

Student-Staff Partnerships for Diversifying and Decolonising the Higher Education Curriculum

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Abstract:

In this paper we discuss a student-staff partnership project to diversify and decolonise the Higher Education curriculum at the University of Brighton, UK. The Inclusive Practice Partnerships Scheme was launched in November 2020, and now in its second year, recruits 64 undergraduate students to co-develop the curriculum within each of the eight Schools across the University. The Scheme is unique in the sector in its focus on undergraduate student experience as the catalyst for a review of curriculum, supporting the development of this work across a wide range of subject areas. It uses the expertise of academic developers to guide and facilitate the work, developing an institutional approach with localised strategies and outcomes, and establishing effective partnership working relationships with academic staff to change perceptions about the relevance and importance of curriculum reparation in all disciplinary areas. The Scheme is a key part of University strategy that aims to address differential outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students and is supported through the Access and Participation Plan and Race Equality Charter Action Plan.

Key Words: Race Equity, Inclusion, Decolonising, Diversifying, Inclusive Learning and Teaching Practices, Student-staff partnerships.

Introduction

In this paper we discuss a student-staff partnership project to diversify and decolonise the Higher Education (HE) curriculum at the University of Brighton, UK.¹ The Inclusive Practice Partnerships (IPP) Scheme, launched in November 2020, is a five-year project that aims to co-create an inclusive curriculum with students. The Scheme is unique in the sector in its focus on undergraduate student experience as the catalyst for a review of curriculum, supporting the development of this work across a wide range of subject areas. Importantly, the Scheme uses the expertise of academic developers to guide and facilitate this pedagogic work, developing an institutional approach with localised strategies and outcomes, and working closely with student and staff partners in Schools to change perceptions about the relevance and importance of curriculum reparation in all disciplinary areas.

The IPP Scheme is a key part of University strategy that aims to address differential degree outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students and meets commitments set out in both the Access and Participation Plan (University of Brighton, 2019a), where there are two targets to reduce the gaps in student degree outcomes between Black and White and Asian and White students by 50%, and the Race Equality Charter Action Plan (University of Brighton 2019b). The University of Brighton was awarded a Bronze Race Equality Charter (REC) Award in December 2019 in recognition of its commitment to address differential outcomes and experiences for Minority Ethnic staff and students and is currently one of only 21 institutions to hold a Bronze REC award, with no silver or gold awards currently held.

The two student centred aspects of the REC, 'Student Progression and Awarding' and 'Diversity of the Curriculum' (Advance HE, 2021) sit at the centre of the University's Education and Student Experience Strategic Plan (University of Brighton, 2020). This Plan underpins a multifaceted programme of work designed to narrow the ethnicity degree awarding gap, of which the IPP Scheme is a key part. Now in its second year, the IPP Scheme has recruited 64 undergraduate Inclusive Practice Partners (IPPs) across all eight academic Schools within the University.ⁱⁱ The IPP Scheme will continue to run in each academic year until June 2025, with an accompanying evaluation that will measure impact on student experience and outcomes throughout this five-year period. Whilst some evidence that relates to student experience will be available from the end of 2022, impact on degree outcomes will only become discernible from 2024/25. For this reason, this paper focuses on the methodological approaches used to develop the Scheme and will not comment on evidence from the evaluation.

Context and Background

The existence of differential outcomes between White students and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students has been longstanding, first reported by Broeke and Nicolls in 2007 using data from 2004/5. The subsequent HEA/ECU 2008 report from the *Ethnicity, Gender and Degree Attainment Project* provided the sector with a series of recommendations to improve the degree outcomes of students from Minority Ethnic backgrounds. However, these were not acted upon widely by the HE sector until the Office for Students (OfS) included the ethnicity degree awarding gap as one of their strategic outcomes (OfS, 2019a). This resulted in the directive for all institutions to address their widest gaps in student success in the five-year Access and Participation Plans (APP), when they were introduced in 2019 for implementation in 2020 (through to 2025). In preparation for the 2020-2025 APP, the OfS also published, for the first time, sector Degree Awarding (Attainment) Data

(OfS, 2019b), which is now updated annually. The new approach to the APP resulted in 238 institutions (of those with plans approved by Oct 2019) being required to include an ethnicity degree awarding gap target, the most prevalent target in the sectors' APPs, highlighting the continued sector-wide issue.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the University of Brighton, we have developed an institutional strategic approach to race equality to meet our commitments in the APP (University of Brighton, 2019a) and REC Action plan (University of Brighton, 2019b). This is underpinned by the '5 steps to success' identified in the UUK/NUS #ClosingtheGap report (2019), which the University's Vice Chancellor has pledged to use. The University's APP has five student success targets, of which two relate to ethnicity degree awarding gaps (University of Brighton, 2019a). We have committed to reducing the gap between UK domiciled Black and White students from a baseline gap of 24.3% points to 11.5% points, and between Asian and White students from a baseline gap of 17.3% points to 8.65% points by 2025. In the most recent published data (OfS, 2021a) our degree awarding (attainment) gaps stand at 18% points (Black/White students) and 14% points (Asian/White students), which is ahead of the APP yearly milestones (21.66% points and 15.57% points respectively).

