UNPACKING THE CURRICULUM AT WESTMINSTER ▪ A DECOLONIAL ENQUIRY

Survey Findings, Report and Recommendations

UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER▦

Contents

BACKGROUND

In recent years, there have been increasing calls and efforts by academics and students to decolonise universities and to dismantle the embedded structures of coloniality within curricula. In the United Kingdom (UK), scholar-activists have highlighted the deep-rooted Euro/Western-centric perspectives which continue to shape pedagogy, knowledge production, institutional structures, and relationships in our learning and teaching environments (Arday and Mirza, 2018; Gopal, 2021; Bell, 2022).

The resurgence of the racial justice movement in 2020 significantly altered the socio-political landscape around the world, intensifying demands for institutions, including universities, to reckon with their historical and ongoing roles in sustaining racial inequalities. Catalysed by student- and academic-led activism, radical traditions such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and decolonial thought, discussions about decolonising the curriculum, decentring whiteness, Eurocentrism, and the colonial entanglements of our institutions gained renewed attention. Since this moment, British universities have made mixed efforts towards addressing these issues and embedding principles of diversity and inclusion into institutional policy. While these have helped to open space for dialogue and understanding, they have often fallen short of driving the deeper, structural changes that are needed.

The factors affecting these issues are complex and multifaceted. Challenges such as insufficient time and resources, institutional resistance, and differing understandings about what decolonisation is, are just a few of the barriers to doing this work (Shain et al., 2023). There is also a tendency to conflate decolonising with the work of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), rather than recognising it as a distinct concept, ethos, and praxis (Doharty et al., 2021; Jivraj, 2020). As a result, forms of coloniality often go unnoticed and unchallenged in our courses and classrooms. It is essential to confront these structures and critically examine how they influence what is taught, how it is taught, and the overall culture of our institutions. As we know, these factors drive wider inequalities, including degree awarding gaps and differing retention rates for marginalised students, as well as the underrepresentation of racialised groups in academic and leadership positions (Arday et al., 2022; Rana et al., 2022).

The University of Westminster's aspirations for decolonising the curriculum are reflected in initiatives such as our Education Strategy 2023-2029, the Student Partnership Framework (2022) and the Black Lives Matter Commitment Plan (2020). These documents lay out the framework for integrating equitable and socially-responsible principles across the institution. However, turning these aspirations into lasting practice takes more than just policy commitments. It demands that decolonial work becomes an integral part of how we teach, learn, and function as an academic community.

Against this complex and evolving backdrop, we carried out a survey-based study to gain insight into how staff and students perceive decolonial work within the university, and how they envision the future of decolonial initiatives at Westminster. Our aim was to explore participants' perspectives on their practices, ethics and impact, and to identify ways in which we can collectively work towards a more socially-just university.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The 'Unpacking the Curriculum' study was developed as a part of the *Pedagogies for Social Justice Project* (PSJ), a student-staff collaboration based at the University of Westminster. The central aims of our collaboration are to interrogate contemporary forms of coloniality in curricula, relationships, and research while centring the voices, knowledges, and experiences of underrepresented students and faculty.

From March to May of 2024, we conducted a university-wide survey engaging all 12 academic schools, the Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation (CETI), and professional services departments.

Our three aims were:

- To gain insight into the perceptions of both students and staff regarding the process of decolonising the curriculum.
- To identify individuals or groups perceived as key agents for driving change within the university, as well as to pinpoint areas where opportunities for change may be present.
- To explore students' and staff dreams and aspirations for decolonial initiatives within the university community.

The survey was open to individuals in any of the following roles at Westminster: students, academic staff (including PVTLs), and professional services staff. It included both closed and open-ended questions. We received a total of 365 responses.

While the primary focus of this report is to share the quantitative data, we also incorporate and reference qualitative data to provide a deeper understanding of the nuances and perspectives expressed by participants. The findings in this report as well as the recommendations contribute to the ongoing conversation around decolonising higher education, highlighting both the progress made and the work still to be done.

Project information and contacts

- Our research and the survey received ethical approval from the University of Westminster (ETH2324-1824)
- The full questionnaire can be found at: https://doi.org/10.34737/wz76v
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- More information about the project, including publications, resources, and events can be found on our website: https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/psj/
- Follow the project on BlueSky: https://bsky.app/profile/psjproject.bsky.social
- Email: psj@westminster.ac.uk

FINDINGS

The findings from the survey are organised into three sections. **Engagement with decolonial work** examines participants' involvement with decolonial initiatives and praxis, aspirations for this work, and their views on key change agents. **Coloniality within and beyond the curriculum** explores how colonial structures shape the university, reinforcing a Eurocentric curriculum and the impact on students and staff. **Aspirations for change at Westminster** highlights key aspects of the university that students and staff see as priorities for decolonising.

Key Findings:

1   Most students and staff are concerned about decolonising the university and see it as important for the future of the community at Westminster.

- 72% of participants said that decolonising the university is something they are concerned about.
- 84% of participants deemed it very important or somewhat important that decolonial initiatives are shaping the future of the educational community at Westminster.
- 81.6% of academic staff participants have engaged in discussions or actions related to decolonisation, in comparison to only 31.9% of student participants and 45.5% of professional services staff participants.

2   Students and staff have different levels of understanding and engagement with decolonial work and this highlights the need for student-staff partnerships and dedicated time and resources to sustain curricular change.

- Students believe both groups are contributing to curriculum change, while academic staff do not always recognise students' efforts.
- Over half of student participants (58.6%) identified students as the primary agents of change.
- 90.4% of staff believed that faculty were leading these efforts.
- In qualitative data participants highlighted that student-staff partnerships and co-creation are essential for sustainable change.
- Participants also emphasised that dedicated time and resources are crucial for decolonial work to continue, with barriers arising when the university does not provide the necessary support.

3   **Students and staff have differing views on how colonialism and non-Western perspectives are acknowledged in the curriculum.**

- o 38.8% of students felt their courses do not address the impact of colonialism on contemporary social structures.
- o 43.4% of students identified biases and gaps that reinforce colonial narratives.
- o 78.4% of academic staff felt their curricula acknowledges non-Western perspectives, while only 36.7% of students agree.

4   **Students and staff believe decolonising the curriculum requires not only changing learning materials but strengthening student-staff relationships and providing sufficient resources.**

- o Participants identified lectures (71.3%) and seminars (66%) as key areas that would benefit from decolonial approaches, but also emphasised that changing materials alone is not enough.
- o The qualitative data revealed that participants view student-staff relationships as crucial for meaningful decolonial change, with many highlighting the importance of fostering partnership work and engagement with external stakeholders and local communities.

5   **Most participants believe that university management have responsibility for decolonising efforts but fewer feel they are actively making the changes needed.**

- o 77% of participants believe university management should lead decolonisation efforts
- o Only 31% of participants think management are actively making changes.

ENGAGEMENT IN DECOLONIAL WORK

To understand participants' perceptions of decolonising the curriculum, we first needed to assess how important decolonial work was to them. To explore this, we asked questions about its importance now and in the future, as well as their own involvement. This helped us see whether they saw it as a priority and how engaged they were in these efforts.
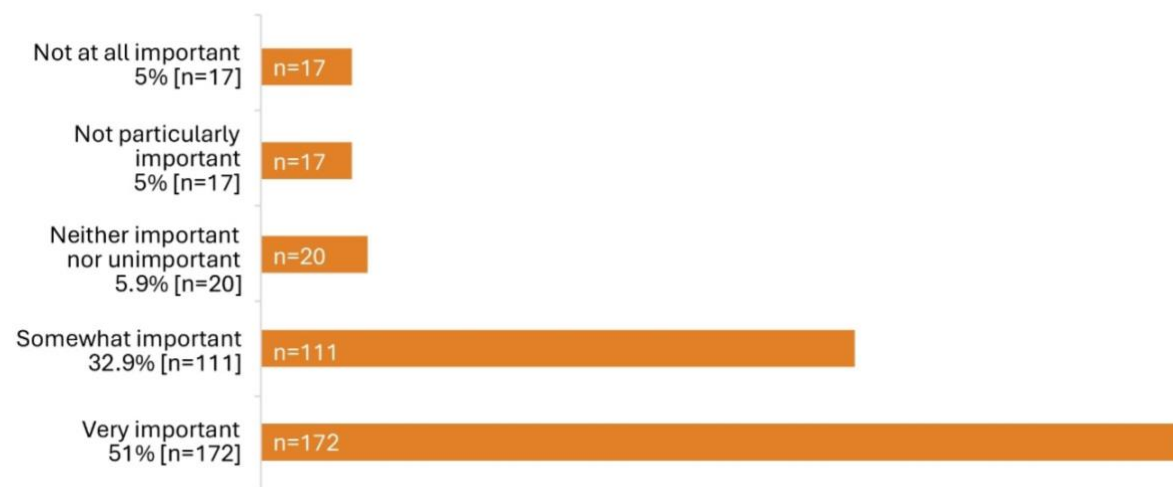
Figure 1: Is decolonising the university something that you are concerned about? [n=344]

