

Cultures of Decolonisation at UCL

Report produced by
Grand Challenge of Cultural Understanding Working Group

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“I recognise it [decolonisation] is a provocation and that is part of the value of it”

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Preface

This report is a result of extensive research undertaken by researchers within UCL on Cultures of Decolonisation. Commissioned by the UCL's Grand Challenge of Cultural Understanding Working Group, the report has been overseen by a team of members from that group, along with two researchers from within the university.

It is envisaged that this report will lead to discussions amongst all faculties and departments across UCL on how cultures of decolonisation can be more directly reflected in their activities.

The report makes a number of observations about ways in which decolonisation themes can be more directly reflected in areas such as support to doctoral students, revision of ethical frameworks, and international collaborations.

We suggest that all that departments across the university set aside time to discuss this important report, and that structures such as Equality and Diversity committees, Research Ethics, and those involved in supporting global engagement initiatives recognise and address the themes and recommendations within the report.

Douglas Bourn

Co-Chair of UCL's Grand Challenge of Cultural Understanding Working Group

Researchers

Simon Eten Angyagre has recently completed a PhD at the UCL Institute of Education. His research interest is in the fields of global citizenship education and internationalisation as they apply in higher education contexts in Africa and the Global South more widely, using theoretical approaches that lie at the intersections of critical pedagogy, postcolonial and decolonial theories.

Ysabel Hannam is a recent MSc Global Health and Development graduate from the UCL Institute for Global Health, with a background in Social Anthropology. She enjoys exploring the intersections of health, race and gender using intersectional and decolonising frameworks.

Executive Summary

The Cultures of Decolonisation project is a research initiative of the UCL Grand Challenge of Cultural Understanding and was developed to assess decolonisation in research structures, norms, and practices at UCL.

It builds on a range of initiatives undertaken within UCL on decolonisation since 2018. Most of these initiatives have focused on curriculum matters, but this report aimed to map decolonising research initiatives and examine the extent to which the institution's research structures and norms facilitate and support these.

The report is based on in-depth interviews with 46 academics, 12 professional services staff, and eight doctoral students. Additionally, two separate online surveys were responded to by 11 doctoral students and 9 academics. The report also draws on a review of academic literature, project reports and websites of decolonising research projects within UCL, the UK, and globally. Staff reviewed their experiences and some broader conceptual issues including the language around decolonisation, UCL's global positioning vis-à-vis a decolonisation agenda, as well as the mainstreaming of decolonisation across UCL.

The interviews, surveys, and document review show that, although the explicit language of decolonisation is seldom used, many academics at UCL guide their research practice with principles and values that fall within a decolonising framework, including practices that centre on co-production, relationship-building, and capacity development, equitable participation in research, and promoting intersectionality in research. Many saw the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) committees as key to promoting a decolonisation agenda. But the report also found concerns that decolonisation needs to go beyond discussion in these committees as it poses wider questions of power, and knowledge construction and production.

Research at UCL takes many forms, and not all of it involves researched communities. For those engaged in research that involves human communities, decolonisation themes have particular relevance. Doctoral students engaged in human communities research, for example, are a particularly important grouping. However the report suggests that decolonisation has relevance to all researchers, regardless of discipline and subject area, across the university.

Engagement with researchers revealed that there were a range of ongoing initiatives to embed EDI in research training for doctoral students at UCL. Participants also suggested that the following should be included as requirements for doctoral students to consider before embarking on their research as part of the ethics application process:

- 1) Challenge the assumptions related to ownership over their research relative to co-ownership with researched communities.
- 2) Articulate how their research will benefit researched communities.
- 3) Ask whether researched communities see and want the benefits often ascribed to research projects.
- 4) Articulate their positionality and subjectivity in the research they undertake.

Many researchers who participated in the project thought there was a need for a greater scrutinising of the structures and incentives UCL puts in place to recruit, retain, and support doctoral students from underrepresented groups.

There was consensus among researchers that research culture(s) at UCL are, in the most part, conducive for undertaking decolonising research. This was said to be evident in the existence of a high level of awareness and interest among academics across some

faculties on the general topic of decolonisation. However, this interest does not appear to be homogenous across the institution, as most of the researchers who participated in the project were predominantly based in the Humanities, Social Sciences, Medical and Population Health Sciences, and much less so for the Life, Physical and Brain Sciences, as well as Management and Law.

Specific enabling factors for doing decolonising research were discussed during interviews. These were:

- The availability of seed funding for research projects through the UCL Grand Challenges, Liberating the Curriculum Award, and UCL Research Cultures award, among other funding schemes
- The establishment and work of the Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the study of Racism and Racialisation
- The 'Liberating the Collection' project undertaken by the Library Services
- The potential support UCL's Research and Innovation Services could give to decolonising research projects

Some constraints were also discussed as inhibiting the efforts of researchers to undertake decolonising research. These were:

- The fact of UCL's global elite status may potentially impact on the institution's commitment to decolonisation
- Bureaucracies and bottlenecks inhibiting the release of funds for research projects that involve partnerships and collaborations with researchers in Global South contexts
- Ethical frameworks for research in some faculties bear colonial dimensions. For example, some portions of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines for research were cited as Eurocentric and less conducive for undertaking research in non-western contexts. Alternatively, the British Sociological Association ethical framework was cited as more flexible and less colonial
- Teaching and research on Africa, South-East Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America appear not to be prioritised, and as such are under-resourced and not given the required attention

Recommendations

1. **Disseminate examples of decolonising approaches at UCL** through appropriate online and face to face forums, including UCL Learning and Teaching Conferences, ensuring all staff within UCL are kept regularly informed of current practices, training opportunities and research initiatives. In doing so, encourage open discussions on the most appropriate language to be used; this may vary between departments. The Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the study of Racism and Racialisation may act as a hub to collate resources, as well as providing relevant training and expertise.
2. **Develop a strategy for decolonising research at UCL** linked to the university's Education Strategy, in which there needs to be a recognition of themes raised in this report. This strategy should recognise that engagement with decolonisation within departments needs go beyond the responsibility of EDI Coordinators. All departments should identify how they are addressing decolonisation in their research strategies. Strategy development should include Research Services and

a discussion of how systems could be streamlined for funding agreements with partners from the Global South.

3. **Allocate appropriate human resources for strategy implementation**, including ensuring that decolonisation and cultural understanding remain an integral component of UCL's Grand Challenges. The Grand Challenges to be seen as playing a leading role in encouraging decolonisation themes to be embedded across appropriate UCL research practices. Staff development and training to be part of the core training provision for all UCL staff. Specific training materials should be developed with and for the doctoral school and ethics committee.

4. Specific Recommendations:

- Decolonisation themes directly addressed in UCL Education strategy by encouraging all faculties and departments to look at ways in which both their research and international partnerships could, where appropriate, have clearer social justice and equitable principles.
- All Faculties to organise special sessions on decolonisation and prepare a programme of activities to develop work in this area including staff development, review of research practices and most appropriate language to engage all staff.
- All EDI coordinators to have theme of decolonisation as part of their job description. Their role should also include encouraging the creation of a team of interested people within a department to oversee, monitor and support the implementation of decolonisation practices across the Department.
- ARENA team to organise appropriate training for all UCL staff on decolonisation themes
- Global Engagement team to review nature of their international partnerships in terms of extent to which they are encouraging mutual learning and are actively supporting decolonisation strategies. The team to also lead on reviewing ways in which all international partnerships across UCL could address ways in which funding could be equitably shared.
- The EDI module for doctoral students, for example, should be recognised as an essential component of doctoral training.
- Decolonisation themes to be reflected within the specific job descriptions of staff who have a research development brief that directly involves human interaction.

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1.0 Introduction: Project rationale and report structure

The Cultures of Decolonisation project is a research initiative of the UCL Grand Challenge of Cultural Understanding. It was developed to map decolonising research initiatives across the university and to examine the extent to which the institution's research structures and norms facilitate and support these initiatives.

The project dovetails with UCL's efforts to understand how its research might better reflect its global vision and mission, and contribute to addressing global challenges, including challenges faced by historically disadvantaged groups and communities. Given the historical role European universities played as colonising spaces for the colonial project¹, many are beginning to confront their colonial past and are moving to redress the oppression and injustices that resulted from colonisation.

In 2018, UCL commissioned an inquiry into the institution's historic links to the eugenics movement and sought to implement some of the recommendations that came out of the inquiry². Alongside these efforts, there are ongoing conversations across UCL on decolonisation, precipitated partly by student-led demands within the UK and globally for universities to be decolonised. This has led to the development of various decolonisation initiatives in different faculties across UCL. Examples of these initiatives are the Decolonising the Medical Curriculum and Liberating the Curriculum initiatives^{3 4}. A Town Hall event was also held in June 2020, under the caption 'A conversation about race at UCL: a lived experience', as part of the broader conversations on decolonisation (see Appendix B for other decolonisation initiatives at UCL). However, many of the existing decolonisation initiatives appear to focus on curricula, with few paying much attention to research. Building on actions discussed at the Town Hall event, the Cultures of Decolonisation project aimed to address the seeming lack of focus on research in the decolonisation conversations and initiatives at UCL.

