

Decolonising the curriculum: project outline

Why is there a need for this project now?

The UK's history as a colonial empire has ongoing implications for the contemporary university, such as “uncritical cultural reproduction of Eurocentric curriculum knowledge and discourses” ([Moncrieffe 2022](#)). As Adeela ahmed Shafi argues, there is a need to frame the university “as a generator of knowledge to challenge itself not just in terms of historical, political, or colonial reflection but also its intellectual claims, which might have privileged its own (cultural) knowledge to the exclusion of other epistemologies” (2025a: 168) Brunel University of London has one of the most diverse populations within the UK; in 2025 about 80% of students were from Black, racially and ethnically minoritised communities as were 42.8% of our staff.¹ However, at Brunel and indeed across the higher education sector, differences in outcome measures for students from different ethnicities are widely acknowledged as a significant concern. While the awarding gap is only one element of the decolonial project, and decoloniality can manifest in the aforementioned discourses even where the awarding gap does not manifest as the only explicit issue. The awarding gap is evidence of broader structural inequities in the colonial university model (see Shafi 2025a: 174), and evidence of fissures in Black student belonging. Frequently, the sector focuses on the awarding gap between students of Black and White heritage, but Brunel data also demonstrate that gaps across ethnicities exist throughout the success element of the student lifecycle, including continuation (progression from year to year) and completion (of the course) as well as attainment (the awarding gap), and that these differences are present across different racially and ethnically minoritised communities.

Internal data reveal that, alongside work² to address the gaps, both the continuation and awarding gaps between students of Black and White heritage and students of Asian and White heritage increased each year from 2020/21 to 2022/23. The 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years saw a significant decrease in the awarding gap between students of Asian and White heritage and a significantly smaller decrease in the gap between students of Black and White heritage, but both gaps persist. Previous analysis revealed that a change to awarding regulations for students joining

¹ November Census 2025, Strategic Planning, Tableau

² A range of projects to address the awarding gap is ongoing at Brunel: see [Tackling Brunel's Awarding Gap](#) Additional projects have included decolonising reading lists in several departments to various action research projects involving students to look at the barriers to assessments, work placements and others. A repository is currently being created.

Brunel from 2019 disproportionately affected students from Black and racially and ethnically minoritised communities; changes have now been made to these regulations, but the gaps remain.³ Awarding gaps also exist within entry qualification groups with, for example, fewer students of Black heritage who studied BTECs at Level 3 achieving 1st and 2:1 degrees than students of White heritage who also studied BTECs. The same trend is reflected amongst students who studied A-Levels, and from an intersectional perspective.⁴

Our [Access and Participation Plan \(APP\)](#), [Equity Strategy](#) and [Anti-Racism Strategy](#) all recognise the need to address and take action to understand and reduce these gaps. The APP and Equity Strategy contain specific targets relating to these gaps which link with institutional targets and KPIs. Action is also supported by the Anti-Racism Strategy and pertinent delivery plans.

What does the project intend to do?

Both the APP and Anti-Racism Strategy 2025-29 highlight that structural barriers and the legacies of colonialism impede Black, racially and ethnically minoritised communities from achieving successful outcomes. All too often, the institution is underpinned by a white Eurocentric colonial culture and service delivery model which can impact the access, success and progression of these students to post-graduate study or graduate level opportunities. In the words of Joshua Castellino, “[...] The push towards a Western- style curriculum at the cost of other systems of laws and sciences completes the Western hegemony in terms of content production and dissemination” (2024: 60). This hegemony, and its associated inequities, are produced through the curriculum, institutional policies and practices, regulations and institutional language. It is also perpetuated through inter-generational gaps in the accumulation of social capital, which is reflected in our student population, amongst whom are several first-generation university learners, possess diverse entry qualifications that are not necessarily A-Levels, and immigrants (first, second and third generation). Whilst individual academics at Brunel have undertaken a series of initiatives over recent years to deconstruct and decolonise their individual curriculum content, this has been mainly rooted within specific departments leading to an inconsistent and unstrategic approach.

The project will focus on the decolonisation of the University’s education provision: curriculum design, content, delivery and assessment to ensure that both *what* is taught and assessed and *how* it is taught and assessed remove barriers to success. Importantly, curricula also need to be representative of Brunel’s student and staff demographics embedding diverse viewpoints,

³ The new awarding regulations and borderline mechanisms, as well as the 2+2 assessment attempts regs were changed based on modelling to show they would improve awarding gaps.