Category	Count
No, not at all — 4.7% [n=16]	n=16
No, not very much — 11% [n=38]	n=38
I am not sure — 11.6% [n=40]	n=40
Yes, a little — 34.3% [n=118]	n=118
Yes, a great deal — 38.4% [n=132]	n=132

Figure 2: How important is it to you that the university community is engaged in decolonial scholarship and activism? [n=341]

| Category	Count
Not at all important — 5% [n=17]	n=17
Not particularly important — 4.4% [n=15]	n=15
Neither important nor unimportant — 7% [n=24]	n=24
Somewhat important — 29% [n=99]	n=99
Very important — 54.5% [n=186]	n=186

Figure 3: Is it important to you that decolonial initiatives are actively shaping the future of the educational community at Westminster? [n=337]

We found that decolonial work was overwhelmingly important with 72.7% (n=250) of participants viewing decolonising the university as something which they are concerned about [fig 1]. In addition, over half of participants (54.5%, n=186) considered engaging with decolonial scholarship and activism very important, with 29% (n=99) deeming it somewhat important [fig 2]. Furthermore, when asked about the significance of decolonial initiatives for shaping the future of the academic community at Westminster [fig 3], 84% (n=283) of participants found it to be very important (51%, n=172) or somewhat important (32.9%, n=111).

We also sought to assess engagement levels among students and staff. The most significant finding here was the stark gap in involvement between students and academic staff in decolonial discussions or actions, with 81.6% (n=102) of academic staff engaging, compared to only 42% (n=114) of students and 45.5% (n=12) of professional services staff [fig 4].

Figure 4: Have you engaged in discussions or actions related to decolonisation at Westminster? [n=344]
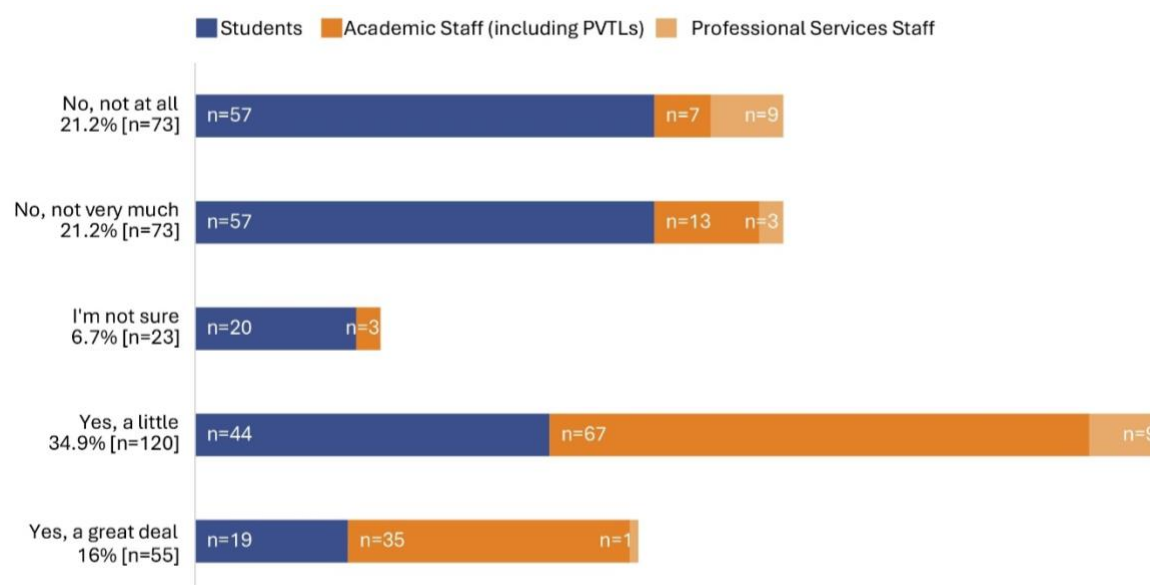
These data raise questions about the extent to which decolonial work is being integrated into the wider university community, particularly with students. They suggest that academic staff are driving these efforts. However, the limited engagement from students and professional services staff may point to a lack of opportunities for collaboration and inclusion in the process. Student participants were also the most likely to be unsure whether they have contributed to discussions or actions related to decolonising the university (10.2%, n=20). This suggests confusion around what decolonisation entails, potentially indicating a lack of clarity or understanding about the variety of aims and processes of decolonising at the university.

Change agents

We wanted to understand how participants conceptualised change and who they believed to be driving it. To do this, we asked participants who they believed was leading curricular changes and who was actively implementing them in practice. This allowed us to understand whether they saw change as being driven by university management, students, or staff. It also highlighted which efforts were recognised in shaping change and where there might be gaps in recognition.

Figure 5: Who do you think is responsible for bringing about change in the curriculum? Please choose all that apply.
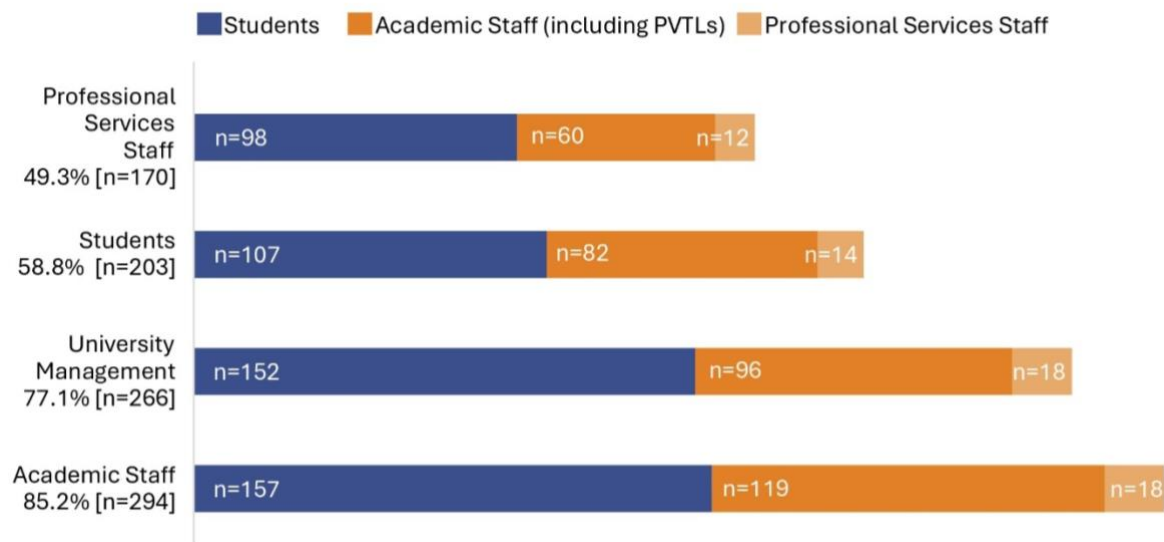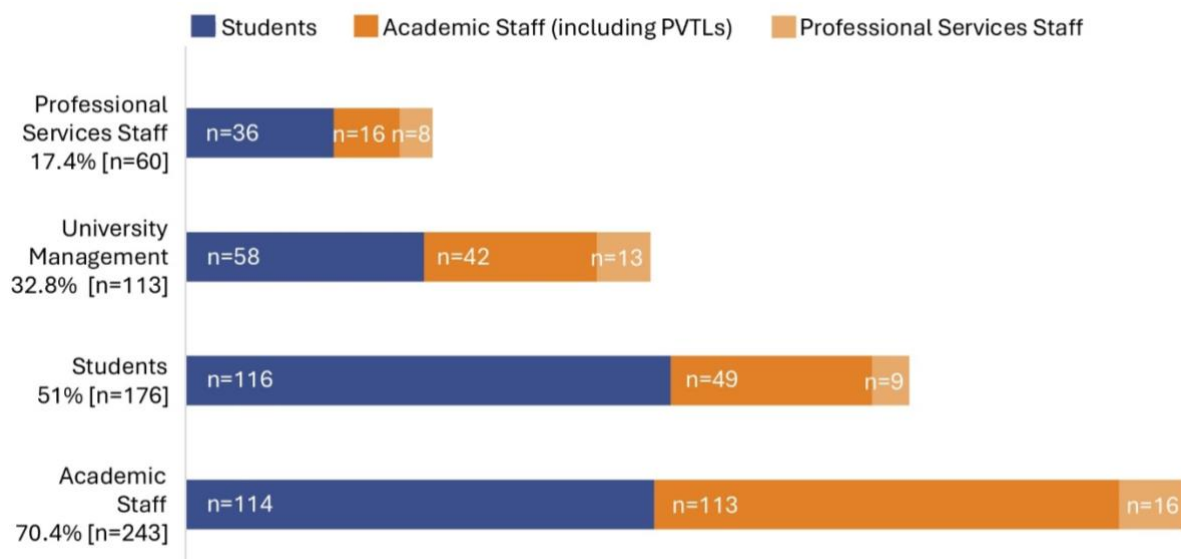
Legend: Students | Academic Staff (including PVTLs) | Professional Services Staff

- Professional Services Staff 49.3% [n=170]: n=98 | n=60 | n=12
- Students 58.8% [n=203]: n=107 | n=82 | n=14
- University Management 77.1% [n=266]: n=152 | n=96 | n=18
- Academic Staff 85.2% [n=294]: n=157 | n=119 | n=18

Figure 6: Who do you think is actively making changes in the curriculum? Please choose all that apply.