This report summarises past and ongoing decolonising research across UCL and identify themes that emerge from interviews and surveys with academics, professional staff, and doctoral students. It also discusses similar initiatives in other universities and offers recommendations about how to take the themes forward across the university. The report includes case studies which reflect five themes: co-production in research; equitable participation in research; giving visibility to the scholarly works of minoritized groups; promoting intersectionality in research; and embedding EDI in postgraduate research training. In all, 8 decolonising research case studies are discussed within the report to demonstrate how decolonising research at UCL is practised. A list of research initiatives and projects that fall within decolonising research framework undertaken by researchers at UCL is attached to this report as Appendix A.

¹ Bhabra GK, Gebrial D, Nişancioğlu K, Editors. Decolonising the university. London: Pluto Press, 2018.

² University College London, Inquiry into the History of Eugenics at UCL. [online]. UCL, London [Accessed 10 August 2022]. Available from: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/provost/inquiry-history-eugenics-ucl>

³ UCL Medical School, Decolonising the Medical Curriculum [online]. UCL Medical School, London [Accessed 20 August 2022]. Available from: <https://decolonisingthemedicalcurriculum.wordpress.com/>

⁴ University College London, Liberating the Curriculum. [online]. UCL, London [Accessed 22 August 2022]. Available from: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/research-based-education/liberating-curriculum>

2.0 Methodology

The methodological approach for the research was qualitative, consisting of in-depth interviews, two separate online surveys, and a review of academic literature, project reports and websites of decolonising research projects within UCL, the UK, and globally. The approach to recruiting participants for the research was open-ended, as the goal was to encourage all researchers, doctoral students and professional staff engaged in or supporting any form of decolonising research to come forward to share their views and experiences. The report largely reflects the positionality of the two researchers who executed the project and put together this report, with guidance and inputs from members of the project steering committee.

In all, 46 academics, 12 professional staff, and 8 doctoral students participated in in-depth interviews, with additional 9 academics and 11 students responding to two separate online surveys. Interviews were held over Microsoft Teams, with the aid of interview guides developed with members of the project steering committee. In-depth interviews were preceded by a pilot focus group discussion with a select group of UCL researchers known to be part of the team driving forward decolonisation conversations at UCL. This pilot focus group was used to solicit views on relevant topics for the in-depth interviews and online surveys.

Interview participants came from ten faculties, including the Institute of Education (n=7), Arts and Humanities (n=8), Social and Historical Sciences (n=13), Built Environment (n=6), Engineering Sciences (n=2), Maths and Physical Sciences (n=8), Medical Sciences (n=3), Population and Health Sciences (n=5), the Life Sciences (n=1), and the Brain Sciences (n=2).

Staff from professional services who took part in interviews were from the UCL Arena Centre (n=2), the Doctoral School (n=2), UCL Library Services (n=5), the Global Research Funding Team (n=1), UCL Research and Innovation Services (n=1), and the Research Staff Development Programme (n=1). Figures 1-3 show participants' from UCL Faculties and services.

Figure 1: Representation of researchers across faculties

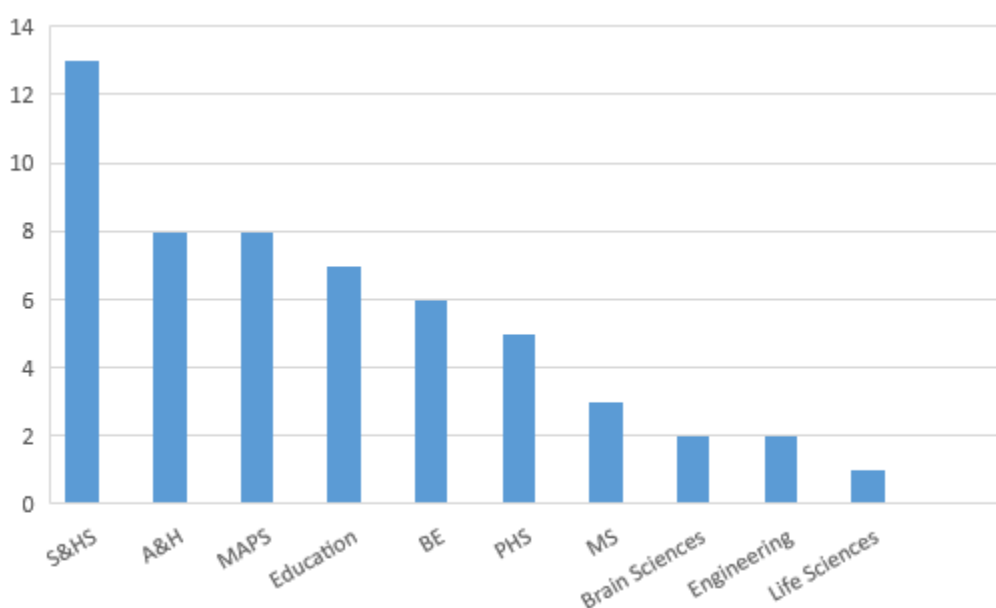


Figure 2: Representation of professional staff in interviews

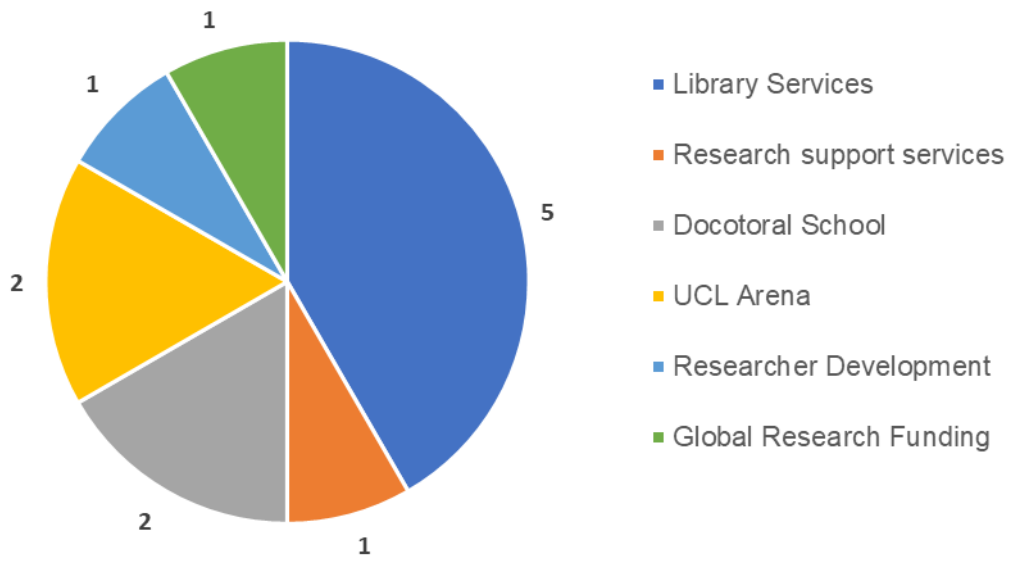
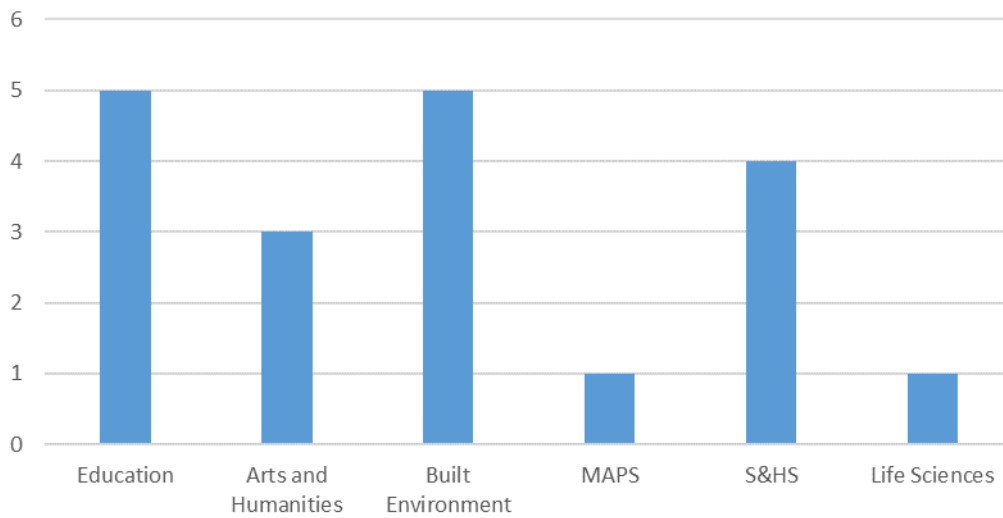


Figure 3: Representation of PhD students in interviews and online survey



3.0 Why decolonise research?

Decolonising methodologies are increasingly being recognised as essential to good research practice within and outside higher education. The need to decolonise research is based on the recognition that traditional research methodologies predominantly stem from Western research traditions to the exclusion of non-Western indigenous research paradigms. Whether advertently or inadvertently, these dominant Western research methodologies are said to entail pathologising approaches that dehumanise minority and indigenous groups, and as a result perpetuate the stereotypes and inequities these groups face. These methodologies are also said to be driven by extractivist approaches to research that exploit knowledge resources belonging to indigenous and local communities without appropriate recognition and compensation.⁵ Calls for research to be decolonised are premised on the argument that, to be able to address the challenges of a global society, research needs to take into account the diverse social, cultural, and historical experiences of different populations around the world, and particularly those of communities that have historically faced marginalisation based on race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality, among other categories of difference. Initiatives to decolonise research aim to address questions of equity, representation, relevance, capacity, and ethics in the intertwined processes of research and knowledge production. This challenges (neo)colonial approaches to research that often relegate the knowledges, experiences and values of minority groups and communities to non-consideration.⁶

Given its connection to knowledge production, research has the power to name, label, condemn or liberate, and through this can make or unmake groups and communities that are on the margins of society.⁷ On this basis, research should not be seen as the ‘innocent’ pursuit of knowledge, but as an endeavour that holds the potential of either liberating and empowering marginalised groups or, conversely, deepening inequities and hierarchies in society. The goal for decolonising research then is to address hegemonic elements in traditional research methodologies that contribute to domination and subordination in society.⁸ At the centre of a decolonising research agenda therefore are questions of who has power to prioritise the knowledge that is produced, interpret research, and own research products.

