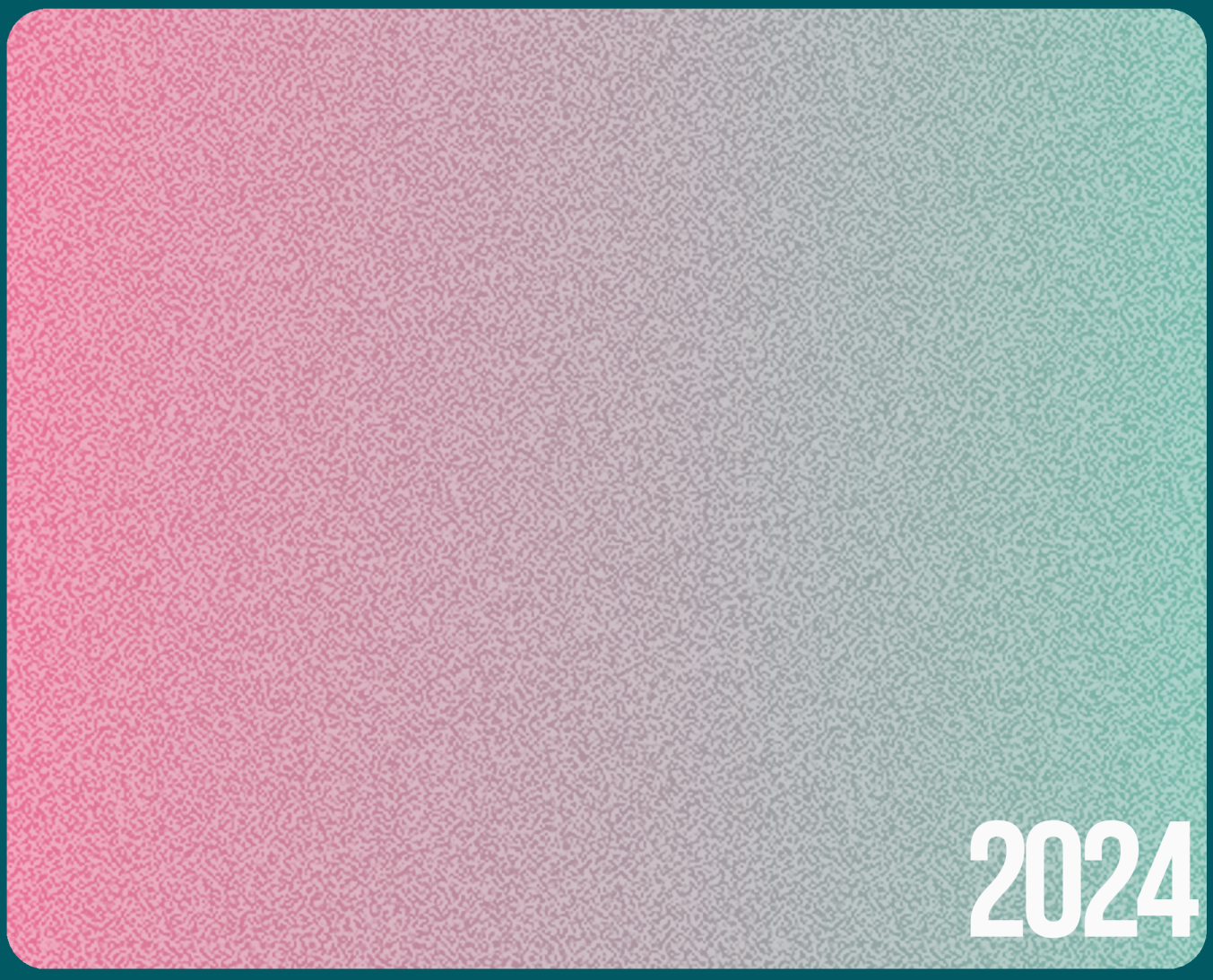
CAMBRIDGE DECOLONISATION REPORT



2024

INTRODUCTION

As the Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Sabbatical Officer for 2024-25, it is my privilege to present the Decolonisation Report 2024, a document that chronicles the establishment, development, and future direction of the Decolonisation Hub at Cambridge University.

This report emerges from the collective efforts of students, staff, and stakeholders committed to addressing the colonial legacies embedded within the university's curricula, practices, and structures.