Legend: Students | Academic Staff (including PVTLs) | Professional Services Staff

- Professional Services Staff 17.4% [n=60]: n=36 | n=16 | n=8
- University Management 32.8% [n=113]: n=58 | n=42 | n=13
- Students 51% [n=176]: n=116 | n=49 | n=9
- Academic Staff 70.4% [n=243]: n=114 | n=113 | n=16

85.2% (n=294) of participants identified academic staff as being most responsible for making changes to the curriculum, followed by university management at 77.1% (n=266) [fig 5]. However, despite broad agreement that academic staff are actively making changes (70.4% (n=243) only 32.8% (n=113) believed this to be the case for university management [fig 6]. This gap highlights the perception that while academic staff are leading efforts, university management may not have fully embraced or understood the importance of decolonisation. This suggests that, despite efforts at the academic level, the broader institutional support necessary for lasting change could be strengthened.

As university management hold significant power in terms of implementing university-wide strategies and making decisions about the curriculum, their perceived lack of engagement is seen as a significant barrier to decolonising. At the same time, top-down managerial cultures in higher education institutions can also contribute to the reproduction of hierarchies, perpetuating the very structures decolonial initiatives seek to interrupt and change.

"The university management should show they care about the subject at hand, and most importantly understand why change is needed." [Professional Services]

"We have a very top-down managerial culture at Westminster. When we have an unelected, top-down managerial team who seem to be accountable to no one [...] then what does decolonisation look like?" [Academic Staff]

"Some academic staff [are actively making changes], not all. I don't think management has quite got the memo." [Academic Staff]

"Making some radical decisions - in hiring processes, in senior management, in what is funded etc - which make actual changes to what the staff body of the University looks like." [Academic Staff]

"It is important for University management to be deliberate in bringing decolonial texts in the syllabus across courses. We urgently need to learn from new approaches that free us from coloniality in HE." [Academic Staff]

The qualitative data also reveal that participants see students and academic staff as the primary drivers of curricular change. This suggests that decolonial efforts are perceived as happening where the impact of coloniality is most directly felt – within teaching and learning spaces. However, the data imply that students and staff have different understandings of what constitutes meaningful change and who is responsible for enacting it. While over half of student participants (58.6%, n=116) identified students as the primary agents of change, an overwhelming majority of academic staff (90.4%, n=113) believed that faculty were leading these efforts [fig 6]. This suggests that students and staff may not fully recognise each other's contributions to decolonial work, pointing to a possible lack of collaboration in their efforts. Ultimately, this disconnect highlights the need for more co-creative approaches to decolonial change, ensuring that students and staff work together as well as in parallel.

Collaboration and co-creation

Collaboration emerged as a key aspiration for participants in decolonising the curriculum and as crucial to more engagement in decolonial work across the university. It was generally understood by participants as a tool for bridging the gap between students and staff, as well as tackling inequalities at all levels in the university.

The data further suggest that the disconnect between students and academic staff may stem from top-down approaches to learning and teaching which separate students and staff in their learning and working practices. This highlights the need for greater efforts to foster relationships and develop collective approaches to better understand each other's dreams and aspirations for the curriculum.

"[The most promising possibilities lay in] a clearer strategy and approach from management, which implements a framework for co-creation between academic staff and students and stakeholders." [Academic Staff]

"We can't be having conversations about decolonisation only on an academic level and without engaging and actively participating in decolonisation practices. In addition, very little support has been offered to students directly impacted by colonisation." [Undergraduate Student]

"Developing new pedagogies, having more time to engage in deeper thinking and work to build less hierarchical and more collaborative relationships." [Academic Staff]

"I would suggest a joined- up approach to decolonisation, not just of the curriculum but of the university." [Academic Staff]

"Campaign to end senior leadership and instead build a collaborative and elected revolving team that is representative of staff and student body." [Academic Staff]

"Staff and student partnership to co-design the curriculum." [Undergraduate Student]

Importantly, several participants pointed out the risk of decolonial work being reduced to performative measures or co-opted into superficial 'tick-box' initiatives within broader Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies and strategies. This suggests concerns that decolonial efforts may be diluted and seen to be prioritising institutional optics over meaningful structural change. Ultimately, changing this will require sustained investment, transparent accountability mechanisms, and the creation of spaces where students and staff can collaboratively shape and lead change.

"I am concerned about decolonisation being co-opted by the university [...] and becoming yet another set of metrics that we have to achieve. Without sufficient resources being allocated to this work it is difficult to see how real, sustainable change is going to be possible." [Academic Staff]

"As a PhD student, there is little information within the documents and training we're given about what we can do to decolonise our research. There are students who are working on decolonial topics, but no support given by the graduate school in undertaking this work that isn't just performative." [Postgraduate Research Student]

"The School has taken some steps towards decolonising a few aspects of the curriculum, e.g. through the leadership of the EDI leads. But it doesn't seem joined up across course teams or different areas of the School. {...} The discussion seems to have fallen off now, and I feel the boundaries are more blurred with general areas, such as implementing equality, inclusivity and diversity as well." [Academic Staff]

"Sometimes I feel there is more effort in our uni recording evidence of our performing decolonisation rather than investing more time in understanding the deeper and more complex machinations of how colonialization is present in existing systems of education. I would like to see more visibility of projects (co-created by students) with decolonisation at the core." [Academic Staff]

COLONIALITY WITHIN AND BEYOND THE CURRICULUM

In addition to exploring our participants' engagement with decolonial work in the university, we also wanted to understand their perceptions of coloniality in their course curricula. Specifically, we asked whether their course curriculum acknowledges the impact of colonialism on contemporary social structures and power dynamics. This helped us to identify gaps in the curriculum and understand how decolonial ideas were included or overlooked in the learning process.

The data show that 51% (n=173) of participants believed their curriculum acknowledged the impact of colonialism to some extent or a great deal, while 30% (n=102) felt it did so only minimally or not at all. Academic staff were significantly more likely to think that the curriculum acknowledges colonialism than any other participant group (71%, n=88). In contrast, 38.8% (n=76) of students stated it was either minimally addressed or not addressed at all. The disparity between academic staff and student perceptions suggests that academic staff may overestimate how sufficiently colonialism is covered in the curriculum. There may also be a disconnect between what is taught and what students experience, highlighting the importance of aligning teaching practices with student needs and perspectives. Mitigating this issue could involve providing academic staff with additional training and support to effectively integrate decolonial perspectives into the curriculum. However, this should be complemented with actions that enhance communication and collaboration between students and staff such as in curriculum co-design, to ensure both groups are unified on how social issues are addressed within the curriculum.