⁵ Zurba, M., Petriello, M. A., Madge, C., McCarney, P., Bishop, B., McBeth, S., et al. Learning from knowledge co-production research and practice in the twenty-first century: Global lessons and what they mean for collaborative research in Nunatsiavut, *Sustainability Science* [online]. 2022; 17: 449-467. [Accessed 25 August 2022]. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-021-00996-x>>

⁶ Keikelame MJ, Swartz L, Decolonising research methodologies: lessons from a qualitative research project, Cape Town, South Africa, *Global Health Action* [online]. 2019;12(1): 1-7. [Accessed 24 August 2022]. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2018.1561175>>

⁷ Chilisa B, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publishing, 2019.

⁸ *Ibid*

4.0 External examples of decolonising research initiatives

Calls for research in higher education to be decolonised has given impetus to decolonising research initiatives in universities both in the UK and internationally. These initiatives aim to promote and integrate decolonial practice in mainstream research. While some of these initiatives are institution-wide and aim to encourage the uptake of decolonising methodologies among researchers, others are focused on the training of students in decolonising methodologies, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A few examples of these initiatives are presented.

SOAS, University of London set up a 'Decolonising Research Initiative' to explore ways in which the institution can decolonise its research structures, norms, and practices. The initiative was preceded by a Conversation Event⁹ that brought together researchers, academics, funders, and research directors, both from within the UK and across the globe, to share perspectives and best practices through presentations and panel discussions on the topic of decolonising research. The event has contributed to positioning decolonising research high on the agenda of SOAS, making it an important item in the institution's Research Strategy. Lessons from the event have also informed the development of a new online training course on *Ethical Reflexivity and Research Governance: Navigating the Tensions*¹⁰, aimed at both researchers and doctoral students.

At the level of training, many universities are beginning to centre decolonial methodologies in their doctoral training programmes. One prominent UK example is the South West Doctoral Training Partnership¹¹, a doctoral training consortium of five universities in the South West of England (comprising University of Bristol, University of Exeter, University of the West of England, University of Bath and the University of Plymouth). In 2020-1, this consortium organised a Decolonising Social Research Series targeted at doctoral researchers and their supervisors. This addressed topics including Decolonising Theory, Decolonising Epistemology, Decolonising Research Ethics, Decolonising Methodology and Decolonising Writing and Representation.

In Australia, universities are beginning to integrate decolonising research methodologies in undergraduate programmes. These initiatives aim to introduce students to the works of indigenous scholars and centre indigenous research methodologies and knowledge paradigms. For example, the Australian National University offers an undergraduate course on *Decolonising Methodologies and other Indigenous Perspectives on Research*.¹² This course aims to help students understand the historical context of contemporary research methods vis-à-vis current calls for research to be decolonised, against the backdrop of indigenous people's experiences, histories, and cultures.

Underpinning these different decolonising research initiatives are principles of practice that guide the way decolonial research is undertaken. Whilst some principles aim to promote critical reflexivity and a critique of traditional research assumptions, others require researchers to be guided by values of reciprocity and respect for self-determination for the

⁹ SOAS, University of London. Decolonising Research Initiative. [Online]. SOAS: London. [Accessed 20 July 2022]. Available from: <https://www.soas.ac.uk/research/researchstrategy/decolonising-research-initiative/>

¹⁰ <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337680235>

¹¹ South West Doctoral Training Partnership. Decolonising Social Research Series. [Online]. [Accessed 24 August 2022]. Available from: <https://www.swdtp.ac.uk/training-and-development/past-training-and-development-courses/decolonising-social-research-series/>

¹² Australian National University. Programs and courses: Decolonising Methodologies and other Indigenous Perspectives on Research. [Online]. ANU: Australia [Accessed 30 August 2022]. Available from: <https://programsandcourses.anu.edu.au/2022/course/INDG4001>

groups and communities they research. There are also decolonial principles that require researchers to embrace other(ed) ways of knowing, whilst also engaging in transformative praxis.¹³ Some research approaches and principles are more naturally aligned with decolonial research practice; these include co-production, co-creation and capacity strengthening and development. For example, Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies are noted as decolonising because they move away from deficit approaches that view researched communities as 'objects' to be studied, and towards valuing communities as equal collaborators and partners in the research process.

¹³Thambinathan V., Kinsella E. A. Decolonizing methodologies in qualitative research: Creating spaces for transformative practice, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* [Online]. 2021; 20: 1-9. [Accessed 25 August 2022]. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211014766>>

5.0 Case studies of decolonising research at UCL

We found that, although the language of decolonisation is seldom used, many academics at UCL guide their research practice with principles and values that fall within a decolonising framework, including practices that centre on co-production, relationship-building, and capacity development, among other principles. Case study research projects undertaken by researchers at UCL are presented to highlight the various ways in which decolonising methodologies and approaches are enacted. Many of these initiatives are small scale research projects funded through UCL internal funding schemes, whilst the large-scale projects are funded by external funding bodies.

5.1 Co-production in research

Co-production is an established approach to driving participation, engagement, and capacity development in research¹⁴, and based on this is noted as one of the effective ways to decolonise research. Co-production is a methodological approach based on partnership and collaboration in implementing research projects. Among the different research initiatives shared by academics at UCL, two research projects are presented below to showcase co-production. These two research projects are the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality project and an evaluation of a mental health project anchored in the decolonising principle of co-production.

5.1.1 Case study 1

Project Title
Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW)
Project Description
KNOW ¹⁵ is a large-scale research project implemented by a consortium of higher education institutions and community-based organisations in the Global North and South, with the UCL Faculty of Built Environment as one of the consortium members. The project was designed as a response to growing inequalities in cities globally, with implementation focused around six working packages: City knowledge co-production; Comparative Inquiry for Urban Equality; Ethics of Research Practice; Translating Research into Practice; Multiplying Translocal Learning in Higher Education and Expanding UK ODA Research Capacity.
Objectives/Anticipated Outcomes
“To co-produce knowledge to activate transformations towards urban equality in selected cities in the Global South, with a focus on redistributive and integrated actions to address prosperity, resilience, and extreme poverty”.
“To build and strengthen research capacity in selected DAC countries and the UK to

¹⁴ Burgess R. A., Choudary N. Time is on our side: Operationalising 'phase zero' in coproduction of mental health services for marginalised and underserved populations in London, *International Journal of Public Administration* [Online]. 2021; 44(9): 753-766. [Accessed 27 August 2022]. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2021.1913748>>

¹⁵ Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) project website. [Date unknown]. [Accessed 20 June 2022]. Available from: <https://www.urban-know.com/>

<p>tackle the challenges and opportunities of vulnerable urban communities through partnerships with equivalence between networks and organisations of the poor, government, the private sector, and academia”.</p> <p>“To co-create responsive Urban Learning Hubs in target countries to co-produce relevant knowledge to analyse, plan, monitor, and compare city progress towards national and global goals on urban equality, in particular, the SDGs and the Habitat III New Urban Agenda”.</p>
<p>Project Strategies</p>
<p>Though the project does not explicitly identify its goals, strategies, and outcomes as decolonising, it employs language affiliated with decolonising approaches, including transformative research, knowledge co-production, partnerships of equivalence, capacity building/strengthening and urban equality. The decolonial innovations in the KNOW project are discernible in the project’s emphasis on participatory and collaborative intervention in co-producing to address inequality in urban design. In deploying these co-production processes, the project also aims to develop the capacity of institutional partners based mostly in the Global South and enhance the institutional capabilities of local actors to advance an urban equality agenda in their individual localities.</p> <p>A key novelty in the project that aligns well with decolonising research is the concept of partnerships of equivalence which underscores the significance of horizontal relationships in research and the need to pay attention to the power dynamics that play out in co-production.¹⁶ In interviews, there was the understanding from a UCL researcher that an important consideration that underlies the notion of partnerships of equivalence in the KNOW project is that ‘equality’ should not be framed as ‘sameness’ but valuing the unique contribution that each actor can bring to the research process. An extended innovation in the KNOW project is a Doctoral Training Course developed around the principle of co-producing research. The course is titled “Co-producing Doctoral Urban Research in the Global South”.</p>

