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**Decolonisation of Curricula in Undergraduate Dental Education: An
Exploratory Study**

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Abstract

Aims: To explore experiences and perceptions of students and staff regarding decolonisation of the curriculum in a dental undergraduate programme at a British University.

Methods: Participants were invited to respond to an online survey on decolonisation of the dental curriculum. The target population included current students on the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) and Bachelor of Dental Therapy and Hygiene (BScDTH) programmes, as well as Dental Staff. The common items for student and staff versions of the survey were focused on six themes: Representation, Content, Peer Engagement, Assessment, Language and Communication, and Culture. The staff survey included additional items on Evaluation. All responses were anonymous. Data on program, year of study, age, gender, and ethnicity were captured on a voluntary basis.

Results: In total, 34 staff members and 120 students participated in the survey. A comparison showed that average student responses were lower (i.e., less favourable) compared with average staff responses. Of the 24 surveys items, 17 showed significantly less favourable responses reported by Minority Ethnic (ME) students compared to their White peers. ME students were, when compared with White counterparts, less likely to report that their programme included opportunities for group discussions about ethnicity and privilege. Similar comparisons of staff responses did not show any significant differences between White and ME staff.

Conclusions: This study provides useful insights into the perceptions and experiences of students and staff regarding decolonisation of dental curriculum in an undergraduate dental programme. Significant differences were noted between staff and student scores and also between White and ME students. The findings underscore the need to take further steps to decolonise dental curricula.

Key words: Decolonisation, Curriculum, Higher education, Dental, Racial inequalities,

Introduction

Colonisation is a historic phenomenon beginning in the 15th century with the advent of European oceanic exploration. By the 19th century it had led to the subjugation of 750 million indigenous people across 80% of countries by a handful of European governments. Methods of subjugation varied but typically included political, legal, and economic domination, coupled with racial and cultural inequality. These processes were facilitated by the normalisation of colonisers' belief and knowledge systems, language, customs, and education. Although the dismantlement of colonial power began after World War 2 and the subsequent creation of the United Nations (1945), the legacy of colonialism persists. It is accepted that colonial activities are responsible for many of the social inequalities present in modern societies, and provide the bedrock for much social and institutionalised racism. Decolonisation then, as a political and social agenda, remains relevant. Amongst a range of definitions, Von Bismark (2012) describes decolonisation as "...the reversal of the process of European imperial expansion with all its political, economic, social, cultural and linguistic consequences".

Attainment Gap and Decolonisation in Higher Education (HE)

Whilst there is compelling evidence of an ethnicity attainment gap in HE (OFS, 2020), debate continues regarding the cause. Some evidence suggests the gap is partly structural; attributable to "disadvantaged" background, pre-HE experiences and entry qualifications (Miller, 2016) (all arguably caused by the tendrils of colonisation across time). However, where factors including prior attainment have been controlled for, differences remain between ME and White students (Broecke and Nicholls (2008). 'Controlling for entry qualifications, Black students are between 6 and 28 percentage

points less likely than white students to get a higher classification degree, while Asian students are between 3 and 17 percentage points less likely. The differences exist at all levels of entry qualifications, so are even apparent among students who enter higher education with very high prior attainment' (Stevenson et al., 2019:10). It appears that inequalities within HE mirror those in wider UK society. 'Broader political and social realities are evident on campuses affecting the experiences and actions of staff and students' (NUS, 2019:4). Once in HE, contributing factors such as relationships with and between staff and students, the curriculum, social, cultural capital, and identity factors all come into play and there is evidence of inequality remaining through to graduate outcomes where unemployment for minority ethnic groups is double that of White (GovUK, 2019).