Figure 7: Does the curriculum on your course(s) acknowledge the impact of colonialism on contemporary social structures and power dynamics? [n=339]
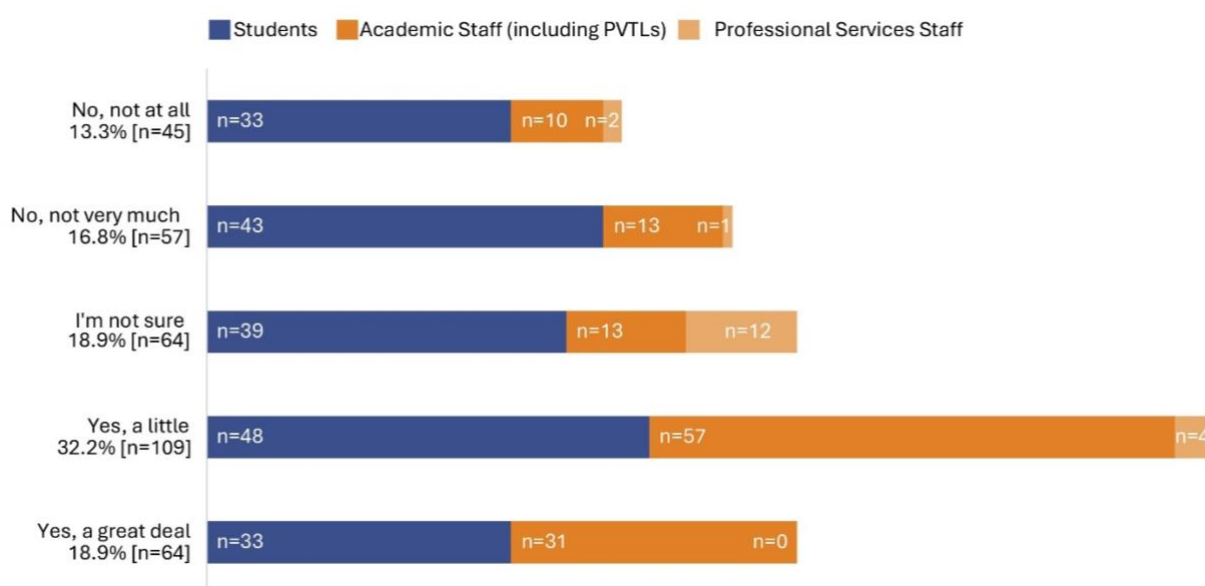
Bias in the curriculum

We also wanted to delve deeper into the specifics of the curriculum, examining whether participants felt that it was diverse in perspectives and or reinforcing of certain bias. This included asking participants how well the curriculum acknowledges and engages with non-Western perspectives [fig 8], and whether they believed there were biases or gaps that reinforce colonial narratives or cultural stereotypes [fig 9].

59.4% (n=202) of participants believed that their course(s) acknowledged the contributions of non-Western perspectives a great deal or a little, in comparison to 27.6% (n=94) which stated that it was minimal or not at all [fig 8]. While these data are initially favourable, when we look closer at the responses, a significant disparity emerges. While academic staff participants were the most likely to think that their curriculum did this a great deal or a little bit (78.4%, n=98), student participants were the mostly likely to think that their curriculum did not address this very much or not at all (36.7%, n = 72).

Figure 8: Does the curriculum on your course(s) address the contributions and perspectives of non-Western cultures and histories? [n=340]
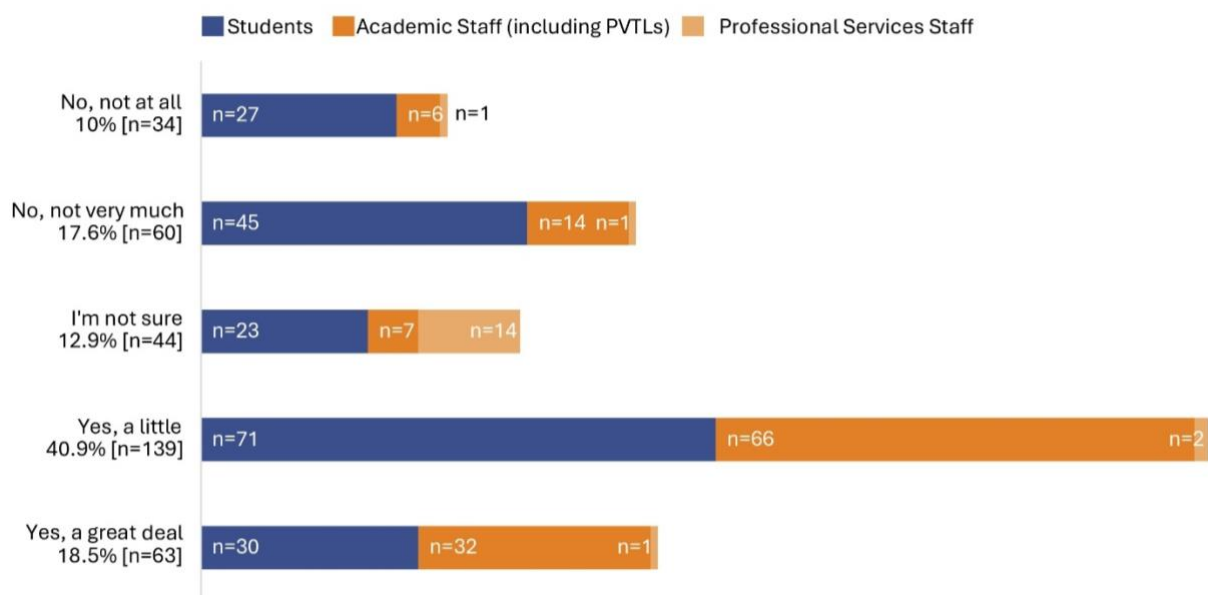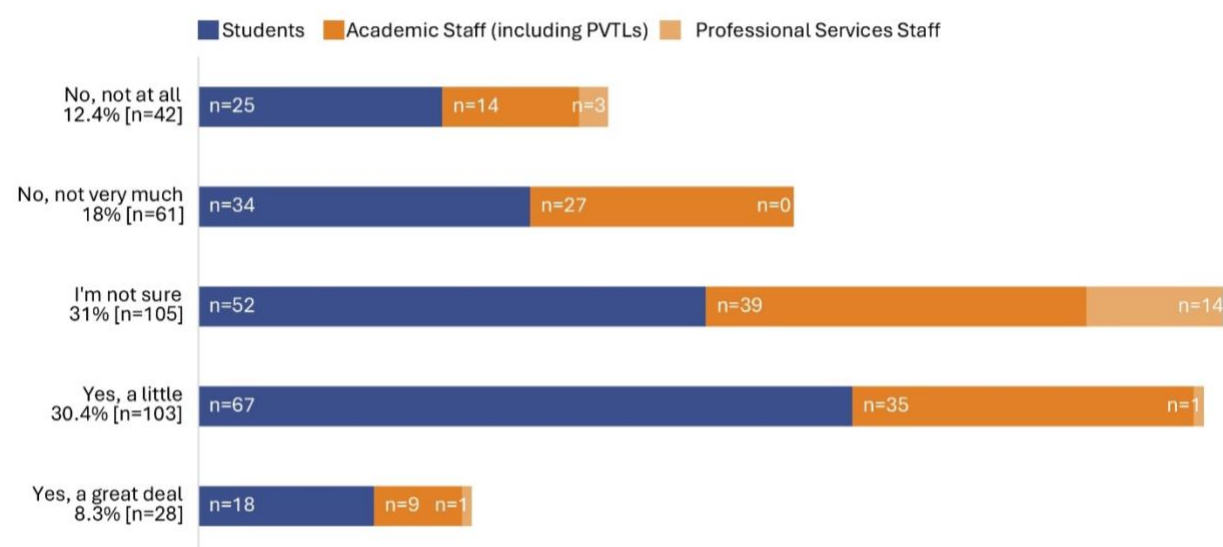
Figure 9: Are there biases or gaps in the curriculum on your course(s) that reinforce colonial narratives or cultural stereotypes? [n=339]

Likewise, student participants were more likely to identify biases or gaps in their curriculum at 43.4% (n=85). This emphasises the need for academic staff to critically reflect on their own biases in shaping the curriculum, as these biases appear to have a more significant impact on students' learning experiences than staff may fully recognise. Qualitative responses to these questions indicated bias in the curriculum through several factors such as racial bias, lack of diversity in staff and representation, as well as openness towards changing bias and integrating diversity through decolonising the curriculum. These data are explored thematically below.

Racial Bias

Participants emphasise that there are barriers at different levels within the university. They suggest that racial bias can be found within the culture and systems of the institution as well as through direct resistance to decolonial work.

Participants also highlighted systemic racism as a significant barrier impacting both students' and staff members' experiences at the university. This suggests that more efforts need to be made towards establishing anti-racist rhetoric and practices which recognise and challenge the perpetuation of racial bias.

"I think that there may be barriers in some respects (physical, the space we work, and metaphorical, the invisible barriers that also include systemic racism of the institute itself and the persistent blinkers to avoid seeing this)." [Academic Staff]

"Doing a PhD about the challenges that comes with Black lived experiences really highlighted to me that the same things I found in my research also still applied to me." [Postgraduate Research Student]

"We need to learn about students' experiences but I feel that students of colour don't feel comfortable discussing it with white Staff." [Academic Staff]

"As somebody that has worked continually to promote EDI and decolonial thinking at Westminster I can say that at every level I have met with suspicion, outright abuse, microaggressions and resistance, my experience is that a lot of people just do not know what the term means or how it might work or be implemented. This is about re-educating people because we have all been educated under a colonial system." [Academic Staff]

Openness

The qualitative data also highlights the need for more efforts to facilitate open discussions on race and coloniality in the curriculum. Participants recommended incorporating these discussions through course content, teaching activities, and institutional strategies to help dismantle the stigma surrounding racism within the university.

