

TO: Assembly
FROM: Sam Johnson Audini
RE: Decolonising the Curriculum: SU Core Position
DATE: 6 February 2020

The belief and its justifications

What we learn is inherently political. From what we are taught to how we are taught, certain values and voices are prioritised, and others marginalised. Decolonisation centres the impact of colonialism, both historic and ongoing, in how we understand the world in which we live and the information that we teach. What we learn is overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, knowledge produced by and centred around the Global West, putting the achievements and knowledge of the West above those of other regions, centring them as the producers and owners of knowledge. Within Durham there are few courses that acknowledge communities of colour and where those spaces exist, students are unable to progress in the same way as there is a lack of resources that students can access in terms of resources that actively address these communities. The onus often falls on students of colour, unpaid, to partake in decolonial and anti-racist activity in order to make their courses and the university a better place. This further entrenches the hierarchical values inherent in colonialism. Durham as an institution has a disproportionate lack of students of colour from the UK, and international students of colour are often charged exploitatively high fees.

The definition of a better future

Decolonising the curriculum is an ongoing process that must be continually shaped in collaboration with students and staff of colour. The processes should not be tokenistic; student labour should not be expected to be unpaid. The groups undertaking decolonisation work should be supported and integrated into university decision making processes as equal partners.

Our curriculum should be relevant to all students and engage with the global context in which it has been produced. This includes the content and method of what and how we're taught and our learning resources, who we learn from and with and the diversity of the opinions, content and learning communities we have access to. We should be critically engaging with the colonial power structures that have shaped our disciplines and challenge these, including challenging the values that are held as 'norm' and the history of our subjects. We need a curriculum that engages in dialogue with itself throughout as opposed to one which merely tinkers around the edges.

In essence, the University needs to undertake a full scale review of the processes and practices that exist in the University and how they work to exclude and marginalise students of colour. We want to see the end of exploitation of international students. Their contribution to our University is more than economic, and they should not be valued for their economic power alone. We have to serve their needs as students first, alongside all other students, to benefit from the University experience.

The barriers

Durham University has a distinct lack of people of colour in managerial and decision making positions. This means that decisions are often taken without a single person of colour in the

room and when those decisions are made, they lack transparency. Conversations about racism and colonialism are difficult, but even more so when the internal power structures of the University do not allow for individuals affected by the issues. Moreover, we run the risk of reproducing the same issues if those in charge do not consult with people of colour during this process, whilst at the same time interrogating their position and their complicity in a system that has excluded for so long.

DU has been expanding rapidly over the past few years, with a focus on recruiting international students to drive revenue as international fees are often double, if not triple the price of home/EU fees. While this provides an opportunity for increasing diversity amongst the student body, it relies upon a strong University reputation. The context of marketisation and competition for student numbers makes introspection on the part of the university is difficult as it requires being publically self critical and acknowledging past and present failings, which may be damaging for the University's reputation.

Belief about the change and the responsibilities

Durham Students' Union must take a leading role in this process through

- working closely with Durham People of Colour Association, academic representatives and colleges. Prioritising a collaborative approach, centring students of colour and educating other students on decolonisation.
- Fully supporting student representatives across the University, to be engaged in working towards this goal and building a common understanding of decolonisation, through their positions in colleges, departments and elsewhere.
- Engaging in internal criticism and investigating initiatives which are successful at other students unions.

Durham University should

- consider not just the themes of the content studied, but also the diversity of teaching methods, learning resources and their creators, teaching staff and student body when it considers diversity of curricula.
- Not rely on the goodwill of staff and students of colour to undertake decolonisation work. When staff and students of colour do participate in decolonisation work in partnership with the university they should be treated as equals and their labour remunerated.
- Actively recruit staff of colour to bring their perspectives and expertise to the courses offered
- Ensure any curriculum review activity includes consideration for decolonisation.