5.1.2 Case study 2

<p>Project Title</p>
<p>Evaluation research on London-based mental health co-production network</p>
<p>Project Description</p>
<p>This evaluation research¹⁷ was led by a researcher based at UCL’s Institute for Global Health and aimed to assess the dynamics underpinning the work of a mental health co-production network based in South London. The network has developed a programme of co-produced mental health initiatives through collaborative work with statutory organisations, community-based organisations, the voluntary sector, and religious groups with the aim of improving mental health outcomes for racially minoritized communities.</p> <p>The need for adopting a co-production approach to improving mental health outcomes for racialised minority groups comes out of the recognition that engagement with service users is essential to addressing their needs. This is further anchored in the belief that people should be actively involved in health initiatives that aim to promote their health</p>

¹⁶ Osuteye E., Ortiz C., Lipietz B., John C., Kombe C. Knowledge co-production for urban equality, KNOW Working Paper No. 1 [Online]. Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality; 2019 [Accessed 28 July 2022]. Available from: [know_workingpaper-no1_vf.pdf \(ucl.ac.uk\)](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/know/working-paper-no1_vf.pdf)

¹⁷ Burgess R. A., Choudary N. Time is on our side: Operationalising ‘phase zero’ in coproduction of mental health services for marginalised and underserved populations in London, International Journal of Public Administration [Online]. 2021; 44(9): 753-766. [Accessed 27 August 2022]. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2021.1913748>

and well-being. In service delivery, the standard co-production processes are said to usually involve four levels of engagement: co-commissioning, co-designing, co-delivery, and co-assessment. Through these different levels of engagement, co-production processes are said to hold the potential of transforming services through the nurturing of more equitable relationships between service providers and racially minoritized groups. However, beyond this recognition, it has been observed that attempts to address power imbalances through this model of co-production have largely been tokenistic and do not bring about transformation.

Project Objective

The evaluation specifically sought to address the question of how the network leverages co-production to address the mental health needs of historically marginalised groups beyond the tokenistic processes of participatory engagement that often characterise mainstream health delivery engagements.

Project Strategies

One important decolonising research perspective that comes out of the evaluation is that in undertaking long-term research that is driven by co-production tenets, at the preliminary stages, it is important to map existing power relationships between groups that might impact negatively on genuine participation and engagement. This will lay the groundwork for redressing any power imbalances that might characterise engagement in the research process.

5.2 Promoting equitable participation in research

UCL researchers noted that promoting equitable participation in research for marginalised groups and communities is a key approach to decolonising research. While in some cases, underrepresentation of minority groups in research has been attributed to systemic exclusionary research practices¹⁸, there are other instances where hesitancy to participate is due to past negative experiences with research, culminating in distrust.^{19 20} However, equitable participation in research for minority groups has been noted for producing positive outcomes for these groups, but also more broadly for ensuring equity in the planning and provision of development interventions.²¹ Two projects are presented to demonstrate how decolonising research can be employed to address questions around equitable participation in research. These projects were developed by a clinical lecturer based at the UCL Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care, and one of them is a collaboration with the University of Brighton.

¹⁸ George, S., Duran, N., Norris, K. A systematic review of barriers and facilitators to minority research participation among African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders, *American Journal of Public Health* [Online]. 2014; 104(2): e16-e31. [Accessed 10 September 2022]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.2105%2FAJPH.2013.301706>>

¹⁹ Burnette, C. E., Sanders, S., Butcher, H. K., Salois E. M. Illuminating the lived experiences of research with indigenous communities, *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* [Online]. 2011; 40: 275-296. [Accessed 10 September 2022]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2011.622199>>

²⁰ Smith LT. *Decolonising methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* [Online]. (3rd edition). London: Bloomsbury Publishing; 2021 [Accessed 15 June 2021]. Available from: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350225282>>

²¹ Loignon, C., Dupéré, S., Leblanc, C., Truchon, K., Bouchard, A., Arsenault, J., et al. Equity and inclusivity in research: co-creation of a digital platform with representatives of marginalized populations to enhance the involvement in research of people with limited literacy skills, *Research Involvement and Engagement* [Online]. 2021; 7(70): 1-6. [Accessed 23 August 2022]. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-021-00313-x>>

5.2.1 Case study 1

Project Title
“Diverse Voices” A UCL community engagement project on diversity in health research participation
Project Description
The project aimed to improve the engagement of ethnic minority communities in health research beyond the methods traditionally used in academia. This is important given ethnic minority groups face multiple health and socioeconomic inequalities, but are historically under-represented in health research. Understanding of why these inequalities occur is limited.
Project Strategies:
Working in partnership with Kois Miah, a photographer based in East London specialising primarily in projects that combine photography with community participation for social change, the project involved photography workshops with community groups in East London sharing skills in visual storytelling to create new tools for self-advocacy and representation. Participants were invited to creatively express themselves and tell their own stories of health, illness, inequality, or barriers to participation in research through their images.
Project Outcome
The visual storytelling performed a dual role as both a form of creative expression and a way to document lived experiences.

5.2.2 Case study 2

Project Title
Novel community-based digital intervention to address ethnic inequalities in COVID vaccine confidence.
Project Description
The Covid-19 vaccine has been described by public health experts as a critical tool for controlling the pandemic as herd immunity can break the chain of transmission. England’s COVID-19 vaccine campaign has been successful but inequalities in uptake exist, with Black and some Asian ethnic groups having lower uptake than White people, despite having a higher risk of death from the virus. This study aimed to help address these inequalities, and work with communities to improve the health of those hardest hit by the pandemic.
Project Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a digital storytelling intervention to increase Covid-19 vaccine confidence with a low uptake ethnic minority group in London • Determine the feasibility of sharing the intervention through community networks • Determine the feasibility of collecting data on the views of participants on the

intervention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervention delivery and its impact on their decision to have the vaccine.
Project Outcome
The project is a collaboration between researchers at UCL and the University of Brighton. At the time of the interviews for this report, the project was still ongoing.

5.3 Giving visibility to scholarly works of minoritized researchers

There is evidence of intersectional inequalities in research authorship that emanate from the dominance of white males in academia, much to the exclusion of gendered, racialised and other minoritised groups.²² This inequality is compounded by a lack of visibility for scholarly works authored by researchers from minority backgrounds. Yet, there is evidence to show that diversity in academia drives excellence, enhances innovation and leads to wide-ranging research approaches and outcomes.²³ If decolonising research aims to centre marginalised knowledge forms in knowledge production processes, then there is a case for giving visibility to the scholarly works of researchers from minoritized backgrounds as part of the process of decolonising research. Part of the decolonising research innovations undertaken by researchers and professional services at UCL consist in giving visibility to the intellectual works of scholars in the margins. The UCL Library services have been responsive to decolonisation calls and have put in place an initiative to decolonise the library collections. This initiative, along with research projects undertaken by UCL researchers to centre the works of marginalised scholars, are presented below.

5.3.1 Case study 1

Project Title
Liberating the collection
Project Description
UCL's Library Services have undertaken a number of activities to address concerns about the lack of representation of diverse voices within the library's collections. Library services have set out to increase the visibility of, and access to, works by authors who have been marginalised on the basis of race, sexuality, gender and disability. The library services are reviewing all collection policies to ensure diversity in newly acquired material. They have also made a public commitment to deal with inherent historical bias and inequalities in the library collections. This commitment is noted in UCL Deans and Professional Services Director's Race Equality Pledges 2020. ²⁴ Library services pledge to:
Take action to acknowledge and address inherent historical bias and structural

²² Kozłowski, D., Larivière, V., Sugimoto, C. R., Monroe-White, T. Intersectional inequalities in science, *PNAS* [Online]. 2021;119(2): 1-8. [Accessed 17 August 2022]. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2113067119>>

²³ Swartz, T. H., Palermo, A-G. S., Masur, S. K., Aberg, J. A. The science and value of diversity: Closing the gaps in our understanding of inclusion and diversity, *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* [Online]. 2019; 220(suppl. 2): S33-S44. [Accessed 26 August 2022]. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/infdis/jiz174>>

²⁴ University College London. UCL Deans' Professional Services Directors' Race Equality Pledges [Online]. [Accessed 14 August 2022]. Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/equality-areas/race-equality/deans-and-professional-services-directors-race-equality-pledges-2020>

inequalities in the provenance, development, and discoverability of UCL's library collections. Engage with stakeholders, support UCL's de-colonisation initiatives, and adopt best practice to future-proof the Library's collecting strategy. (UCL Website)
Project Strategies
In terms of specific actions, the Library Services hold significant amounts of uncatalogued material within its collections and is using these uncatalogued collections to redress the balance in the lack of representation in the Library's collections.
Project Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A list of 650 collection items relating to underrepresented groups • Three public talks and four blog posts aimed at the general public • Enhanced catalogue records that will better support collections-based research into these areas

5.3.2 Case study 2

Project Title
Contemporary Afro-Brazilian literature in translation
Project Description
<p>This project is being undertaken by a researcher at the UCL School of European Languages, Culture and Society. The project is built on the recognition that there is a lack of material on Afro-Brazilian literature translated into English, which makes it difficult to teach the works of both established and up-and-coming authors in this field. The project addresses this gap in terms of making available Afro-Brazilian literature to both students and academics.</p> <p>Through this, the project contributes to the theoretical and critical debate on and to the diffusion of Afro-Brazilian literature in the UK by using as its case study short stories published by the Literary Festival of the Peripheries (FLUP 2012-19). FLUP is an international literary festival intended to affirm the favela as a legitimate space for literary debate and creativity. It has published 21 books, becoming the most important platform for emerging writers from the Rio de Janeiro favelas, mostly Afro-Brazilian descendants.</p>
Project Outputs
The outcomes of the project consist of research on intercultural translation and contemporary Afro-Brazilian literature, as well as practitioner activities consisting of a series of 10 fortnightly translation workshops on Afro-Brazilian short stories. Students studying Portuguese at UCL now have an opportunity to study a module called 'Afro-Brazilian Literature in Translation', and teaching staff also have a resource to broaden the material they can make available to students.

