinary group enabled me to use that experience to engage in discipline-specific decolonising projects in my own school.'*
- *'Although my role was executive support, I always felt included in the group. This feeling made it a pleasure to explain the importance of the work to others.'*
- *'I found the collaborative nature of the process particularly helpful as it allowed me to see the challenges faced by other disciplines. It was valuable to hear others' experiences and ideas for DtC.'*

#### Impact on students' knowledge and confidence

Although outside the scope of this evaluation, the below testimonial provided by a student inclusion consultant involved in the DtC WG illuminates the impact of this work for the student body. This impact is not only felt by the students directly involved in the work, but presumably by those across the institution:

- *'Seeing the toolkit created was great reassurance that our discussions and contribution led somewhere. It allows us students to feel more comfortable in classes knowing our lecturers are actively doing something to improve our*

*experiences. It nurtures trust as well as inclusivity, both of which are so paramount in a student's life.'*

## Conclusions & recommendations

### Conclusions

While influenced by the broader higher education, current affairs and societal contexts, the decolonising the curriculum project at Reading has been an organic endeavour responding to the needs of the institution and the voices of students and staff. The centre of this project is the Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group, which has been a locus of activity. It has drawn significant attention to the importance of decolonising the University through producing two widely accessed compendiums of guidance and case studies. The influence of the WG and its outputs in raising the knowledge and profile of DtC at the University has resulted in decolonising initiatives that have spread beyond its members and into schools and departments with either little or no active representation in the group.

This evaluative exercise has revealed decolonising work extends beyond the WG, and that individuals and schools are undertaking their own initiatives. This is extremely encouraging, for decolonising activities must be responsive to a range of contextualised factors, including the history and culture of the discipline and the needs, interests and lived experience of students and staff on the programme. The diversity, complexity and often disconnected nature of this decolonising work means evaluating the impact of the DtC resources and the WG is not without its challenges. Here, multiple forms of evidence have been drawn upon to ascertain to what extent the resources have enhanced staff awareness, knowledge and confidence, and how the resources are influencing teaching and learning activities or plans in schools.

What follows is a discussion of this evidence, followed by concluding remarks and specific recommendations for future resources and decolonising work at Reading.

### *Key findings*

The survey, although the sample size was very small, indicated the resources had led to a modest improvement in awareness of why it is important to decolonise the curriculum, and that those who had engaged deeply with the resources were making changes to their practice or were planning on doing so. Open text responses to the survey illustrated that not all respondents understood the WG's aim or that membership was open to all staff and students at the University. Further, a content-focused conception of how to decolonise teaching and learning emerged e.g. decolonising reading lists. This theme in the responses, along with the comments in webinar evaluation praising 'concrete examples' and 'practical examples,' indicates future decolonising work should reaffirm the commitment to encourage experimentation and different types of practice. However, the mean response for

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confidence in DtC practices was low, indicating that staff may understand the principles but be less sure about how to action them.

To help build confidence, all colleagues regardless of experience and knowledge can be encouraged to participate in discussions. Anecdotal feedback from staff involved in the WG found that active involvement in open conversations about decolonising practice and collaborative endeavours to develop guidance was deeply rewarding. Activities, awards and publications produced by colleagues directly involved in the WG have raised the profile of Reading within decolonising higher education circles. Ongoing strategic investment in research and T&L enhancement projects via the DtC funding track under the PLaNT scheme will enhance the evidence base for the efficacy of DtC.

Data revealed that engagement with web resources was high, and that workshops and other events are generally well attended. Training sessions were found to enhance theoretical and practical knowledge of DtC and inspired colleagues to pursue actions to enhance their practice or to open conversations in their school. We can see from webinar and showcase attendance data that all academic schools have engaged with DtC, although some are more engaged than others. One takeaway is that supporting colleagues to decolonise their practice demands a mixture of outputs, from one-off training events to self-access resources.

