

# DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM

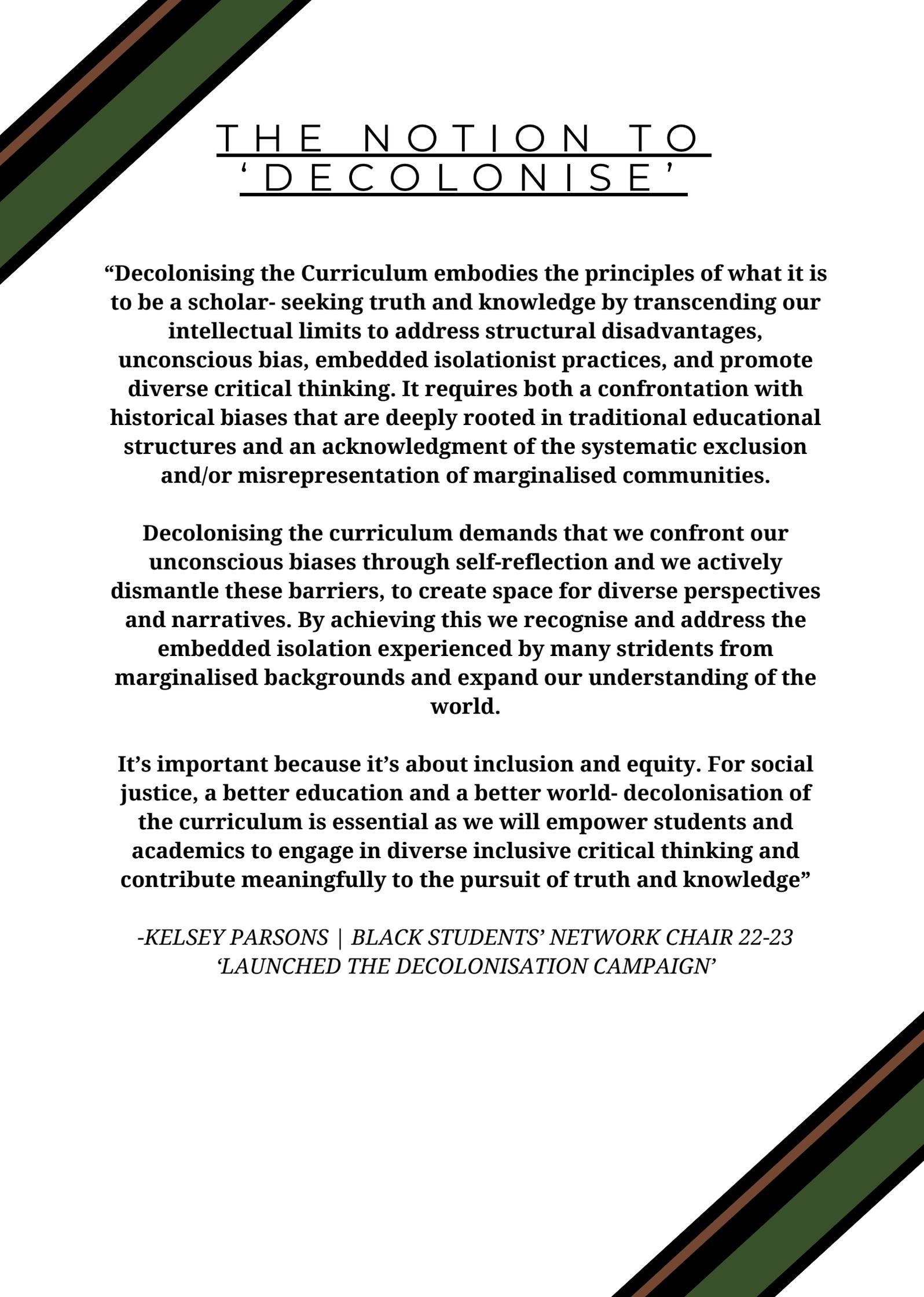
2023 - 2024

Black Students' Network



 Bristol SU

Written By  
23/24 Decolonisation Officer  
Monique Arowojolu



# THE NOTION TO 'DECOLONISE'

**“Decolonising the Curriculum embodies the principles of what it is to be a scholar- seeking truth and knowledge by transcending our intellectual limits to address structural disadvantages, unconscious bias, embedded isolationist practices, and promote diverse critical thinking. It requires both a confrontation with historical biases that are deeply rooted in traditional educational structures and an acknowledgment of the systematic exclusion and/or misrepresentation of marginalised communities.**

**Decolonising the curriculum demands that we confront our unconscious biases through self-reflection and we actively dismantle these barriers, to create space for diverse perspectives and narratives. By achieving this we recognise and address the embedded isolation experienced by many students from marginalised backgrounds and expand our understanding of the world.**

**It’s important because it’s about inclusion and equity. For social justice, a better education and a better world- decolonisation of the curriculum is essential as we will empower students and academics to engage in diverse inclusive critical thinking and contribute meaningfully to the pursuit of truth and knowledge”**

*-KELSEY PARSONS | BLACK STUDENTS’ NETWORK CHAIR 22-23  
‘LAUNCHED THE DECOLONISATION CAMPAIGN’*



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# MISSION STATEMENT



**The Black Students' Network is dedicated to championing the decolonisation of the curriculum at Bristol University.**

**Our mission is to ensure that the institution becomes a safe and inclusive space for Black students, where their voices, experiences and contributions are acknowledged, valued and celebrated.**

**We believe that decolonising the curriculum is essential for addressing systemic inequalities, dismantling colonial biases, and fostering a learning environment that embraces diversity and promotes social justice.**

**Through collaborative efforts with faculty representatives, fellow networks and societies, we aim to reshape the educational landscape to reflect a more accurate and inclusive representation of global perspectives.**

**By centering Black narratives, we aspire to create transformative educational experience that empowers Black students and cultivates a culture of respect, understanding, and equity for all members of the university community.**



# IN SOLIDARITY WITH D.R CONGO & PALESTINE

IN THIS MOMENT OF SUFFERING, OUR HEARTS ACHE FOR THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE AND THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, WHO CONTINUE TO ENDURE THE HORRORS OF GENOCIDE. WE CANNOT REMAIN SILENT IN THE FACE OF SUCH INJUSTICE.