5.4 Promoting intersectionality in research

There is increased awareness that the social inequalities faced by marginal groups are intersectional in nature, often cutting across different categories of identity including race,

gender, disability, sexuality, and class. The key idea that underpins intersectionality is that social inequality is often embedded in different marginalised identities.²⁵ Therefore, to understand the multiple dimensions of social inequality requires an intersectional approach to research.²⁶ Intersectional approaches to research and decolonising research are said to be two sides of the same coin as intersectionality provides a suitable framework for decolonising research “because it supports power analyses that make different *positionalities* legible for the purposes of *co-creating processes* that lead to more equitable and just social arrangements”.²⁷ Decolonising research principles are therefore at the heart of intersectionality research just as principles of intersectionality are central to decolonising research.

5.4.1 Case study

Project Title
Gender Responsive Resilience & Intersectionality in Policy and Practice (GRRIPP)
Project Description
<p>The Gender Responsive Resilience & Intersectionality in Policy and Practice (GRRIPP) project is implemented by a group of researchers at the UCL Institute of Risk and Disaster Reduction, together with university partners and civil society organisations in the Global South. The project centres principles of intersectionality to address the social inequalities faced by women and girls.²⁸</p> <p>GRRIPP is described as a global collaboration and a knowledge exchange project. It is grounded in the recognition that too often humanitarian and development programmes have “gender equality” as a “value added” aspect of projects rather than as a central goal. In addition, too few organisations engage with how overlapping aspects of discrimination, such as gender, race, and class interact and exacerbate development challenges for women and girls. These challenges increase in situations of urban-based disasters and conflict, where pre-crisis resilience may be low. GRRIPP brings together partners from Latin America and Caribbean (LAC), Southern Africa, South Asia, and the UK to disrupt mainstream development discussions on gender. The project is developed around four overarching themes: Resilience, Intersectionality, Critical Theory, and Infrastructure. The themes related to Intersectionality and Critical Theory are directly related to a decolonising research framework.</p>
Project Approach
<p>The GRRIPP project aims to be guided by a decolonial ethos, including a critical reassessment of power relationships between and within countries, communities, and social relations more generally. The structure of management is flat and horizontal, and all the partners follow a code of conduct that ensures a diverse, fair, and safe working environment. Through this approach, the GRRIPP aims to foster an international collaboration that brings to the forefront initiatives from the Global South. With this change of focus and methods, the project aims to contribute to renewing theory, and to the implementation of better policies and practices in the fields of gender-responsive disaster risk reduction, climate change action and development.</p>

²⁵ Daniel A. Rhodes Must Fall: different layers of intersectionality in students’ protests in South Africa, *Interface: A journal for and about social movements* [Online]. 2021;13(1):12-37. [Accessed 17 August 2022]. Available from: [Interface-13-1-Daniel.pdf \(interfacejournal.net\)](https://www.interfacejournal.net/Interface-13-1-Daniel.pdf)

²⁶ Romero M. *Introducing intersectionality*, Cambridge: Polity Press; 2018.

²⁷ Parker PS. Notes on intersectionality and decolonising knowledge production. In: Manion C, Anderson E, Baily S, Call-Cummings M, Iyengar R, Shah PP et al. editors. *Interrogating and innovating comparative and international education research*. Leiden/Boston: Brill Sense; 2015. pp. 140-147.

²⁸ Gender Responsive Resilience & Intersectionality in Policy and Practice project website: <https://www.gripp.net/>

Intersectionality is adopted in the project as a research approach for examining the root causes of discrimination and inequalities at the intersection of social identities. Through this, the project examines and questions existing 'hierarchies' and 'categories' to better support a focus on power relations and imbalances that have historically undermined equal opportunities for all. Using an intersectional approach to the research helps question how knowledge is produced and embedded within particular epistemic communities and cultures of knowledge.

5.5 Embedding EDI in postgraduate research training

Many UCL researchers felt that the process of decolonising research should start with the research training UCL gives doctoral students, as well as the structures and incentives it puts in place to recruit, retain, and advance the research careers of doctoral students from underrepresented groups. Whilst research takes many forms at UCL and not all directly involves research communities, there was a strong message from many of those interviewed of the lack of representation of minoritised groups in research and academia, and the need for actions to redress this. Students interviewed as part of this project discussed some of the challenges and barriers that negatively impact on their training experiences at UCL, including the limited availability of scholarship opportunities for students from underrepresented groups and the absence of mentors and role models from these groups. Many of the barriers discussed by doctoral students are captured in a comprehensive study undertaken by the UCL Doctoral School on the topic of barriers to doctoral education at UCL.²⁹ In the specific area of embedding EDI in postgraduate research training, interviews with researchers revealed that there were some ongoing initiatives to embed EDI in research training for students at UCL.

5.5.1 Case study

Project Title
Embedding EDI in Post-Graduate Planning and Built Environment Research Training
Project Description
<p>Phase One</p> <p>An intern was recruited and guided to complete a comprehensive audit of EDI relevant practices in existing postgraduate taught research training modules across the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment and cognate departments across UCL. A literature review was also conducted. The intention from this baseline study was to develop a typology of best practices for built environment student researchers, which would then be utilised to develop an online EDI Self-Assessment Tool. The tool is the subject of the next project described below.</p> <p>Phase Two</p> <p>Building on the preceding assessment, this project is designed to implement a new and bespoke EDI Self-Assessment Tool for postgraduate (taught and research) students to use as part of the research training support modules within the School of Planning. The online tool will holistically embed essential EDI thinking and practice in dissertation and thesis planning, design, and implementation. The project will have a direct influence on the range and impact of research topics, approaches, methods, and analytical frameworks undertaken in planning-relevant MSc dissertations and PhD theses. It is</p>

²⁹ Lindner R. Barriers to Doctoral Education: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion for Postgraduate Research Students at UCL. [Online]. London: UCL Doctoral School; 2020 [Accessed 22 August 2022]. Available from: <https://www.grad.ucl.ac.uk/strategy/barriers-to-doctoral-education.pdf>

expected that students (and their supervisors) will develop an inclusive ethos for research, policy analysis, and professional practice, further promoting the value of studying Planning at the Bartlett. The production of a tool for assessing one's own cultural competency in research design and implementation has not previously been foregrounded in dissertation research training. The previously noted audit revealed the limited (nearly non-existent) extent to which EDI considerations are explicitly embedded into research training, beyond the catch-all of basic research ethics. Such considerations include, but are not limited to: researcher positionality, unconscious bias, inclusive language, decentering dominant literature and methodological narratives, and enabling a positive and inclusive research space.

6.0 Decolonising research in doctoral education

The doctoral students who participated in the interviews and the online survey indicated decolonial methodologies are central to their doctoral research. Some of the specific ways they reported using decolonial methodologies are: (1) The centring of indigenous intellectual and research traditions in their research; (2) Using collaborative approaches to design the research with participants; (3) Being reflective of one's positionality and centring the perspective/voices of 'others' in the research; (4) Employing decolonising theoretical frameworks (critical race theory and black feminism); (5) Using participatory approaches to co-create knowledge with indigenous communities; (6) Using cultures and interpretations from the Global South to critique international norms; (7) Employing rhizomatic (emergent and iterative) rather than hierarchical methodologies to doing research; (8) Using purposive sampling to recruit participants from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds.

Doctoral students also discussed challenges they experienced in efforts to use decolonial methodologies in their research. These include limited knowledge and understanding of existing decolonial theories and how these can be used in research. This was said to be linked to the low profile given to decolonising methodologies in doctoral training which, for example, is reflected in the absence of decolonising requirements in the research ethics bureaucracy at UCL. This is also evident in the limited training opportunities in the doctoral training programme in terms of seminars, modules or reading groups that specifically address the subject. Other methodological challenges included difficulties in using decolonial methodologies in research within positivist paradigms, specifically looking at how decolonising methodologies can be used in the hard sciences. In terms of the availability of training opportunities for doctoral students on the subject, many students indicated that their knowledge and understanding of decolonial methodologies were based on a few seminars that were organised within UCL, but also on seminars and reading groups organised by other institutions in the UK and globally.

With regards to the level of support doctoral students get from their supervision teams at UCL in adopting decolonising methodologies in their research, many students were agreed that their supervisors at UCL are generally receptive to decolonising methodologies. However, there was also the indication that some supervisors appear to lack the necessary expertise on the subject to sufficiently guide students, leading to suggestions that students should focus on disciplinary aspects of research that they (supervisors) have expertise in.