Participants also suggested that these conversations could take place in both traditional teaching spaces and through alternative approaches. This would challenge the dominance of classroom-based knowledge-sharing and create new spaces and opportunities for learning together from diverse perspectives.

"It'll change perspectives of race etc. for certain people (both students and academic staff) - Encourages an open mindset." [Undergraduate Student]

"This could be through case studies and sharing our positionality and understanding more about intersectionality in our classrooms, challenging our own beliefs and biases." [Academic Staff]

"Address racialisation and the coloniality of human rights especially at times when these topics are the most taboo, and not just when it is convenient and yield benefit." [Postgraduate Research Student]

"I feel that staff are also biased and not prepared to refresh their teaching materials. We all need to be open-minded for this decolonisation approach to work and benefit everyone at the University." [Academic Staff]

"Decolonial book club where participants read and discuss literature written by authors from marginalised communities, covering topics such as colonialism, apartheid, genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, and social justice. This could be a space for critical dialogue and collective learning, empowering participants to challenge dominant narratives and expand their perspectives" [Academic Staff]

"That students feel comfortable sharing their lived experience, that more perspectives (other than Euro-western centric) become integrated into learning and teaching materials, that we're able to discuss racism openly." [Academic Staff]

Lack of diversity and representation

Survey responses highlighted a perceived connection between bias in the curriculum and the lack of diversity among academic staff. Many participants noted that a lack of diversity can influence the types of knowledge disseminated in classrooms. This is because staff bias can contribute to the prioritisation of perspectives rooted in Eurocentric or Western frameworks, overlooking alternative forms of knowledge. This suggests that a lack of diversity among academic staff narrows the curriculum and reinforces existing power structures, marginalising voices and perspectives essential for a decolonised education.

"I feel as a black woman, we aren't taught about black women enough unless it's based on struggle/racism and figures who have helped contribute to society in different avenues e.g., black women in STEM." [Undergraduate Student]

"There should be more women of colour and general diversity within cohort of lecturers and students to provide different perspectives and outlooks." [Postgraduate Taught Student]

"I would like to see more people of colour and different ethnic background in my classes because I feel that it is important for everyone to get equal opportunities and for people who are of colour and different ethnicities to feel like they belong." [Postgraduate Taught Student]

"The staffing profile in some schools continues to be all or nearly all white. All white panels for PhD interviews, staff recruitment, all white EDI groups, White staff teaching about Black histories, presents & futures…" [Academic Staff]

"I think a massive problem is the under-representation of other ethnicities (other than [white]) among the teaching staff in the School of Humanities. There is also little (if any) support for [white] lecturers who are teaching on courses related to the experience of other ethnic groups." [Academic Staff]

ASPIRATIONS FOR CHANGE AT WESTMINSTER

By centring aspirations in our research, we wanted to understand the futures that students and staff envision for decolonising the curriculum. Our aim was not only to explore their hopes for decolonial transformation but to critically examine how they perceive existing decolonising initiatives, in particular what feels meaningful, what is lacking, and what is needed to drive lasting change. To do this, we asked participants to identify specific parts of the curriculum where decolonial approaches would be most impactful.

Figure 10,11 and 12 shows that 64.6% (n=128) of student participants and (81.6%, n=102) of academic staff identified lectures and lecture materials as a key area that could benefit from decolonial approaches. This was followed by seminar and seminar materials (students: 59.1%, n=117; academic staff: 76%, n=95), reading lists (students: 52.5%, n=104; academic staff: 80.8%, n=101).

Figure 10: Which areas of the curriculum would benefit most from decolonial approaches? Choose all that apply. (Student responses)
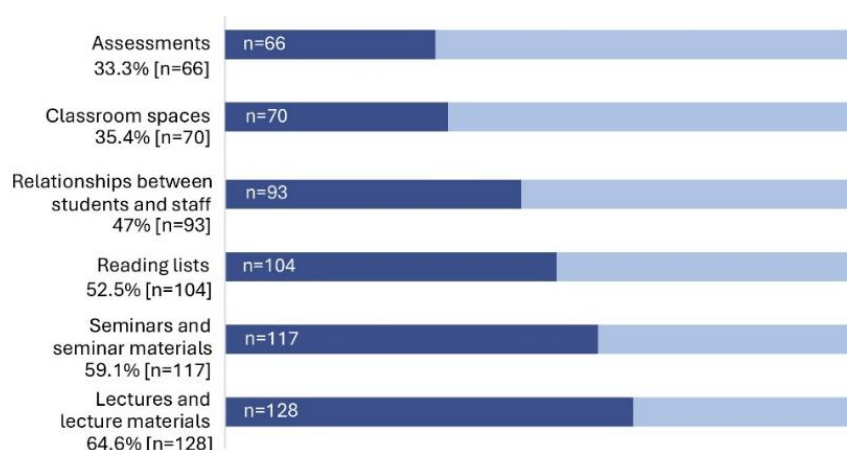

Figure 11: Which areas of the curriculum would benefit most from decolonial approaches? Choose all that apply. (Academic Staff responses)
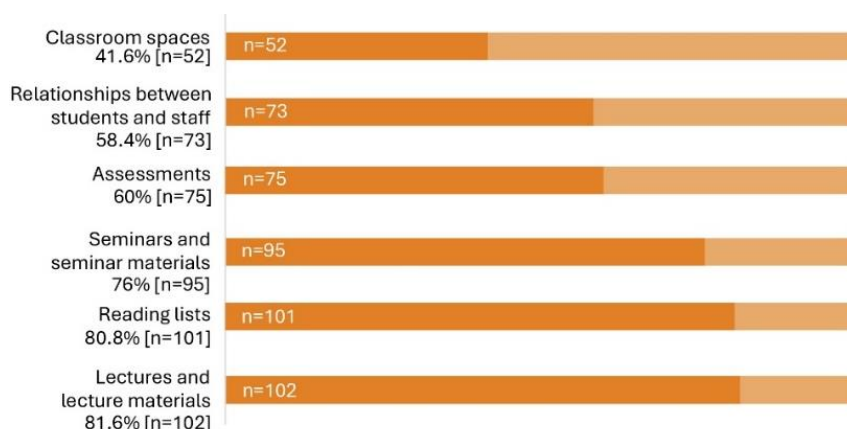
Area	Percentage
Classroom spaces	45.5% [n=10]
Assessments	54.5% [n=12]
Seminars and seminar materials	63.6% [n=14]
Reading lists	68.2% [n=15]
Relationships between students and staff	72.7% [n=16]
Lectures and lecture materials	72.7% [n=16]

The quantitative data also revealed that only 47% (n=93) of student participants and 58.4% (n=73) of academic staff believed that student-staff relationships would benefit most from decolonial approaches. While it appears that student-staff relationships ranked lower in the multiple-choice responses, the qualitative responses reveal a more nuanced picture. In open-ended answers, several participants emphasised that decolonisation is not just about changing content but also about critically examining student-staff dynamics, facilitating partnership work, and evaluating our relationships with external stakeholders and local communities. Many staff participants expressed a strong commitment to decolonial work but noted that structural pressures such as high workloads and a lack of institutional support often hinder their ability to fully engage in aspects such as relationship-building with students. This contrast suggests that while material changes like diversifying reading lists, lectures, and seminar content are seen as more tangible and straightforward means of addressing coloniality within the curriculum, participants deeply recognise the need for a deeper, more systemic shift in the way relationships are structured in the university.

"The understanding of the different needs of students/staff coming from the variety of backgrounds." [Professional Services Staff]

"There needs to be more of a conversation about the role of professional services in decolonising the university including thinking about our international partners." [Professional Services Staff]

"Really shifting the ideas of what academic learning and research is about, and who it is for [...] ensuring professional services staff are empowered and supported." [Postgraduate Research Student]

"There should be a policy and a strategy, there should be events and changes in teaching and learning materials that will include various perspectives." [Postgraduate Research Student]

"I think it is 'easy' to add new case studies and reading materials which attempt to bring in new perspectives. It's much harder to address our teaching, learning and assessment styles but this might be where change could be most impactful." [Academic Staff]

"I think more work needs to be done around the social relationships and practices, as well as material/structural conditions through which coloniality is reproduced." [Academic Staff]

"There needs to be strategies and curricula guidance/policies that can be used to help develop curricula and against which curricula can be mapped against. Involve internal and external stakeholders / local communities." [Academic Staff]

"More spaces and opportunities to create those relationships and take part in further partnership projects. I know that some colleagues may like to take part in some further partnerships, but they do not even appear to have enough time to undertake all their teaching as well as their research." [Academic Staff]

DEMOGRAPHICS

To enhance our understanding of the trends across different identity groups, we collected demographic data to examine how factors such as ethnicity, gender, age, course, and level of study might relate to participants' views on decolonising the curriculum.