TO THE RESILIENT SOULS OF PALESTINE, WHO ENDURE RELENTLESS ACTS OF MURDER, OPPRESSION AND DISPLACEMENT, COMMITTED BY THE STATE OF ISRAEL AND THOSE WHO FUND THEIR ARMAMENT. WE STAND WITH YOU IN YOUR STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN PEACE ON YOUR ANCESTRAL LAND.

TO THE COURAGEOUS PEOPLE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, WHO CONFRONT UNSPEAKABLE VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION BROUGHT UPON BY WESTERN SUPERPOWERS THROUGH THEIR FACILITATING OF POLITICAL UNREST AND MISUSE OF NATURAL RESOURCES. WE STAND WITH YOU IN YOUR FIGHT FOR SECURITY, DIGNITY, AND THE END TO THE CYCLE OF SUFFERING.

THE BLACK STUDENTS NETWORK REFUSES TO TURN A BLIND EYE TO THE PAIN AND ANGUISH ENDURED BY THE INNOCENT WE WILL CONTINUE TO AMPLIFY THEIR VOICES, DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE, AND WORK TIRELESSLY TO BUILD A WORLD WHERE EVERY LIFE IS VALUED AND PROTECTED. TOGETHER, WE MUST STRIVE FOR A FUTURE WHERE PEACE, JUSTICE, AND SOLIDARITY REIGN SUPREME.

## RESOURCES

### PALESTINE

[BDS MOVEMENT - STUDENT SOLIDARITY](#)  
[PALESTINE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN - RESOURCES](#)  
[FRIENDS OF PALESTINE - BRISTOL SU](#)  
[MEDICAL AID FOR PALESTINIANS](#)  
[BOYCOTT LIST](#)

### D.R CONGO

[UK STUDENT ENCAMPMENTS - SOLIDARITY](#)  
[EDUCATION CANNOT WAIT - CAMPAIGN](#)  
[FRIENDS OF THE CONGO](#)  
[LET AFRICA LIVE - PLEDGE A DONATION](#)  
[AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL](#)

# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

**This academic year proved to be revolutionary for the Black students' network in a plethora of facets. With the strong help of a truly splendid committee, I've been blessed in my involvement of executing some passion projects that I believe will generate a long-lasting impact on the experience of Black (and minority ethnic) students at Bristol university. One of these projects was the "decolonising the curriculum" campaign.**

**This campaign is very special to me as it was a challenge I took on with minimal prior knowledge of its true nuances and cultural significance. Moreover, the more I indulged into the movement the more I began to realise it's not just about "teaching more black history."**

**It's immensely more multi-dimensional. This crusade intentionally challenges inherited Eurocentric perspectives and rewires the mind to boast a broader perspective than has been subconsciously taught to us. The campaign challenges the manner in which we are told to perceive history, general knowledge, effective learning methods etc. I've been immensely proud of the events we have hosted to bolster knowledge about decolonising the curriculum, including and not limited to our "decolonisation debate" (in collaboration with the wonderful BAME network) and the "Games night + decol discussion."**

**Moving forward, I believe it's critical that educational institutions reconsider the methods in which they formulate their teaching processes. This could include and is not limited to reconsidering its content material e.g. dentistry/medicine related courses need more research and teaching on minority ethnic skin, illnesses, gums etc. The way citations are marked needs to be re-evaluated e.g. some of the results of the surveys last year from the campaign demonstrated that some students were limited in what they could be credited for in their essays as in some cases foreign references were impermissible as they weren't recognised due to their obtention method.**

**It is imperative that institutions acknowledge the history in which its current reality is built, meaning institutions must not shy away from the people and the actions that built them and the country in which they operate in whether pleasant or not. In the Network's other projects, I was also extremely proud of the glamorous Spring soiree we presented (in conjunction with the Global lounge and the SU events team) in March. It was a truly special day that saw culture and expression collide. I wholeheartedly believe events of this nature create an environment for students to feel at home and should occur more often.**

**Finally, I would love to say a colossal thank you to all members of BSN, as a committee we have really appreciated your engagement and presence this academic year with events, the newsletter, campaign and much more and as the chair I couldn't have been more honoured to be in this role this year.**

*- SILVIO MADUEKE  
BLACK STUDENT'S NETWORK CHAIR 23/24*

# C A M P A I G N O V E R V I E W

## **Project Overview:**

This initiative involved gathering additional valuable insights and perspectives through focus groups, both internal and external interviews, and various collaborative events engaging students. These insights will be shared with the institution to promote awareness and push forward their actions of decolonising the curriculum.

## **Objectives:**

- Enhance comfortability of Black Students
- Increase diversity within curriculum.
- Promote awareness through dialogue
- Share data with Student Board, to be passed onto institution board

## **Timeline:**

### **November - January: Campaign Planning**

- Conduct a thorough review of the curriculum to identify areas for improvement; Faculty call-outs (focus groups), workshops, sample interviews (to happen within events)
- Establish communication channels for the campaign; updating social media frequently, publishing the newsletter.

### **February - March: Awareness Building**

- Organize awareness events; panel discussions, workshops, open forums.
- Develop and distribute informative materials on the historical context of colonization within the institution; collaborative with the SU and other societies (hopefully), literature meetups (allows for students to suggest relevant literature to diversify academia)

### **April: Advocacy and Further Outreach**

- Continue focus groups
- Create a platform for students to submit anonymous feedback on their experiences with the current curriculum (balances data out)
- Make initiative external; collecting input from the general public.

### **May: Data Organisation & Committee Deliberations**

- Organizing all data collected over the past 5 months.
- Drafting a curriculum review and proposal for the SU, to then hand over to the Institution.
- Developing a comprehensive report outlining recommended modifications for a more inclusive curriculum as proposed by the students themselves

# C A M P A I G N O V E R V I E W

## June: Presentations: Implementation & Evaluation

- Presenting the proposal to the SU, and attending meetings
- Seeking endorsement and support from other societies (can be collected through surveys)
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of the changes on student experiences and academic outcomes.
- Collect feedback and work with SU to ensure it can be sustained.