In addressing the lack of decolonising methodologies in the doctoral training programme, interviews with the **UCL Doctoral School** revealed that efforts are underway to roll out a mandatory module on EDI in research, as well as other EDI related modules/courses. The mandatory EDI module for doctoral students is jointly being developed by the UCL EDI team and the Doctoral School. There was however indication that the mandatory module (yet to be introduced) is meant to be an introduction to EDI with a training duration of just 30 minutes, which raises questions about the impact such training might have and how it might be supplemented.

Further interviews with the UCL **Doctoral Skills Development Programme** show that the programme offers tailored professional development for postgraduate research students. Efforts are also underway to develop training courses that target students from underrepresented groups in research based on prior engagement and feedback from these groups. It is worth noting that many of the existing doctoral training initiatives cited, and those that are being developed, do not focus on the specific subject of decolonising

research, but rather are broadly couched around the language of EDI. This raises the question of whether EDI initiatives are decolonising in their approach and outcomes.

7.0 Institutional enablers for decolonising research

Researchers who participated in the interviews shared views and experiences in relation to the systems and structures at UCL that facilitate decolonising research within the institution. These are discussed below.

7.1 Favourable research culture

There was a general consensus among participants that research culture(s) at UCL is/are broadly conducive to undertaking decolonising research. Evidence of this was found in the high level of awareness among academics across different faculties on the general topic of decolonisation and an associated interest in engaging in conversations on the topic. From our own assessment during this project, evidence of interest has been adduced from activities and groups that have been organised across UCL on the topic of decolonisation. For example, pertaining to research, a **Decolonising Research Ethics Reading Group** has been formed at the UCL Institute of Education to hold regular reading sessions on the topic of decolonising research ethics. Also, the UCL Collaborative Social Science Domain organised an ECR and PhD Masterclass on the topic “**Decolonising Research: Ethical Practices and Epistemic Expansions**”. At the UCL Institute for Global Health, a **Decolonise Global Health Working Group** has been formed to “address and prevent neocolonialism at UCL and in the field of global health and development”. The working group has designed a **Decolonising Global Health and Development toolkit**³⁰ based on feedback from students and outcomes of a departmental inclusivity health check to guide tutors and teaching staff on how to foster inclusive learning environments. With no specific focus on research, there are several other initiatives on decolonisation going on across UCL, which point to a favourable academic and research environment for engaging in conversations and undertaking decolonising research.

However, the aforementioned level of interest in decolonisation should not be considered homogenous across the institution, as many of the researchers and doctoral students who signed up for our interviews and responded to our surveys were from the Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences as well as the Medical and Population Health Sciences. There was less or no representation from the Physical and Life Sciences, and Management and Law disciplinary fields, which might suggest a lower interest or lack of awareness on how the topic of decolonisation plays out in these disciplinary fields.

7.2 Availability of seed funding for decolonising research

An important institutional mechanism that is said to provide an enabling environment for decolonial research is the availability of seed funding for research projects through the UCL Grand Challenges, Liberating the Curriculum Award and UCL Research Cultures award, among other funding schemes. These schemes have funded many research projects that employ decolonising methodologies and approaches. For example, in the course of the

³⁰ UCL Institute for Global Health. Decolonising Global Health and Development: A Toolkit. [Online] London. UCL: London. [Accessed 19 January 2023] Available from: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/sites/teaching_learning/files/decolonising_global_health_toolkit.pdf

project, we picked up information on two ongoing research projects that relate to decolonising research that received funding from the UCL Grand Challenges and UCL Cultures Awards (*The Ties That Bind: Mapping the Intergenerational Mental Health Consequences of the Windrush Scandal; Exploring barriers to equitable participation in health research among ethnic minority groups*).

Researchers also made references to past research projects that have been funded through these schemes and implemented within decolonising research framework. Many of the research initiatives presented earlier in this report and captured in Appendix A were funded through UCL internal funding schemes.

7.3 Research and innovation services

The work done by UCL's Research and Innovation Services also came up as significant and has the potential to support future decolonising research across the institution. There was the indication that the unit provides specific and targeted support for partnership research projects implemented with institutions in the Global South. One such source of targeted support is said to be provided by the office of the UCL Vice-Provost (Research, Innovation & Global Engagement) for researchers who undertake partnership research projects in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs). An existing example of this support is an LMIC toolkit³¹ that has been developed as a resource for UCL researchers and professional staff who work with partners in LMICs. Whilst recognising the relevance of the support the Research and Innovation Services provides, many participants emphasised the need for this support to be streamlined, especially for research projects with partners in the Global South.

7.4 Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the study of Racism and Racialisation

Many researchers pointed to the work of the Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the study of Racism and Racialisation as a significant enabler for decolonising research at UCL. The centre is said to provide an appropriate forum for researchers to discuss and advance research that relate to decolonisation:

*I think the opening of the Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the study of Race and Racialisation. That has been a great inspiration, but also a venue in a way like a forum where these things can be discussed. So that I would say has been very good.... So their seminars have been good. I've given a small talk there myself... It was about eugenics in the Nordic countries, so they [community members] came to talk and I gave just a short intro, but I'd say that has been very good and that helps to increase capacity in the sense that I know more, but I also have a venue, I have a forum where I can go and present and find people to listen. **Researcher-School of European Languages, Culture and Society***

Several researchers mentioned the lack of a collaborative space for decolonising research to be discussed and shared. There is much decolonial research happening across UCL, but a lack of awareness about these initiatives owing to UCL's large size and the

³¹ University College London. UCL LMIC Toolkit. [Online].UCL: London. [Accessed 25 July 2022] Available from: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/school-life-medical-sciences/about-slms/office-vice-provost-health/research-coordination-office-life-and-medical-sciences/global>

fragmented nature in which faculties and departments operate. The Sarah Parker Remond Centre is said to partially fill this gap by providing an interdisciplinary space for work related to decolonisation to be shared and promoted. Some participants further observed that the seminars the centre organises on topics related to decolonisation provide capacity development on the topic, and in that sense it also serves as a capacity development hub for researchers.

8.0 Constraints on decolonising research

Some constraints were discussed as inhibiting the efforts of researchers to undertake decolonising research.

8.1 Bureaucracy in UCL financial systems

A key constraint mentioned by researchers is the bureaucracy involved in managing research projects that involve partnerships and collaborations with researchers in Global South contexts. This includes due diligence requirements, especially at the post-award phase of research project implementation. These requirements are said to not be flexible enough to contain uncertainties that often accompany partnership research projects based in the Global South. Additionally, UCL internal funding systems were cited as not allowing for expedited release of funding for implementation of research projects, a situation that often causes delay in the release of funds for project implementation:

"In UCL systems, it's really difficult and very bureaucratic to send money to partners. It does things in this weird way of like sort of work in arrears, right? And it sort of says, ok. People invoice in arrears now... when I'm working with local partners or small universities and we have to do things like pay for an ethics application, we can't do that until money has been sent from this grant because the institution is very small and doesn't have the money..." **Researcher-Population Health Sciences**

There is an additional internal funding regulation that was said to prohibit payments to external researchers invited as resource persons to contribute to research projects or participate in research related events at UCL. This was also cited as inhibiting engagement with researchers from the Global South.

In addition, UCL does not guarantee protected time to researchers involved in partnership research projects whose funds are not managed by UCL financial systems. This was felt to be a substantial disincentive for researchers to be involved in projects which seek to promote independent financial management for institutions in the Global South, as an approach to decolonising research. However, because UCL does not recognise and reward efforts researchers put into such projects, there is less motivation for researchers to get involved in such projects.

8.2 Colonial elements in UCL research ethics

There was consensus among researchers that decolonising research is in the main implemented through ethical frameworks for research. As such, many participants thought that the research ethics review process at UCL should be an appropriate platform to encourage academics and doctoral students to use decolonial methodologies and approaches in their research. In terms of examples of ethical research practices that fall within decolonising methodologies and approaches, participants called for ethics review processes to demand that researchers: (1) Challenge the assumptions related to sole ownership over their research relative to co-ownership with researched communities/groups; (2) Articulate how their research will benefit researched communities; (3) Ask whether researched communities see and want the benefits often ascribed to research projects; (4) Articulate their positionality and subjectivity in the research they

undertake. There were suggestions for these elements to be included and strengthened in the ethics review processes at UCL.

Pertaining to the fitness for purpose of the research ethics review processes at UCL, and whether these align with decolonising research methodologies, some researchers pointed out problematic elements in the ethics review processes in some faculties that appear to be (neo)colonial. A specific case cited is the Informed Consent provisions in the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines for research with children, which was said to be Eurocentric and not flexible enough to accommodate the socio-cultural norms of non-western societies. The issues and tensions that pertain to the application of Western research ethical codes such as those developed by BERA and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) are discussed in much detail in this COMPARE journal article³². The assessment made by participants in regard to the fitness for purpose of some research ethics guidelines at UCL was made on the back of the recognition that, given the international character of the student composition at UCL, research ethics frameworks need to reflect this international character:

*So most people doing research from England use BERA as the ethical code, which is very England-centric. And I think people who do work in the Global South tend to find that the British Sociological Association ethics guidance is much more flexible, much less colonial, if you like. And I think that itself shows such a misunderstanding of what research landscapes are like in other countries, and so I think that is a very good area for discussion and renewal. **Researcher-UCL Institute of Education***

Participants also felt that some faculties tend to censor research projects that are deemed to be politically sensitive and pose reputational risks to UCL. These censorship elements are said to go against the norms of academic freedom, and do not promote the ethos of free intellectual enquiry within certain parts of the institution.