The University's strategic approach was informed by a university-wide research project (MacDonnell & Bisel, 2021), which identified the key issues that impact on the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students and that could be contributing to the ethnicity degree awarding gap. One of the key findings of this research was the identification of the significant impact of the curriculum on students' sense of belonging. In focus groups, students highlighted tokenistic attempts at diversity in the curriculum as being particularly problematic and how some attempts at inclusion appeared to be a 'tick box' exercise. Two key recommendations from the report: for measures to diversify and decolonise the curriculum to be embedded in institutional quality processes, and for students to be engaged as paid partners to co-develop a more inclusive curriculum, have been incorporated into the APP and the REC action plan and have led directly to the development of the IPP Scheme following a small pilot project that ran from 2018-2020.

The 'Developing Learning Communities' project (University of Brighton, 2019c) was established by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in the academic year 2018/19.^{iv} One strand of this project, the Curriculum Advisors, explored issues around decolonising the curriculum in partnership with students. This was influenced by practices already established at Kingston University (McDuff *et al.*, 2018) and others within the BME Attainment Gap HEFCE/OfS funded project (OfS 2019c). Curriculum Advisors ran in the School of Humanities in the first year (2018/19) and, additionally, in the School of Art in the second year. Whilst small-scale, this project was influential in developing the preliminary

thinking behind the subsequent institution-wide strategic approach to diversifying and decolonising the curriculum, the IPP Scheme.

Initially the IPP Scheme was conceived as a phased rollout across the institution, taking place over two academic years. However, in summer 2020, following the murder of George Floyd in the USA, the University held a 'Black Lives Matter' Action Forum, where students were able to meet with the University's executive board and directly raise concerns related to race equality. At this meeting, students asked for the work to diversify and decolonise the curriculum to be implemented more inclusively, across the whole University, rather than in selected Schools. The Brighton Students' Union (BSU) subsequently brought this request to formal committee, where a commitment was made that the IPP Scheme would be applied to all undergraduate provision at the University of Brighton, including Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) in the following academic year.

To support the implementation of this work across the full range of subject areas, it is necessary to enact an institution-wide culture change around inclusivity (MacDonnell & Bisel, 2021). To drive and support this change, a policy framework was developed by colleagues from the Learning and Teaching Hub, the Student Operations and Support team and Information Services. The Learning and Teaching Inclusive Practice and Accessibility Policy (University of Brighton, 2020b) focuses on embedding all aspects of inclusivity in the curriculum, and was approved in Spring 2020 for implementation in the academic year 2020/21. Alongside the development of this policy, the University refreshed its strategic plan 'Practical Wisdom' (University of Brighton, 2021a), and created a dedicated strand of the Education and Student Experience strategy, 'Brighton Achieves', which focuses on enabling all students to achieve their goals. This strand of work relates directly to the achievement of the APP targets for student degree outcomes and continuation and the student facing elements of the REC action plan.

At the University of Brighton, there has been additional work to fully embed inclusive learning and teaching practices into institution-wide curriculum development with the launch of the refreshed Curriculum Design Framework (University of Brighton, 2021), which has inclusivity as one its core principles. With reference to diversifying and decolonising the curriculum, there is also now a specific requirement for course teams to work with Inclusive Practice Partners (IPPs) (the students employed as part of the IPP Scheme) to review a selection of modules when they engage in formal review procedures, such as periodic review and validation. These are important, institutional commitments to reducing differential outcomes and to improving the experiences of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students in all subject areas.

Evaluating the IPP Scheme

Understanding how and if the work of the IPP Scheme successfully addresses differential outcomes and experiences of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students is paramount. The HE sector is continually seeking to understand 'what works' in this area and a project of this nature requires a robust evaluation strategy. The University's commitment to funding the IPP Scheme for five years has enabled us to use the Theory of Change (TASO, 2021) model where we have identified in the planning the short- and long-term changes we want to achieve and the evaluation methods we will be using to measure that change. In relation to the standards of evidence model for the purpose of evaluating APP related activity (recommended by OfS), we are conducting a Type 2, empirical enquiry and a 'pre/post' project evaluation, with the objective of demonstrating that the IPP Scheme can be associated with beneficial results. We are not seeking to demonstrate causality (Type 3 evaluation) using a control group.