## Success Indicators

- Increased awareness and engagement in the campaign
- Positive feedback from students regarding the impact on their learning
- Endorsement from the SU
- Success in notifying the institution

## Challenges & Mitigation

- Resistance to change (particularly from the institution); implement a robust communication strategy to address concerns and emphasize the benefits of a more inclusive curriculum.
- Limited engagement: social media must be updated regularly to ensure continuous student engagement, events must also be frequent
- Limited resources: all activities must be cost effective, but still as impactful.

## Communication Strategy

- Committee meetups to discuss the best ways to hold events and most importantly, availability.
- Contact with the University Union, Liberations and Networks Coordinator

## What we did | Monthly Evaluations

Nov - Jan	<b>Met with Liberations Coordinator to discuss decol campaign [16/11/23]</b> <b>Launched BSN PRESS - Weekly &amp; Monthly Newsletter [24/11/23]</b> <b>Met with Liberations coordinator to discuss decol 2024 events [12/12/23]</b> <b>BSN Refreshers + decol discussion [23/1/24]</b>
Feb - Mar	<b>Meeting with Liberations coordinator for decol update [8/2/24]</b> <b>Decol Coffee Morning [21/2/24]</b> <b>BSN X BAME Decol Debate [23/2/24]</b>
April	<b>Attended the SPAIS Decolonisation Assembly [17/4/24]</b>
May	<b>Attended the Bristol SUs - Reparative Futures - facilitated discussions relating to the commissioned 2024 'reparative futures' program by the institution [1/5/24]</b> <b>Release of the 23/24 Decolonizing the Curriculum Report [17/5/24]</b>

# C A M P A I G N O V E R V I E W

The campaign effectively increased awareness among students about the institution's efforts to decolonise, regardless of their ethnic background. The newsletter kept students informed about institutional changes and opportunities, often exceeding what the university typically provided.

By joining the Black Student's Network through the newsletter, readers gained access to valuable resources. The decolonisation efforts included diverse perspectives from collaborators like the BAME network, the student hub, and individual students.

The campaign fostered a shared culture of decolonisation on campus. Although it struggled to extend this culture beyond the university, it did inform various organizations about the network's aims through career-related outreach.

The network also promoted decolonisation via short-form content on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Videos from decolonisation events, such as the decol coffee morning, were shared online, creating a community of engagement. The response helped define decolonisation for a broader audience.

All four success indicators were met, and two of the four objectives were achieved. The goal of sharing data with the student board for institutional consideration will be accomplished with the publication of this report.

# ESTABLISHING THE NEWSLETTER



As outlined in the campaign project plan, the Newsletter was an early initiative endorsed by the network. The inception of BSN PRESS was discussed directly with the chair prior to my assumption of the decolonisation officer role. Originally named 'Embracing Liberation,' the newsletter aimed to articulate the network's plans and forthcoming events while offering exclusive opportunities tailored specifically for Black students.

These opportunities encompassed social gatherings and career-focused events, leveraging the network's connections with entities such as the Bright Network, as well as prominent companies and agencies like McKinsey & Company and EY. The First Edition of BSN Press was published on November 24th, 2023.

For a brief period, we introduced a weekly edition of BSN PRESS to bridge the gap during the student holiday break between December and January, when there wouldn't be a monthly issue. We experimented with sustaining this frequency throughout the year, but it proved challenging to manage alongside academic commitments and studies.

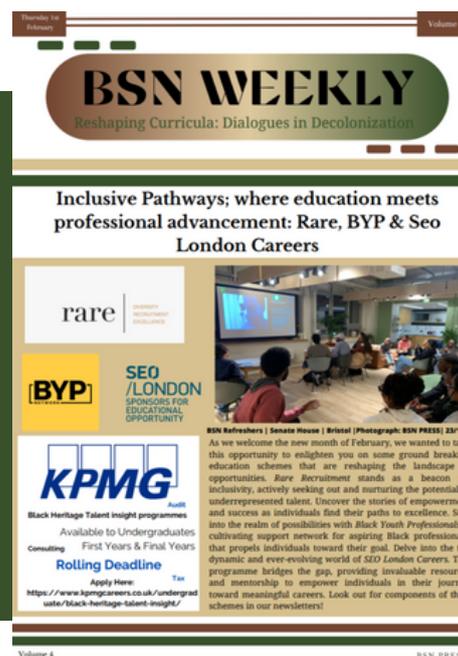
That being said, the weekly newsletter can still be released intermittently, as it consistently generated the highest engagement, as evidenced by the chart below.

## Engagement statistics

<https://www.bristol-su.org.uk/administrator/sites/294324/resources>

STATISTICS RECORDED: 4/3/24 - 10:35AM

Name	Document	Category	Created At	Updated At	Status	Number of Views	Number of Downloads
BSN Press - Third Issue	BSN_Press_monthly_issue_3_February.pdf		04-03-2024 - 10:33	04-03-2024 - 10:33	Live	38	106
BSN weekly (16th February)	BSN_WEEKLY_16224.pdf		16-02-2024 - 11:06	16-02-2024 - 11:06	Live	60	128
BSN weekly (9th February)	BSN_WEEKLY_9224.pdf		09-02-2024 - 15:28	09-02-2024 - 15:28	Live	57	60
BSN weekly (1st February)	BSN_WEEKLY_1224.pdf		01-02-2024 - 14:11	01-02-2024 - 14:11	Live	80	155
BSN Press - Second Issue	BSN_PRESS_JAN_2024_ONLINE.pdf		25-01-2024 - 15:51	25-01-2024 - 15:51	Live	75	169
BSN weekly (15th December)	BSN_WEEKLY_151223_.pdf		15-12-2023 - 18:08	15-12-2023 - 18:51	Live	160	118
BSN weekly (8th December)	BSN_WEEKLY_vol_2.pdf		08-12-2023 - 17:56	08-12-2023 - 17:59	Live	102	200
BSN weekly (1st December)	BSN_WEEKLY_volume_1.pdf		01-12-2023 - 16:01	08-12-2023 - 17:53	Live	121	217
BSN press - First issue	BSN_PRESS_First_issue.pdf		24-11-2023 - 17:02	08-12-2023 - 17:53	Live	111	201



# FACULTY DISCUSSIONS

## FACULTY OF ARTS

18th January 2024

-‘you said we did’ aim - Decolonisation in philosophy  
‘students concluded that it is not incorporated enough in curriculum’  
goal: 1 unit per term etc.

## FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & LAW

19th January 2024

discussions of diversity through student panels & decolonising groups. Decolonisation differs by school  
Goal; establishing decolonisation & inclusion

17th April 2024

Held a decolonisation meeting: discussed programs and ways in which to incorporate into the curriculum

## FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

30th January 2024

More people of colour in teaching resources - Decolonisation in Dentistry & medical school  
‘historically the vast majority of images demonstrating procedure and anatomy have been of white people’  
Goal: inclusivity.

22nd March 2024

How representative is the curriculum to medical conditions  
‘historically the vast majority of images demonstrating procedure and anatomy have been of white people’  
Goal: inclusivity.

The Black Student’s Network reached out the science, life sciences and engineering faculties, about the decolonisation initiative but received no reply

This is in simply not good enough, given the significant role these three faculties play at Bristol University, especially since they encompass key areas where most institutional research is conducted.

Additionally, each faculty has sections on their respective webpages dedicated to equity, diversity, and inclusion, indicating that they should be actively integrating the decolonisation initiative into their curricula.

Here are some ways in which the faculties of science, life sciences and engineering can address decolonisation.

Science	Life Sciences	Engineering
Promote inclusive research practices Conduct regular assessments of diversity efforts	Identify and address colonial biases of the curriculum Promote research considering globally diverse ecological impacts	Include contributions from diverse engineers Offer decolonisation talks specific to engineering

# 'DECOLONISATION IN THE LAW SCHOOL'

Funmilola Jempeji - 3rd Year - LLB

Decolonising the Law School goes beyond mere demographic numerical shifts towards inclusion of students from African, Caribbean, Asian or other racialised background, nor is it simply acknowledging the historical context that the city's prosperity was built on the backs of enslaved individuals, thereby benefiting both the University and the Law School. It should not be reduced to simply using willing ethnic minority staff to spearhead initiatives and schemes aimed at raising awareness about the University's complicity in perpetuating elitist, discriminatory agendas, only to then brand it as a university-wide or Law School role in decolonisation. These appear to be surface-level gestures and tokenism. And it most certainly is not the inclusion of theories propagated by racist and bigoted thinkers in the curriculum, whilst sweeping their racist notions under the carpet with a single statement 'He held a lot of racist views but we don't agree with that, we're just focusing on his theory.' No. It is not any of these weak and fruitless attempts. This is not to minimise the department's efforts to initiate decolonisation and support its racialised students. My contention is that these efforts are just not good enough. They lack depth required for meaningful change. The Law School staff and pupils need to take an active role in fostering inclusivity within the department. True decolonisation demands a comprehensive re-evaluation and restructuring of curricula, and institutional practices to dismantle entrenched power dynamics that work to silence students from these racialised backgrounds, and instead fostering genuine equity and just dynamics within legal education.

The University of Bristol stands as a prestigious Russell Group university, celebrated and praised for its rich history and world-class research facilities. This makes the Law School ideal for racialised students aspiring to reach certain heights in the legal field, considering the challenges many of us face in securing positions in a profession often fraught with systemic barriers. Why not give yourself an advantage by attending a renowned Russell Group university like Bristol? That is what many consider before venturing out to study here, with worries of racism, and closed elitist systems residing entrenched in the corner of their minds but disregarded as the ends outweigh the means. Those of us granted the honour to pursue our studies here find ourselves grappling with various concerns and issues, some of which are obviously not as overt as they once were and are indeed acknowledged. The Law School has taken some steps to implement schemes and initiatives aimed at ensuring the safety and security of its racially diverse student body. Yet, the effectiveness of these measures leaves much to be desired, owing to some of the factors I will discuss. Conversations with fellow black peers in our first year revealed a shared sentiment: despite the purported efforts, our collective grievances and challenges within the Law School persist.

Despite efforts to increase diversity through widening participation schemes, the representation of black students remains minimal. In my cohort, for instance, there were only three black male students. This lack of representation becomes acutely apparent in seminar groups, where one may find themselves as the sole person of colour among peers and under the guidance of a white seminar tutor. This isolation can lead to feelings of alienation and imposter syndrome, regardless of whether overt discrimination is present. This emotional toll is significant and cannot be overlooked or ignored. While widening participation initiatives aim to address this disparity, their effectiveness in the context of law education appears limited.

The decolonisation of knowledge within UK Law Schools has been ineffective for several reasons and has yet to yield meaningful results. The seven foundations of legal knowledge that are taught in order to meet a qualifying law degree standard are : Criminal Law; Equity and Trusts; Law of the European Union; Contract Law; Tort Law; Land Law; and Public Law. Within these units there are opportunities to address issues of race and colonialism, but these attempts are sporadic and often relegated to the periphery of the syllabus. Even modules like Jurisprudence, which could provide ample ground for critical discussions on colonial legacies, racist philosophies, fail to do so. Jurisprudence offers ample opportunities to engage in discussions on race, racialization, and racism within law and its development, but falls short of serving this purpose. Instead, these discussions are marginalized or left until the end of the term when exam pressures mount, and engagement is not as frequent. Instead, discussions on race and intersectionality are relegated to the sidelines or squeezed into the curriculum as an afterthought. This prioritization—or lack thereof—sends a clear message to Black and Asian students about their place within the Law School and the university as a whole. By failing to create a safe and inclusive environment for dialogue, the institution perpetuates a cycle of exclusion and alienation. If the Law School truly does value diversity and inclusion as it claims, it must prioritize these discussions and actively foster an environment where all students feel empowered to voice their concerns and perspectives.

# 'DECOLONISATION IN THE LAW SCHOOL'

Funmilola Jempeji - 3rd Year LLB

If the Law School sets this precedent, it will become something the University of Bristol Law School is well known for, but until then, students will either join the Law School with high expectations and have these expectations crushed, or join with low expectations and be proven right.