Racial inequalities have intensified debate on decolonisation in HE, fuelling calls for a nuanced approach to addressing cultural, social, and political structures that reinforce and reproduce racially motivated differences in attainment. Potentially, decolonisation can help mitigate the attainment gap by questioning and then transforming these meta-structures to add value to the student experience. It is helpful to distinguish decolonisation from inclusivity. The inclusivity mission is to improve the educational experience for all (including students with protected characteristics) and aims to remove political/power relationships from the curriculum. Conversely, decolonisation seeks to challenge dominant forms of thought and practice and to radicalise, not de-politicalise. The aim of a decolonised curriculum extends beyond the attainment of individual students at a given University, important as that is. Ultimately, it is about transforming society, breaking down structural inequalities and institutional racism. As centres of knowledge production, universities should be at the vanguard of these efforts (Garaway, 2020).

Beyond issues of representation, decolonisation demands deeper critique of the construction and content of curriculum, and the canons of disciplinary knowledge. Decolonisation highlights how knowledge is socially and temporally situated, with the current dominant social paradigm being Eurocentric and rooted in colonial epistemology. Decolonisation of HE involves liberating curricula from these selective narratives; instead, providing students with ‘diverse academic learning environments, curricula and approaches to research within which Indigenous cultures, histories, and knowledge are embedded’ (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2020).

Decolonisation of Dental Curricula

Like other healthcare professions, Dentistry has, historically, been conceptualised as a “White” profession (Adams, 1998). Despite growing representation of ME students in Dentistry, White males continue to dominate academic positions. Approximately 76% of academic faculty members identified as White, 9% as Asian and 2% as Black. Moreover, in UK dental schools the proportion of ethnic minorities in *senior* posts remains low (Woolston 2020). Limited representation of ethnic minorities in institutional power structures and decision-making processes may impact on the educational experiences of ME students, potentially erecting barriers to attainment and career progression (Wolf et al., 2011). Equally, under-representation of ethnic minorities in healthcare curricula can translate into disparities in patient care for these groups, with far reaching implications for their health and wellbeing, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kirby, 2020).

The impact of medical curricula on patient health inequalities and lower attainment among ME students have not been researched adequately (Claridge et al, 2020). Nevertheless, calls for decolonisation of dental curricula are growing (Ali et al, 2021; Gishen & Lokugamage 2019). The current paper details a survey of decolonisation and the curriculum, which explored experiences and perceptions of students and staff at a dental school in Southwest England.

Methods

Development and piloting of the survey instrument

Google searches, utilising the terms “decolonisation” and “ac uk”, were conducted to identify materials relevant to a UK HE context. No existing survey tool was found. Nonetheless, three comprehensive ‘toolkits’ were identified at SOAS¹, UCL² and Kingston University³. Scrutiny of the toolkits indicated consistent themes regarding decolonisation and the curriculum: Representation, Content, Peer Engagement, Assessment, Language and Communication, and Culture. Synthesising across toolkits, the Educational Development team developed a draft survey featuring four items for each of these six themes. Staff and student versions were produced featuring subtle wording changes where appropriate.

Following institutional ethical approval, the draft survey was piloted, first amongst staff and student interns attached to the institutional Education Development (ED) Team, and then amongst staff ($n > 40$) and students ($n > 90$) in two university Schools. Response rate, item completion rate, and open comments taken from the surveys indicated good participant comprehension. Consequently, the surveys were finalised for use in the Dental School (Appendix).

¹ Decolonising SOAS Learning and Teaching Toolkit for Programme and Module Convenors. <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/files/2018/10/Decolonising-SOAS-Learning-and-Teaching-Toolkit-AB.pdf> Accessed 11/6/21.

² BAME Awarding Gap Project. Staff Toolkit 2020. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/sites/teaching-learning/files/bame_awarding_gap_toolkit_2020.pdf Accessed 11/6/21.

³ Inclusive Curriculum Framework. <https://www.kingston.ac.uk/aboutkingstonuniversity/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/our-inclusive-curriculum/inclusive-curriculum-framework/> Accessed 11/6/21.

