

LiberatEd

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*Creating an intersectional, inclusive
and empowering curriculum*

Edinburgh
University
Students'
Association



Context

- Students across Schools have been running workshops on the underrepresentation of marginalised voices within their curricula, and how teaching can become more inclusive
- The Senate Learning Teaching Policy Group has been discussing 'LiberatEd', and most Heads of School, Undergraduate and Postgraduate Teaching have been made aware of the project
- A working group looking at diversifying the curriculum, under the Learning and Teaching Committee, will begin this July



What is LiberatEd?

- LiberatEd is an initiative created by Edinburgh University Students' Association and led by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Disabled, LGBT+ and Women students from across the University, aimed at challenging the academic establishment to become more diverse, more inclusive, and more critical of historically dominant narratives.



LiberatEd Principles

- LiberatEd is collaborative project between students and staff, led by marginalised communities
- Those with lived experience of oppression do not require an academic qualification to validate their perspectives
- LiberatEd is about more than reading lists and quotas, it is a reimagining of academic life



Curriculum

Diversifying existing Eurocentric and male-dominated reading lists to include academics and texts from underrepresented backgrounds

Mainstreaming intersectional and critical perspectives throughout curricula and at all levels of study, including at Pre-Honours



Learning & Teaching

Ensuring that teaching and assessment methods are inclusive, for example, by empowering students from underrepresented groups to make their voices heard in lectures, tutorials and labs

Equipping all teaching staff with the **knowledge, skills and confidence to challenge problematic behaviour**, including racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic and transphobic microaggressions



What about LiberatEd in STEM subjects?

- Everyone benefits from a more diverse curriculum e.g. adding a core module on trans healthcare to the Medical curriculum, or including information on how symptoms present in People of Colour
- It's not just about reading lists, what about case studies? Do they represent the realities of a diverse modern community e.g. LGBT+ relationships
- Is the classroom environment inclusive? Are all voices equally heard? Who is doing the work in group tasks?



What about LiberatEd in STEM subjects?

- Research shows that BME students are less likely to access academic and pastoral support – how are you making yourself available and welcoming to students from marginalised groups?
- Are students being disadvantaged by your assessments? Anonymous marking is key.



Why is it important: educational environment

- Studies show lack of representation in curricula and teaching environments manifests in feelings of exclusion and alienation from university for those belonging to said groups
- Students from marginalized groups often have to encounter 'microaggressions' in learning spaces, which contributes to an atmosphere of exclusion
- Conversations around how academic canons are formed is essential in developing critical thinking skills, and being able to challenge existing power dynamics



Why is it important: assessment

- BME students report low levels of satisfaction with assessment and feedback.
- Need for anonymous marking
- Inaccessible/ poor communication of standards or criteria used for assessment
- 'Inclusive Assessment'



Outcomes

- In 2013, there was a 16.1% gap between the numbers of 2:1 or 1st degrees awarded to White UK-domiciled and BME UK-domiciled students.
- Feelings of exclusion often manifests in lower retention of students from marginalized groups and progression into further academic spaces



Career development and progression for staff and students

- **Greater support for BME, Disabled, LGBT+ and Women academics**, and providing both academics and students from underrepresented groups with opportunities for career development and progression



Pathways and instruments for change within Schools

- i) Lobbying for changes to Institutional processes
- ii) Staff-student dialogue



Institutional processes and procedures

- Board of Studies course approval
- New L&T strategy
- Modules that credit collaboration between staff and students on projects that diversify the curriculum
- Surveys of courses that provide section on the extent of inclusion, equality and diversity within course
- Looking at recalibration of curricula through Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) suggestions



New Learning and Teaching Strategy

‘We will develop and enhance our curriculum by:

- Embedding the University’s excellence in research in our teaching and assessment;
- ***Using the curriculum to promote inclusion, equality and diversity;***
- Supporting a culture of active and engaged students by providing varied opportunities for independent and student-led-learning within and beyond students’ main programmes of study;
- Developing opportunities for experiential learning on campus, in the community, and in businesses and other organisations, nationally and internationally;
- Committing to the creative use of digital technologies in our teaching and assessment where appropriate whether online, blended or on-campus; and
- Utilising our world-class libraries and collections in innovative and research-led ways to enrich our curriculum



What have we achieved?

- **LiberatEd workshops:** predominantly in CAHSS (Literatures, Languages and Cultures; History, Classics and Archaeology; Social and Political Science; and Philosophy, Psychology and Language Science); students and staff deconstructing the curriculum.
- **Project Myopia:** award-winning contributor-led site articulating the value of works by people from marginalized groups
- **Three pre-honours courses:** Understanding Gender in the Contemporary World; Introduction to Queer Studies; Introduction to Race Studies



What have we achieved?

- **Regular Library exhibitions:** Black History Month; LGBT+ History Month
- **Decolonising the Curriculum panel:** over 100 students and staff in attendance
- **Community:** 100+ students engaged in online discussion and resource sharing
- **Positive student media coverage:** multiple articles featuring interviews and discussion



How students can get involved

- **Talking to class and elected reps about subjects or perspectives which are missing from your courses** and asking them to pass this information on to staff. Alternatively, you could include suggestions for reading at a Staff-Student Liaison Committee, or in your mid-semester feedback.
- Receive training from student association staff about liberating the curriculum
- **Requesting texts from marginalised authors and academics be added to the Library's collection** using the [Request a Book form](#) on the University's website.



LiberatEd

- Getting involved on social media
- **Arranging a LiberatEd workshop in Schools** to gather feedback on subject-specific issues relating to liberating the curriculum. Students have already run LiberatEd workshops in the Schools of Literatures, Languages and Cultures; History, Classics and Archaeology; Social and Political Science; and Philosophy, Psychology and Language Science.
- **Organising an event focusing on the experiences of a specific marginalised group in Higher Education.**

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Exercise

What might the potential barriers be and how would you overcome them?

What outcomes would you want to achieve?

