LiberatEd:
liberating the curriculum through student-staff collaboration

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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, eusa.ed.ac.uk/liberated
What is LiberatEd?

- Campaign launched in academic year 2016/17
- Student-led...
  - Students’ Association’s Liberation Campaigns, particularly BME Officer
  - Vice President Education
  - UG and PG students in various Schools (primarily CAHSS)
- But collaborative
  - Allies across the University
LiberatEd Principles

● LiberatEd is a 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.
What does that look like in practice?

- 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.
- Hiring more BME, Disabled, LGBT+ and Women academics, and providing both academics and students from underrepresented groups with opportunities for career development and progression.
What does that look like in practice?

- 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 liberate the curriculum?

- **Comparatively low recruitment of students from marginalised communities:** Talented students from underrepresented groups are choosing other institutions.
- **Student and staff retention:** Talented students are dropping out, and staff are leaving, for other institutions and in some cases academia.
- **The BME Attainment Gap:** Black students are consistently under-achieving.
- **Encouraging critical thinking:** Edinburgh aims to produce graduates who are “engaged and critical thinkers”.
How can students get involved?

- Talking to your 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 lists at a Staff-Student Liaison Committee, or in your mid-semester feedback.

- 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.
How can students get involved?

- Arranging a LiberatEd workshop in your School to gather feedback on subject-specific issues relating to liberating the curriculum.
- Joining the LiberatEd Facebook Group.
- Organising an event focusing on the experiences of a specific marginalised group in Higher Education.
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 marginalised
- **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
Any questions?

Feel free to drop me an email (sarah.moffat@eusa.ed.ac.uk) if you want to know more!
Further Resources

- LiberatEd website: https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/representation/campaigns/academic/liberated/
- Project Myopia: https://projectmyopia.com/
- Diversity Reading List, gathers philosophy texts written by authors from under-represented groups: https://diversityreadinglist.org/
- Decolonising Science Reading List: https://medium.com/@chanda/decolonising-science-reading-list-339fb773d51f#.om5w2ivfq