Mentions in three schools' STEAPs was encouraging because they indicated the resources are having an impact the school level, albeit this impact is limited at this stage. This result will form a baseline, from which we hope to see an increase in mentions of decolonising practice. It is hoped the work of individual DtC WG members to decolonise their modules and practice – and the successes they have experienced in the form of positive student feedback – will influence schools and departments to advance their decolonising efforts.

### *Concluding remarks*

Overall, based on available evidence, the two sets of resources produced by the Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group and other related decolonising initiatives appear to be having an impact on teaching and learning across the institution. This impact is mainly in the form of raising awareness of the theory and practice of decolonising the curriculum, starting and developing conversations in schools and across the institution, and bringing greater attention to colleagues' successful activities. Limited evidence also supports the contention that the resources are supporting schools to embed the approach in STEAPs and in teaching and learning at the module level. Students appear to appreciate when their lecturers and seminar leaders open spaces to critique the colonial histories of disciplines and universities, and when they apply decolonising pedagogies in the classroom. Taken together, these

activities will, in theory, help to close unexplained degree outcomes gaps that correlate with ethnicity and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

## **Recommendations**

Based on this analysis, seven recommendations are offered for stakeholders to take forward, including but not limited to the Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group, teaching and learning leadership, and interested colleagues. In no particular order, these recommendations are enhance the messaging; apply different evaluation strategies; enhance practical guidance; target specific schools; seek to understand barriers staff face in implementing DtC; maintain student involvement, and; preserve independence from usual University business. These are expanded upon below.

### *1. Enhancing the reach of messaging*

Despite the wide reach of the DtC resources, the underwhelming response to the questionnaire demonstrates there are still opportunities to raise awareness of decolonising praxis and its importance to access and participation. Work is ongoing to enhance colleagues' engagement with the Decolonising the Curriculum resources 1 and 2. This is a long-term commitment that will be helped by visible and regular messaging from the University regarding their commitment to decolonising. This messaging should also aim to address any misconceptions about the Working Group and its output.

### *2. Different evaluation strategies*

There is currently a paucity of evidence that decolonising pedagogies close the awarding gap at Reading. It is likely more evidence is needed to this effect to broaden the uptake of the resources and future DtC guidance.

The few responses the evaluation questionnaire received revealed staff appeared to approach the sets of resources – and the subject of decolonising higher education – differently depending on several factors, including demographic background, lived experience and position held in the University. Alternative evaluation strategies should be developed to take account of these differences in background and lived experience. Semi-structured interviews or focus groups could be conducted, based on resource and staff willingness.

Additionally, the next cycle of evaluation could look to involve feedback from students on the curricula, to assess whether decolonising actions taken by staff are resulting in students experiencing their education as more inclusive. This kind of evaluative activity will help identify the impact of DtC on student outcomes and the student experience.



Future iterations may do more analysis e.g. paired T tests if the surveys are administered at several timepoints. Data will also be linked with awarding gap data when it becomes available.

### *3. Enhancing practical guidance*

Feedback from the survey, webinars and showcases reveal staff are looking for more practical steps and advice for implementing DtC. This is an invitation for further sets of resources in this area. In implementing this recommendation, it is worth keeping in mind the consensus of the research literature, which finds that university curricula cannot be decolonised according to formulas or recipes (Behari-Leak et al., 2017). There is therefore a need to navigate the tension between demands for practical advice from time-poor staff and the spirit and intent of decolonial education, not to mention the freedom of schools and units to implement decolonial approaches in reflexive and locally appropriate ways.

### *4. Targeting schools*

It is clear from available data that engagement in DtC is not equal across academic schools. Decolonising the University of Reading calls for a collaborative effort to overcome the barriers, tensions, and challenges that hinder meaningful progress. As Rai and Campion (2022) argue a 'collective response towards "decolonising" would entail establishing meaningful collaborations that stretch across disciplines, learned societies, university departments, research centres as well as collectives, students and staff, to work together in instituting the envisioned "decolonial" changes' (p. 496). In order to accomplish this 'collective response,' schools with lower levels of engagement with the DtC project could be strategically engaged, especially those with awarding gaps. This targeted approach could take many forms, including messaging from T&L leadership within the school, developing school-wide DtC 'champions' and organising discipline-specific workshops.