Although Law in Action, taught in our first year of study, touched on issues of bias, it fell short of addressing the broader implications of race and inequality within the legal system and fully stimulating critical discussion on topics that some may find uncomfortable to address. There's a distinct lack of opportunity for open discussion, especially when it comes to critiquing the law from a racial perspective. Optional modules like Rich Law Poor Law and Law and Race (taken in third year) provided some opportunities for deeper exploration but should be integrated more seamlessly into the compulsory modules within the curriculum. While Rich Law Poor Law had its own limitations, it offered a valuable platform for engaging in crucial discussions. So it wasn't until my third year that I truly felt I could engage in critical thinking that resonated with me. And it wasn't just me; others I'd befriended along the way, all racialized students, shared this sentiment. This common experience shed light on why so many students like us feel compelled to drop out—it often feels like there's no viable path forward. We're often burdened not only with the pressure of earning a university degree but also with supporting families, often coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Navigating law school independently in an environment where discussions on race are merely token gestures for EDI initiatives adds an extra layer of challenge. It's disheartening to feel as though our voices are only acknowledged when convenient, leaving us invisible in other aspects of our academic journey.

The Law School must move beyond performative gestures such as sporadically incorporating a singular learning cycle on intersectional issues of race, gender etc when these topics are not consistently addressed and integrated into the curriculum. The school should instead commit to meaningful decolonisation efforts. This includes not only revising the curriculum to incorporate diverse perspectives but also actively supporting racialized students in navigating the challenges they face within the institution. By doing so, the Law School can truly demonstrate its commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and ultimately decolonisation. Furthermore, the repetitive nature of seminar preparation, undermines the potential for meaningful engagement and critical reflection of the law. This repetitive cycle of reading, answering specific questions, and attending seminars to discuss these questions fails to foster a deeper understanding or stimulate genuine discourse on important socio-legal matters that is neglected in our modules. It reduces seminar preparation to a mundane task, lacking the inspiration or enthusiasm necessary for meaningful engagement – a chore. Thus the efforts toward decolonizing knowledge within UK Law Schools have fallen short of their intended impact. The Law School should work harder in integrating discussions on the historical and contemporary implications of colonialism and imperialism into the fabric of legal education, rather than neglecting these topics. Your expressions of support are heard and acknowledged, but unfortunately, they lack tangible impact on our lived experiences, leaving us feeling suffocated. Despite the verbal assurances, the support provided does not translate into meaningful action or results. The Law School should attempt to address the repetitive but often less impactful attempts it has made to decolonise the curriculum and encourage its racialised students.

Of the seventeen modules I have taken in the past three years, I have encountered only four seminar tutors from racialised backgrounds and , the lack of representation among teaching staff exacerbates feelings of marginalization for racialized students. Whilst this number exceeded my initial expectations, it still falls short of what should be considered adequate representation. Of course, this may not necessarily be everyone else's experience (there are various seminar tutors for each module), it is still shocking to see. In first year, encountering a Black PhD student as a contract tutor was initially encouraging, but it was a rarity. Of course, it went downhill from there but I was happy to see it nonetheless. The absence of racial diversity among senior lecturers and seminar tutors creates an environment where racialized students may feel unseen and unheard, particularly in the face of a predominantly white cohort and this needs to be addressed. This lack of representation also hinders meaningful dialogue on decolonisation and anti-racism within the institution. Not to say that white seminar tutors should take a backseat in discussions, but there should be more representation in senior lecturers and seminar tutors who can aid in leading conversation. It is incredibly suffocating to find oneself as the sole racialized individual in a classroom setting, especially when faced with a succession of white seminar tutors whose experiences often contrast sharply with one's own.

# 'DECOLONISATION IN THE LAW SCHOOL'

Funmilola Jempeji - 3rd year LLB

For introverted individuals, navigating these dynamics can lead to a significant reluctance to participate, which ultimately hinders the learning experience. Conversations with friends studying other disciplines, such as politics, suggest that they encounter similar challenges. Of course, this effort of increasing representation in the staff and student body must go hand in hand with a thorough understanding of the university's and the Law School's roles in perpetuating colonial ideologies. Without addressing these foundational issues, merely increasing representation could prove to be counterproductive and regressive. However, this lack of representation amongst staff not only stifles diverse perspectives but also undermines the credibility of efforts to decolonize the curriculum

Another running theme within the law school is that these decolonisation, anti-racist initiatives, schemes and discussions aimed at addressing these issues often lack broad engagement from staff, leaving the burden on a few individuals like Dr. Foluke Adebisi (the director of Forever Africa Conference and Event (FACE)), who spearheads efforts like the Law School Anti-racism Week. While I appreciate the positive initiative taken by her, whether it's at the request of others or a voluntary effort on her part, it's evident that only a few other members of the Law School appear to be similarly engaged, at least on the surface. One name consistently stands out above others, gaining recognition and respect among racialised students. Why is that? Dr. Foluke's dedication to advancing the University and Law School is commendable, and her leadership in these discussions and initiatives as a racialized individual is invaluable. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is limited when there's minimal engagement from others. It's essential for other senior tutors and lecturers to also demonstrate their commitment to the process of decolonisation and anti-racism. Genuine progress requires collective commitment from all members of the Law School. This will also help ensure that their own biases, whether conscious or unconscious, are acknowledged and confronted, and that they actively participate in these crucial discussions. It's not surprising that more Black students leave university compared to their counterparts when the support system in place isn't sufficiently evident or secure. Just because we may not face overt racism on a daily basis doesn't mean we aren't subjected to repeated psychological traumas whenever we feel isolated, unable to discuss issues that affect us within a unit, or ignored by tutors. Engaging in challenging conversations can serve as a source of motivation for both current and future racialized students. Furthermore, it may inspire non-racialized students to become more actively involved. It's crucial for the school to make concerted efforts to ensure that everyone is engaged, as many of the students here will eventually become influential figures in society. By actively participating in shaping these minds, the law school has the opportunity to challenge and dismantle any bigoted stereotypes or biases that individuals may hold, ultimately benefiting everyone involved. The engagement of both racialized and non-racialized staff in anti-racist activities and schemes is thus crucial to challenging biases and fostering meaningful dialogue. These are just a few of the pressing concerns weighing heavily on the minds of racialized students

