

Access and Participation Evaluation



UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

How does decolonising the curriculum support
students' sense of belonging?

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Summary

This report evaluates decolonising the curriculum (DTC) activity at the University of Bath and its relationship to student sense of belonging. It is grounded in Bath's own performance data: a 9.8 percentage point degree-awarding gap between Black and White students, the largest single ethnic group gap in the University's data, and a 3.1pp gap for students from Asian, Black, Mixed and Other (ABMO) backgrounds. It forms part of ten research projects in Bath's Access and Participation Plan (APP), designed to deepen our understanding of systemic barriers to equality of opportunity (see Appendix A).

The evaluation examines how DTC activity operates within Bath's specific institutional context, the mechanisms through which it shapes belonging and influences degree outcomes, and how Bath's current approach compares with practice elsewhere in the sector.

Brief overview of method

Using a realistic evaluation (Context–Mechanism–Outcome) framework, the evaluation combined a review of the theoretical and empirical literature on decolonising the curriculum and belonging with three in-depth internal case studies, selected as Bath's most documented examples rather than a comprehensive account of all departmental activity. These were: Decolonise Architecture, Psychology, and Library/Race Equality Taskforce resources. Four sector comparators were identified to benchmark against: Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), University of Reading, Plymouth Marjon University, and De Montfort University (DMU) (see Appendix B and C).

Key findings

- Bath has substantial grassroots DTC activity, but the strength of institutional evidence for its impact varies widely, from peer-reviewed, multi-perspective case studies to undocumented grassroots campaigns.
- Across Bath's strongest cases, active staff effort to seek out and centre student voice, not reading-list content alone, is the clearest driver of improved belonging.
- Bath's best-evidenced initiatives currently rely on time-limited funding rather than durable, resourced institutional ownership, mirroring the early stages Reading and DMU were at before moving to sector-leading, structurally embedded models.
- The wider sector evidence base linking DTC to belonging is qualitatively consistent but lacks robust longitudinal or causal data, an opportunity for Bath to contribute more rigorous evaluation going forward.

Considerations

1) Theoretical foundations

Decolonising the curriculum begins from the recognition that what counts as legitimate knowledge in most UK universities was shaped by centuries of colonial power: whose ideas were published, translated, canonised, and taught was never a neutral process.

Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic challenges the assumption that modernity, reason, and culture developed along a purely European trajectory, tracing how Black intellectual and cultural life was constitutive of modernity rather than peripheral to it (Gilroy, 1993). Gayatri Spivak's concept of epistemic violence goes further: colonialism did not only extract material resources but actively suppressed and delegitimised non-Western ways of knowing, structurally denying the colonised subject a voice within the very systems of knowledge that claimed to

represent them (Spivak, 1988). Together, these give decolonising work its theoretical spine: not adding a few non-Western names to a reading list, but interrogating whose frameworks, methods, and assumptions get treated as the unmarked default within a discipline.

2) The UK Policy and Institutional Landscape

This case has been taken up formally across UK higher education. Universities UK and the NUS's #ClosingTheGap report names curriculum content and pedagogy as contributing factors in the BAME attainment gap, alongside a lack of staff diversity and weaker student belonging (Universities UK & NUS, 2019). The Runnymede Trust makes the parallel case for schools, arguing decolonising is not censoring history but giving a fuller and more accurate account of it, and calling for statutory teaching on empire, race, and migration alongside better teacher training (Johnson & Mouthaan, 2021). At institutional level, SOAS's Decolonising Learning and Teaching Toolkit is among the sector's most widely cited practical resources, giving staff concrete prompts for auditing reading lists, assessment, and pedagogy for Eurocentric bias, and has since been adapted by numerous UK institutions (SOAS University of London, n.d.), including Bath's own Psychology and Architecture departments.

3) Decolonising at Bath

Decolonising activity at Bath extends beyond the case studies examined in this report. Most activity is supported centrally through the Learning and Teaching Hub, the Centre for Decolonising Knowledge in Teaching, Research and Practice (DECKNO) and the Race Equality Charter team. Additional activity is driven through a cross-departmental Decolonising Learning and Teaching Community of Practice and student-led activity coordinated by the Students' Union, which has previously identified decolonising the curriculum as one of its Top 10 priority issues.

Alongside the initiatives evaluated in this report, schools and faculties are undertaking a range of activities that contribute to decolonising the curriculum and broader equality, diversity and inclusion objectives. These include work on representation in curricula, anti-racist pedagogies, decolonial approaches to teaching materials, and initiatives exploring bias and the historical development of disciplinary knowledge.

Given the breadth of activity taking place, the case studies in this report were selected because they could be traced fully against the Context–Mechanism–Outcome framework, prioritising depth of analysis over breadth of coverage. However, much departmental work is absorbed into routine teaching practice, through revised reading lists, updated case studies and diversified examples, rather than formalised as publicised initiatives. The case studies presented are therefore illustrative rather than exhaustive, and the absence of a full case study should not be read as an absence of value or impact. Readers are encouraged to consult Appendix D for an overview of additional substantive decolonising activity taking place across the university that falls outside the scope of this evaluation.

4) Why Decolonising the curriculum matters?

Decolonising the curriculum involves broadening our understanding of whose knowledge is recognised and valued within academic disciplines. For example, reading, learning and understanding Persian polymaths such as al-Khwarizmi, whose work gave rise to the term “algorithm” and much of algebra, or the astronomers of the Maragha observatory, or African mathematical and scientific traditions such as the Ishango bone counting system or the manuscript tradition of Timbuktu, is not diversity for its own sake. It is a matter of historical accuracy. Framing mathematics and the sciences as a purely European achievement erases a

well-documented history of cross-cultural transmission that produced the modern disciplines as we know them. This is where the argument that decolonising is “not just for BAME students” lands the hardest: every student, regardless of background, is currently taught a partial history of a discipline. A White British physics or mathematics student benefits from an accurate, global genealogy of their subject just as much as any other student. Decolonising in this sense is a correction to everyone’s education, not an accommodation made for some students and readers of a certain subject.

5) Impact on Student’ Sense of Belonging

Raddadi (2021) frames decolonisation as a spatial as well as curricular problem: students and staff navigate the university as a physical and historical space, encountering their own position as raced and gendered bodies within institutions built by and for colonial power, meaning a decolonised syllabus without a decolonised institutional culture only goes so far. Reyes et al. (2021), writing in the *London Review of Education*, examine how academic staff themselves negotiate identity and positionality when attempting to decolonise curricula within traditionally Eurocentric UK institutional structures, which matters for student belonging because staff who cannot do this work openly are poorly placed to model it for students.

Milian et al. (2025), examining a Department of Chemistry case study at Durham, show what happens when students are given a genuinely collaborative role in curriculum redesign, a decolonising committee, staff and student surveys, a co-created "History of Chemistry" course, rather than being consulted only after decisions are made: student voice, not curriculum content change alone, is what shifts how students feel about their place within an institution. Belonging is not a side effect of a "diversified" reading list. It is produced, or undermined, by whether students see their own epistemic traditions reflected in what counts as legitimate knowledge, whether that recognition extends across every subject, and whether students have real agency in shaping curriculum, assessment, and the conversations that surround them.

Introduction

The University of Bath's Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2024-2028 identifies student sense of belonging as a core risk to equality of opportunity. The data explains why: a 9.8 percentage point awarding gap exists between Black and White students, the largest ethnic gap in the University's data and a 3.1pp gap for students from Asian, Black, Mixed and Other (ABMO) backgrounds (University of Bath, 2024). National Student Survey data shows the same pattern: students from minoritised ethnic groups report lower satisfaction across assessment, feedback, organisation and learning community than their White peers, consistently, across four years.

This gap has narrowed since the University began systematically tracking it in 2020–21, but progress has been slow relative to the scale of the problem. This reflects a wider national concern about persistent ethnicity degree-awarding gaps. In 2018, the Office for Students introduced a national target for reducing and ultimately eliminating differences in degree outcomes between students from different ethnic groups, signalling a shift from measuring disparities towards requiring institutions to demonstrate progress in addressing them (Office for Students, 2018). This national policy context is important because it establishes the awarding gap as an institutional priority requiring sustained intervention, rather than simply an outcome

to be monitored. It therefore provides an important backdrop to this evaluation's focus on whether institutional activity produces substantive changes in curriculum, practice and students' experiences of belonging.

The APP traces these gaps to a chain of compounding factors: unconscious bias, inadequate support, and a lack of role models in both curriculum content and senior leadership (Risk Definitions 5, 7, 8). Intervention Strategy 3 names decolonising the curriculum as a direct response, particularly for ABMO students, because the curriculum is where belonging is confirmed or denied, where students either see their experience reflected in what they study, or don't.