### *5. Seeking to understand barriers*

Closely related to enhancing engagement with academic schools is seeking to understand barriers staff face in engaging with the DtC resources and training or implementing DtC practice in their contexts. The literature highlights barriers for example, funding for students and shortages of staff time (Shain et al., 2021); the degree to which these barriers apply at Reading could be better understood, so the Working Group and school-based DtC champions can adapt their support and resources to better align with staff needs.

### *6. Maintaining student involvement*

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This report has highlighted students benefitted from being a part of the Working Group and DtC work. Ongoing student input into DtC discussions and resources is therefore a vital step towards decolonising the University. As Takhar (2023) highlights, 'co-produced resources such as a website can ... contribute to an institution better equipped to deliver the kind of pedagogical practice which may contribute to narrowing the racial awarding gap as part of the wider aim to decolonise the curriculum' (p. 120).

#### *7. Preserving independence from usual University business*

Beginning with a clear set of objectives that emerged through staff and student listening exercises, the DtC WG has maintained independence from official University processes. This has enabled distance for critical and honest discussions to take place. This approach was appreciated by staff and students and is supported by the wider literature (Shain et al., 2021). It is therefore a good idea for the WG to remain as a standalone body and continue to function as a safe space for staff and students to discuss matters relating to decolonising higher education.

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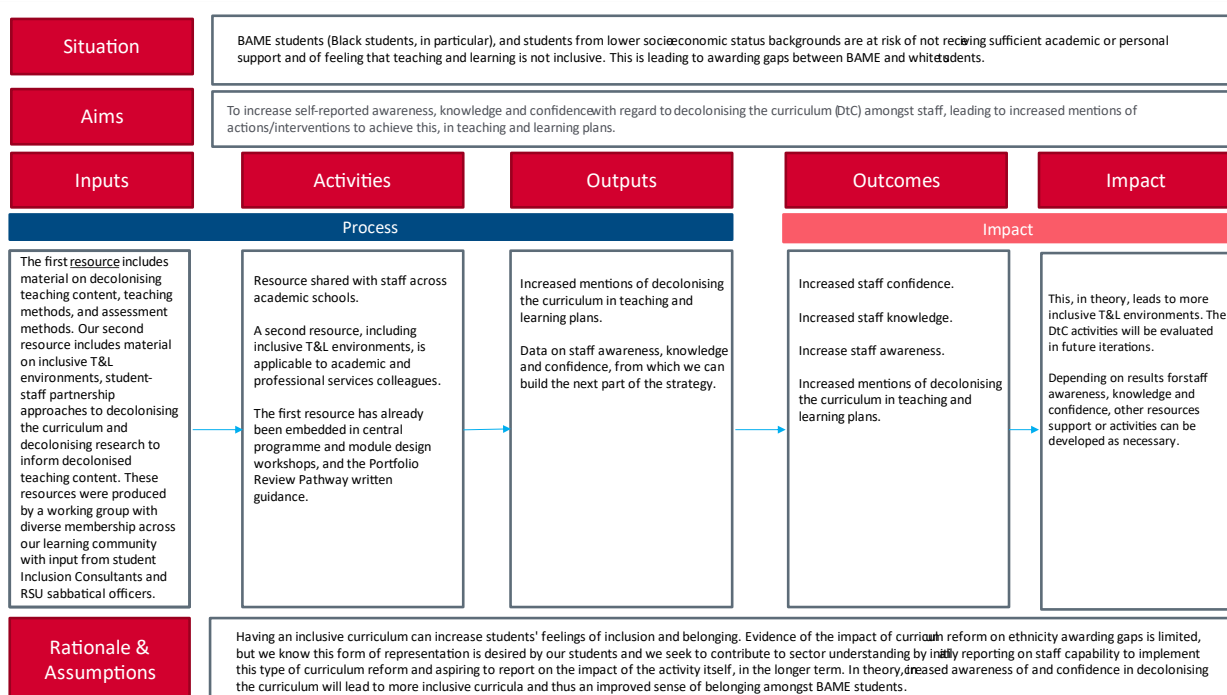
and her encouragement and patience. There would be no survey data to report on without Ceara Webster, who setup the Microsoft Form and distributed it to staff. Aaliya Williams, Lisa Munday, Jennie Chetcuti and Pete Bryant kindly supplied key data to 'fill in the blanks;' this report would be incomplete without their efforts.