Ethnicity

Participants' ethnic identities revealed stark differences between student and staff participants. While staff participants were overwhelmingly white, students came from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. We categorised ethnicity in our survey in accordance with the Higher Education Statistics Agency practices for ethnicity data collection.
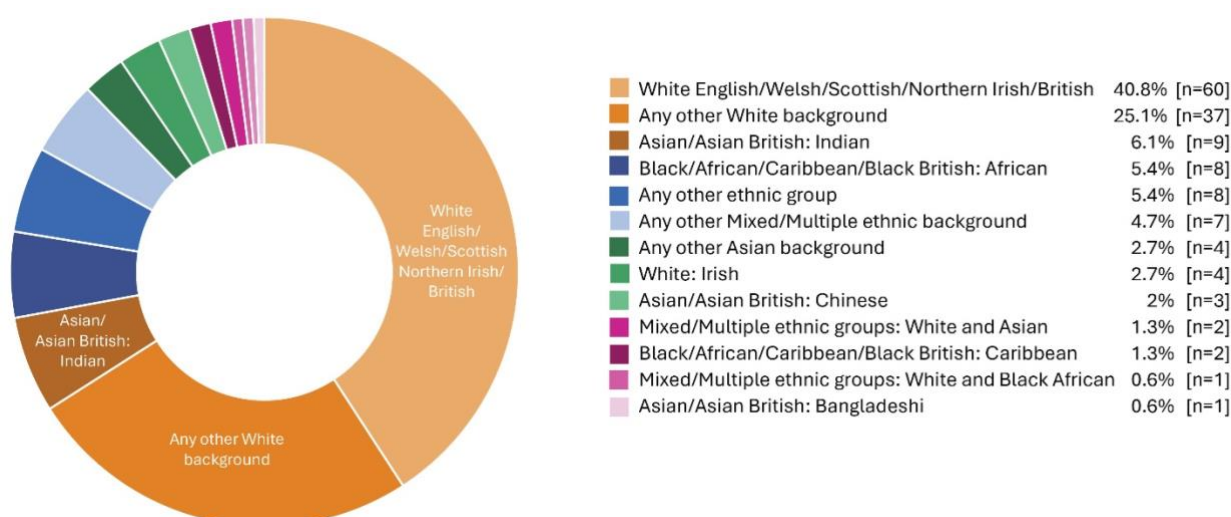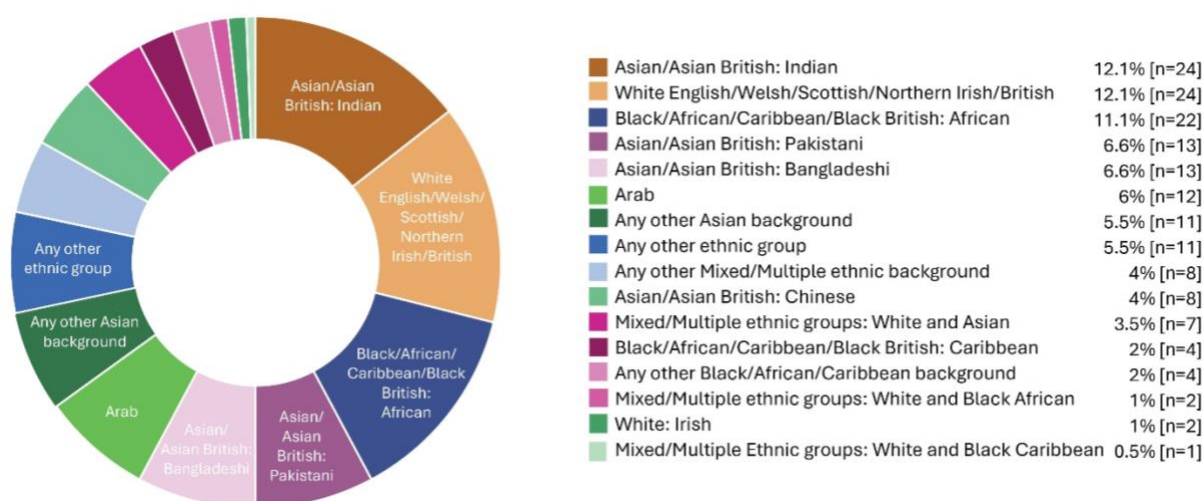
Figure 13: Staff responses [n=146]

White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	40.8% [n=60]
Any other White background	25.1% [n=37]
Asian/Asian British: Indian	6.1% [n=9]
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African	5.4% [n=8]
Any other ethnic group	5.4% [n=8]
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	4.7% [n=7]
Any other Asian background	2.7% [n=4]
White: Irish	2.7% [n=4]
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	2% [n=3]
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	1.3% [n=2]
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean	1.3% [n=2]
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	0.6% [n=1]
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	0.6% [n=1]

Figure 14: Student responses [n=166]

Asian/Asian British: Indian	12.1% [n=24]
White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	12.1% [n=24]
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African	11.1% [n=22]
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	6.6% [n=13]
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	6.6% [n=13]
Arab	6% [n=12]
Any other Asian background	5.5% [n=11]
Any other ethnic group	5.5% [n=11]
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	4% [n=8]
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	4% [n=8]
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	3.5% [n=7]
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean	2% [n=4]
Any other Black/African/Caribbean background	2% [n=4]
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	1% [n=2]
White: Irish	1% [n=2]
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	0.5% [n=1]

Gender

The majority of participants identified as a woman (59.5%, n=203). This was followed by a man (36.1%, n=123), questioning or unsure (1.5%, n=5), non-binary (1.2%, n=4), a different gender (1.2%, n=4), and agender (0.6%, n=2).

Figure 15: How do you understand your gender? [n=341]
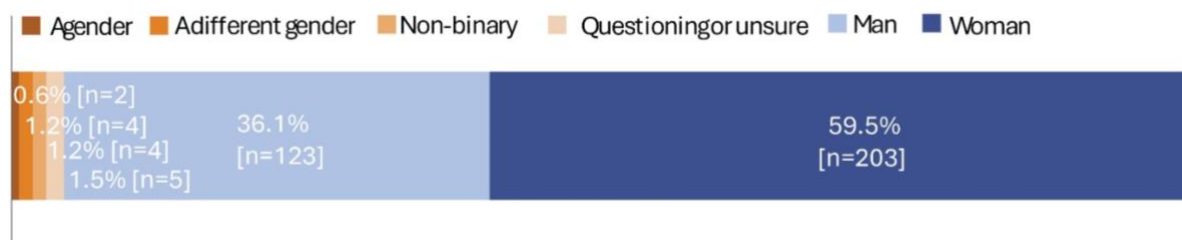
Age

Participants came from a range of different ages. The predominant age group was 30 years old and older (47.3%, n=162), followed by 20 years and under (21.7%, n=74), 21-24 years (20.2%, n=69) and 25-29 years (11.8%, n=38).

As shown in Figure 16, 33% (n=65) of student participants were 21-24 years, and 20 years and under (37.6%, n=74). Most staff participants were 30 years and older (90.4%, n=132).

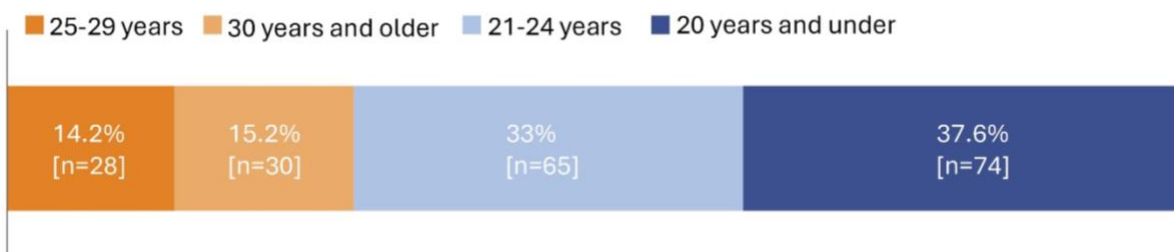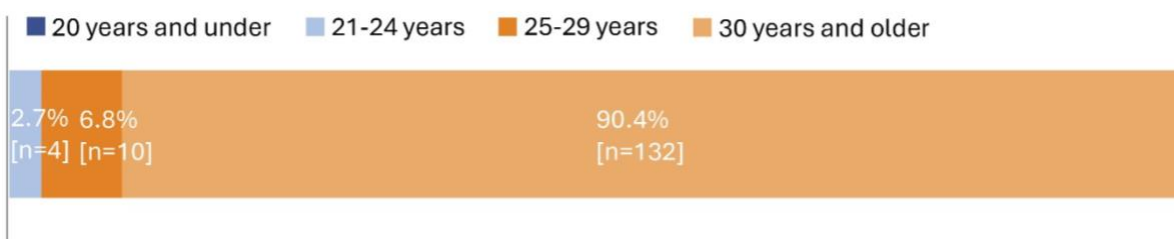*Figure 16: What is your age? Student responses [n=197]*

Figure 17: What is your age? Staff responses (including PVTLs & Professional Services) [n=146]

Role at the university

Student participants account for over half of the survey participants. While all groups answered the quantitative questions, staff were more likely to engage with the qualitative ones. This suggests that staff may have more experiences relating to decolonising the curriculum, but these perspectives could be further explored to better understand the nuances of their views. It is also necessary to conduct further qualitative research with students using different methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their perspectives.