We are adopting a longitudinal mixed methods evaluative approach over the five years of the IPP Scheme, quantitatively and qualitatively investigating changes over time in relation to undergraduate students' attitudes and experiences of belonging and inclusion on modules that are part of the IPP Scheme. To achieve this, we are using an annual survey, which asks questions about students' sense of belonging, and how represented and included they feel in module curricula and its delivery. We are also examining student attainment on these modules, exploring differences according to students' ethnic group.

In the first year of the IPP Scheme, 2020/21, we collected baseline data on modules which were under review but prior to any changes being made. This process will be repeated each year, with comparisons being drawn between data to assess the impact of the work. We are also conducting qualitative focus groups to evaluate the successes and challenges of using partnership working as a methodology for diversifying and decolonising the curriculum. We have obtained appropriate ethical approval for all aspects of the evaluation from the University Research Ethics Committee. In the following section, we move on to discuss the development of the IPP Scheme in more depth, focusing particularly on inclusive learning and teaching practices, recommended methods for enhancing student engagement and partnership working methodologies that have been influential to our approach.

Inclusivity in practice

Inclusive learning and teaching theories and recommended practices have directly informed the development of the IPP Scheme. As described above, this work emerges from the Teaching and Learning Inclusive Practice and Accessibility Policy (2020) and is the responsibility of both the Lead for Inclusive Practice in the Learning and Teaching Hub, and eight School-based Inclusive Practice

Leads, who co-ordinate the work locally. Whilst the location of this work within the area of Inclusive Learning and Teaching Practice does not appear immediately controversial, it may be more so when reminded that this Scheme aims to diversify and decolonise curricula. Along with others, Liyanage (2020) has called for an end of the conflation of decolonisation with equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives. This is due to the term inclusion being associated with ‘adding’ more to the curriculum, working within its already existing structures, rather than engaging in deeper reflection and work of reparation. Additionally, the perception of diversifying as a less desirable activity and outcome of curriculum review will be discussed more fully later in this article, as we use both terms diversifying and decolonising in the IPP Scheme. In this next section, we outline the ways in which ideas about inclusive practice have been integral to the development of the IPP Scheme’s work, making the case for it to remain within this area of work.

In their report *Inclusive Curriculum Design in Higher Education* (2011), Morgan and Houghton identify several key points that resonate with the IPP Scheme’s ethos, aims and delivery methods. Firstly, drawing on work previously published by Hockings (2010), Morgan and Houghton highlight the important move away from ‘inclusion’ being used as a term that refers only to the adjustments needed for students with specific educational needs, to the idea of inclusive curricula being of benefit to all.^v This approach to inclusive learning and teaching practices is integral to the work of the IPP Scheme in that the changes to curricula arrived at through the work of our student partners is seen to be of benefit to all, in terms of raising the profile of race equity and social justice. Institutional initiatives that diversify and decolonise the curriculum contribute to changing student and staff perceptions about racial, ethnic and cultural identities (Arday *et al.*, 2021) and this is an essential element of this work.

Furthermore, an inclusive design for Higher Education curriculum has at its heart a commitment to promoting equality and diversity (Morgan & Houghton, 2011). This commitment is central to the IPP Scheme, with two aims of the work being actions within the University of Brighton’s REC Action Plan (UoB, 2019b) and the #Closing the Gap Pledge (UKK/NUS, 2019). These are to improve the representation of race equality in the curriculum, and to improve staff confidence in addressing issues of race equality in teaching and learning. The IPP Scheme achieves this by focusing on the representation of racial, ethnic and cultural identities and their histories in the curriculum. Our Inclusive Practice Partners (IPPs) in collaboration with their academic staff partners, make recommendations that will diversify and / or decolonise both content and its delivery. By placing issues of social justice and race equity at the forefront of institutional strategy and policy, which then delivers work on this area in each School, we are enabling productive discussions about these issues to take place, raising the profile of race equity in relation to the curriculum.