Survey administration

In Spring 2021 an invitation and electronic link to the relevant survey was emailed to all current Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) students (n=227) and Bachelor of Dental Therapy and Hygiene (BScDTH) students (n=38), and all Dental Staff (n= 60 TBC). Reminders were sent two weeks later. All participants provided online consent before proceeding to the survey questions. All responses were anonymous. Data on program, year of study, age, gender, and ethnicity were captured on a voluntary basis.

Results

In total, 34 staff members and 120 students participated in the surveys. Amongst staff, 31 reported affiliation with the BDS programme, and 3 with BScDTH. Amongst students, 89 reported being on the BDS programme (23, 12, 20, 13, and 21, respectively, in Stages 1-5), and 31 on the BScDTH programme (10, 12, and 9, respectively, in Stages 1-3). No gender information was recorded for staff. All 31 BScDTH students identified as women. Amongst BDS students, 57 identified as women, 30 as men, and 2 preferred not to say. Table 1 summarises the ethnic profile of participants.

Table 1 Ethnicity Profile of participants

Group	Ethnicity	Count	Percentage
Staff	Asian / Asian British	1	2.94
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black		
	British	0	0
	Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	0	0
	Other ethnic group	0	0
	Prefer not to say	3	8.82
Students	White	30	88.24
	Asian / Asian British	45	37.5
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black		
	British	12	10
	Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	5	4.17
	Other ethnic group	7	5.83
	Prefer not to say	1	0.83
	White	50	41.67

Responses by Question and Group

All items featured the response options ‘Not at all’, ‘To some extent’, and ‘Very much’ (scored 1-3, respectively). Items LC1 and CU2 were reverse scored where combined with other items, but not where examined individually.

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for each item, stratified by group. The minimum and maximum scores for each item were 1 and 3 respectively. Alongside mean differences, p-values from Chi-Squared tests of response profiles are shown. P-values <0.05 (highlighted) indicate statistically significant differences in response profiles between students and staff.

Reported *p*-values are based on 10,000 Markov chain Monte Carlo simulated replicates, to minimise impact of small subgroup/cell sizes; though some categories remain empty.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for item responses by staff and student respondents, mean difference, and p-values for statistical significance of associations between groups and responses.

Question	Staff (n=34)				Students (n=120)				Mean Difference	p
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max		
R1	2.24	0.50	1	3	2.06	0.75	1	3	-0.18	0.007
R2	2.35	0.49	2	3	2.08	0.62	1	3	-0.27	0.043
R3	2.29	0.64	1	3	2.09	0.66	1	3	-0.20	0.336
R4	2.35	0.66	1	3	1.79	0.69	1	3	-0.56	<0.001
C1	1.69	0.54	1	3	1.77	0.68	1	3	0.08	0.165
C2	2.00	0.45	1	3	1.72	0.78	1	3	-0.28	<0.001
C3	1.83	0.59	1	3	1.7	0.63	1	3	-0.13	0.440
C4	2.45	0.57	1	3	2.03	0.60	1	3	-0.42	0.003
PE1	2.79	0.42	2	3	2.6	0.54	1	3	-0.19	0.185
PE2	2.26	0.68	1	3	1.87	0.71	1	3	-0.39	0.027
PE3	2.30	0.65	1	3	1.78	0.79	1	3	-0.52	0.002
PE4	2.13	0.68	1	3	1.66	0.76	1	3	-0.47	0.003
A1	2.00	0.59	1	3	1.68	0.69	1	3	-0.32	0.017
A2	2.13	0.62	1	3	1.69	0.69	1	3	-0.44	0.005
A3	2.42	0.50	2	3	2.1	0.71	1	3	-0.32	0.021
A4	1.93	0.52	1	3	1.49	0.63	1	3	-0.44	<0.001
LC1	1.30	0.53	1	3	1.26	0.53	1	3	-0.04	0.678
LC2	2.28	0.63	1	3	2.03	0.62	1	3	-0.25	0.104
LC3	1.96	0.69	1	3	1.81	0.62	1	3	-0.15	0.373
LC4	2.23	0.63	1	3	1.71	0.67	1	3	-0.52	0.001
CU1	2.25	0.72	1	3	1.83	0.76	1	3	-0.42	0.023
CU2	1.13	0.35	1	2	1.43	0.68	1	3	0.30	0.069
CU3	2.65	0.55	1	3	2.53	0.57	1	3	-0.12	0.530
CU4	2.3	0.60	1	3	1.95	0.74	1	3	-0.35	0.030