So how do we proceed from here? As I prepare to graduate, I hope to see tangible improvements in the Law School's approach to diversity and inclusion. Decolonisation entails not only understanding the historical roots of inequality but also actively dismantling institutional barriers that perpetuate it. I would like the Law School to have more of a comfortable feel for racialised students who decide to venture to this city. This requires ongoing dialogue, engagement, and a commitment to meaningful change from all stakeholders by challenging the status quo. Decolonisation is understanding the role the University and Law School plays in furthering these colonial agendas in modern society, it's understanding, targeting and changing those things that seem small but in fact are hindering the positive experiences of racialised students. It is ensuring that both white and racialised members of staff partake in these anti-racist activities and schemes. Yes, the conversation is better led by someone who understands it but why are non-racialised members of staff not seen engaging? There are various other issues that may have been missed in this address and the Law School should create a dialogue with students comfortable enough to engage in these discussions. It is commendable that the University is undergoing the Reparative Futures programme and this should be very progressive if achieved. Ultimately, decolonisation will remain an ongoing process, the success of these efforts will be measured by the experiences of future racialized students who choose to study at the University of Bristol Law School. The Law School owes it to us to do better. The racialised individuals who came before us and were subjected to oppressive ideologies, the friends I've made at Law School who echo these sentiments, and the future racialized students considering the University of Bristol Law School, would undoubtedly value such efforts as much as I.

# DECOLONISATION IN SOCIOLOGY, POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

## SPAIS Decolonization Plan

Dr Lucas de Abreu Maia

02/11/2022

### 1. Plan goals and Objectives

In decolonizing SPAIS, we are motivated by two main objectives.

The first is related to our duty of care and responsibility towards our students. We recognise that decolonizing SPAIS is imperative for how we develop a strong sense of belonging—in which students of all backgrounds can succeed and thrive. An inclusive environment is requisite for establishing this sense of community and belonging. In SPAIS, we also see student collaboration as a central aspect of decolonization, where students often have a leading role in decolonizing SPAIS.

Our second priority is to maintain and increase the intellectual rigour of our subject teaching through being actively and critically self-reflexive of knowledge and knowledge production, in particular with relation to the legacy of colonialism. In this we recognise the challenge to be open to critically evaluate our curriculum content, and the intellectual challenge that decolonising represents in relation to the subjects and disciplines taught in SPAIS, and for us as educators.

Decolonising SPAIS is embedded in our concerns of wider issues of supporting and adoption programmes which address issues of ethnic disadvantage, equality, diversity and inclusivity. We are committed to address these and implement a strategy of accountability and consistency.

### 2. Our Approach

Our approach aims to be supportive, collaborative and substantive; both of students and their concerns and of staff involved in decolonising. As such, we aim to avoid prescriptive approaches and tick boxes exercises, or 'one size fits all' approaches.

We seek to create opportunities to work with students and staff, where issues and discussions around decolonising in the School, and steps along these lines are part of ongoing developments and dynamic efforts adopted by the School.

Collaboration with students is a central feature of decolonising more generally, and SPAIS students have been active participants, and in many ways have driven the decolonising agenda in the School. This has principally come through our DecolSPAIS group, which includes areas of student activity as well as those that bring students and staff together. There have also been paid internships for students funded by Widening Participation Bristol and the Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching.

### 3. The Role of Decolonization Lead

The role of decolonization lead, therefore, entails coordinating SPAIS' actions surrounding decolonizing SPAIS. This involves bringing students and staff together to listen to their concerns regarding decolonization; encouraging decolonizing initiatives; informing students and staff at the school about best practices regarding decolonization; researching other decolonization initiatives inside and outside of the University of Bristol to assess if and how they could be adopted by SPAIS; and providing advice and encouragement to staff seeking to decolonize their units.

Following our approach, this role aims to listen, rather than prescribe; advise, rather than impose; understand, rather than determine; and encourage, rather than force. Given the emphasis that SPAIS places on decolonizing, the lead should directly engage with both students and staff, ensuring that decolonization efforts are on course.

### 4. Decolonization Initiatives for the Current Academic Year

The decolonization lead has the following activities planned for this academic year:

1. launch the Decolonization Sharepoint for staff;
2. conduct a round table with students and staff to discuss future decolonization efforts at the school; and
3. propose the creation of a decolonization advisory board with the goal of assisting staff seeking to decolonize their units.

These initiatives will follow the approach outlined above, by incorporating feedback from both students and staff with the goal of enacting our objectives.

## Key Points

- **Recognise that decolonising SPAIS is imperative for how we develop a strong sense of belonging in which students of all backgrounds can succeed and thrive**
- **We see student collaboration as a central aspect of decolonisation**
- **priority to maintain and increase the intellectual rigour of our subject teaching through being actively and critically self-reflexive of knowledge and knowledge production, in particular with relation to the legacy of colonialism**
- **Supporting and adopting programmes which address issues of ethnic disadvantage, equality, diversity and inclusivity**
- **decolonisation lead holds role that brings students and staff together to listen to concerns and encourage initiatives that address the best ways to address decolonisation.**

## Initiatives 22-24

- **launch the decolonisation sharepoint for staff**
- **conduct a roundtable with students and staff to discuss future decolonisation efforts at the school**
- **propose the creation of a decolonisation advisory board with the goal of assisting staff seeking to decolonise their units**

The campaign has identified the SPAIS faculty as the most active in the institution's decolonisation efforts. Dr. Lucas has led this initiative for both staff and students, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts to adequately address the institution's structural issues.

The SPAIS faculty needs to maintain a self-reflective approach. Decolonisation must be deconstructed, and the faculty must understand the unique challenges faced by ethnically diverse students.

While the collaborative effort has been positive, the campaign recently found that students, particularly their representatives, have been more proactive in addressing the initiative. It is crucial for staff to match this level of effort.

Dr. Lucas's decolonisation plan is effective as it aims to position the faculty board as a bridge between the institution and the students. As independents from the university, the staff are better positioned to advocate for decolonisation to be a central focus in institutional and upper committee operations.