The IPP Scheme is focused on modules (rather than entire undergraduate courses) and uses a dual approach to the review of curricula. Working in School-based teams, IPPs review modules in terms of their content but are also encouraged to review how that content is delivered (through attending sessions, reviewing resources and talking to students taking the module). A focus on the design of curricula, in terms of balance of content and structure as well as how it is delivered, is a further recommendation by Morgan and Houghton (2011). These authors note that previous resources on inclusion have tended to focus on the delivery of curriculum being inclusive rather than how it is structured or its content. However, this contrasts with research that discusses decolonising the curriculum, which tends to focus on content, particularly reading lists, rather than pedagogic approach (see for examples, *The Alternative Reading List Project*; *Pedagogies for Social Justice Reading List*, University of Westminster; *Decolonising Reading Lists*, UAL, *Diversity Mark*, University of Kent). The IPP Scheme encourages School-based IPP teams to adopt *both* or *either* approach, as we believe that the work is more effective across a variety of subject areas if students and staff can choose their focus. For example, in subject areas where content is selected with professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements (PSRBs) in mind, IPP teams may focus only on approaches to curriculum delivery. Alternatively, they may look at a range of materials that are more about content, such as reading lists and module specifications.

The last point by Morgan and Houghton (2011) that supports the work of the IPP Scheme, is how an inclusive approach to curriculum design needs to take 'into account students' educational, cultural and social background and experience as well as the presence of any physical or sensory impairment and their mental well-being' (2011, p. 5). Describing how differing dimensions of diversity may affect how students engage in study, these authors advocate the importance of recognising students' multiple and intersecting identities and circumstances when designing curricula for everyone. In the work of the IPP Scheme, we extend this idea by looking at the connection between students' racial, ethnic and cultural identities, how they are represented in the curriculum, and the effect of this on student engagement and achievement. We recognise the importance of students being able to see themselves in the curriculum (Livingstone Hughes *et.al.*, 2019; Arday *et.al.*, 2021) and address this through employing a specific focus on the representation of racial, ethnic and cultural identities and histories to then make changes that will begin the on-going work of diversifying or decolonising curricula.

Inclusive learning and teaching practices can assist students to overcome barriers to participation (Ainscow in Hockings, 2010). It is important to recognise that the barriers that students face can be multiple and intersecting, relating to differing aspects of their identity, educational, social, economic, and cultural background, and experience. We acknowledge that this is a potential

criticism of the IPP Scheme, as we focus on one aspect of identity in the review of racial, ethnic and cultural identities and their histories in the curriculum. However, this focus is driven by the real and urgent need to address differential outcomes for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students and the need to decolonise the curriculum for the benefit of all.

The link between the adoption of more inclusive learning and teaching practices and increased student engagement is frequently acknowledged (see Livingstone Hughes *et.al.*, 2019), but there is a need to consider carefully what this means when applied to curriculum design. As noted at the beginning of this section, many have argued the need to move beyond the term 'inclusion', especially in projects that seek to decolonise due to the inference of a need to assimilate to 'fit in' (Lorde, 2017). The IPP Scheme aims to create a sense of belonging for students by enabling them to see their own racial, cultural, and ethnic identities represented in the curriculum in a positive way.

Fostering a sense of belonging

Belonging has been defined, in the context of Higher Education, as 'a feeling of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by and important to the campus community, such as faculty, staff, and their peers' (Strayhorn, 2019, p.4). It is part of the development of psychological processes that are important to student success, academic attitudes and motives, positive social and personal attitudes, engagement and participation, and academic achievement (Cooke, 2021). This is echoed in the report, *Building Belonging in a Post-Pandemic Landscape*, where belonging is described as 'a valued concept in student success, being firmly linked with improved attainment, increased learner satisfaction, reduced attrition rates and overall well-being' (QAA, 2021, p.2).

As discussed in an earlier section of this article, a lack of belonging to an institution has been identified as contributing to differential outcomes for students and, as we have described, this is acutely focused when accounting for the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students. Peacock *et. al.* (2020) even describes students as being unable to fulfil the goals of Higher Education without acquiring a sense of belonging. The question of how we enable our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students to acquire a sense of belonging is essential and underpins the methodology for the IPP Scheme: diversifying and decolonising through student-staff partnerships. This is supported further by Burke (2018), who describes the need for students at universities to feel that they are legitimate participants within their disciplinary contexts. Whilst Burke's article looks more broadly at issues of access to the Academy in terms of application and selection procedures, it is also useful in the context of student engagement and achievement. To have parity of participation, defined by Burke (2018) as the same access to participating at university, a student 'must be

recognised and have *access to representation* as a fully valued member of the community' (Burke, 2018, p.369).