Of the 24 items given to staff and students, there were significantly different average ratings for 15 (Table 2). Notably, in all cases of significance, average students' responses were lower (i.e. less favourable) compared with average staff responses. Looking closely at Table 2, particularly notable disparities appeared to occur for the 'Peer Engagement' and 'Assessment' domains. In both cases, significant differences were identified for all four of the constituent items. Moreover,

the scale of the mean differences between staff and student responses appeared particularly large for items under these headings.

Using the same approach to statistical analysis, student responses to each question were analysed further, to compare the scores for White and ME students. The results are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for item responses between White and ME Students, mean difference, and p-values for statistical significance of associations between groups and responses.

Q	White					ME					M diff	p
	n	M	SD	Min	Max	n	M	SD	Min	Max		
R1	50	2.69	0.51	1	3	70	1.61	0.55	1	3	-1.08	<0.001
R2	50	2.45	0.5	2	3	70	1.81	0.55	1	3	-0.64	<0.001
R3	50	2.31	0.65	1	3	70	1.94	0.62	1	3	-0.37	0.008
R4	50	2.06	0.78	1	3	70	1.6	0.55	1	3	-0.46	<0.001
C1	50	2.06	0.68	1	3	70	1.57	0.61	1	3	-0.49	<0.001
C2	50	2.02	0.88	1	3	70	1.51	0.63	1	3	-0.51	<0.001
C3	50	1.78	0.67	1	3	70	1.64	0.6	1	3	-0.14	0.411
C4	50	2.12	0.53	1	3	70	1.97	0.65	1	3	-0.15	0.121
PE1	50	2.82	0.39	2	3	70	2.44	0.58	1	3	-0.38	<0.001
PE2	50	2.23	0.67	1	3	70	1.62	0.62	1	3	-0.61	<0.001
PE3	50	2.09	0.88	1	3	70	1.57	0.65	1	3	-0.52	<0.001
PE4	50	2.02	0.83	1	3	70	1.41	0.6	1	3	-0.61	<0.001
A1	50	1.9	0.68	1	3	70	1.52	0.66	1	3	-0.38	0.009
A2	50	1.88	0.7	1	3	70	1.57	0.65	1	3	-0.31	0.058
A3	50	2.1	0.69	1	3	70	2.1	0.74	1	3	0	0.801
A4	50	1.63	0.64	1	3	70	1.4	0.6	1	3	-0.23	0.081
LC1	50	1.14	0.46	1	3	70	1.34	0.56	1	3	0.2	0.019
LC2	50	2.23	0.6	1	3	70	1.88	0.59	1	3	-0.35	0.009
LC3	50	1.91	0.67	1	3	70	1.74	0.59	1	3	-0.17	0.224
LC4	50	1.73	0.67	1	3	70	1.7	0.68	1	3	-0.03	0.933
CU1	50	2.18	0.77	1	3	70	1.58	0.65	1	3	-0.6	<0.001
CU2	50	1.22	0.47	1	3	70	1.57	0.76	1	3	0.35	0.024
CU3	50	2.67	0.56	1	3	70	2.43	0.56	1	3	-0.24	0.011
CU4	50	2.24	0.71	1	3	70	1.74	0.69	1	3	-0.5	0.002

Of the 24 surveys items, 17 showed a significant difference in responses between White and ME students. In all cases of significance, the direction of the scores suggested less favourable responses amongst ME students. Scrutiny of Table 3 reveals those domains with the most divergent pattern of responses. For the themes of ‘Representation’, ‘Peer Engagement’, and ‘Culture’, there were significant differences for all four constituent items and substantial mean differences. In the domains of ‘Content’ and ‘Language and Communication’, a mixed picture occurred; White and ME students provided divergent responses for two of the four constituent items. Under ‘Assessment’, significantly different responses were only identified for one item (A1 – “Do assessments in the programme allow participants to draw in personal experiences, including those relating to ethnicity and privilege?”).