Decolonising the curriculum has a specific lineage: it draws on the dismantling of colonial rule and asks whose knowledge counts as legitimate within academic disciplines. Universities were built within colonial contexts that embedded Western epistemologies as the default standard (Bhambra, Gebrial & Nişancioğlu, 2018); dominant theory in the social sciences has been shaped disproportionately by scholars from Europe and North America (Connell, 2007). The aim isn't to remove established knowledge but to contextualise it, widen the range of perspectives students engage with, and make the production of knowledge visible rather than assumed (Smith, 2012; Mbembe, 2016).

Across the sector, this has translated unevenly into diversified reading lists, revised assessment, multiple knowledge traditions, and space for students to interrogate how their discipline formed, often linked explicitly to closing awarding gaps (Universities UK & NUS, 2019). But the linkage is contested: Tuck and Yang (2012) warn that tying curriculum reform to attainment metrics can flatten a structural project into checkbox content diversification, the minimum adjustment rather than the deeper work required. Others argue incremental change, staff development and student partnership can still shift culture within existing structures (Arday & Mirza, 2018). Bath shows both: genuinely innovative grassroots work in Architecture, Science, Modern Languages and Psychology, yet no shared institutional framework to connect or sustain it.

Context sharpens the stakes. Bath is a high-tariff institution in an affluent, predominantly White city, a factor the APP itself flags as a barrier to belonging (University of Bath, 2024, p.2). A student who doesn't see themselves in the theories, scholars or examples they're taught faces a compounding invisibility that the University's own risk framework links directly to continuation, completion and degree outcomes. This report doesn't set out to design or direct decolonising activity. It asks how that activity is generated at Bath, and how it affects student sense of belonging in practice. The question isn't whether individual initiatives are well-intentioned, but whether they add up to a coherent system, and what that system needs to be both meaningful and sustainable.

The report has three parts: first, a map of current decolonising activity at Bath, work that has emerged independently across multiple departments and faculties, but without the institutional backing needed to connect or sustain it; second, sector case studies benchmarking Bath's approach; third, priorities and design principles for the outcome of this report, a possibility of a second phase, based on what the evidence, internal, sectoral, emerging, shows actually embeds change rather than adjusting it once.

Two principles from the APP run through the analysis: student and staff voice as the primary mechanism for understanding impact, not consultation at the margins; and that lasting change requires institutional backing, governance, investment, alignment with the 2036 University

Strategy, because the risks are systemic and so must the response be. As students at Bath have put it directly: healing happens in community, not isolation.

Methodology

Research questions

The analysis aims to address the following research question:

1. How effective have previous decolonising curriculum initiatives at University of Bath been in supporting students' sense of belonging?

Purpose and approach

This evaluation asks a single, focused question. To answer it, the evaluation adopts a realist evaluation framework built on the Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) model (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Realist evaluation starts from a simple premise: interventions do not work in a vacuum. What produces change is not an activity in isolation but an activity operating within a particular context that activates particular mechanisms. The framework asks not simply whether DTC “works”, but what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why a question especially suited to DTC, where the same pedagogical change can generate very different effects depending on institutional conditions, disciplinary culture, and the level of staff and student agency involved.

Crucially, the evaluation team's role, as defined by the APP, is not to design or direct DTC interventions but to understand how, in Bath's specific context, existing interventions activate the mechanisms through which student belonging and degree outcomes are affected. This methodology does not recommend new DTC activity; it synthesises what is already known, theoretically, sector-wide, and at Bath, to build that understanding, and is explicit about where the evidence base is currently too thin to draw firm conclusions.

Theoretical grounding

The CMO structure is populated by a clear body of theory. Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancıoğlu (2018) provide the foundational account: universities have historically been complicit in colonial projects not just through their global reach but through the knowledge systems they privilege, so decolonising the curriculum is a structural rethink of what counts as knowledge, and for whom, not simply the addition of non-Western authors to reading lists. Their concept of epistemic injustice, the harm caused when certain knowledge systems are excluded or delegitimised, provides a lens for asking whether Bath's curricula inadvertently marginalises the knowledge traditions of racially minoritised students.

de Sousa Santos (2018) sharpens this into a mechanism the evaluation can test directly: when students encounter knowledge systems reflecting their own backgrounds (context), they experience greater intellectual recognition and validation (mechanism), leading to stronger relational and epistemic belonging (outcome), what he terms resisting ‘epistemicide’, the suppression of non-Northern ways of knowing.

His concept of the ‘epistemologies of the South’ challenges the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems and calls for the recognition of knowledges that have historically been marginalised or excluded. This provides a basis for testing whether Bath's curriculum creates

meaningful space for diverse ways of knowing, or whether activity remains primarily representational rather than producing deeper epistemic change.

Spivak's (1988) caution runs alongside this: including marginalised voices within unchanged structures of knowledge production is not the same as transforming those structures, a question this evaluation returns to throughout the consideration of its case studies: is Bath transforming epistemic structures, or operating at the level of surface inclusion?

This connects to a wider belonging literature. Ahn, Venn and Lowe (2025) describe belonging in UK higher education as dynamic and relational, produced through everyday academic and social interaction. Blake, Capper and Jackson (2022) applied framework identifies four foundations of belonging: connection, inclusion, support and autonomy. Their research shows how these foundations interact across students' academic and social experiences, including the importance of relationships with staff and peers, inclusive learning materials, opportunities for students to contribute to curriculum, and participation in learning communities. For this evaluation, the framework is particularly useful in connecting curriculum activity with belonging: students who encounter inclusive content and opportunities to contribute to their learning report stronger connection, inclusion and autonomy.

Watkins (2005) bridges this with the learning-community literature, framing classrooms as social environments in which learning is constructed collaboratively rather than simply transmitted. Together, this literature translates into three hypothesised mechanisms, set out below, through which DTC activity may affect belonging at Bath.

Curriculum content and pedagogy

This report distinguishes between two aspects of decolonising the curriculum: content and pedagogy. Curriculum content is what is taught, such as reading lists, case studies and module materials, and whose ideas and examples are treated as central to a subject. Pedagogy is how it is taught, such as whether students' personal and cultural experiences are welcomed into discussion and assessment, and how far authority is shared between staff and students.

In Wonkhe's (2022) typology of belonging, curriculum content is most closely associated with intellectual belonging, while pedagogy relates to relational and community belonging. Although content and pedagogy are closely connected, they represent distinct dimensions of decolonising activity. Changes to what is taught does not necessarily lead to changes in how students experience learning, just as changes in teaching practice may occur without substantial revisions to curriculum content. Considering content alongside pedagogy therefore draws attention to the different ways in which decolonising the curriculum can shape both what students encounter, and how they are invited to engage with knowledge.

This distinction provides a useful lens for this evaluation. While decolonising the curriculum is often discussed as a single endeavour, the case studies illustrate different emphases on content and pedagogy. This report explores how these dimensions interact within Bath's context and how they contribute to students' experiences of belonging.

The Bath context

Context, in CMO terms, is not backdrop; it is what determines whether and how a mechanism activates (Pawson, 2013). Four contextual features shape this evaluation:

- **The awarding gap.** Bath's APP performance data show a 9.8 percentage point degree-outcome gap between Black and White students, and a 3.1pp gap for students from Asian, Black, Mixed and Other (ABMO) backgrounds (University of Bath, 2024). NSS data (2019–

2022) show students from minoritised ethnic groups consistently reporting lower satisfaction with assessment and feedback, organisation, and learning community.

- **The nine risks to equality of opportunity.** Of the APP's nine identified risks, three are most directly curriculum-relevant: sense of belonging (Risk 1), inequity and unconscious bias (Risk 5), and lack of role models (Risk 8) each operating through whether students encounter knowledge that reflects and affirms their identity.
- **Institutional profile.** Bath is a high-tariff institution in an affluent, predominantly White city, a feature the APP itself flags as a potential barrier to belonging. Its portfolio is roughly 80% STEM and Business, meaning the mechanisms relevant to Architecture or Psychology will differ from those relevant to Engineering or Management.
- **An unmapped landscape.** DTC activity at Bath has genuine institution-wide reach student-led work in Architecture, cross-disciplinary engagement in Science, Modern Languages and Politics, faculty guidance in Humanities and Social Sciences, and a peer-reviewed case study in Charrette (Grover, Wright & Stacey, 2023) but strong grassroots energy has developed without a shared institutional framework or, until now, a single evidence base. This dispersal is itself contextual: it helps explain why the same underlying commitment to inclusive curriculum has produced uneven outcomes across departments.

Sector-wide, DTC has become a recognised but unevenly implemented response to persistent awarding gaps and race-equality commitments. A 2024 SRHE systematic review confirms consistent qualitative links between DTC activity and improved belonging, via representation, cultural safety and trust, but notes that robust longitudinal or causal evidence remains sparse and evaluation quality varies (SRHE, 2024). Winter et al. (2024) similarly find mixed staff perceptions and no shared metrics across institutions. This uneven base is precisely why Bath's evaluation needs to be theory-informed rather than descriptive.

