

DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM IN STEM ACROSS SCOTLAND

Knowledge Exchange Workshop

Background

Since holding our Breaking Barriers event in October 2020, SULSA have been supporting our Scottish academics in making their STEM teaching more inclusive. While working with our decolonising the curriculum working group has been insightful and inspiring, we had the vision to bring the topic to a wider audience; to inform teaching staff at Scottish universities, to connect academics who are interested in decolonising their curriculum and to help them find like-minded people within their disciplines across Scottish universities.

Consequently, we designed a Decolonising the Curriculum in STEM across Scotland Knowledge Exchange event led by Creative Tuition, a Bristol based student-led company, which consisted of a webinar and a workshop. The webinar offered 3 presentations which explained the vision behind decolonising the curriculum, which highlighted the importance of the topic, and which included some examples. With a smaller number of attendees, we then held a workshop where attendees split up into inter-disciplinary and discipline specific facilitated discussions. To support personal exchange and inspiration, participants were asked to give answer to the questions: *“Where are you in your Decolonising Science storyline? What practice can you share with the group around decolonisation.”* and *“In preparation of your modules, where would you start to decolonise your subject?”*.

Review

The **webinar** was attended by more than **110 academics from 16 universities** and colleges across Scotland. Most attendees came from the University of Aberdeen, the University of Glasgow, the University of St. Andrews and the University of Edinburgh. More than **65 academics** participated in the **facilitated discussions**.

Participants came from a **multitude of academic backgrounds with more than ¾** of attendees from STEM subjects. Physics/ Astronomy, Health/Medicine, and (Micro-)Biology were the most common academic backgrounds in STEM. We were happy to see a substantial participation from **non-STEM subjects** as well with most academics in this group coming from Geography, Education, and Linguistics.

Attendees of the workshop were all in very different stages of their decolonising journey with some already transforming their teaching and some learning about decolonising for the first time. Most attendees expected to **learn what decolonising the curriculum means**, to **hear discipline specific examples/** exchange ideas for good inclusive teaching practice, and to **find support**. Feedback suggests that the workshop was successful in teaching attendees about the importance of decolonising the curriculum and to convey that the overall **cultural shift** needed in HE best begins with **personal reflection and individual initiatives**. There seems, however, to be a **greater need for discipline specific networks** to support academics and to facilitate knowledge exchange.

Some testimonials

“Thanks for putting together this event: gained a great deal of insight from the talks and the discussions.”

“Thank you very much - really informative and you've certainly got me thinking much more deeply and broadly about this.”

“Thank you everyone, this was a really useful session. Lots of ideas and advice!”

“There are many ways to decolonise a curriculum; there is no one size fits all.”

“Everyone is on a journey and it is ok to take baby steps.”

“I feel quite awkward speaking about these issues but have been given some ideas about how to start.”

Useful links

Creative Tuition’s webpage: www.creativetuitioncollective.com

Paper mentioned in the third presentation: Maas, Bea et al. (2021): Women and Global South strikingly underrepresented among top-publishing ecologists, Conservation letters 14:4; <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/conl.12797>

Recent interesting paper: Cronin, Melissa R. (2021): Anti-racist interventions to transform ecology, evolution and conservation biology departments, Nature Ecology & Evolution 5 (1213-1223); <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-021-01522-z>



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