Positively, it appears that White and ME students report less divergent perspectives around the pivotal domain of Assessment, which can be so impactful on educational and career outcomes. This outcome does, however, highlight the importance of appraising results from the ‘intra-student’ analyses (i.e., White versus ME students), alongside the staff versus student analyses. Despite the relative consistency of White and ME students’ views on Assessment, student perspectives on this domain were, overall, substantially less favourable compared with all staff (Table 2).

Turning to the responses provided by White staff and their ME colleagues, only one staff member identified themselves as ME. Hence, there was no further analysis of staff data according to ethnicity. Nonetheless, descriptive statistics for all staff are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for item responses across all staff combined

All Staff (n=34)				
Question	Mean	SD	Min	Max
R1	2.24	0.50	1	3
R2	2.35	0.49	2	3
R3	2.29	0.64	1	3
R4	2.35	0.66	1	3
C1	1.69	0.54	1	3
C2	2.00	0.45	1	3
C3	1.83	0.59	1	3
C4	2.45	0.57	1	3
PE1	2.79	0.42	2	3
PE2	2.26	0.68	1	3
PE3	2.30	0.65	1	3
PE4	2.13	0.68	1	3
A1	2.00	0.59	1	3
A2	2.13	0.62	1	3
A3	2.42	0.50	2	3
A4	1.93	0.52	1	3
LC1	1.30	0.53	1	3
LC2	2.28	0.63	1	3
LC3	1.96	0.69	1	3
LC4	2.23	0.63	1	3
CU1	2.25	0.72	1	3
CU2	1.13	0.35	1	2
CU3	2.65	0.55	1	3
CU4	2.30	0.60	1	3

Finally, scores for individual items in each domain were combined to produce a single, average score. These scores were then analysed to establish any significant differences according to Group (i.e., staff versus students) and Ethnicity (i.e., White versus ME). The findings are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for responses within each domain, by Group, Ethnicity (White-Minority Ethnic), and Group by Ethnicity

Domain	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean Diff.	p*
Staff (All)					Students (All)					
Assessment	2.12	0.58	1	3	1.74	0.71	1	3	-0.38	<0.001
Content	1.99	0.6	1	3	1.81	0.69	1	3	-0.18	0.004
Culture	2.51	0.62	1	3	2.22	0.77	1	3	-0.29	<0.001
Language and Comm.	2.31	0.67	1	3	2.08	0.73	1	3	-0.23	0.001
Peer Engagement	2.38	0.66	1	3	1.98	0.8	1	3	-0.4	<0.001
Representation	2.31	0.57	1	3	2.01	0.69	1	3	-0.3	<0.001
White (All)					Minority Ethnic (All)					
Assessment	1.96	0.67	1	3	1.68	0.71	1	3	-0.28	<0.001
Content	1.99	0.67	1	3	1.69	0.65	1	3	-0.3	<0.001
Culture	2.47	0.67	1	3	2.08	0.77	1	3	-0.39	<0.001
Language and Comm.	2.23	0.71	1	3	2.02	0.72	1	3	-0.21	<0.001
Peer Engagement	2.32	0.73	1	3	1.80	0.75	1	3	-0.52	<0.001
Representation	2.34	0.63	1	3	1.78	0.61	1	3	-0.56	<0.001
White Students					Minority Ethnic Students					
Assessment	1.88	0.7	1	3	1.65	0.71	1	3	-0.23	0.001
Content	2.00	0.71	1	3	1.67	0.64	1	3	-0.33	<0.001
Culture	2.46	0.69	1	3	2.04	0.77	1	3	-0.42	<0.001
Language and Comm.	2.19	0.74	1	3	2.00	0.72	1	3	-0.19	0.006
Peer Engagement	2.30	0.78	1	3	1.76	0.73	1	3	-0.54	<0.001
Representation	2.38	0.66	1	3	1.74	0.58	1	3	-0.64	<0.001

