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Decolonising DMU Toolkit

A self-auditing guide for Research Centres and Institutes – applying a decolonising lens

A self-auditing guide for Research Centres and Institutes – applying a decolonising lens

The aim of this guide is to support research centres and institutes at DMU (and wider) to look at their research and related activities with a decolonising lens. Conversations about coloniality have been applied to methodologies and epistemologies. However, this might usefully be developed in relation to research centre and institute activities such as reading groups, external speakers, seminars, conferences, who we invite as external examiners, PhD supervision teams, international staff and student support etc.

We accept that there are systemic, political and economic barriers to decolonialising scholarship and research, which include the contexts within which funding bodies operate, alongside ethics/ethical codes of practice that often dictate the ways in which research is carried out. This audit tool is designed to enable reflection upon these contexts, in light of institutional structures, cultures and practices.

As a result, this self-auditing guide is not a tick-box form or means of reporting. Rather, it is a tool to enable centre and institute teams to reflect on their practices/ activities and to develop your own objectives or even strategic plan around decolonising. Accepting the importance of a decolonising agenda, it enables researchers to ask: what do we need to understand in order to move our research agendas forward? Here, there may be opportunities to think through structures, cultures and practices in relation to wider equality, diversity and inclusion work, for instance in relation to intersectional inequalities.

Below are some prompts for you to answer based on practical actions. Many of the questions include language such as “how much/many”. However, we emphasise that this is not to reduce this work down to numbers or to provide a quantitative “score”. This is simply to help you think about consistency and transparency, and to begin a conversation about the lived experiences behind those numbers. Members of the DDMU team are available to help with these conversations.

NB: We reiterate that this is a tool for centres and institutes to use to enhance their own activities, and is not designed for institutional auditing.

Writing and normalising position statements

Position statements are useful in highlighting our positionality and privilege not only with our individual characteristics but as researchers and academics. They also allow us to acknowledge our position on a topic, alongside any bias or insider knowledge that may have informed our research. Position statements can be uploaded to individuals research profiles and websites.

- Would your Centre/Institute benefit from a position statement, in relation to decolonising?
- Would members of your Centre/Institute benefit from developing their own position statements?
- Does your centre or institute have a position statement about racism and how complaints can be made should they be needed?

Research outputs

- Does your Centre/Institute have relevant work that might be broadly or specifically categorised in relation to decolonising?
- In thinking about your Centre/Institute outputs, have you developed expertise in/ experience of decolonising theory and/or methodology?
- Does your Centre/Institute have an open archive, through which its legacy of work can be disseminated?
- Does your website have a tab/section that explicitly highlights the work you are doing that relates to decolonising, racism, racial injustices, methodologies that support decolonising research?
- How many of your outputs are published open access?
- Is it important that your work is available beyond a limited scholarly community?
- How many of your outputs are freely available in digital and/ or hardcopy format?
- Does your Centre/Institute encourage co-produced or co-created research outputs with those being researched?

Impact and Community Engagement

- Does your Centre/Institute have relevant impact case studies that might be broadly or specifically categorised in relation to decolonising? Here, decolonising may be one strand of this work.
- Beyond case studies, does your Centre/Institute have relevant societal impact and engagement work that might be broadly or specifically categorised in relation to decolonising? Here, decolonising may be one strand of this work.
- Are there barriers to the integration of decolonising into the development of societal impact and engagement? Who might help in engaging with these barriers?

- Does your website summarise research/ studies with which Black and Ethnically Minoritised (BEM) communities have been involved? Are these engagements open access?
- Can you describe how your research involves co-creation with communities, or the types of participation? NB in some cases this may involve reimbursements.

Research Environment

Funding bids

- Has your Centre/Institute developed, submitted or been successful in bids relating to decolonising, ethnicity, intersectionality and related topics? Here, a strand/strands of a proposal/bid may relate to decolonising.
- Are there barriers to the integration of decolonising into the development of proposals and bids? Who might help in engaging with these barriers?

PGR

- Does your Centre/Institute monitor registrations, completions, terminations and withdrawals, based upon ethnicity, and intersections? Are there differences for home/international students?
- How does your Centre/Institute engage with the diversity of PGR student voices?
- Have you bid for/developed ring-fenced scholarships/bursaries for BEM students?
- Do you deliver workshops/events, or enable spaces that support BEM students in considering applications for PGR study?
- Have students been supported in finding mentors outside of their supervision team?
- Do you provide any doctoral training on the topic of decolonising research methodologies or theories?

- Does your Centre/Institute consider the ethnicity of first and second supervisors in supervisory teams, and its impact upon the student experience (including welfare and mental health)?
- In terms of examinations, does your Centre/Institute consider the ethnicity of examiners, and its impact upon the student experience?

Talks and seminars

- Have your external speakers been from a diverse range of backgrounds, both academic and non-academic?
- Do you deliver any sessions that might be broadly or specifically categorised in relation to decolonising?
- What topics and whose voices are being centred in your talks and seminars?
- Are diverse voices represented in who is chairing your events?

Reading groups

- Over the past year have the texts you have covered involved voices from the global South? Do you feel that they enable engagement with a diverse range of researchers engaged in your fields?
- Do you discuss non-textual and community-produced pieces, in the forms of videos, vlogs, dance and drama pieces etc?
- How are you engaging with voices/pieces that are not published in traditional, academic spaces?

Knowledge Transfer and Exchange

- Has your Centre/Institute developed, submitted or been successful in knowledge transfer and exchange, relating to decolonising, ethnicity, intersectionality and related topics? Here, a strand/strands of a proposal/bid may relate to decolonising.
- Are there barriers to the integration of decolonising into the development of knowledge transfer and exchange? Who might help in engaging with these barriers?
- In terms of knowledge transfer and exchange, how are you engaging with co-creation and co-production in partnership work?

Research Ethics/Responsible Research and Innovation

- How might a lens of decoloniality be applied to research ethics, especially in low/middleincome countries and post-colonial contexts?
- How can a lens of decoloniality be operationalised at the structural, cultural and practical level in relation to research?
- How can we challenge dominant epistemology, in order to transform knowledge production?