The idea for creating a central 'Decolonisation Hub' came into being following the passage of a policy by the Cambridge SU Student Council, aimed at creating a more equitable and inclusive academic environment. Over the past year, consultations with students, academics, and staff have informed the direction for the Hub's foundation, ensuring that the voices of historically marginalised communities are central to its work.

This report outlines the activities undertaken during the academic year 2023-24, including the consultations and the publication of the Decolonisation Manifesto 2024. These initiatives reflect the broad consensus that decolonisation is not a one-time objective but an ongoing, transformative process that must permeate all aspects of the university.



The report also presents the recommendations and strategies for future progress, guided by the core principles of diversity, equity, and the recognition of marginalised voices. The Decolonisation Manifesto contained within this document provides a clear roadmap for how Cambridge University can confront its colonial past, repatriate cultural artefacts, diversify its curriculum, and promote inclusivity across all departments and faculties.

PREPARED BY

Maroof Rafique
BME Officer
Cambridge SU

In moving forward, this report calls on the University of Cambridge to remain steadfast in its commitment to decolonisation, ensuring that the creation of the Decolonisation Hub will act as a collaborative space for students, staff, and academics to work together in the pursuit of an inclusive and just academic institution.

CAMBRIDGE DECOLONISATION MANIFESTO 2024

The University of Cambridge, as one of the world's leading institutions, must confront its deep-rooted complicity in the legacies of colonialism. While Cambridge is a beacon of academic excellence, it has historically upheld systems of knowledge production and social structures that marginalised voices from the global south. This manifesto calls for radical reform at every level of the University to dismantle these colonial structures and move towards a truly inclusive, equitable, and decolonised institution.

Colonialism has left indelible marks on Cambridge. The University's possession of stolen objects from former colonies, its Eurocentric curriculum, hierarchical teaching structures, investments in industries that exploit the global south, and its celebration of colonialist figures reflect a historical blindness that perpetuates inequality. It is time to recognise and address these injustices by prioritising the voices of students and staff from marginalised communities and ensuring that decolonisation is embedded in every aspect of University life.

MANIFESTO AIMS

1. LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM AND REPATRIATION
2. DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM
3. RECOGNISING COLONIALISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE
4. DECOLONISING LABOUR AND HIRING PRACTICES

1 LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM AND REPATRIATION

Cambridge must acknowledge its role in perpetuating colonialism, particularly through the possession of cultural artefacts that were looted or acquired through colonial violence. Many of these items remain in Colleges, Faculties, and Museums, disconnected from their communities of origin. The University must take the following steps:

INVESTIGATE THE LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM:

Each College should conduct a comprehensive inquiry, in partnership with students and staff of colour, as well as scholars and communities from the global south. This inquiry should uncover the University's colonial legacies, with a focus on identifying objects, buildings, and traditions tied to colonialism.

COMMIT TO REPATRIATION:

The University should develop a transparent and actionable framework for the repatriation of cultural items to the countries they were taken from. This process must be conducted in collaboration with the communities to whom these items rightfully belong.

BROADEN THE INQUIRY:

These efforts must extend beyond the Colleges to encompass the wider University. Cambridge must reassess its global partnerships, financial ties, and ongoing affiliations with organisations and individuals who profited from or perpetuated colonialism.

2 DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM

The University's curriculum reflects a Eurocentric worldview that marginalises or erases the contributions of scholars, thinkers, and histories from non-European societies. A decolonised curriculum must be one that does not treat colonial critiques as optional but integrates them fully into every discipline. The following actions are necessary:

CURRICULUM AUDIT:

The University must undertake a thorough audit of its curriculums to identify where colonial legacies continue to dominate. This audit should examine where:

- Decolonial perspectives are sidelined as optional or secondary.
- Authors, ideas, and events are presented without context regarding their colonial background.
- Non-European perspectives are marginalised or entirely absent.

REFORMING EXISTING PAPERS:

Eurocentric biases must be addressed by revising existing courses to include robust critiques of colonialism. Reforms should ensure that underrepresented voices from the global south are fully integrated into the core of the curriculum, not relegated to niche areas.

INTRODUCING NEW PAPERS:

There must be the addition of new, fully decolonised courses that explore the histories, knowledge systems, and intellectual traditions of non-European societies. These courses should be centred on postcolonial studies, global perspectives, and the impacts of colonialism in shaping modern societies.