# COLLABORATIONS: THE DECOLONISATION DEBATE

The 2 decolonisation debates took place on February 23rd. It was a collaboration between the Black student's network and the BAME network

The debates were centred on unveiling different perspectives surrounding decolonisation on university campus.

## Debate 1

### Empowerment vs Dependency

#### What does Positive Action Cause?

## Debate 2

### Erasing History vs Colonial Ties

#### Should symbols of colonialism be removed?

## Debate 1 : Positive Action

Position: Affirmative

Notion: In the pursuit of the campaign to decolonise, this house argues for the remained use of measures of Positive Action within Higher Education

Key Points:

- Positive action addresses historical injustices and marginalization.
- Encourages economic empowerment and reduces inequality.
- Aims to create an egalitarian society that eventually won't need positive action.
- Uplifts those deprived due to sovereign statehood.
- Provides literature on colonization.
- Initiatives like 10,000 Black Interns offer visibility and opportunities, emphasizing equity vs. equality.

Cross - Examination

How will you address bridging the gap?

- Positive Action must remain as evidence of the global colonial impact

How can you ensure that positive action represents the most marginalised minorities?

- The whole point of Positive Action is the notion of the equal level playing field

Closing Statements

- Positive Action benefits most, it gives an effective outcome on the basis of circumstance.
- Positive Action assesses real time situations
- Positive Action focuses on distributive justice
- Effectivity and Purpose increases with policy discourse

Position: Negative

Notion: In the pursuit of the campaign to decolonise, this house argues for the removal of all measures of Positive Action within Higher Education

Key Points:

- Encourages the model minority myth
- Promotes division between minority communities
- Positive Action is extremely ambiguous
- categorisation and eligibility is unclear
- outcome is not clear
- Positive action doesn't address structural issues

Cross-examination

What do suggest is done instead?

- an initiative that addresses different types of injustices such as colorism within minority communities

What do you suggest as an adequate framework

- intersectionality works as the main framework for Positive Action, when addressing structural issues, due to the depth there is no one-fitting solution

Closing Statements

- Positive Action is not equitable enough
- structural adjustments are not firm enough
- perpetual cycle of the model minority myth due to homogenised understanding
- affluence is extremely subjective

# COLLABORATIONS: THE DECOLONISATION DEBATE

## Debate 1

### Empowerment vs Dependency

What does Positive Action Cause?

## Debate 2

### Erasing History vs Colonial Ties

Should symbols of colonialism be removed?

## Debate 2 : Colonial Ties

Position: Affirmative

Notion: -In the pursuit of the campaign to decolonize, this house argues for the remain of all symbols of colonialism (as to not erase history) from university campuses

Key Points:

- Notion addresses symbols of colonialism.
- Old history vs. new history: acknowledge colonialism to prevent its recurrence.
- Removing symbols is one-dimensional.
- Erasing colonial symbols removes educational tools.
- Functional infrastructure is a colonial symbol.
- Expensive costs are covered by the city council.
- Minorities are most affected if council funds decrease.
- Redistributive policies impact minorities.

Cross - Examination

Can we keep history relevant, without glorifying those involved?

- An individuals identity should not be reduced in the shadow of colonial masters
- symbols bring in revenue

Closing Statements

- colonial symbols are associated with education
- Statues are used for acknowledgement
- The Public is better informed with symbols such as statues
- If money wasn't initially spent on minority communities it will not be redirected in the case of the removal of statues

Position: Negative

Notion: -In the pursuit of the campaign to decolonize, this house argues for the removal of all symbols of colonialism (as to not erase history) from university campuses

Key Points:

- Constant reminder of colonialism
- Colonial statues should not have any representation in this day and age
- By removing - there is an acknowledgement that they have taken accountability for their actions
- Perspectives, representation, symbols need to change
- Prevents the silent glorification of the colonialists themselves

Cross - Examination

Economic expenses/ Allocation of funds?

- In the case of the Colston statue, it's didn't cost money to topple.
- Conversations started on the basis of that toppling
- Money used maintaining these structures can be used to help minorities in the present.

Closing Statements

- Taking the setting into account. Individuals shouldn't have to weigh up their safe space with the white counterparts

To note

Debates were 30mins each

6 debators in total

3 per perspective

Alternating debators

# CONCLUSION: THE DECOLONISATION DEBATE

The first debate on positive action concluded that unintended consequences can arise if precise methods aren't used when addressing deep issues like structural racism and inequality.

It is crucial for institutions and organizations to carefully consider their approaches and prepare for various responses, both positive and negative.

Positive action may initially appear performative but proves effective by targeting vulnerable communities and providing them opportunities to succeed.

Both sides agreed that positive action should not be a permanent measure. The ultimate goal is to reach a point where all individuals are treated equally, regardless of race or socioeconomic status.

However, effectively repairing the damage caused by the British Empire will take years, so these measures need to be designed for long-term impact.

The second debate was about symbols of colonialism and how they should be addressed in universities today. This debate concluded on the importance of decolonisation of the curriculum specifically. In the scenario that the symbols remain or are removed, the curriculum should see that students learn about the history of the British empire fully and the horrors it done to African nations that they are still suffering from in the present.

Apologies should almost always be made, and there should be a discussion of what reparative measure has been put in place.

Institutions must make it a point of call to take accountability as many of them are built on the blood shed of those enslaved. Diversifying the curriculum is simply the tip of the iceberg in decolonisation.

Both sides discussed economic outcomes during this debate, as the United Kingdom makes money of its history and resistance to change regarding architecture and the glorifying of prominent figures during British Imperialism.

The dirty money made from the British Empire and passed onto companies built in legacy should be allocated to those affected issues of structural disparity accordingly, in an attempt to decolonise.