## Notes

This report has been reviewed by members of the Access and Participation Evaluation Subcommittee (APES).

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Theory of Change



### Appendix 2

Decolonising the Curriculum resources survey questions:

1. To what extent have the resources improved your awareness of the importance of decolonising the curriculum?

Please rate your response on a scale of 1-5, 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'to a great extent'.

2. Please tell us more about how the resources impacted your awareness.
3. To what extent have the resources improved your knowledge of how to decolonise curricula?

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Please rate your response on a scale of 1-5, 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'to a great extent'.

4. Please tell us more about the level and type of knowledge you gained from the resources.
5. To what extent have the resources improved your confidence in planning and executing the next steps to decolonise your curriculum?

Please rate your response on a scale of 1-5, 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'to a great extent'.

6. Have you made any changes to your practice as a result of engaging with the resources? Options: Yes; No; I'm planning on making changes
7. Please indicate if you would be happy to be contacted about future research (for example, a short focus group about Decolonising the Curriculum resources).  
Options: I would be to be contacted about future research; I do not want to be contacted future research
8. If yes, please enter your University of Reading email address.

### Appendix 3

Attendance to decolonising the curriculum-related events on CQSD's T&L Programme, 2021-24. Source: UoR Learn and CQSD.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Participants</b>
<b>Addressing Discrimination - Diversifying and Decolonising Higher Education (Webinar)</b>	17/03/2021	42
<b>Practical Steps towards Decolonising the Curriculum 1 (Webinar)</b>	01/07/2021	83
<b>Decolonising Science: Designing a New Module (Webinar)</b>	11/11/2021	33
<b>Practical Steps Towards Decolonising the Curriculum 2 (Webinar)</b>	02/12/2021	17
<b>T&amp;L Showcase: Experiences of Decolonising the Curriculum (Webinar)</b>	28/02/2022	26
<b>Decolonising Science and Medicine: Reflecting On Experiences Of Teaching And Learning On This New Module (Webinar)</b>	23/03/2022	17
<b>A Curriculum for Social Justice: Decolonising the Curriculum (Webinar)</b>	11/05/2022	18
<b>T&amp;L Showcase: Experiences of Decolonising the Curriculum (2) (Webinar)</b>	09/06/2022	42
<b>Decolonising Teaching and Learning Environments Showcase (Hybrid)</b>	18/10/2023	48
<b>Spring Term Decolonising the Curriculum Showcase (Hybrid)</b>	06/03/2024	14



## Appendix 4

School attendance to nine DtC webinars and showcases, 2021–24. Organised in alphabetical order. Source: UoR Learn and CQSD.

School	No. of attendees
Foundation Study and Language Institute UoRM	3
Henley Business School	28
Institute of Education	27
International Study & Language Institute	17
School of Agriculture Policy & Development	15
School of Archaeology Geography & Environmental Science	23
School of Arts and Communication Design	12
School of Biological Sciences	6
School of Built Environment UoRM	1
School of Chemistry Food & Pharmacy	26
School of Humanities	21
School of Law	12

<b>School</b>	<b>No. of attendees</b>
School of Literature and Languages	4
School of Mathematical Physical & Computational Sciences	17
School of Politics Economics & International Relations	10
School of Psychology & Clinical Language Sciences	39
School of Psychology & Clinical Language Sciences UoRM	4
School of the Built Environment	7
Grand Total	<b>272</b>

Attendance of staff in functions to nine DtC webinars and showcases, 2021–24. Organised in alphabetical order. Source: UoR Learn and CQSD.