Using Butler's (1993) concept of performativity, where subjectivity is constructed through social and cultural processes, including whether students can understand or quickly learn the 'hidden curriculum' of the University, Burke (2018) continues to argue that belonging within the Academy is 'deeply entwined with questions of recognition and representation' (2018, p.369). As it has been White, Eurocentric, and masculine perspectives that have historically formed expectations of who 'has the right' to Higher Education (Burke, 2012), there is a clear need to enable Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students to better see themselves in the Academy and the curriculum and feel represented in a way that they can feel a valued member of the community.

In the *What Works? Student Retention and Success* programme's (2008-2011) final report, Thomas describes the importance of students developing a sense of belonging as the *result* of engagement, which is 'most effectively nurtured through mainstream activities with an overt academic purpose' (2012, p.12). We interpret this in the context of our Scheme as both the IPPs participating in the Scheme, where they co-develop module curricula and for future students who, we anticipate, will feel more engaged in module content as the result of the implementation of module recommendations. Importantly for this discussion, Thomas's earlier research also identifies how students who do not feel that they fit in, 'that their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and that their tacit knowledge is undervalued...may be inclined to withdraw early' (2012, p.13) or underachieve. The outcomes from the *What Works?* projects (Thomas, 2012) demonstrate that specific interventions improve retention rates and, importantly, develop a sense of belonging for students. These are noted as the development of supportive peer relations, meaningful interaction between staff and students, developing knowledge, confidence, and identity as successful HE learners, and HE experiences that are relevant to their interests and future goals (Thomas, 2012). In the next section, we discuss how some of these important ways to develop a sense of belonging have been incorporated into the IPP Scheme using a partnership working approach.

Students as partners

Involving students as partners provides the underpinning operational methodology for the IPP Scheme. We view partnership as a way to position both students and staff as active and equal collaborators in critiquing and co-creating the curricula and pedagogy through a meaningful and reciprocal process (Cook-Sather *et.al.*, 2014). Access to partnership training, information and support is central to the Scheme in order to foster authentic working relationships, and we provide a

suite of partnership resources for IPPs and staff to access as a team or independently. All partners are required to attend a 90-minute workshop which introduces the principles and values of partnership working, as well as establishing and facilitating the relationship, being mindful of inhibiting and perpetuating factors that can cause barriers in partnership working, and reflection on the transformational and disruptive effects of working in this way.

We have based our training on a framework for partnership set out by Healey *et. al.* (2014, p.25), which highlights four inter-related ways of engaging students as partners in higher education: 1) learning, teaching and assessment, 2) subject-based research and inquiry, 3) the scholarship of teaching and learning, and 4) curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy. The IPP Scheme works across all of these categories (with the main focus on curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy), leading to what Healey *et. al.* describe as 'partnership learning communities' (2014, p.26).

Furthermore, we use a set of values drawn from scholarly literature and practice (Healey *et. al.*, 2016) within the training to prompt in-depth reflective dialogue. These values are Authenticity, Honesty, Inclusivity, Reciprocity, Empowerment, Trust, Courage, Plurality, and Responsibility, and we ask student and staff partners to consider what each word means to them, and to explain to the group which values they feel are a priority and why. These values are then revisited during the year in support sessions, and reviewed in qualitative interviews as part of the IPP Scheme evaluation.

An integral part of the training is to discuss the complexities inherent in partnership relationships, with particular emphasis on using reflective practice and dialogue to tease out some of the key challenges that colleagues and students may face. We try to make space within the early stages of the IPP training to discuss some of the contradictions of partnership, such as seeking to involve and build equal relations, whilst being mindful of the exertion of power that is manifest in the act of assessment, the transmission of expertise and curriculum content, and the established hierarchical relationship of knowledge giver-receiver. Other tensions involve navigating implicit affinity biases when partnering, and the importance of promoting a safe and confidential environment for discussion and disagreement. Students giving critical and constructive feedback to academics about their module content can be challenging for some staff to receive. We believe that whilst these, and other complexities cannot be avoided or necessarily ameliorated, that preparing colleagues and students for potentially difficult conversations can facilitate an increased mutual understanding and flexible mindsets.

The ideals of student-staff partnership draw upon Freirean concepts of transformative education and anti-oppressive principles, advocating for improved humanist and emancipatory practices in relationship-focused teaching and learning (Freire, 1996). Adopting partnership within the IPP

Scheme is a step towards decolonising the conventional hierarchies of staff-led curriculum design, and a way to democratise and develop space for underrepresented voices to speak and be listened to at an influential level. We acknowledge that working in partnership is a subjective experience for participants, and through a process of reflective enquiry we are committed to evaluating the extent to which partnership has been achieved. Future research using participatory action research methodology will help us to identify the strengths and barriers inherent in this partnership project and will be used to feed forwards into future iterations of the IPP Scheme.