Figure 18: What is your role at Westminster? [n=345]
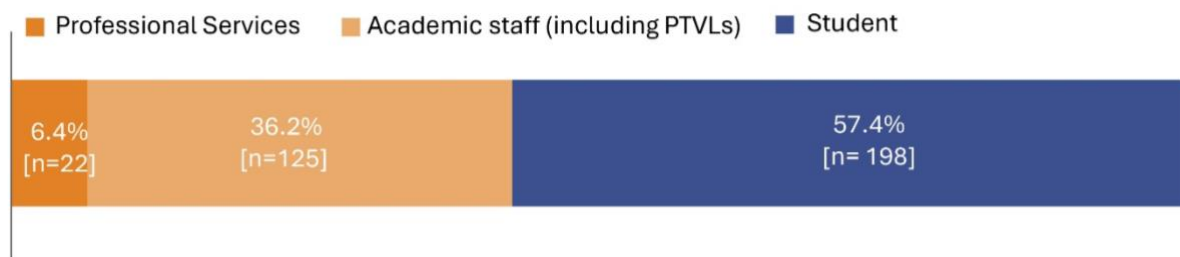
Study and teaching discipline
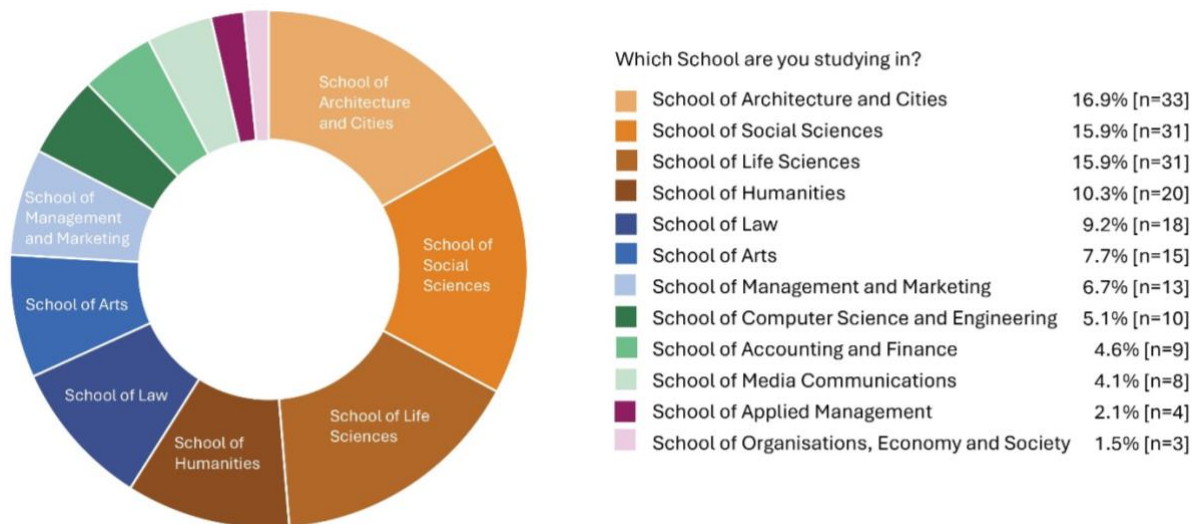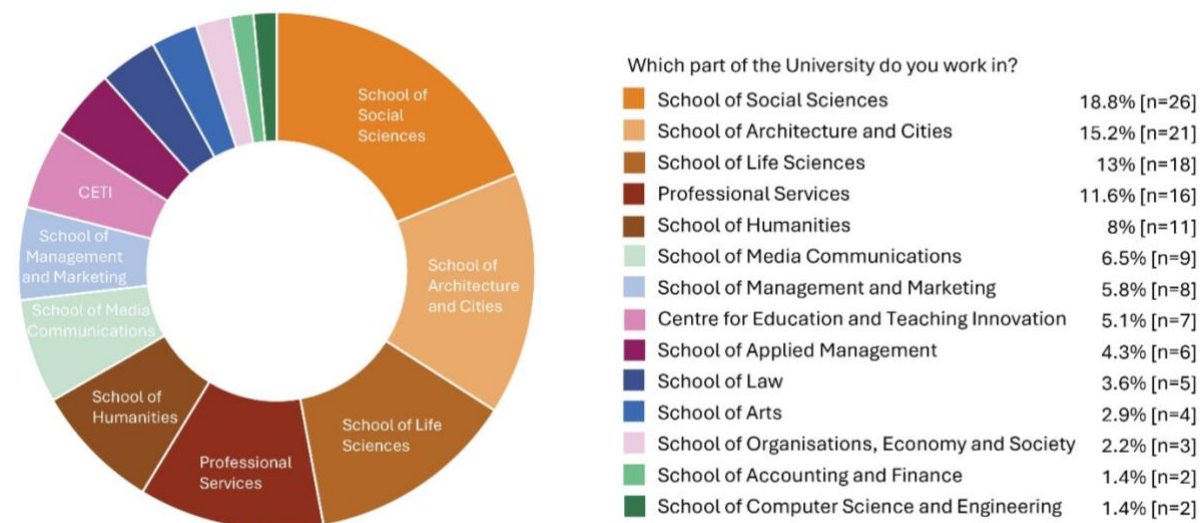
Figure 19: Student responses [n=195]

Which School are you studying in?

School	
School of Architecture and Cities	16.9% [n=33]
School of Social Sciences	15.9% [n=31]
School of Life Sciences	15.9% [n=31]
School of Humanities	10.3% [n=20]
School of Law	9.2% [n=18]
School of Arts	7.7% [n=15]
School of Management and Marketing	6.7% [n=13]
School of Computer Science and Engineering	5.1% [n=10]
School of Accounting and Finance	4.6% [n=9]
School of Media Communications	4.1% [n=8]
School of Applied Management	2.1% [n=4]
School of Organisations, Economy and Society	1.5% [n=3]

Which part of the University do you work in?

School of Social Sciences	18.8% [n=26]
School of Architecture and Cities	15.2% [n=21]
School of Life Sciences	13% [n=18]
Professional Services	11.6% [n=16]
School of Humanities	8% [n=11]
School of Media Communications	6.5% [n=9]
School of Management and Marketing	5.8% [n=8]
Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation	5.1% [n=7]
School of Applied Management	4.3% [n=6]
School of Law	3.6% [n=5]
School of Arts	2.9% [n=4]
School of Organisations, Economy and Society	2.2% [n=3]
School of Accounting and Finance	1.4% [n=2]
School of Computer Science and Engineering	1.4% [n=2]

The data demonstrate that both student and staff participants represent a variety of disciplines. Figure 19 displays that students were mostly from the School of Architecture and Cities (16.9%), Social Sciences (15.9%, n=31), Life Sciences (15.9%, n=31) and Humanities (10.3%, n=20). A similar pattern follows with staff as shown in Figure 20, who were predominantly from the Schools of Social Sciences (18.8%, n=26), Architecture and Cities (15.2%, n=21), Life Sciences (13%, n=18) and Professional Services (11.6%, n=16).

To gain a deeper understanding of the specific challenges and opportunities in decolonising the curriculum, further research needs to be conducted within individual schools. This would allow for a more nuanced exploration of how different disciplines approach decolonising and highlight their specific needs.

Further student data

Student participants come from across different levels of study, a range of fee status and different paths of study. The most predominant student participant group was undergraduate (65.9%, n=130), followed by postgraduate taught (21.3%, n=42), postgraduate research (10.2%, n=20) and foundation year (2.5%, n=5) [fig 21]. 66.3% (n=130) of student participants were home fee-paying students, and 33.7% (n=66) were international fee-paying students [fig 22]. 95.4% (n=188) of student participants were studying full-time while 4.6% (n=9) were studying part-time [fig 23].