<b>Function</b>	<b>No. of attendees</b>
Centre for Quality Support & Development	33
Digital Technology Services	1
Human Resources	6
Library	12

<b>Function</b>	<b>No. of attendees</b>
Marketing Communication & Engagement	1
Reading Students Union	1
Research Services	1
Student Services	6
Technical Services	1
University Museums and Special Collections Services	3
Vice Chancellor's Office	3
Grand Total	<b>68</b>

## Appendix 5

This is a complete list of DtC projects that have been funded under the PLaNT scheme, organised by academic year, and where the findings have been disseminated. The wording has been supplied by Jennie Chetcuti. You can read about three Decolonising the Curriculum PLaNT projects which were funded in 2022/23 in the [Decolonising the Curriculum resource 2023](#) (pages 19-29).

### 2022/23

- Exploring and evaluating the decolonisation of mathematics and meteorology modules (Lead applicants: Joy Singarayer and Joan Badebye, School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences)
- Students and staff partnership to decolonise a Geography and Environmental Science module and develop a decolonising curriculum toolkit (Lead applicants:

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Hong Yang and Adelana Oyenuga, School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science)

- Decolonising the Law: A Programme of Staff-Student Workshops (Lead applicant: Elizabeth Conaghan, School of Law)

All three project leads presented their findings at a DtC Working Group meeting in 2023 and wrote case studies which were published in the second DtC resource (2023; case studies 3, 4 & 5).

#### *2023/24*

- AI-driven empowerment in curriculum decolonisation (Project leads: Hong Yang and Amy Harriss, School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science)
- Neurodivergent well-being in higher education: Building communities of care through staff-student partnership and decoloniality (Project leads: Vishnu Nair and Jack Takeda, School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences)

Note: The dissemination for these projects is in progress at the time of writing.

#### *2024/25 (projects awarded in December of that year, so they are in progress at the time of writing)*

- Decolonising dissertations in geography and environmental science: Integrating diverse perspectives and underrepresented regions (Project leads: Hong Yang and Tess Mustafa-Aiteouakrim, School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science)
- More than human assessments: Student experiences and perspectives on standard Academic English and AI-generated language (Project leads: Vishnu Nair and Aneeqa Safdar, School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences)
- Psychology film club: Bringing students together outside of the classroom (Project leads: Dan Jones and Zenoida Ustinov, School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences)
- Addressing awarding gaps among undergraduate real estate and planning students (Project leads: Yi Wu and Katie Mak, Henley Business School)

## **Appendix 6**

DtC principles have been embedded in the following activities. This list was compiled by DtC WG members in October 2024 as part of the AdvanceHE CATE Award expression of interest process.

- In the School of Law, a Legal Skills module (3.35/5 module satisfaction increasing to 4.1/5) with all students passing the module at first attempt.

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- DtC practice disseminated at SPCLS (School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences) away day, which increased colleagues' ability to implement DtC strategies in their teaching (4.2/5 found the techniques easy to implement).
- Decolonisation of psychology in foundation year, which received positive external examiner feedback.
- DtC resources used to audit CLS modules including the creation of a new module on decolonisation (4.71/5 satisfaction), which resulted in meaningful conversations with module teams and improved student learning.
- Creation of two international development modules, which have resulted in international recognition and impact.
- Generative AI tools through a decolonised lens integrated into environmental sciences modules, the impact and results of which have been disseminated nationally (Yang, 2024)
- Significant DtC T&L advancements in pharmacy, including cultural competency training and global healthcare practice.
- DtC materials embedded in university-wide Global Graduate Intercultural Communication module (ISLI) and in new global citizenship FutureLearn MOOC (massive open online course).
- DtC resources embedded into student-staff [co-created zines](#) published in 2024.