3 RECOGNISING COLONIALISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The University & Colleges must acknowledge the intersection between colonialism and climate change. The exploitation of the global south for resources by colonial powers is a root cause of many environmental injustices today. Cambridge, as a significant landowner and global institution, must take bold actions to address its role in exacerbating these injustices:

DIVEST FROM FOSSIL FUELS:

The University & Colleges should immediately cut all financial ties with fossil fuel companies whose operations disproportionately harm communities in the global south. This divestment must be total, transparent, and irreversible.

NET ZERO BY 2030:

Cambridge must commit to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, taking into account the environmental degradation that disproportionately impacts people in the global south. As an influential institution, it has a responsibility to lead by example.

ASSESS GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS:

These efforts must extend beyond the Colleges to encompass the wider University. Cambridge must reassess its global partnerships, financial ties, and ongoing affiliations with organisations and individuals who profited from or perpetuated colonialism.

4 DECOLONISING LABOUR AND HIRING PRACTICES

Decolonisation must extend to the University's employment and hiring practices. Currently, Cambridge's academic staff and leadership do not reflect the diversity of its student body or the broader global community. The University must commit to:

DIVERSIFYING EXPERTISE:

The University & Colleges must identify areas where teaching and research are lacking in terms of global perspectives. This includes hiring more academics who specialise in non-European histories, cultures, and knowledge systems.

INVOLVING MARGINALISED VOICES:

All hiring and curricular reform processes must involve students and staff of colour. These voices should play a central role in identifying underrepresented topics and suggesting solutions for creating a more inclusive curriculum.

ADDRESSING INSTITUTIONAL HIERARCHIES:

The current hierarchical structures that privilege certain forms of knowledge must be dismantled. Teaching and learning practices should encourage collaboration between students and staff, fostering a co-creation model where students' voices are equally valued in shaping the academic environment.

CONCLUSION

Towards a Truly Decolonised Cambridge

Decolonising Cambridge is not a short-term task but a long-term, persistent process that will require commitment from all levels of the University. It is imperative that the institution listens to and works closely with marginalised communities, particularly students and staff of colour, to ensure that the necessary changes are made. Cambridge can and must be a leader in the global movement for decolonisation, setting an example for other academic institutions to follow. Only through this process of reckoning, repair, and reform can Cambridge move towards a future where education is truly equitable for all.

DECOLONISATION CONSULTATIONS 2023-24

CONTEXTURAL BACKGROUND

The policy to create a Decolonisation Hub was proposed by Zaynab Ahmed and seconded by Tara Choudhury and was passed in Easter 2022. The primary aim of the Hub is to address the pervasive effects of colonialism within the university's curricula and institutional practices. This includes diversifying the curriculum, promoting the inclusion of marginalised voices, and supporting decolonisation projects across the university's departments and colleges.

In Lent 2024, an amendment titled "Diversify the Curriculum as a First Step of Decolonization" was proposed by Chang Liu and seconded by the BME Sabbatical Officer, Maroof Rafique. This amendment emphasised the need to reorganise the curriculum to include a broader range of perspectives, particularly from underrepresented groups, and outlined specific strategies for achieving these goals.

CONSULTATIONS CONDUCTED

Throughout the year, two major consultations were conducted to gather input from students and staff on the establishment and functioning of the Decolonisation Hub. These include:

FOR STUDENTS:

Date: 16th February 2024
Time: 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM
Location: Marshall Room, 1st Floor, University Centre, CB2 1RU

FOR STAFF & ACADEMICS:

Date: 7th March 2024
Time: 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM
Location: Marshall Room, 1st Floor, University Centre, CB2 1RU

CONSULTATION NO. 1

Focus: Initial feedback on the concept and structure of the Decolonisation Hub.

Participants: Broader student body, including representatives from minority student groups.

BRAINSTORMING SESSION:

A brainstorming session was held where the participants were asked the question 'What comes to mind when you think of Decolonisation?' through the anonymous *slido* board. Eleven participants answered and twenty responses were recorded for the prompt:



KEY FINDINGS:

1. Setting Up the Decolonisation Hub

Question: How would you like to set up the Decolonisation Hub?