Mechanisms

Three mechanisms, drawn from this theory and the APP's own intervention logic, are hypothesised to explain how DTC activity affects belonging at Bath:

1. **Representation and recognition.** Encountering one's own cultural or epistemic traditions in reading lists, case studies and pedagogical examples activates recognition and academic self-efficacy; its absence produces marginalisation. Glasgow's qualitative work with psychology students (Ghazali-Mohammed et al., 2025), and Plymouth Marjon's survey of 99 staff and 290 students across four schools in 2022–2024 (Winter et al., 2024), both evidence this bidirectional effect.
2. **Staff and student agency.** Meaningful change depends on staff willingness to interrogate disciplinary assumptions and on students feeling able to identify, discuss, and be supported to name what is missing in the curriculum. Beck's (2022) evaluation of reasonable adjustment plans provides a relevant parallel. Students described institutional provision as becoming a "tick box" exercise, where standardised adjustments were formally recorded but not necessarily producing meaningful inclusive experiences. Beck also found that students placed considerable importance on staff attitudes, relationships, and willingness to act, rather than on the formal adjustment document alone. This raises an important question for the current evaluation. Do decolonising initiatives lead to substantive changes in teaching practice, understanding and student experiences, or do they remain primarily focused on meeting institutional expectations? This is consistent with wider concerns about performative, metric-driven

accountability displacing deeper forms of institutional change (Everett, 2026). The working hypothesis is that trust and belonging emerge where critical spaces enable staff to move beyond compliance and students to exercise meaningful agency.

3. **Institutional legitimacy and sustained embedding.** Belonging effects may be possible without formal infrastructure, but sector evidence suggests that they are more likely to be sustained when institutionally supported through governance, resourcing and strategic alignment (SRHE, 2024; Birmingham, 2020–2023). In this evaluation, institutional backing is therefore understood as a mechanism of institutional validation, rather than simply institutional tolerance: it signals that the changes generated through staff-student activity are legitimate, valued and capable of being sustained beyond individual projects or relationships.

Outcomes

Outcomes are tracked across three timeframes aligned to APP targets (University of Bath, 2024):

- **Short-term (1–2 years):** greater staff confidence in inclusive curriculum design; revised module content, reading lists and assessment incorporating diverse epistemologies; improved NSS scores for minoritised ethnic student groups.
- **Medium-term (2–4 years):** narrowing of the ABMO/White awarding gap from 3.1pp to under 1.5pp by 2027–28 (APP Target 4); improved self-reported belonging among Black and minoritised ethnic students; increased uptake of Bath's DTC resources, including the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) How-to Guide and CLT Community of Practice.
- **Long-term (4+ years):** inclusive curriculum design embedded as a structural feature of Bath's course portfolio; a sustained reduction in the awarding gap; and Bath contributing longitudinal evidence to a sector base the SRHE (2024) review identifies as currently lacking.

Evidence base

The evaluation draws on three complementary sources. Documentary analysis codes six categories of institutional material, project and evaluation documentation, pedagogical guidance, governance documents, student-produced materials, including the Decolonising Architecture Weekly Shout newsletter, 2020–21, the Grover, Wright and Stacey (2023) publication, and the APP itself, against the CMO framework, directly mapping explicit theories of change (such as the HSS How-to Guide's six-category framework), and applying documented interpretive inference where change logic is implicit. Sector case study analysis benchmarks four institutions to locate Bath's context within a wider pattern of what has worked elsewhere:

- Reading's VC-commissioned Race Equality Review (2025)
- MMU's faculty-level toolkit
- Plymouth Marjon's staff and student survey (2022–2024)
- DMU's whole-institution Decolonising DMU model

Positionality and limitations

Three considerations bear on how these findings should be read. First, identifying mechanisms is an interpretive act; where formal evaluation data is limited, as in much of Bath's DTC landscape, the project reading is theory-informed rather than purely empirical. Second, the evaluation team sits within the Recruitment and Admissions directorate at Bath, giving it privileged access to institutional documentation but also a stake in the plan it is evaluating; this is managed through transparency, cross-validation across sources, and the ethical approval processes set out in the APP's evaluation plan. Third, the sector evidence base against which Bath is benchmarked is itself uneven and definitionally contested; this evaluation does not

attempt to resolve that, adopting instead the HSS How-to Guide's practical framing of decolonising as an ongoing process of examining whose knowledge is represented, rather than a fixed programme with a definable endpoint (MacLennan & Butler, 2024).

The three internal Bath case studies examined here were selected because they had the clearest documentary trail, not because they represent the full landscape of decolonising activity at Bath. Other decolonising initiatives are known to exist across the University (see Appendix D) but were beyond the scope of this evaluation, and further departmental work is likely to exist that has not surfaced through documentary analysis alone. A systematic survey of departmental activity would be needed before any claim of comprehensive coverage could be made. This report should therefore be read as an evidenced account of Bath's best-documented cases, not a full map of its decolonising activity.

Despite these limits, the CMO framework gives this evaluation a coherent, applicable basis for treating DTC activity as something to be understood rather than assumed beneficial, the kind of rigorous, institution-specific evidence both the sector and Bath's own APP commitments call for.

This project is scoped as two phases: Phase One, this report, comprising a systematic analysis of internal and external evidence through case study review; and Phase Two, a subsequent stage of primary data collection with students and staff. Given the time required and the ethical considerations of consulting students and staff, alongside capacity constraints, it was decided that Phase Two would run sequentially rather than concurrently, beginning only once this report is published and the impact team has scoped its design. Where Phase Two is referenced in this report, it therefore describes a not-yet-completed stage of work; the recommendations that follow are based on Phase One's findings alone.

Consistent with the APP's principle that student and staff voice must be central to evaluation, not peripheral to it, Phase Two would incorporate primary qualitative data collection: focus groups with students from ABMO backgrounds and semi-structured interviews with staff engaged in decolonising-the-curriculum activity. Data would be analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and will address the key limitation of documentary analysis identified in Phase One's methodology: that outcome-level indicators relating to student experience and epistemic change, requires direct evidence, not documentary alone.

Ethics

A favourable ethics decision for this evaluation was received in March 2026 from the University of Bath's Social Science Research Ethics Committee.

Bath Case Studies

Case Study One: Decolonise Architecture (DA), Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering (2020-2023)

1a) Overview

DA emerged at Bath's School of Architecture in summer 2020, amid the Black Lives Matter movement. Four final-year BSc Architecture students, the eventual authors of this report, drafted and circulated a letter signed by over 200 students, alumni, and young professionals, raising two core problems: implicit and explicit bias from staff, and a curriculum, spanning

Design Studio and History and Theory modules, they felt was rooted in an outdated, Eurocentric, colonial framework. They argued the University's narrow model of architectural education failed to reflect genuinely global or inclusive practice, mirroring wider pressure on the profession to reform its methods and confront systemic inequities.

1b) Key Initiative

DA combined dialogue, practical tools, and resource-building across four flagship outputs. "The Inclusive Review" was a six-prompt guide for external reviewers at Crits. Crits are industry-led design reviews that bridge studio education and professional practice. Architecture students wanted to encourage professionals from these industry critics to avoid incidents of biased or alienating comments toward students, such as, mispronouncing names, or asking someone where they are "really" from. The "Alternate Reading List" broadened architectural history and theory beyond the Western canon to include work on race, space, power, and culture across academic texts, podcasts, fiction, and film. DA also ran ongoing outreach, a newsletter ("DA Shout!") and social media series ("Around DA World," "Technology Tuesday," spotlighting non-Western building technologies and vernacular architecture), culminating in an in-person Decolonise Architecture Festival in September 2022, funded by a £10,000 University Teaching Development Fund (TDF) grant and featuring speakers including RIBA President Muyiwa Oki and the Vice Chancellor.

The final report takes a multi-perspective view of how staff responded and worked alongside the group. Daniel Wong, senior lecturer and chair of the department's EDI team, became DA's initial point of contact and helped translate their demands into curriculum reform, including a redesigned first-year BSc Architecture curriculum launched in 2022 that embedded race, ethnicity, and social difference into every taught unit, illustrated by studio briefs such as designing a pavilion near the toppled Edward Colston statue in Bristol, or a Migration Museum in London. Faculty librarian David Stacey partnered with DA from November 2020 to build a diversified reading list that grew to over 180 items, favouring non-traditional and diverse media where possible. Deputy Head of Architecture and Civil Engineering Dr Robert Grover, highlighted DA's growing advocacy role, including talks to library networks and support for the 2022 festival. The report is candid that the University's prior equality efforts, focused heavily on gender balance through Athena Swan, had been slow to address racial and cultural representation among staff and students before DA's intervention.