*My confidence has been undermined by things I've seen with the ethics review process, which has taken a very cautious and politically inappropriate response and role particular with PhD students working in the Global South and working on politically sensitive topics where the fears over reputational damage to the institution have led to a series of back and forth debates over the framing of research projects and the approval of ethics guidelines, and I think this is being extremely problematic for the maintenance of academic freedom and free speech. **Researcher-UCL Department of History***

As shown in the preceding narrative, some researchers at UCL have had experiences where research ethics review processes at UCL have taken a cautious approach that suggest there were concerns over institutional reputational damage.

³² Shamim F, Qureshi R. Informed consent in educational research in the south: tensions and accommodations. COMPARE: A Journal of Comparative and International Education [Internet]. 2013; 43(4): 464-482. [Accessed 1 December 2022]. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2013.797729>

9.0 Wider issues emerging from the project

Beyond specific decolonising research projects, researchers also broached topics that relate to the type and quality of the decolonising efforts underway at UCL. Some of these topics touched on the language of decolonisation, the elite status of UCL relative to a decolonisation agenda, the question of whether the broad category of EDI initiatives fall within a decolonisation framework as well as the appropriateness of the language of decolonisation.

9.1 Language around decolonisation

In line with the project's goal of mapping the different decolonising research practices at UCL, the approach to targeting participants and conducting interviews was open-ended. This resulted in the recruitment of a wide range of participants across the university. The open-ended nature of the engagements revealed different interpretations of decolonisation practice, as demonstrated in the case studies presented earlier. Two concerns that emerged out of the engagements are questions around the appropriateness of the language of 'decolonisation' and whether broad EDI efforts in research can sufficiently be characterised as decolonising.

9.1.1 The appropriateness of the language of decolonisation

Views on the appropriateness or otherwise of the language of 'decolonisation' were recurrent in the project interviews. In some instances, participants contested the use of 'decolonisation' as a framing for addressing bias and inequity in research. Some felt that the term 'decolonisation' was vilifying and isolating, and had the potential of alienating people who otherwise would be allies in the struggles to achieve the goals of decolonisation. They proposed alternative phrases and framings: inclusive research, transformative research, anti-racist research, among others. The terms used in conjunction or in place of decolonising research are captured in Figure 4 in this report. A researcher at the School of Medical Sciences shared the following:

*What I don't like about it [decolonisation] is its negative connotations and the danger that it vilifies people because I think there's good in most people, isn't there, and what you want to do is extract the good but redirect the power. And so you know, I like transformation. You know, I like any of those things that sound positive. ...I think the only way that this is gonna be effectively solved is if there is partnership, equitable partnerships of course, but I think that to throw away all support, mentorship, involvement from partners in the global North for all projects would be counterproductive. **Researcher-School of Medical Sciences***

At the same time, in responding to the question about the appropriateness or otherwise of the language around decolonisation, other participants considered the term as apposite for naming the problem that decolonisation seeks to address and as useful for its provocative effects. While recognising the validity of terms such as "inclusive research", "transformative research" and "ethical research practices" these terminologies were thought to not speak to the colonial foundations of research methodologies and approaches that create power imbalances and produce hierarchies in the production of knowledge in higher education systems around the world. It was noted that the premise for promoting a decolonial

approach to research is based on the recognition that, for research to adequately contribute to addressing global problems, it needs to move beyond a colonial logic of Western domination to reflect the diverse knowledge traditions and cultures around the world. Another academic at the School of European Languages shared the following:

I recognize that it's a provocation and that's part of the value of it... and I think it offers a very particular provocation that's worth keeping front and centreto my mind, the benefits of decolonising as a framework chiefly is that it keeps at the centre of the discussion questions of power and knowledge production that are intertwined with historical processes that had very material effects, and that linked the places where we are now, say, London, with places that are often far distant. **Researcher-School of European Languages, Culture and Society**

Figure 4: Alternative and complementary terminologies for decolonising research



9.1.2 Decolonisation as equality diversity and inclusion

A related interpretive issue that comes out of the research is whether the broader agenda of EDI addresses the specific dynamics of decolonising research. One of the key groups

that the project engaged with is the EDI leads in departments and faculties. As the main UCL institutional structure for addressing issues on diversity and inclusion, EDI committees provide an entry point for assessing UCL's institutional efforts related to decolonising research. Based on the expansive nature of the EDI framework, most of the EDI committees' work is felt to be intersectional in nature, cutting across the spectrum of gender, race, disability, class, and sexuality. In some instances, participants' interpretations of decolonising research reflected this broad spectrum of intersectionality. Participants also recalled that UCL has signed the Athena Swan and Race Equality Charters, which drive the institution's efforts at promoting gender and race equality and representation among staff and students.

There were no indications of any targets achieved in relation to the Race Equality Charter as no gains were reported for this scheme, although these may exist in faculties/departments that the project did not cover. The open-ended scope of the project therefore revealed different but interrelated interpretations of decolonising research, going beyond race and ethnicity to encapsulate class, disability, gender, and sexuality.

However, while noting the intersectional nature of the work undertaken by EDI committees, some participants emphasised that the normative goals of decolonising research are much more attentive to issues of power than the inclusion norm that underpins a broader EDI agenda. In this sense, decolonising research is said to explicitly address questions of epistemic justice related to research and knowledge production practices within given disciplines. Along this framing, a decolonising research agenda is said to aim at redressing power imbalances and hierarchies in the geographies of the production and distribution of knowledge.

9.2 UCL's elite status and global positioning

Many interview participants acknowledged that UCL's status as a global university provides opportunities to undertake research with diverse partners and communities across the globe. There was also the recognition that, within UK higher education and more widely across British society, UCL has historically led the way in championing the cause of underrepresented groups based on its tradition of liberal values. However, related to the specific agenda of decolonising research, participants pointed out that UCL's characteristics as an elite and global university are inconsistent with the aims of decolonisation.

There were concerns around how the university can reconcile its status as a Western elite institution with a decolonisation agenda that is primarily focused on challenging Western hegemony and domination in research and knowledge production rooted in historical colonial processes. This assessment was made on the back of the recognition that decolonisation is a deeply political process, making it a difficult subject for elitist universities to engage with because of their association with certain agendas and interests in society. Specific examples were given by participants to illustrate the aforementioned contradictions relating to UCL. One is the contradiction inherent in UCL being a global research-intensive university whilst decolonising its research. Some participants felt that it is difficult for UCL to decolonise research if it is actively engaged in pursuing large transnational research grants and participating in global research excellence exercises which are inherently built on extractive and exploitative research models.

9.3 Mainstreaming decolonisation of research across UCL

Our project aimed to map decolonising research initiatives at UCL in order to work towards integrating decolonisation approaches into research structures, norms and practices across the institution. This is not only aimed at disciplinary fields and faculties at UCL, but also aims to enlist the involvement of all staff and students, irrespective of race, gender, class or disability. In that regard, some findings point to issues that should be considered in any mainstreaming efforts.

The majority of researchers who responded to our call for interviews and survey were from the Humanities, Social and Historical Sciences as well as the Medical and Population Health Sciences. There was low representation from the Physical, Life and Brain Sciences, as well as the fields of Law and Management. In the few instances where researchers from the Physical and Life Sciences were interviewed, there were initial questions as to the relevance and compatibility of decolonisation to their disciplines. There were also statements that suggest decolonisation may not be relevant in research in these fields because they do not engage directly with human subjects. This seems to suggest there is a lack of appreciation of how decolonisation plays out in these fields, which may explain the lack of enthusiasm to engage with the topic during the project.

There was one notable exception in the Physical Sciences: several participants were from the Science and Technology Studies (STS) department (Faculty of Mathematics and Physical Sciences). These participants were mainly historians of the Sciences and described themselves as an “island history department in the Sciences”. The research undertaken in this department does not focus only on the history of science in Europe, but also the history of Sciences in ‘peripheral’ regions. These researchers were therefore very enthusiastic about the debates on decolonisation and demonstrated various ways their research projects engaged with decolonising methodologies.

This notwithstanding, there were considerable differences between the research approaches used by ‘historians of the Sciences’ and those used by the ‘hard scientist’ in other departments within the same faculty. This is said to be based on the perception that the research undertaken by the Science historians focusing on science in peripheral countries appear to challenge the Eurocentric foundations of Science, and therefore is seen as threatening to Western traditions in science. However, this perception was said not to be widespread across the faculty, but limited to certain sections in some departments. This observation was made to highlight the need for closer engagement and collaboration between the STS department and other science departments in the Faculty, and for the work that the STS department does to be mainstreamed across the broader Mathematics and Physical Sciences faculty.

A related finding that points to the need for mainstreaming decolonisation at UCL is the disproportionate burden of EDI efforts placed on the few researchers and students from underrepresented groups. For example, it was noted that, given the low number of academics from underrepresented backgrounds, it is ‘unfair’ and overly taxing to expect these few academics or students to be part of various committees across the university that all seek to incorporate their perspectives into institutional processes. It was suggested that rather than placing the burden on a very small minority, it will be helpful to recruit more academics and students from these underrepresented groups to enable their proportionate representation across the institution. An equally important approach is to ensure that academics from majority white backgrounds understand and appreciate the issues sufficiently, allowing them to be able to participate and contribute to driving the needed transformation.