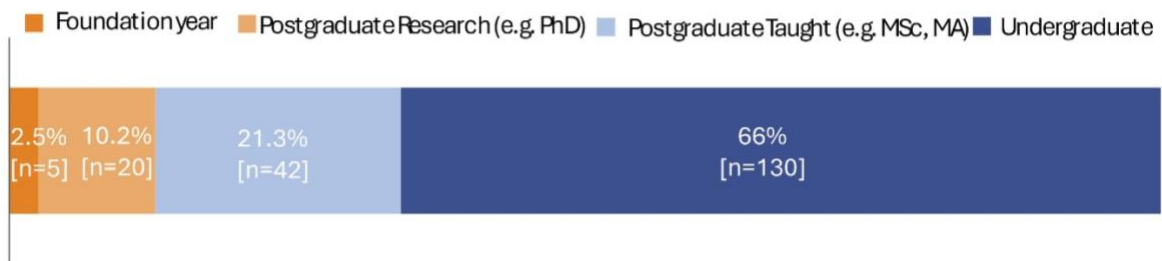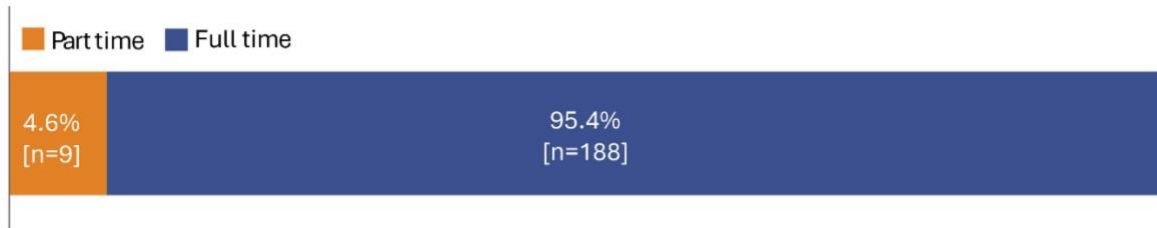*Figure 21: What level are you currently studying at? [n=197]*

Legend: Foundation year · Postgraduate Research (e.g. PhD) · Postgraduate Taught (e.g. MSc, MA) · Undergraduate

| 2.5% [n=5] | 10.2% [n=20] | 21.3% [n=42] | 66% [n=130] |

Figure 22: What is your fee status? [n=196]

Legend: International student · Home student

| 33.7% [n=66] | 66.3% [n=130] |

Figure 23: Are you studying full or part time? [n=197]

Legend: Part time · Full time

| 4.6% [n=9] | 95.4% [n=188] |

RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey findings demonstrate that participants want to be more engaged in decolonial work and want to see involvement from people across all levels at Westminster. They also call for more collaborative work to sustain decolonising initiatives and to involve more people within the university. However, the data also indicate that there are currently structural barriers which prevent meaningful change. These include a lack of time and resources to do decolonial work at the university, as well as the perpetuation of coloniality through factors such as the lack of staff diversity, representation, and bias in the curriculum.

The data suggest that as an educational community, we need to challenge bias and inequalities at both structural and ideological levels as these directly impact our teaching and learning practices. Participants particularly expressed this in the qualitative data, illustrating how practices of coloniality and bias can have significant impacts on student-staff relationships, minoritised students' and staff senses of belonging, and processes of knowledge production. Considering the value that participants place on the university community being engaged in decolonial scholarship and activism, the university must work towards fostering an institutional culture where this work can thrive.

The institution must also consider its own context to address issues related to forms of coloniality in curriculum. Our data revealed that at Westminster we need to look further than simply examining and changing our curriculum, but to integrate action towards decolonising our institution and cultures of coloniality within it. What follow are some areas for action informed by our findings. These are split into four categories: create open spaces for discussion and learning; facilitate co-creation and partnership work; implement policies and strategies; change the culture of the institution.

Create open spaces for discussion and learning

Inside the classroom:
- Foster an atmosphere where colonialism and decolonisation can be discussed openly and without fear of judgement.
- Integrate decolonial perspectives, methods, and pedagogies into teaching materials and class content.
- Practice flipping teaching praxes: making lessons student-centred and support students to become producers of knowledge, redressing epistemic injustice.
- Engage critically with how bias may impact marginalised students' sense of belonging in the classroom, with attention to how this impacts the learning environment and may be harmful to these students.
- Learn to recognise and intervene with microaggressions in the classroom.

Outside the classroom:
- Actively create and support community-building spaces around decolonising within the institution. Survey participants suggested book clubs, workshops, and panel discussions.
- Have dedicated and recognised professional development activities for staff to engage with decolonial pedagogies in a sustained way.

Facilitate co-creation and partnership work

- Allocate appropriate resources to staff and students to engage in sustained decolonial work. This should not be limited to short projects and needs to be in the form of time, training, and funding.
- Hold regular meetings within Schools that are open to students and staff to identify areas which need work within disciplines.
- Fund projects that enable students and staff to co-create and implement decolonial curricula.
- Engage in cross-disciplinary work to understand how decolonial work is practiced in other disciplines.

Implement policies and strategies

- Policy and strategy creation processes should involve minoritised people from across all levels at the university, including students and staff.
- Schools should develop a clear strategy and action plan for decolonising the curriculum that is specific to their School.
- Strategies for decolonising the curriculum should be evaluated regularly to ensure that minoritised student and staff lived experiences are addressed.
- As a university community, we must critically evaluate how we use EDI strategies, being careful not to co-opt decolonisation efforts or reduce them to 'tick box' exercises.

Change the culture of the institution

- Foster a culture in which decolonial knowledge, scholarship, and activism can flourish.
- Create atmospheres and processes for holding ourselves and others accountable for our own complicity and investments in colonial structures.
- Have structures of support in place for students and staff as they work towards change.
- Ensure that the university becomes an accessible space for collaboration and organising with community groups.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Further information about the survey can be found at:
https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/psj/tools/survey/

You can listen the Pedagogies for Social Justice podcast at:
https://open.spotify.com/PSJ

You can view our Social Justice glossary at:
https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/psj/tools/glossary/

We would like to acknowledge the invaluable decolonial and anti-racist work being carried out by other organisations and institutions that are also committed to challenging these issues in higher education. Their efforts continue to inspire and inform our own work, and we encourage readers to explore these resources for further understanding and engagement in the ongoing journey toward transformative, decolonial practices in academia.

Building the Anti-Racist Classroom

Convivial Thinking

Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures

Real Paradigms

University of Alberta – *Citing Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers*

Western Sydney University – *A Manifesto for Student-Staff Partnerships and Equity*

Change agents

We understand change agents as those who promote and support new ways of doing and being in their schools and the wider university and are responsible for bringing about change. They are open to new ideas and educational developments, and use their agency to support, take a critical stance, or even resist educational change in their Schools.

Curriculum

In our study, we refer to the curriculum as the multitude of ways in which learning is structured and experienced in higher education. It encompasses both material resources, such as course content, assessment, and access to educational resources, as well as the relational aspects of teaching such as student-teacher relationships.

Coloniality

Coloniality is the lasting impact of colonialism that still affects culture, work, relationships, and how knowledge is created, even after colonial rule has ended.

Decolonising the curriculum

Decolonising the curriculum constitutes efforts directed at challenging and reshaping the colonial and Euro/Western-centric biases inherent in our educational systems. It involves acknowledging, critiquing, and ultimately dismantling forms of coloniality embedded in the content and delivery of the curriculum, as well as the power dynamics that influence our teaching and learning environments.

Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism, and monocultural ways of thinking in general, treat knowledge as universally true, ignoring where it comes from. This hides the fact that the dominant perspective is not neutral but comes from a specific place and power position.

Pedagogy

How knowledge is taught in educational contexts and the interactions that contribute to the learning process.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

We are six researchers, three staff members and three students, collaborating on a student–staff partnership project as part of the Pedagogies for Social Justice Project at the University of Westminster. Grounded in decolonial practices, our work prioritises co-creation as a relational process that values the contributions of both students and staff. Coming from diverse disciplinary and cultural backgrounds, we sought to move beyond normative research practices by acknowledging our positionalities and privileges as co-researchers. We are:

Kyra Araneta

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University Director of Student Partnership and Principal Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of Westminster. Jennifer works on critical higher education studies and gender studies.

Fatima Maatwk

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Özge Süvari

Early-career researcher and PhD candidate at the University of Westminster. Özge works on landscape and urban studies, environmental humanities, and cartography.

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