1c) Applying the CMO Framework

CONTEXT	A design discipline whose curriculum, teaching materials and studio culture were, by students' own account, overwhelmingly centred on Western architectural traditions, situated within a wider institutional landscape in which the Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering had existing channels (module review, studio culture) through which student-initiated change could be formally received.
MECHANISM	Student agency and co-production: DA organised workshops, public discussions and campaigns, gathered evidence directly from students, and authored the Inclusive Review, a student-written developmental tool that was formally approved by the Department and were sent to invited professionals who speak to students as part of 'Crit's' ahead of their time on campus and the discussion they bring. Staff reciprocated by reviewing modules, broadening reading lists and case studies to include more international and global perspectives, to encourage more critical engagement with architectural history

	and theory. The Architecture subject Librarian expanded collections and supported curriculum redesign, and school leadership provided the institutional backing needed for changes to embed rather than remain isolated. This activated both the Representation/Recognition mechanism (broadened content) and the Intuition Legitimacy mechanism (formal departmental approval of the Inclusive Review).
OUTCOME	One of the key outcomes was a published, peer-reviewed account of sustained curricular and institutional change over a two-year partnership. It was an example of ‘realistic and effective change through solution-based initiatives’, including improved global representation in course content, more diverse library-sourced resources, and closer working between DA and the University's Access & Widening Participation team on recruitment. Another core outcome was the collaborative model developed throughout the project, whereby students were positioned as active participants in the process of scrutinising and transforming knowledge production, rather than as merely being recipients of knowledge transfer through teaching. This partnership between staff and students was named directly in the published account as the central contribution to inclusive curriculum design, and the model was presented at the Race Equality Taskforce international seminar. (Centre for Learning and Teaching, 2021).
GAPS & IMPACT	This is a multi-perspective, peer-reviewed, and triangulated across student, staff, library and leadership accounts. However, the documented partnership is time-bound (2020–2022); this review found no published evidence of whether the Inclusion Review's recommendations have been sustained, refreshed or extended since, and no direct quantitative measure (NSS, awarding-gap, or belonging-survey data) links this work. What the case study does not offer is impact-level evidence, there is no data here on whether these changes shifted student belonging or degree outcomes, which is consistent with the wider pattern across Bath's case studies.

Case Study Two: Department of Psychology

2a) Overview

Psychology's decolonising work is led by co-leads Dr Keren MacLennan and Dr Catherine Butler. The work is grounded in the recognition that Psychology as a discipline has been shaped almost entirely by Western frameworks, theories, and research practices, tending to overlook or misrepresent other cultural experiences and knowledge systems. The initiative had a pointed origin: a staff survey suggested students weren't particularly interested in decolonising the curriculum, but MacLennan and Butler tested that assumption by interviewing students directly rather than accepting it at face value. What they found was the opposite: students described genuine exclusion and isolation stemming from the absence of decolonising effort in teaching and campus culture, a finding that became the driving justification for the department's subsequent work.

2b) The Video

The department's most visible output is a short film bringing together staff and student perspectives, embedded on its public-facing webpage. Rather than a top-down policy statement, it foregrounds first-person testimony, students describing not seeing themselves reflected in curriculum, lecturers, or reading lists, and the psychological toll of that absence, alongside staff reflecting on why the work matters. This choice to demonstrate decolonisation

through lived testimony rather than policy assertion is consistent with the department's framing of the work as an ongoing process of audit, learning, and adjustment rather than a completed initiative.

2c) The HSS How-to Guide

Building on the video, MacLennan and Butler led development of a more substantial output, the "Decolonisation: How-to Guide for Teaching in Humanities and Social Sciences," funded by a TDF grant. This was genuinely cross-departmental drew contributors from Policy and Social Sciences, Education, Economics, and the Centre for Learning and Teaching, plus postgraduate students, and the guide is built largely from direct, quoted insights on what decolonising practice looks like in practice.

It's structured around six practical areas: decolonising teaching practice itself, moving from one-way lecturing toward discussion-based, reflective teaching; questioning whether "universal" psychological constructs and measures really are universal, illustrated by the difficulty of translating certain mental-health concepts across languages; rethinking curriculum content to include global examples and diverse authorship as central material, not token add-ons; sharing power in the classroom by reducing the lecturer/student hierarchy; listening to and partnering with students on course design; and building institutional support so the work doesn't rest on isolated individuals. The guide is also careful to define what decolonising is not, distinguishing it from EDI work, "cancel culture," and simply removing Western scholars from reading lists, framing the goal instead as making curricula multi-perspectival rather than substitutive.

2d) Applying the CMO Framework

CONTEXT	A Humanities & Social Sciences department in which staff held a documented but inaccurate assumption about student appetite for curriculum change, within a Faculty that had already begun to invest in decolonising infrastructure through DECKNO, a Community of Practice, and through dedicated TDF resource available to support staff-led curriculum guidance work.
MECHANISM	Direct staff-student dialogue as a corrective mechanism: by interviewing students rather than relying on the earlier staff survey, the co-leads activated a form of the Representation/Recognition mechanism in reverse, surfacing where its absence was already producing marginalisation, and simultaneously activated the Staff Agency mechanism , translating that finding into a public video and a structured, faculty-wide guide. The guide's explicit rejection of 'checkbox thinking' targets the agency mechanism directly, aiming to move staff engagement beyond minimum expected adjustment toward the kind of critical, sustained engagement identified in the sector literature (e.g. University of Reading, 2025) as necessary for belonging effects to emerge.
OUTCOME	A publicly published video bringing together staff and student perspectives, correcting an internal misconception about student interest; and a Faculty-wide How-to Guide now in active use across HSS, feeding directly into DECKNO's work and the University's Community of Practice. The Psychology case provides Bath's clearest documented instance of the staff/student perception gap identified in the sector literature (Winter, Webb & Turner, 2024; Plymouth Marjon survey evidence) being independently confirmed through Bath's own primary data.

EVIDENCE BASE & GAPS	This case is unusually strong on triangulated primary voice (staff survey, student interviews, video) relative to Bath's other cases, but like Decolonise Architecture it stops short of a formal outcome evaluation: there is no published data on how the video or guide has changed measurable student experience (NSS scores, attainment, or a validated belonging measure) since publication, and uptake of the guide beyond HSS is not systematically tracked in the documentation reviewed.
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Case Study Three: University Resources, Diversifying Reading Lists & Institutional infrastructure

3a) Overview

Unlike the two cases above, the library's contribution is not a bounded, time-limited initiative but standing institutional infrastructure touching every department at Bath. Its central resource is the Diversifying Reading Lists staff guide, a practical checklist drawing explicitly on equivalent work at UAL, UCL, Leicester, and Huddersfield. It prompts staff to consider:

- Whose voices might be excluded from a reading list
- To search grey literature, reports, working papers, conference proceedings, alongside conventional journal publishing, which the guide notes is itself dominated by Global North peer-review conventions
- To check the diversity of authors cited
- To include non-print and multimedia formats (podcasts, Kanopy, Box of Broadcasts) for accessibility
- To ask students directly whether, and how far, they see themselves reflected in what they're assigned.

The guide sits within Library Lists, the University's live, staff-editable reading-list platform, meaning diversification can be actioned incrementally, without a separate project or funding bid. It was supported by a dedicated newsletter running for over 34 issues between November 2020 and May 2021, sustaining a year-long institutional conversation on race, equity, and representation. Library staff are also named directly within the DA case study as active partners in implementing curriculum change, and the guide includes a live example reading list curated with a DECKNO academic (Dr Ana Dinerstein, Social & Policy Sciences), evidence of a working connection between the library's infrastructure and Bath's other decolonising initiatives, rather than a parallel effort operating in isolation.

3b) Applying the CMO Framework

CONTEXT	A central professional service with cross-institutional reach, operating a live reading-list platform used by every department, and sitting alongside, department-level initiatives such as DA and Psychology; explicitly modelled on equivalent guides at UK universities not developed from Bath-specific evidence.
MECHANISM	The library guide operationalises the Representation/Recognition mechanism , directly at the level of curriculum content and does so at lower friction than a full module or programme review, because reading lists are 'live' and staff-editable at any point in the academic year. It also activates a secondary Agency mechanism by explicitly inviting staff to ask their own students whether they see themselves reflected in what they are assigned, pushing decision-making outward from the library toward the staff-student relationship.

OUTCOME	A maintained, updated guide that functions as one of the University's parallel institutional structures supporting inclusive practice, alongside the HSS How-to Guide and Athena Swan assessment. Concrete embedding is evidenced anecdotally, the DECKNO-curated example list, and the library's documented partnership with DA, rather than systematic uptake data.
EVIDENCE BASE & GAPS	The library's contribution is easier to evidence as a mechanism (a checklist, a platform, a newsletter archive) than as an outcome. No data was located on how many students access reading lists across the University, nor any link drawn between reading-list diversification and belonging or attainment measures. Because the guide is a standing capability rather than a bounded intervention with a defined start and end, it is also the hardest of the three cases to evaluate using a classic realist before/after logic.