9.4 The global reach of research at UCL

A related area of inconsistency shared by participants related to UCL's global positioning and how this reflects in the coverage of its teaching and research. There was a general consensus that UCL has made immense strides in promoting research and teaching to cover diverse regions of the world, especially when compared to the curricular provision of other universities in the UK.

However, there were concerns that teaching and research on certain regions of the world appear not to be prioritised, and as such were under-resourced and not giving the required attention. Specific cases cited were the MSc and MA programmes in African Studies, for example, which have not yet begun because of under-resourcing. This is also said to reflect in a lack in the institutional support available at UCL for research centres whose research focus is on regions such as the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

Though there are many research centres that focus on different regions of the world, including regions in the Global South, there was a call for UCL to offer more support to these centres - to strengthen their research portfolios and enable them to undertake more collaborative work with institutions in the South. The relevance of such collaborative work lies in the capacity strengthening and development it offers institutions in the South as demonstrated in the partnership of equivalence model featured in one of the case studies. Given the mandate of UCL's Global Engagement office, there is the question of how this unit can support research centres to undertake research that strengthens UCL's global impact.

10.0 Conclusion

The findings of the research point to tensions around the use of the language of 'decolonisation' in framing efforts directed at addressing the marginalising elements in traditional research methodologies. Whilst many researchers found the use of the term 'decolonising' appropriate for tackling the specific issues that decolonisation seeks to address, some were sceptical of its practical relevance. In taking forward the themes addressed in this report, there is the need to be conscious of these challenges in terms of defining the most appropriate language to be used and recognising that this may vary from department to department.

A related area of tension is the question of whether the EDI efforts ongoing at UCL adequately constitute decolonisation. Decolonisation is focused on addressing power imbalances rooted in historical colonial processes that manifest in research and knowledge production processes, and in this sense stretches the remit of EDI. For example, a close examination of the EDI initiatives at UCL as captured in this report shows that many are driven by the 'inclusion' goal, with less focus on how teaching, research and training can destabilise and transform hierarchies in knowledge production. While training workshops and reading groups organised by research centres and departments have in the past focused on the topic of decolonisation, the training modules offered by the professional services such as the Doctoral Skills Development Programme, Researcher Development Programme and the Doctoral Skills Training Programme are usually focused on the broader topics of inclusivity and diversity. There may therefore need to be efforts to incorporate the values and principles of decoloniality into the broader EDI training framework.

This project points to significant levels of awareness of and engagement in efforts to decolonise research at UCL. This is visible in the discussions generated through targeted events and workshops on decolonising research. Engagement with decolonising research can also be seen in the innovations researchers are undertaking to integrate decolonising methodologies and approaches into their research, as demonstrated in the case studies presented in this report. However, the high level of awareness and interest in engaging in decolonising research notwithstanding, activity is not homogenous across all faculties, but confined to disciplinary areas in the Arts, Humanities, the Social Sciences as well as the Medical and Population Health Sciences. Few researchers from the Life Sciences, Brain Sciences and Engineering Sciences participated in the project interviews and survey, with none from the Management and Law faculties. Interviews with researchers from the Mathematical, Brain, and Life Sciences suggested that many were unsure how research in their fields could be decolonised, since their research does not directly involve human subjects. This shows that there is a need for a coherent strategy that takes forward the themes raised in this report, which should include increased discussion, resources, and support for training on these areas for all staff. There may be fields in which discussions on decolonisation are genuinely nascent and so discussions of what they might mean for these fields need to precede training. Forums need to be created for staff to share their research and ideas and have the opportunities to secure peer support as and when needed.

UCL's status as a world-leading research institution presents challenges in attempts to engage with decolonisation themes. We need greater recognition that these challenges exist, as well as dialogue across the institution to address them. The following recommendations are offered in light of our findings and following consultation with the wider Grand Challenge of Cultural Understanding group.

11.0 General Recommendations

Disseminate examples of decolonising approaches at UCL through appropriate online and face to face forums, including UCL Learning and Teaching Conferences, ensuring all staff within UCL are kept regularly informed of current practices, training opportunities, and research initiatives. In doing so, encourage open discussions on the most appropriate language to be used; this may vary between departments. The Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the study of Racism and Racialisation may act as a hub to collate resources, as well as to provide relevant training and expertise.

Develop a strategy for decolonising research at UCL linked to the university's Education Strategy, in which there needs to be a recognition of themes raised in this report. This strategy should recognise that engagement with decolonisation within departments needs go beyond the responsibility of EDI Coordinators. All departments should identify how they are addressing decolonisation in their research strategies. Strategy development should include Research Services and a discussion of how systems could be streamlined for funding agreements with partners from the Global South.

Allocate appropriate human resources for strategy implementation, including ensuring that decolonisation and cultural understanding remain an integral component of UCL's Grand Challenges. The Grand Challenges must play a leading role in encouraging decolonisation themes to be embedded across appropriate UCL research practices. Staff development and training to be part of the core training provision for all UCL staff. Specific training materials should be developed with and for the doctoral school and ethics committee

Specific Recommendations:

- Decolonisation themes directly addressed in UCL Education strategy by encouraging all faculties and departments to look at ways in which both their research and international partnerships could, where appropriate, have clearer social justice and equitable principles.
- All Faculties to organise special sessions on decolonisation and prepare a programme of activities to develop work in this area including staff development, review of research practices and most appropriate language to engage all staff.
- All EDI coordinators to have theme of decolonisation as part of their job description. Their role should also include encouraging the creation of a team of interested people within a department to oversee, monitor and support the implementation of decolonisation practices across the Department.
- ARENA team to organise appropriate training for all UCL staff on decolonisation themes
- Global Engagement team to review nature of their international partnerships in terms of extent to which they are encouraging mutual learning and are actively supporting decolonisation strategies. The team to also lead on reviewing ways in which all

international partnerships across UCL could address ways in which funding could be equitably shared.

- The EDI module for doctoral students, for example, should be recognised as an essential component of doctoral training.
- Decolonisation themes to be reflected within the specific job descriptions of staff who have a research development brief that directly involves human interaction.

APPENDICES

*The hyperlinks in the following appendices have been sourced from third party websites. As such there is no guarantee that they will be permanently functional.

Appendix A: Research projects/initiatives at UCL that employ decolonising research frameworks

[STARS-C Project- Starting from the bottom: Using Participatory Action Research to re-imagine local mental health services in Colombia](#)

[Co-designing built interventions with children affected by displacement \(DeCID\)](#)

[Gender Responsive Resilience & Intersectionality in Policy and Practice](#)

[The role of knowledge coproduction to reframe climate change adaptation](#)

[Transnational Infrastructures of Resistance: From Empire to Occupation](#)

[UCL Extreme Citizen Science \(ExCiteS\)- Extreme Citizen Science Blog](#)

[Women in the Miners' Strike, 1984-5- Online Exhibition](#)

[Legacies of British Slave-ownership](#)

[Demarginalizing medieval Africa: Images, texts, and identity in early Solomonic Ethiopia \(1270-1527\)](#)

[Youth Equity + STEM - Global Website](#)

[Counter mapping diaspora and queer communities' living heritage in Sheffield](#)

[Making Spaces: A project to empower young people from marginalised communities using science, technology and engineering](#)

[One Hundred Voices: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Black Students on their Journey to a PhD](#)

Appendix B: Other Decolonisation initiatives/resources at UCL

[UCL Inclusive Curriculum Health Check](#)

[Decolonising Global Health and Development Toolkit](#)

[Decolonising Medical Curriculum at UCL](#)

[UCL Medical School Decolonisation Seminar videos](#)

[Decolonising Conservation at UCL](#)

[Liberating the Curriculum | Teaching & Learning - UCL – University College London](#)

[Article on UCL efforts on Decolonisation and Anti-Racism](#)

[UCL Students Union perspectives and efforts on Decolonisation](#)

[Why is my Curriculum White- UCL Students Union Interviews](#)

Appendix C: External Decolonisation initiatives

[SOAS Decolonising Research Initiative](#)

[University of Sussex Resource on Decolonisation and Anti-Racism](#)

[Decolonisation Resources at LSE](#)

[Decolonising LSE Collective](#)

[Decolonising De Montfort University](#)

[Decolonising Natural Science Collection-Conference Proceedings](#)

[Decolonising Science-Can Science be Decolonised Conference Proceedings](#)

[Decolonising Sociology Working Group at the University of Cambridge](#)

[Decolonising Geography](#)

[University of East Anglia-Decolonising Science and Health Resources](#)

[Cambridge University Library- Decolonising through Critical Librarianship](#)

[Cardiff Met & CILIP ILIG Decolonising Library Collections and Practices Conference Padlet](#)

[University of Manchester Statement on Diversifying Library Collections and practices](#)

[Decolonising University of Kent](#)

[Inclusive Curriculum Framework at Kingston University](#)

[UAL Decolonising Arts Institute](#)

[Decolonial Dialogues resources on Research Ethics and Research Methods](#)

[Decolonising Teaching Resource at Queen's University \(Canada\)](#)

[Podcasts on decolonisation and anti-racism in higher education](#)

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