⁴ See p. 48 of the Access and Participation Plan 2025-26 to 2028-29: [Brunel-University-London-Access-and-Participation-Plan-202526-to-202829.pdf](#) See also Tableau data: awarding gap ethnicity and entry qualifications 2024 - 25, Strategic Planning, Tableau

experiences, beliefs, and frameworks throughout teaching content and teaching methods. This also needs to be factored in for professional programmes regulated by external bodies, which may not always reflect demographically diverse staff perspectives. Focuses could include repairing and developing the curriculum to ensure it is culturally sensitive, equitable, inclusive and relevant; developing culturally diverse and anti-racist materials decentering the Global North, including syllabi, virtual learning materials, and in-class materials and contexts, case studies and resources; identifying and [modifying class cultures of participation](#); identifying and modifying pedagogic practices/assessments which contribute to ethnicity awarding gaps; developing resources and workshop sessions to build colleagues' skills and confidence to decolonise the curriculum; department-specific analysis of cultures of Black students' belonging; and reviewing programme resources to ensure all students have equal access to learning materials. As Twyman-Ghoshal et al note, [Decolonising the Curriculum] "is not a destination but an ongoing process requiring both individual accountability and collective action" (2025: 5). Previous and ongoing efforts of this kind from across STEM and SHAPE subjects include the international Rethinking Economics group, "Why is my Curriculum White?" (UCL), the 'Keele Manifesto for Decolonising the Curriculum', Manchester Metropolitan University's ["Decolonising the Curriculum for STEM" toolkit](#), and [others](#).

In Adeela ahmed Shafi's words, "Therefore, the first aspect for decolonising knowledge is for the global North to acknowledge and reference where knowledge, discoveries and inventions have been made, particularly when they originate from previously colonised places. This has to then come through an overhaul of the broader power structures inherent in university curricula, published research and funding criteria" (2025b: 14). A key starting point in this exercise would be to acknowledge the existing coloniality in the curriculum, and in internal university structures that enable and support curriculum design and pedagogic practices. This requires an acknowledgement of historical inequalities and legacies of "epistemicide" (Grosfoguel 2013 qtd. in Shafi 2025) that may begin with, but does not end with, interrogating the current curricular material.

How will the project achieve its objective?

A Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group (DtC Working Group) and a 'community of practice' will be created to bring together key individuals to take forward this project. The Working Group will meet twice per term and will be co-chaired by the Associate Deans for CALSS and CHMLS, Dr Sharanya Murali and Shafeena Anas respectively. As a whole-institution initiative, members of the working group will be drawn from academic colleagues, professional services staff, and the student community ensuring breadth and diversity of relevant experience, knowledge and skills and will include, but not be limited to:

- a. Associate Pro Vice Chancellor for Quality Assurance
- b. Associate Pro Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion

- c. Associate Deans for Equity and Inclusion
- d. Strategic Lead for Access and Participation
- e. Equity Lead
- f. Members of the Anti-Racism Working Group
- g. Representation from the Academic Professional Development Unit
- h. Academics and Professional Services Staff
- i. Students

The core function of the DtC Working Group is to plan, implement, oversee and monitor appropriate, necessary and effective action towards the Decolonising the Curriculum project.

The Working Group will report and make recommendations to the University Education and Student Experience Committee and the Access and Participation Sub-Committee. The DtC Working Group will maintain appropriate links with other University groups to ensure a collegiate and joined up approach where areas of interest and responsibility converge. Confidentiality will be maintained by members of the DtC Working Group in relation to sensitive information discussed in meetings.

References

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Existing and ongoing Awarding Gap projects

[About the BAME Awarding Gap Project | Teaching & Learning - UCL BME attainment - London's Global University](#)

[Awarding Gap Project | The Student Hub | University of Southampton](#)

[Project | Approaches to addressing the ethnicity degree awarding gap – TASO](#)

[Mapping the awarding gap](#)

[Closing the gap: three years on](#)

[Ethnicity Awarding Gap Project: Implementation | King's College London](#)

[Sappor | The BAME awarding gap: understanding student perspectives | London Review of Education](#)

[The Project – BME Attainment Gap](#)