Sector Benchmarking

Manchester Met's University (MMU) Decolonising the Curriculum Toolkit

Context

MMU's Decolonising the Curriculum Toolkit was developed by the Faculty of Science and Engineering's Narrowing the Awarding Gaps Task Group, led by Dr D. Theresa Nicholson, and is framed explicitly around closing the sector-wide BAME awarding gap, 10.8% at MMU in 2019/20. Unlike Bath's Decolonise Architecture, which began as a grassroots student campaign, this sat within formal institutional structure from the outset: a faculty-level task group working in Science and Engineering specifically, a discipline area the toolkit's introduction argues is shaped by the same "inherent whiteness" of Western knowledge traditions as the humanities, despite rarely being framed that way. The toolkit defines decolonising as identifying how colonialism shaped what counts as legitimate knowledge and bringing in excluded knowledge systems, not erasing existing content.

Mechanism

The toolkit's core is a Guidance document setting out principles and question prompts rather than prescriptive rules, letting academics apply the thinking to their own subject. Around it sits a discipline-specific resource library, Computing and Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Engineering, Life Sciences, Sport and Exercise Science, with material on topics like the racial history of geography or anti-Blackness in physics, plus a General Resources section and a downloadable collated PDF of sources.

Personal testimony sits at the centre rather than as an add-on. "Stories from Scholars" is eight anonymised first-person accounts from academics across the faculty; "Voices of Student Leadership" gathers pieces from students in leadership roles. Most notable is "Diary of a BAME Student": fourteen first-year students across three departments kept weekly diaries for six weeks in late 2021 about their day-to-day university experience, turned into narrated video extracts and a peer-reviewed conference paper. This mirrors Bath Psychology's video in treating lived testimony as more persuasive to staff than policy language alone.

The toolkit's rationale is that awarding gaps aren't only a numbers problem but a product of students not seeing their knowledge systems or ways of thinking valued, a not-belonging in the discipline itself. Its FAQ and resource bank directly counter STEM academics' common

assumption that decolonising is irrelevant to "objective" science, using subject-specific evidence on colonial legacies in geology, chemistry, and mathematics.

Outcome

The toolkit is actively maintained and cited in the literature, including a 2022 EuroSoTL paper by Nicholson and colleagues and a 2024 Oxford journal special issue, and has been used as a template by other MMU departments, including Nursing and Psychology. Its institutional footprint is narrower than DMU's whole-institution model, but it has a clearly reusable, exportable structure. Its main strength relative to Bath's more scattered landscape is that it was built once, centrally, by a named task group with an ongoing point of contact, Nicholson, rather than depending on multiple individuals or student groups to sustain it.

University of Reading's Decolonising the Curriculum

Drawing on both Reading's March 2025 APP evaluation report and the University of Reading's Decolonising the Curriculum 2023 resource, unlike Bath's grassroots student campaign, Reading's DtC work began as a direct response from senior leadership. In June 2020, Vice-Chancellor Robert Van de Noort commissioned a Race Equality Review, co-led by Allán Laville and Parveen Yaqoob, which recommended a task-and-finish group to define decolonising at Reading and produce practical guidance. This became the DtC Working Group in early 2022, run in two phases, chaired first by Laville alone and then co-chaired with Virendra Adhikari of the Students' Union. The group deliberately avoided a fixed institutional definition, adopting a holistic, student-centred approach on the reasoning that decolonising can't be reduced to a formula applied uniformly across disciplines.

Context

The Working Group's core output is two guidance documents. The first (2022) covered teaching content, methods, and assessment. The second (2023), built from listening exercises with student Inclusion Consultants in November 2022, expands into inclusive environments, student-staff partnerships, and decolonising research, structured around a fifteen-question FAQ and first-person case studies from named academics across disciplines including social psychology, law, and archaeology.

Mechanism

The School of Law paid eight student partners to research decolonising themes and present at a symposium with speakers from Oxford and Birmingham. Mathematical and Physical Sciences used journaling and termly workshops to co-design changes to a climate-change module and a first-year calculus module, finding personal-perspective discussion more impactful than content change alone. Geography and Environmental Science diversified an Air Pollution module's reading list and found 75% student support for more Global South knowledge. A 2023 pilot used student-created zines as a low-stakes alternative to focus groups, on the reasoning that traditional formats can pressure minoritised students to moderate their views. Underpinning all of this is the PLaNT scheme, which funds student-staff partnership projects on decolonising, growing from three in 2022/23 through to 2027/28.

Outcome

A March 2025 evaluation by Michael Kilmister found strong reach: over 600 views of the digital guidance, 150 physical copies distributed, ten webinars drawing 340 attendances, and decolonising content now named in three schools' Teaching and Learning plans. A redesigned psychology/speech-language-therapy module scored 4.71 out of 5 in evaluations, with students crediting the removal of lecturer-student hierarchy. But the evaluation's own survey data was

thin (seven respondents), and staff confidence in implementing decolonising practices lacked awareness. Its recommendations include broadening messaging, adopting richer evaluation methods, producing more concrete guidance, targeting low-engagement schools, and, notably, preserving the Working Group's independence from normal governance, warning that formal committee ownership risks becoming "mired in managerialism."

Plymouth Marjon Decolonising the Curriculum

Context

This case study is not an institutional toolkit, but a peer-reviewed, survey study from Winter, et al. (2022), published in *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. The paper acknowledges UK decolonising activity within a global movement, tracing it back to the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall protests at the University of Cape Town, and UK-specific campaigns like "Why is my Curriculum White?" and "Why isn't my Professor Black?" It observes that despite regulatory pressure from the Office for Students to close degree-attainment gaps between white and minority-ethnic students, decolonising in UK HE has been institutionally uneven.

This matters because the study's "host institution" described as a medium-sized university in Southwest England with a non-diverse student and staff population, which the authors present as the reason the research is useful. Most existing decolonising toolkits were developed by and for more ethnically diverse student bodies.

Mechanism

The researchers converted recommended practices from SOAS, UCL, Kingston's existing toolkits, into a seventeen-question survey across six themes, Representation, Content, Peer Engagement, Assessment, Language and Communication, and Culture, distributed across four schools to 99 staff and 290 students, with student ethnicity recorded to allow statistical comparison.

The headline finding was a consistent perception gap: the gap between staff and minority-ethnic students (significant on 12 of 17 items) was far wider than between staff and white students (4 of 17). The starkest gap concerned opportunities for peer discussion of ethnicity and privilege. Assessment showed the same pattern: white students' views matched staff closely, while minority-ethnic students reported far fewer opportunities to bring ethnicity or real-world issues into coursework. Open-text comments illustrated these findings: several minority-ethnic students described course content as Eurocentric or tokenistic, while some white students acknowledged feeling well represented themselves.

The authors interpret the gap around peer discussion and assessment as a lack of staff confidence in facilitating uncomfortable conversations about race, drawing on Robin DiAngelo's concept of white fragility, to suggest lecturers may be wary of triggering defensive reactions. They argue assessment is a particularly important lever because it shapes what students actually study and how, and introducing non-traditional assessment formats, and co-creating assessment criteria with students, as promising directions. The discussion is candid about deeper obstacles: decolonising work asks staff to reconsider their own worldview and relinquish authority.

Outcome

The paper positions itself modestly, as a benchmarking exercise rather than a finished intervention, with findings used at the host institution to prompt conversations about priorities. Read alongside Bath, MMU, and Reading, it functions as statistical evidence for something the

other case studies assume qualitatively: that staff and minoritised students often perceive the same curriculum very differently, especially around whether ethnicity is meaningfully engaged with in discussion and assessment, not just represented on a reading list.

De Montfort University (DMU) Decolonising the Curriculum

Content

The “Decolonising DMU” toolkit explicitly links to its Universities Race Equality Charter commitments, and the sector framework (run by Advance HE) for universities to sign up to be publicly accountable in addressing racial inequality in higher education. Its mission spans dismantling racist barriers across culture, progression, and representation, not just curriculum.

Mechanism

Rather than a single guidance document, the toolkit is a continuously growing, filterable resource library: Awarding Gap (a five-part seminar series), Case Studies (six discipline-specific sets), Decolonising Research, Multimedia Resources, Reports, Student Support, Systems and Environments, and Teaching and Learning, serving academic, professional services, and research staff as distinct audiences and inviting ongoing contributions.