The IPP Scheme in practice

Recruitment for the IPP Scheme is open and inclusive, using the University's Human Resources systems and procedures; although we continue to reflect on how to ensure that these formal procedures are not barriers to access for some students. The recruitment process has been successful in attracting a range of students to the Scheme, particularly in terms of ethnicity, with 55% of IPPs in 2020/21, and 56% in 2021/22, declaring their identity as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic. In addition, the Scheme has also recruited students from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR4 Q1 and Q2) with 41% of UK domiciled IPPs in 2021/22 coming from these areas, compared to the University UG population of 23.6% of students declaring their ethnicity as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic and 28.4% of students coming from POLAR 4 Q1 and 2 (widening participation) postcodes. The diverse identities of our IPPs are important, as we recognise the importance of not over-burdening our Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic students by expecting them to be solely responsible for diversifying and / or decolonising the curriculum, and conversely, we want to ensure that students from these groups are represented.

Following recruitment, the IPPs and their staff partners participate in two training workshops: one focusing on partnerships (described above) and another that provides guidance on the work of the IPP Scheme, and information on how to conduct the module review. As part of this session, we discuss the need for the Scheme by examining potential reasons for the awarding gap. This draws on published research and student comments from the University of Brighton focus groups (MacDonnell & Bisel, 2021). The use of student voice to explore issues of belonging and representation in these sessions has been particularly valuable, as it has encouraged IPPs and staff partners to share and listen to each other's experiences: building relationships through active listening.

During the IPP Scheme training we also discuss calls to diversify and decolonise the curriculum from within and outside of the University of Brighton, and provide guidance on what this might include.

IPPs and staff partners have access to a number of resources that include both published and internally produced guidance, available to them before and after the workshop. We have chosen not to adopt one of the established frameworks for the development of inclusive curricula (such as Kingston University's Inclusive Curriculum Framework or UCL's Inclusive Curriculum Health Check) in order to allow Schools to develop their own disciplinary specific methods or preferences and to then gather information on what works for different subject areas. This approach has been valued by some Schools but others have requested some more formalised guidance and resource material. Therefore, in the second year of the Scheme we have produced our own set of position statements and descriptors for diversifying and decolonising the curriculum. Students and staff have been able to use these as guidance for their review of modules in the 2021/22 academic year.

Following the training workshops, IPPs and staff partners begin to review modules from undergraduate courses within their School, focusing specifically on the representation of racial, ethnic and cultural identities to ensure that all students can see themselves reflected in the curriculum in a positive and valued way. After a review period of five to six months, the IPP School teams make final recommendations to module staff that will start the work of diversifying or decolonising the module.^{vi} We anticipate that the resulting changes made to reading lists, delivery methods, language and resources, as well as curriculum content, will foster a greater sense of belonging for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students who will take the modules in future academic years, as well as benefiting all students in terms of the promotion and integration of social justice and race equity into HE curricula.

The IPPs work in School-based teams of between six and ten, through which we encourage the development of supportive peer relations. Student partners are also encouraged to be part of the cross-University IPP team through membership of a community of practice, which meets regularly to share progress and challenges. The IPP Scheme uses a Microsoft Teams group for communication, with a general channel where IPPs and academic partners can meet virtually, 'chat' and share resources, as well as a private School channel for each group to discuss, document their progress and set actions. We also have a group of IPP Representatives, one from each School, who attend two School level committees and work on additional projects with other IPP Reps to raise awareness of issues relating to race equity that sit outside of the curriculum.

The employment of the IPPs as members of University of Brighton staff is significant in the context of partnership, as this situates IPPs as equal participants, sharing leadership and authority with

academic staff partners. In addition, providing remuneration for the IPPs' work, and workload allocation for School-based Inclusive Practice Leads, acknowledges the labour involved in acts of curriculum reparation. However, we also recognise that this brings challenges as 'commercialising the partnership model...leads participants to acquiesce to certain conventions and limitations' (Peters & Mathias, 2018, p.58) through the relationship of employee (the student) and employer (the University). We actively try to counteract this by managing the IPP Scheme through the Learning and Teaching Hub (in terms of organising recruitment, training and communications with regards to pay claims), which allows School-based teams the freedom to build effective partnerships and to make decisions collectively and dialogically about module selection and curriculum focus. The use of partnership values and principles to develop relationships between IPPs and their academic staff partners are a key part of the Scheme, although it is a further challenge to know whether that these ways of working are being used by all in such a large-scale, cross-institutional Scheme.