Responses Summary:

- Utilisation of Doctoral Students: Participants expressed a strong preference for involving doctoral students in the setup and operation of the Decolonisation Hub. It was emphasised that these students should not only contribute their expertise but also be fairly compensated for their work. The recognition of doctoral students' efforts through payment was seen as crucial for ensuring sustained and meaningful engagement.

- Involvement of Staff: While the role of students was highlighted, participants also underscored the importance of staff involvement. They noted that students, despite their capabilities and enthusiasm, might face limitations in pushing the decolonisation initiatives to their full potential. Thus, the involvement of staff members was deemed essential to provide guidance, continuity, and additional resources.

2. Vision for the Decolonisation Hub

Question: What would the Decolonisation Hub look like?

Responses Summary:

- Campaign-Oriented Structure: The focus group advocated for the Decolonisation Hub to function as a campaign. This approach would help in creating a dynamic and impactful movement, capable of garnering widespread attention and engagement within the institution and beyond.
- Centralised Platform: There was a consensus on the need for a centralised platform where all decolonisation initiatives across various departments could converge. This centralisation would facilitate the sharing of resources, ideas, and strategies, thereby fostering a collaborative environment. By drawing energy from each other, different departments could enhance their individual efforts and contribute to a cohesive and powerful decolonisation movement.

Conclusion:

These insights highlight the community's desire for a well-supported, collaborative, and dynamic Decolonisation Hub. The emphasis on both student involvement with appropriate compensation and the centralised, campaign-like nature of the Hub provides a clear direction for its development and operational framework.

CONSULTATION NO. 2

Focus: Implementation strategies and specific goals for the Hub.
Participants: Cambridge University Staff and Academics

BRAINSTORMING SESSION:

A brainstorming session was held where the participants were asked the question 'What comes to mind when you think of Decolonisation?' in a chart group activity. 10 responses were recorded for the prompt:

- Unlearn & Relearn
- Colonial Money
- Status Quo
- Diverse Resources (Funds, Supplier)
- Addressing Inequalities
- Power Struggle
- Sustainability Model
- Reflexivity
- Social Justice
- Question the Norms

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Setting Up the Decolonisation Hub

Question: How would you like to set up the Decolonisation Hub?

Responses Summary:

- Mandated Funding: Participants emphasised the necessity for mandated funding to ensure the hub's financial stability and ability to undertake long-term projects.
- Governance Structure: The workshop discussed various governance structures, including the potential establishment of a Board of Directors or an incentivized managing body. This structure would provide leadership and accountability.
- Steering Groups: The formation of steering groups was suggested to guide the hub's initiatives and ensure diverse representation.

- Stakeholders: The importance of involving a wide range of stakeholders was highlighted. This includes students, academics, non-academics, student-facing representatives, support groups, colleges, staff, university departments, and the Cambridge Student Union (SU).
- Coordination:
  - Staff-Student Partnership: A collaborative partnership between staff and students was recommended for effective coordination.
  - Role Allocation: Clear delineation of roles and contributions from each stakeholder group was deemed necessary to ensure efficient operation.
- Sustainability:
  - Location: Discussions included potential physical locations for the hub, focusing on accessibility and visibility within the university.
  - Permanent Position: The creation of a permanent position was suggested to maintain continuity and ensure the sustainability of decolonisation efforts.

2. Vision for the Decolonisation Hub

Question: What would the Decolonisation Hub look like?

Responses Summary:

- University-Wide Collaboration: The hub should function as a coordinated group fostering university-wide collaboration. This would ensure a unified approach to decolonisation across different departments and faculties.
- Toolkit for Best Practices: The development of a toolkit to support and disseminate good practices across the university was proposed. This toolkit would serve as a resource for departments to implement decolonisation initiatives effectively.
- Promoting Dialogue: The hub should promote dialogue among various stakeholder groups to develop a shared understanding of decolonisation. This dialogue is crucial for aligning goals and strategies and for fostering a sense of community and mutual support.

Conclusion:

These insights further elaborate on the foundational elements required for setting up and sustaining a Decolonisation Hub. The emphasis on structured governance, broad stakeholder involvement, and sustained funding highlights the community's commitment to a robust and effective decolonisation initiative.

ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT TRANSFORMING ACADEMIA, CHALLENGING COLONIAL LEGACIES, AND FOSTERING INCLUSIVITY?

Join the Decolonisation Working Group at Cambridge University if you are committed to confronting Cambridge's colonial history and building a more equitable academic community.

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