Two documents stand out for depth. “How to Decolonise Your Pedagogical Approach,” written by criminology lecturer Dr Tolulope Eboka, argues that decolonising has focused on diversifying content, while neglecting how material is delivered, and offers concrete practices: rethinking group work seating to avoid students clustering in ethnicities, building in structured opportunities for students to connect coursework to their experience, learning to pronounce names correctly, and explicitly decoupling English fluency from perceived intelligence.

“A Guide to Embedding Decolonising and Inclusive Approaches” adapted substantially from the SOAS Decolonising toolkit and Advance HE resources, structures the work across three practical stages (module/programme design, curriculum content review, and inclusive delivery), and includes an original “Model for Decolonisation” (developed by DMU’s Marita LeVaul-Grimwood and Hardeep Basra) built around five interlocking elements: a teacher’s self-recognition of their own positionality and privilege, ongoing teacher-student partnership to critique the curriculum, inclusive subject content, assessment, and pedagogies. Meaning a genuine, institution-wide sense of belonging.

The case-study library grounds this guidance in real, faculty-level practice. The Library and Learning Services session confronted how archive professionals should handle historically racist material in their collections, training staff to catalogue “hidden histories” honestly rather than erasing or whitewashing offensive legacy content. The Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development describes using the traditional “blind men and the elephant” parable (found across Buddhist, Sufi, Jain, and Hindu traditions) as a device to help postgraduate sustainability students grasp concepts positionality and the limits of claimed objectivity. DMU Global study/work-abroad mobility scheme reported ABMO student participation grew from 34% to 44% between 2015 and 2019 after targeted outreach and a dedicated Widening Participation hardship fund.

Outcome

DMU frames its approach as an ambitious, a whole-institution commitment spanning governance, research, and professional services, backed by a named project team and formal reporting, compared with the more department-led models at Bath, Reading, or MMU. Its guidance leans heavily on external frameworks (SOAS, Advance HE, UCL), suggesting DMU’s

real distinguishing contribution is less about methodology and more to do with the scale of institutional commitment and volume of curated material.

Discussion

The three Bath case studies show the same three hypothesised mechanisms: **representation and recognition**, **staff and student agency**, and **institutional legitimacy**, operating with markedly different visibility and strength depending on context. See Appendix B for a summary of this pattern.

What these three case studies demonstrate is not that these mechanisms are absent, but that visibility and strength vary sharply with context. Decolonise Architecture's strongest mechanism is student agency and co-production, formalised through department approval of its Inclusion Review, and its outcome is a peer-reviewed, multi-perspective output. Psychology's strongest mechanism is representation and recognition, surfaced specifically through student voice correcting a mistaken staff assumption, backed by TDF money and adoption of its guide across HSS. Its outcome is rich primary testimony but no outcome data. The library's strongest mechanism is also representation and recognition, but infrastructural rather than pedagogic, sitting within the institution without being centrally resourced or tracked, and its outcome is embedding that is anecdotal only.

Three patterns follow from this comparison. First, evidence strength conveys whether an initiative produced a discrete, authored artefact, a peer-reviewed paper for DA, a funded guide for Psychology, far more closely than it shows us the underlying quality or importance of the work itself. This is a warning about the evaluation's own method as much as a finding: the library may well be activating genuine mechanisms that simply never generated documentation, meaning an evaluation built only on institutional paper trails will systematically undercount work like this. Second, student agency is the clearest common thread across Bath's two best-evidenced cases, and in both it took the same form: staff actively sought out student perspectives rather than assuming them. This is consistent with Theme 3 of the sector benchmarking that follows, and it suggests the mechanism worth institutionalising is not "student voice" as a passive input but active staff-led solicitation of it. Third, institutional legitimacy is uneven in a way that mirrors this report's central finding: even Bath's strongest cases rest on time-limited funding, a two-year student partnership, a single TDF grant, rather than durable, resourced ownership. That is precisely the gap Phase Two could aim to address by moving towards sustainable, embedded resource, ownership and funding for similar initiatives.

Both HSS outputs target a specific obstacle the guide names directly: that "decolonisation" as a term can feel abstract, intellectually intimidating, or politically loaded, which deters engagement even from people who are sympathetic to it. The HSS guide's response is to replace abstract exhortation with concrete, discipline-relevant examples, an economics module that now allocates 25% of first-year teaching credit to decolonisation content, a sociology module renamed and reframed to surface unstated assumptions of Western universality. Its justification is pedagogical as much as ethical: multiple ways of knowing are framed as strengthening rigour and critical thinking for all students, not as a corrective reserved for underrepresented students. But the student testimony it includes, describing real distress at not seeing themselves reflected in what they were taught, makes clear the stakes are also about belonging and psychological wellbeing, not intellectual completeness alone.

This work sits within a longer lineage. UCL's "Why Is My Curriculum White?" campaign, launched by Black students in 2014-15, was prompted by a student-made video arguing that the curriculum was overwhelmingly composed of white ideas by white authors, a colonial legacy that had normalised whiteness while rendering Black perspectives largely invisible (Peters, 2015). The campaign spread to Leeds, Manchester, and Oxford, becoming a touchstone that shifted decolonising from an academic debate into a sustained, student-led demand for reform (Peters, 2015; Tyler, 2016). The HSS guide is one of the more concrete, reusable artefacts to emerge from that wider landscape, designed for cross-departmental application rather than psychology-specific use. But it is also recent, self-described as unfinished and ongoing, and its practical reach, like most of Bath's decolonising activity, currently depends on individual staff goodwill rather than formal, faculty-wide ownership. A Phase Two's ambition could be to convert that dependency into an institution-wide framework, so the work no longer rests on individual co-leads to sustain it.

Professor Alexander Wright, Head of Architecture, calls the Inclusive Review a catalyst: rather than routing it through months of committee approval, he distributed it directly to studio leaders, flagged as student-produced. Uptake was quiet at first but spread through staff conversation over the following months, and within a year it had become standard practice in studio teaching. Robert Grover, Director of Studies, reaches the same verdict from a different angle: DA forced staff to relinquish control in the studio-critique relationship, a shift he calls overdue.

Its reach has since extended beyond Bath, adopted by other architecture schools, and its work fed directly into the University's Curriculum Transformation process and into Widening Participation initiatives including the "Pathway to Bath" outreach programme and a 2024 contextual-admissions policy. The original student authors are explicit that this is not a quick fix: they frame decolonisation as intersecting with gender, class, and disability, and describe the goal not as replacing existing content but as ensuring marginalised perspectives receive equal standing within a fuller historical account.

What Decolonising Architecture at Bath also shows is how much of this labour has fallen on students rather than the institution. Students negotiated the legitimacy of the importance of decolonising themselves, supported by staff and the institution only on request, and because they moved through the programme in overlapping year groups, the work's continuity depended on each cohort advocating for it even after leaving. One student returned for an MA specifically to help run the university-wide Decolonising Architecture Festival in 2022. The DA currently no longer exists as all students and most staff who led the initiative are now no longer at Bath. The subject librarian is now the main institutional custodian of this legacy, running drop-in and introduction sessions and helping diversify reading lists for History and Theory of Architecture and Vernacular Architecture. Had the librarian not chosen to take this on, the work would again default to whatever curiosity, discomfort, or prior knowledge individual students happened to bring with them. DA's working group itself become a registered charity, and it now exists to provide resources for architects globally. This is clearly a legacy that has outlasted Bath's own institutional structures for sustaining it, which is itself the clearest evidence in this report that grassroots energy and institutional durability are not the same thing.

How does decolonising the curriculum affect student sense of belonging?

Across every Bath case, belonging is not a side-effect of decolonising work, it is the mechanism through which the work operates, more consistently than content diversity itself. Psychology's experience is the clearest illustration: a staff survey suggested students weren't especially

interested in decolonising the curriculum, but direct student interviews found the opposite, with students describing real exclusion and isolation stemming from the absence of this work, not from any specific content gap. This is corroborated at scale by the one piece of quantitative evidence in this set, the Winter et al. (2024) survey which found staff and White students rated the curriculum similarly while staff and minority-ethnic students diverged sharply, and the widest gap of all was on opportunities for peer discussion of ethnicity and privilege, not on reading-list content. The belonging effect, in other words, appears to live disproportionately in pedagogy and classroom dynamics, and is grounded in who gets to speak, and whether students' personal experiences are invited in, rather than existing solely in the syllabus itself.

This pattern is independently corroborated outside the sector-benchmarking set by Bunce et al. (2021), who conducted focus groups with seventeen Black and minority ethnic students studying health and social care subjects at a UK university, using self-determination theory to interrogate the ABMO attainment gap. Their framework isolates three psychological needs, competence, autonomy and relatedness, that map closely onto this evaluation's own representation, recognition, and agency mechanisms. Bunce et al. (2021) found that course material failing to reflect diverse cultural experience, combined with negative stereotyping from peers and staff, undermined students' sense of autonomy and relatedness, producing isolation and reduced motivation consistent with the exclusion Bath's own Psychology students described to MacLennan and Butler (2024). Similarly, Arday, Belluigi and Thomas (2021) identify students' desire to see themselves reflected in the knowledge provided as part of establishing a sense of belonging. "When you think about our curriculum it is actually very White and in many respects quite exclusionary. As a student of colour when you are sat in that space you feel it, you feel like none of this relates to me. (Female, Mixed-Heritage, Student, 21)" Arday, Belluigi and Thomas (2021) Reflecting further that curriculum representation is a factor contributing to students' experience of belonging.