In response to student feedback in the first year of the Scheme, we have established an additional support programme, 'IPP Extra', which provides monthly on-campus and online drop ins for students to discuss how they are feeling about their IPP work, recognising the additional emotional burden that diversifying and decolonising places on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students. In the current academic year, IPP Extra has also included workshops for students that have been delivered by Professional Services teams from across the University in the following areas:

- 5 ways to well-being (Wellbeing team)
- Communicating confidently in difficult situations (Student Services)
- Recognising your Skill Development (Careers)
- Reflecting on the IPP role in developing graduate attributes (Learning and Teaching Hub)
- Opportunities for post-graduate study (PhD student, Doctoral College)
- Using skills developed in future job applications and interviews (Learning and Teaching Hub)

These multiple and intersecting networking opportunities provide ways for IPPs to develop relationships with other students and academic staff partners, developing their own sense of belonging to the institution, the IPP Scheme, their School and their discipline. They also enable students to develop (and recognise) valuable skills and knowledge, that will have benefit to their future careers. In the next section we discuss, in more depth, the ways in which we are encouraging students to develop discipline relevant ways of working to diversify and decolonise the curriculum.

Decolonising the curriculum

In line with le Grange *et al.* (2020), the University of Brighton sees the decolonising of university curricula as an imperative. Calls to decolonise Higher Education have been gathering momentum since the Rhodes Must Fall campaign in South Africa in 2015, and the consequent UK student movements ‘Rhodes must fall Oxford’, ‘#Liberate My Degree’ and ‘Why is My Curriculum White?’.^{vii} Such campaigns draw attention to ways in which Higher Education curricula are dominated by Eurocentric perspectives as the result of the legacies of colonialism, and identify how this can lead to the awarding gap: ‘the curriculum...gives a disproportionate weight to male, white voices. This, in turn, results in a learning environment that favours white European students and has resulted in the...BME attainment gap’ (UCL, 2019).

One aspect of decolonial work in terms of HE curricula focuses on diversifying reading lists. Students at the University of Oxford have developed *The Alternative Reading List Project*, which provides subject-based resource lists that aims to ‘promote diversity across curricula’ through inclusion of different perspectives and sources on marginalised subjects. Schucan Bird and Pitman highlight the importance of this aspect of decolonial work, commenting that reading lists are ‘*representation devices*, serving to reflect particular perspectives and knowledge’ (2019, p.904, emphasis added). In addition, the development of more diverse reading lists can be transformative, in that they can re-conceptualise disciplinary fields, build on and critique the canon (Wolff, in Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2019), and recognise the contributions of historically marginalised groups (Bird & Pitman, 2019). IPPs are encouraged to review module reading lists, with the aim of diversifying voices and perspectives represented (see Arshad *et al.*, 2021). When doing this, they are encouraged to move beyond a simple inclusion of *more*, as we recognise this may fail to challenge dominant knowledge systems and to look instead at what stories reading lists tell about a subject area (in terms of the legacies of Eurocentrism and colonialism, who is permitted to speak and be heard within a discipline). IPPs are also encouraged to look at module content, for example, at the balance of topics, avoiding tokenism, and to include previously marginalised voices. Lastly, as mentioned previously, IPPs are encouraged to look at the delivery of curricula: the language and images used in sessions and resources, the identities and histories represented in case studies and to suggest ways to avoid stereotyping or perpetuating racism, and to develop a greater understanding of issues of social justice and race equity.

At the University of Brighton, we have developed two position statements and associated descriptors to help guide the work of the IPPs in their review of curricula. One is for diversifying the curriculum, to enable subject areas who are at the very beginning of this important work to start the

process, and importantly to bring other School staff on board with what may be perceived as more accessible or 'comfortable language' (Tran, 2019). We recognise the importance of changing perspectives and have learnt that this takes time, and there is a need to be sensitive to disciplinary contexts. The other is for decolonising the curriculum, recognising the deeper level of reflection required for a discipline to engage in the decolonial work of curriculum reparation. These descriptors will also be used to award the Inclusive Practice Mark (for Diversifying; for Decolonising) to modules who are put forward for consideration by module leaders. This is an important way to recognise and celebrate the wealth of diversifying and decolonising work that is happening across the University, and will be launched at the end of the 2021/22 academic year.^{viii}