**Thank you to the six debators for sharing perspectives.  
Thank you to the BAME network on their collaborative effort during  
this debate.**

# CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

**THE CAMPAIGN HELD SOME CHALLENGES THAT I WOULD URGE THE INSTITUTION OR ANY ORGANISATION IMPLEMENTING ANTI-RACIST INITIATIVES TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.**

## **LACK OF ENGAGEMENT FROM COUNTERPARTS OF COLOUR**

- The conversation of anti-racism is not new to any student of colour in the United Kingdom. Institutions need to be aware, that individuals have become used to the lack of progress past campaigns and initiatives have made.
- Black students in particular are tired of hearing the notion that their history starts and ends with the Transatlantic slave trade. This notion has been proven false time and time again. It can have a really negative affect on their sense of belonging and mindset when it comes to day to day living in this country.
- Institutions need to understand this when navigating this conversation and create an approach that addresses the issues or colonialism whilst uplifting and reminding communities of Colour of the beauty their individual cultures and customs holds.

## **RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

- Organisations need to be aware that there may be some pushback regarding any campaign to decolonise - this can be due to fear of change or the notion of eligibility measures being unfair to some and creating division within minority communities.
- These reasons although relevant, can be addressed as long as their is no singular framework created.
- Institutions and Organisations must take their time in measuring how they are going to implement any forms or redistribution.
- The most vulnerable should be the first to receive the benefits of such policy. But then it is important to note the differences between minority communities and how redistribution would effect them.
- No two minorities are the same, and so we should not be grouped as such. (BAME).

## **LIMITED RESOURCES**

- The conversation of cost-effectivity doesn't apply to institutions that hold more than enough funding to address the economic measures in this initiative.
- A homogenised or lack of understanding can be addressed simply by ensuring a person of Colour is in a position of power alongside those that are trying to address the issues (these are typically white individuals).
- Ensure that white students understand the importance of decolonisation also. White people make up the majority population in the United Kingdom, if you do not discuss the initiative, it will not hold longjevitiy.

# FINAL THOUGHTS

Overall the report finds the University of Bristol is making a substantive efforts to address its legacies of colonialism and implement decolonisation within the curriculum.

Ofcourse there is a lot more that higher education in general as an academic industry can do.

the University of Bristol need to focus on addressing structural inequalities that it perpetuates through its unchanged culture. and needs to ensure that its efforts to decolonise are not performative.

the Black student's network as a component of the Bristol SU will ensure it continues to lobby the Institution into making effective levels of change within university campuses. This is to ensure that there is an enhancement in the level of comfortability black students have when attending the university.

Written by: Monique Arowojolu | Decolonisation officer 23/24 | 3rd Year BSc Politics & International Relations

## APPRECIATIONS

THE BLACK STUDENTS NETWORK COMMITTEE 23/24

CHAIR: SILVIO MADUEKE

VICE CHAIR: VICTORIA EZE

EVENTS OFFICER: MICHAELA MAMBY

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY OFFICER: MARYAN HASSAN

STUDNET LEADERS OFFICER: SAMUEL OGUNWONYI

COMMUNITY OUTREACH OFFICER: CYRINA NWABIAKAM

### **WRITERS & PERSPECTIVES**

**FUNMILOLA JEMPEJI**

**KELSEY PARSONS**

### DEBATERS

LOUIS ANGOY

CHRIS LAI

TANISHA BHATTACHARYA

BHOOMIKA SESHRAJ

MADHURA SOGANE MAHESH

MEGH VISHAL SANGODKAR

### **MEMBERS OF STAFF**

**DR LUCAS DE ABREU MAIA**

**DR FOLUKE ADEBISI**

### SU MEMBERS

UNDERGRADUATE OFFICER: NICOLE ANTOINE

EQUALITY, LIBERATIONS AND ACCESS OFFICER: SARANYA THAMBIRAJAH

### SOCIETIES/ NETWORKS

THE BAME NETWORK

DEBATE SOCIETY

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

## **WHAT YOU HAVE DONE**

- Bilt - decolonisation courses - faculty based
- £10 million pound reparative futures programme
- reparative futures board
- Legacies of Slavery: consultation and outcome on colonial ties to Bristol University
- Scholarships and sponsorships for all degree classifications for people of colour to address diversity within the community.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

- Deliver BILT courses live for faculties other than social sciences and law
- The next time any sort of consultation is held, their needs to be further outreach done to Black students.
- Hold career workshops that discuss the disparity students of Colour may face when navigating the job search, due to hidden biases and racism.
- An open forum for students of Colour to bring their queries directly to the board of directors of the institution, Organised by the INSTITUTION and not the SU.

## **WHAT YOU MUST DO**

- Work placements and year in industry for academic courses. Such as arts, humanities, social sciences etc. The reason that these are not currently held is because the assumption with Bristol university is that its intake centres those that are socio-economically adept to get into their career after university. If you are trying to decolonise and diversify that needs to change as many individuals do not hold those connections on arrival.
- Communicate directly with Black students more regularly as to make the initiative more prominent.
- Communicate with the wider Black community in Bristol. Delve deeper into the structural issues and form a partnership with them. There are two main universities in Bristol, the wider community has a right to know.
- Take decolonisation out of the talking stages
- Discuss with the staff of the institution how decolonisation can be discussed in seminars, lectures etc. All courses should have a decolonisation element to it. This is outside of the Social sciences and Law faculty.
- Lobby the government to take the initiative more seriously.

# A MESSAGE FOR THE INSTITUTION

The University of Bristol and other higher education institutions alike must recognize that decolonisation initiatives are non-negotiable. These institutions, built on the exploitation of enslaved peoples, have an obligation to repair the damaged relationships caused by their historical exploitation of African nations.

The contribution of colonies to the reconstruction of the UK after World War II highlights the ongoing relevance of these issues and is simply another example of how The UK's status as a Western superpower owes much to the contributions of Black and other ethnic communities worldwide.

Throughout history, the generosity of Black people specifically has been consistently overlooked,

Decolonisation is not revolutionary nor should it be celebrated, as it addresses wrongs that should never have occurred in the first place.

Institutions must remember that decolonisation is about returning what is owed after centuries of pillaging, murder, resource exploitation, and human trafficking, profits from which financed the country's technological advancements.

The UK and its legacy institutions owe a great debt to the people of Africa and other Global South nations. In their decolonisation efforts, universities must keep this responsibility at the forefront.

In any attempt to decolonise it is important the universities remind themselves of this.

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