Critically, students who experienced lectures in which diversity was discussed meaningfully, not merely referenced, reported the opposite effect: satisfied autonomy and stronger engagement. This distinction, between diversity as passive content and diversity as active pedagogical practice, is the same distinction this evaluation's case studies repeatedly surface: Reading's flattened lecturer-student hierarchy, MMU's personal-connection discussions, and Bath's own Architecture case, where behavioural harm from Crit comments, not syllabus gaps, was what damaged belonging. Read together, Bunce et al.'s psychological account and this evaluation's institutional case studies converge on the same conclusion from different disciplinary starting points: belonging is a product of what happens in the room, not only what appears on the reading list.

Reading's redesigned psychology/speech-language-therapy module scored 4.71 out of 5 in student evaluation, with feedback crediting the flattening of the lecturer-student hierarchy for the engagement gain, not the addition of new content. MMU's Maths and Physical Sciences case found that simply giving students a platform to connect coursework to personal experience, in this case discussing a film on sea-level rise with international students from affected regions, was more impactful than any syllabus change alone. DMU's framework makes the theoretical claim explicit, defining the goal as an inclusive experience and pointedly distinguishing this from treating a student's disengagement as an individual deficit. Bath's own Architecture case fits the same pattern in reverse: students reported that insensitive Crit comments from external reviewers directly hindered their ability to thrive, a belonging harm, not

a content gap, which is exactly why DA's most durable output was a behavioural guide rather than a reading list.

A consistent secondary finding is that standard consultation methods often fail to surface any of this. MMU's move to student diaries and zines, and Reading's shift toward creative, low-stakes formats, were explicit responses to a shared suspicion: that focus groups and surveys push minoritised students toward cautious, guarded answers rather than honest ones. If that suspicion is correct, belonging data gathered through conventional channels is not neutral but systematically understating the problem, which has direct implications for how Phase Two collects evidence.

A related methodological risk concerns how the language of "mechanism" gets used in the sector literature more broadly. Several case studies, and much of the wider retention-and-progression literature, describe the outcomes this work is trying to secure using the vocabulary of student resilience, the capacity to persist, adapt, and recover from setbacks within an unchanged system. Read uncritically this risks reintroducing the exact individual-deficit model decolonising work is meant to dismantle: if the mechanism is framed as building resilience in students, the implicit corollary is that students who do not progress, complete, or move into competitive careers simply lacked it. Resilience, used this way, quietly relocates responsibility for survival onto the individual while treating the system's own structure as fixed and beyond scrutiny (Fox, 2026). That framing does real evidential work by omission. It brackets out the structural factors that exclude young people from creative and academic careers, wealth, class, race, gender, disability, geography, accent, religious upbringing, and others, none of which any amount of personal grit overcomes. Bath's Architecture case study makes the stakes concrete: students undermined by insensitive Crit comments were not lacking resilience, they were absorbing institutional harm and, absent a different framing, would have been left to read their own distress as personal failure. Treating that distress as a resilience deficit would have obscured the actual causal mechanism, unchecked external reviewer conduct, that DA's Inclusive Review was built to fix.

This has a direct methodological consequence for Bath's evaluation. Within the CMO framework, mechanisms should be specified at the level of the institution and its environment, such as staff practice, assessment design, peer culture, not at the level of a psychological trait manufactured in the student. Outcome measures that implicitly reward resilience, continuation and completion rates read in isolation, should be interpreted alongside the belonging and experience data above, so that a student's route through the system is understood as jointly produced by context and mechanism, not as a test of character. This is the same claim the belonging literature makes in our methodology set up; belonging is a property of the environment, not a fixed trait some students bring and others don't.

Can Bath learn from a more institutional approach?

Set against the other three cases, Bath's current landscape, Decolonise Architecture, Psychology's video and department-level work, the library's list, DECKNO, looks like MMU's or Reading's own starting point: real energy, but champion-dependent and structurally uneven across departments. That is the exact vulnerability this evaluation set out to test against comparable institutions, and the other three cases suggest a fairly consistent path away from it, with several components that transfer directly. Reading's PLaNT scheme and Law School model, paid student researchers presenting at a symposium, converted individual enthusiasm into a recurring, budgeted mechanism. Bath's equivalent activity in Psychology, the Library, and DECKNO is not institutionally sustained in this way, which is the same sustainability risk every

more-advanced institution in this set has already had to solve. MMU's biggest asset is subject-specific relevance: a Computing lecturer and a Life Sciences lecturer each work with material native to their own discipline rather than abstract, cross-institutional principles. Bath's existing outputs, DA's Inclusive Review, Psychology's HSS guide, are exactly this kind of discipline-grounded artefact; the institutional opportunity is to replicate that model deliberately across other schools rather than leaving its emergence to chance. The Winter et al. instrument, or a Bath specific adaption of it benchmarking staff against minority-ethnic-student perceptions specifically on peer discussion and assessment relevance would give Bath's impact team a comparable, quantifiable read on precisely the dimension the evidence says matters most and would allow that dimension to be tracked over time rather than relying on the one-off surveys Reading's own evaluation flagged as a limitation.

Governance structure itself carries a lesson. Reading's working group sits deliberately outside normal governance, and staff and students both cited that independence is what makes it credible enough to invite honest disclosure. DMU shows the opposite also works with full governance integration backed by Race Equality Charter reporting. But Reading's reporting warns explicitly that structure can tip into tokenism if imposed without care. MMU's use of diaries and zines rather than only structured consultation reinforces the same point, particularly given that Bath Psychology's own standard staff survey missed what students actually felt: creative, low-stakes methods appear necessary to capture honest experience of belonging, not optional.

Conclusion

Across all three case studies, belonging is driven less by what is taught than by how students are allowed to participate in it: who speaks in seminars, whether personal experience is invited into assessment, whether staff share authority. This has a direct and immediate implication for what Bath measures. Reading list diversity and module counts will understate impact. Classroom participation, assessment design, and the staff/minority-ethnic-student perception gap will reveal both the real problem and the real effect of any intervention.

Bath's degree outcomes awarding gaps will not be improved by counting citations on a reading list. It will improve by changing who holds authority in a seminar room. Bath's own data shows this gap narrowing over recent years, but slowly, and no evidence reviewed here supports attributing that movement to any specific intervention, DTC or otherwise. What matters for this evaluation is that a substantial gap remains after that movement: whatever combination of factors has produced the improvement to date has not been sufficient on its own, which is the basis for treating decolonising the curriculum as a necessary additional lever rather than a proven solution.

Institutionally, Bath's task now looks less like inventing new practice and more like building the infrastructure to sustain what already exists. The Architecture and Psychology groups have produced genuinely good, exportable artefacts. What Bath lacks is what Reading and DMU built around comparable starting points circa 2021: funded, evaluated, semi-independent infrastructure around work currently sustained by a handful of committed individuals.

This distinction should define how Bath frames success going forward. A resilience-based account of student experience treats variation in outcomes as evidence of individual character

and frames the goal of decolonising-the-curriculum work as equipping students to withstand an unchanged environment. The evidence in this review points the other way: environment and mechanism are the proper unit of analysis. Belonging, progression and attainment are shaped by staff practice, assessment design and institutional legitimacy, not by how much resilience a given student happens to possess. Structural factors, wealth, class, race, gender, disability, geography, accent, religious upbringing, exclude people from the curriculum in ways no amount of individual grit overcomes. An inclusive curriculum should not depend on students to legitimise and negotiate their own space in their education and their place in the University. Bath's evaluation priorities should be built around changing the system, not fortifying the individuals moving through it. This is the same principle the APP itself sets out: that student and staff voice must sit at the centre of how change is understood and acted upon, not at the margins of it, and a Phase Two's potential for primary data collection should be designed to put that principle into practice rather than leave it as intent.

This review extends Bath's evidence base in two connected ways: it retains and applies the theoretical grounding established in the original review, decolonial theory, epistemic injustice, the belonging literature, and it develops, for the first time, full individual case studies of Bath's three most significant strands of this work using the evaluation's own CMO framework. The result is consistent across both theory and case-study evidence: decolonising the curriculum operates through recognisable mechanisms of representation, agency and institutional legitimacy. What varies enormously is how well those mechanisms can currently be evidenced at Bath. Although the source materials vary widely, from a peer-reviewed, multi-perspective account in *Decolonise Architecture* to the library initiatives, they are exclusively self-reported sources, and currently no independent evaluation of their impact exists.