The approach taken at the University of Brighton to diversify and decolonise the curriculum is institutional and part of University strategy, with all Schools taking part in the IPP Scheme. We strongly object to any suggestion that these endeavours are what le Grange *et. al.* (2020) calls 'decolonial-washing'.^{ix} As referred to in the first part of this section, Liyanage supports an institutional approach to this work. Furthermore, contributors to her report support the need for such projects to be run through centres such as the Learning and Teaching Hub, as 'one of the major issues is a lack of training and direction' (2020, p.51). Here, she identifies an essential element in the diversifying and decolonising of Higher Education curricula: a knowledge of and expertise in pedagogy. As explained by a contributor to Liyanage's report, who is an academic, 'there are a lot of disciplinary experts, but they are not educational developers' (2020, p.51). Whilst strategic and institutional approaches to decolonising receive criticism, even within our own University, because of the perception of a top down, colonial approach, we believe that the balance achieved by encouraging the development of localised strategies and methodologies through student-staff partnership working, within a supportive, pedagogic-based frame that has been created by experienced academic developers, is an effective way to diversify and decolonise the curriculum across a diverse range of disciplines.

Final conclusions

This article has set out our ambitious approach to diversifying and decolonising the curriculum at the University of Brighton, taking a strategic and pedagogically informed approach to align the institution to a single policy and curriculum design framework that can be nuanced for different disciplinary approaches. The REC Bronze award along with the actions outlined in the 2020-2025 APP supported the subsequent development of the Learning and Teaching Inclusive Practice and

Accessibility policy, which includes recommendations for diversifying and decolonising the curriculum.

Implementing the policy through the IPP Scheme as a priority within the Brighton 2025 Practical Wisdom strategic plan has ensured that the work is appropriately funded and resourced and has full institutional support. This approach requires buy-in from all academic Schools and disciplines, including those which may not previously have considered diversifying and decolonising their curricula. We seek to bring all colleagues across the University on this essential journey by making the Scheme mainstream institutional practice.

This whole institution strategic approach, which is distinctive in the sector, could be perceived as a 'top-down' process. However, this is countered by the use of partnership working methodologies and principles to ensure that the curriculum is reviewed by those closest to it and then changes agreed in partnership with staff, with the flexibility to implement the framework in the most relevant way for the discipline. Our approach aligns with the UUK/NUS (2019) five steps to success in closing the degree awarding gap by working towards a curriculum where all students see themselves reflected through a whole institution approach, supported through the strategic approaches by the institution's senior leadership. Through developing a theory of change for the IPP Scheme we have a robust and thorough evaluation strategy to understand 'what works' which will contribute to the sector knowledge on closing the ethnicity degree awarding gaps.

The IPP Scheme will continue for the lifetime of the APP and the REC award, until the end of academic year 2024/2025. At this time, we will be able to report on the longitudinal evaluation of student outcomes and experiences of the curriculum across the whole of the five-year project. As academic developers and reflexive practitioners the IPP Scheme is subject to a continual reflective cycle to improve the operational aspects of the scheme and the experiences of those working as staff/student partners (Gibbs, 1988; Kolb, 1984).

The next steps for the IPP Scheme include the roll out of the Inclusive Practice Marks to achieve visibility for staff and students of the modules which have been reviewed and meet the criterion. We will also work over the coming years to embed the IPP practices, which are included in our revised Curriculum Design Framework, in curriculum quality assurances processes through UG and PGT periodic review and validation. This will form a significant part of the work in the coming years due these processes having paused during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evaluation is ongoing, baseline data having already been collected and future articles will discuss the impact the practices within the IPP Scheme are having on student outcomes at module level,

student experiences of studying the curriculum which has been reviewed and developed in terms of representation and a sense of belonging and the effect of using student/staff partnerships as a methodology to diversify and decolonise the curriculum.

Although we do not yet have any data to share, we conclude with this statement from one of our IPPs, Emmanuel Akyeampong who in writing for the University of Brighton Student Blogs (University of Brighton, 2022) summarises the significance and value of the work being undertaken:

‘...it’s rare to find other UK universities that are adamant about finding ways to include student voices of all ethnic backgrounds. The changes that the [IPP Scheme] makes in this programme will ensure Brighton stands out from others. For example, it is one of the very few Pharmacy schools in the UK to educate and deal with skin conditions on darker-skinned patients, potentially attracting more ethnic minority students who understand this to be a big problem in healthcare. This could even encourage other universities to follow in our footsteps, thinking about ways in which they can include marginalised student voices to combat exclusivity in their own course curricula.’

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^{viii} The Inclusive Practice Mark is open to any undergraduate module whose staff team have engaged in this important work to develop the curriculum, not just those which have been reviewed as part of the Scheme. The award will last for a limited period of time to ensure that work is not seen as completed.

^{ix} Which refers to the practice of a university giving the impression that its curricula are decolonised when this is not the case (le Grange *et.al.*, 2020).