Across the three case studies, evidence of activity was generally stronger than evidence of impact. While each provided examples of change in curriculum content, pedagogy, representation or student engagement, the extent to which outcomes were systematically captured varied considerably. As a result, the evaluation is better able to identify plausible mechanisms of change than to draw firm conclusions about effectiveness.

Future institutional effort should therefore focus not only on supporting decolonising the curriculum activity, but also on strengthening how it is documented and evaluated. Consistent approaches to capturing implementation, student experience and outcomes would support institutional learning, enable comparison across initiatives, and provide a stronger basis for understanding what works, for whom, and in what contexts.

The initiatives elsewhere in the sector that achieved the most impact are the ones that moved from grassroots enthusiasm to structural ownership. Bath has the grassroots. This review has, for the first time, set out in detail three of Bath's most documented strands of grassroots activity. Phase Two's task would be to test which environments produced that shift elsewhere, whether Bath's environment is a match, and what that implies for implementation here. What this review supports building is specific: a shared structure, a co-designed toolkit, institution-wide ownership anchored the University's strategy priorities, a shared language, and genuine institutional backing for the staff and students who have, to date, carried this work themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Access and Participation Plan and Risks to Equality of Opportunity

The University of Bath's Access and Participation Plan¹ identifies nine risks to equality of opportunity (Figure 1). Equality of opportunity means “individuals are not hampered in accessing and succeeding in higher education as a result of their background or circumstances they cannot fairly influence” (The Office for Students, 2025).

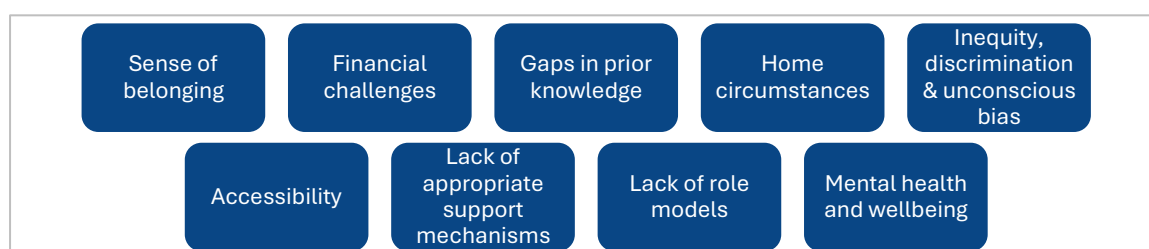


Figure 1: University of Bath's nine key risks to equality of opportunity across the student lifecycle.

The associated risks that the evaluation/programme are designed to address are:

- Sense of Belonging

Appendix B: Summary of Bath Case Studies

The table below summarises the three Bath case studies examined in full in the Literature Review (Sections 4-7), mapped against the evaluation's Context–Mechanism–Outcome (CMO) framework.

¹ University of Bath Access and Participation Plan available from <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/access-and-participation-plan-2024-to-2028-and-fee-information/>

Case Study	Strongest Mechanism Evidenced	Institutional Legitimacy	Outcome
Decolonise Architecture (DA)	Student agency and co-production	Formal department approval of Inclusion Review	Peer-reviewed, multi-perspective account
Department of Psychology	Representation/recognition (via corrective student voice)	TDF funding; HSS-wide guide adoption	Rich primary voice; no outcome data
University Resources (Library)	Representation/recognition (infrastructural)	Institutional but not centrally resourced/tracked	Anecdotal embedding only

Appendix C: Summary of Sector Benchmarking Case Studies

The table below summarises the four external sector case studies discussed in full in Section 9 (Sector Benchmarking).

Institution	Approach	Key Mechanism	Outcome/Evidence
Manchester Met	Faculty-level toolkit (Science and Engineering)	Discipline-specific resource library plus staff and student testimony (e.g. “Diary of a BAME Student”)	Actively maintained; cited in academic literature; adapted by other departments
University of Reading	Senior-leadership-commissioned Working Group	Two guidance documents; PLanT-funded student-staff partnerships; zines used to surface honest feedback	600+ resource views; embedded in three schools’ T&L plans; 4.71/5 module evaluation; independence from governance seen as key to credibility
Plymouth Marjon (Winter, Webb & Turner, 2022)	Peer-reviewed benchmarking survey (not a toolkit)	Staff vs. student perception survey across six themes	Significant staff/minority-ethnic-student perception gaps, largest on peer discussion and assessment; supplies quantitative evidence base for toolkits elsewhere
De Montfort University	Whole-institution, governance-embedded programme	Toolkit, case-study library, “Model for Decolonisation” framework, DMU Global outreach	BAME study-abroad participation rose from 34% to 44% (2015–19); Race Equality Charter alignment

Appendix D: Illustrative examples of wider decolonising work across the University

Decolonising activity at Bath extends beyond the three case studies examined in depth in this report. It is led through staff- and student-driven work across schools and faculties, and is supported institutionally by DECKNO, the Learning and Teaching Hub, the Race Equality Charter and the Decolonising Learning and Teaching Community of Practice, alongside student-led activity through the Students' Union. It spans curriculum development, teaching, research and other work shaped by the interests and expertise of those leading it. Not all of this activity has been captured through formal evaluation, but the examples in the table below show its breadth across the University, including Dr Elena Minelli's work on Afro-Italian representation in PoLIS, recognised by the Society for Italian Studies' EDI Excellence Award, and Dr Alex Holland's workshop on bias, representation and the colonial history of science, now embedded in the Year 2 Advance Science Skills mandatory course.

Initiative	Lead	Description	Evidence of Reach / Outputs
DECKNO	DECKNO team (institution-wide)	Supports decolonising knowledge, teaching, research & practice	Cross-university resource & network; connects staff working on decolonising practice
Teaching Hub support	Centre for Learning & Teaching (institution-wide)	Guidance & support for inclusive & decolonising curricula	Resources & staff development activities; works alongside DECKNO & the Race Equality Charter team
Race Equality Charter (REC)	Race Equality Taskforce (institution-wide)	Supports race equality action planning & institutional change	University-wide governance & activity; led by Dr Teslim Buyoke, working with the Race Equality Taskforce headed by Professor Rajani Naidoo
Decolonising Learning & Teaching Community of Practice	Centre for Learning & Teaching (institution-wide)	Staff forum for sharing practice & resources	Staff forum for sharing decolonising practice & resources. Cross-university resource & network; open to staff across departments
SU Anti-racist Action Group	Students' Union (SU) (institution-wide)	Student-led engagement with anti-racist & decolonising agendas	SU Top 10 priority issue; anti-racism forums & Student Anti-racist Action Group; student representation & dialogue with Race Equality Taskforce
Afro-Italian curriculum work	Dr Elena Minelli (PoLIS, Humanities & Social Sciences)	Curriculum, events & workshops focused on Afro-Italian representation	Online seminar with Afro-Italian filmmaker Fred Kuwornu; three-day TDF project with student & staff workshops & evening presentation; Society for Italian Studies EDI Excellence Award (2024).
Decolonial language pedagogy research	Dr Irene Macías Fernández (PoLIS, Humanities & Social Sciences)	Research on decolonial approaches to Spanish-language teaching materials	Funded project on teaching materials in Equatorial Guinea & Western Sahara; membership of the ELEUK Special Interest Group on decolonisation
Cross-linguistic & pedagogical collaboration	Dr Elena Minelli & Dr Irene Macías Fernández (PoLIS)	Related cross-linguistic & pedagogical work on decolonisation	Co-presentations on related work; complemented by Nick Regan's research interests in bilingualism & intercultural communication
Anti-racist classroom work	Dr Deborah Brewis (School of Management)	Contribution to anti-racist curriculum initiatives	Participation in the Building the Anti-Racist Classroom (BARC) collective
Bias, Representation & Colonial History of Science workshop	Dr Alex Holland & Dr Sarah Bailey (Life Sciences, Faculty of Science)	Teaching on bias, representation & colonial influences on science	Development of two-hour lecture & interactive workshop on bias, representation & the colonial history of science in 2026, covering topics including biopiracy, science revolution, eugenics, sampling & representation bias, & the relationship between power, gender & scientific practice. Following demand, from informal student feedback, the workshop is being embedded across Year 2 mandatory, unassessed

			Advance Science Skills course, alongside statistics & presentation skills from 2027.
EDI & inclusion infrastructure	Faculty EDI leads in Engineering and design	Equality & inclusion initiatives supporting wider curricular development	Inclusion Champion award & Athena Swan recognition; EDI leads & self-assessment teams provide structures through which decolonising work can be raised, while the two agendas remain formally distinct

Access and Participation Evaluation



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