* p-values based on independent measures t-tests given the grouping of items and summation of individual item scores to create a continuous scoring scale for each domain.

Discussion

The increasing emphasis on student voice in general and specific student activism around the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign has pushed decolonisation to the forefront of HE politics. The UK has an ethnically diverse student body comprising domestic and international students, some of whom originate from previously colonised regions. Understanding (de) colonisation can help the sector work with this minority ethnic cohort of students. Decolonisation of HE curricula holds promise in terms of empowering stakeholders. Also, it is perceived as ethically purposeful and aligns with other cognate, high profile HE agendas. For example, decolonisation resonates with principles of global citizenship, which is a staple ingredient of most HE institutions' 'graduate attribute' frameworks. It is also inherently about the promotion of democracy, in that it does not promote diversification for its own sake but for the sake of society (Solanke, 2020:5). The radical nature of decolonisation enhances academic rigour through multi and interdisciplinary knowledge contestation and development (Liyangae 2020; NUS, 2019).

The current study is a response to growing interest in this field. To our knowledge it represents the first effort to explore the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders regarding decolonisation at a dental institution in the UK. Significantly, over 50% of student respondents identified themselves as from ME backgrounds. Consequently, the data set properly represents ME students; obtaining sufficient responses from such students can be challenging on some courses, especially at universities in the South West of England. Overall, average responses from ME students were lower (i.e., less favourable) compared to White students. These findings indicate that students from ME backgrounds may have a less optimal educational experience, with potential implications for well-being, attainment, and subsequent

employment. These results underscore the need for such audits in HEIs to inform urgent initiatives.

Significant differences were also noted in the perceptions of staff versus students. These may be driven by several factors. First, in contrast with the student data, staff data were almost entirely made up of White respondents; only a single staff member identified themselves from ME background. Extrapolating the apparent trend in the student data, to the staff data, it may be the predominantly White dental workforce are not finely attuned to shortcomings in the curricula, relating to ethnicity. Additionally, the overall less favourable perceptions of students may reflect limited knowledge of positive ‘hidden’ practices aimed at addressing inequity. For example, in the current Dental School, attainment in all assessment is closely monitored to pick up differential attainment related to demographic factors, including ethnicity. While staff are involved in these processes, students may not be aware. This raises the question whether there should be more transparency between departments and their students around practices that seek to address inequities in student experiences and outcomes. Whilst the less favourable student results may in part reflect genuine shortcomings in the curricula, a fuller understanding of the work being undertaken by departments around these agenda may have a bearing on student perceptions.

The number of institutions actively pursuing decolonisation as an institutional priority is currently low (Batty, 2020). Without either significant external pressure or institutional priorities that pursue decolonisation, there is likely a risk aversion within departments where academics are disinterested and/or subject to a lack of resources to develop new pedagogical imperatives. This is often compounded by a lack of core specialist support. Recent years have seen the shrinking of funding for pedagogic development across the UK HE sector, with potential implications for decolonisation,

as an example of pedagogic reform (Stevenson, 2019; Solanke, 2020). Liyangae (2020) observes the paucity of Educational Developers to advise on decolonisation and how this detracts from departmental/ institutional progress. According to Batty (2020) only 36/128 HEIs currently offer staff training on decolonisation. This situation may, however, be on the cusp of change with Solanke (2020) predicting that the new OfS interventions may mitigate this, ‘the decolonisation agenda is on its way to becoming embedded into institutional goals’. Indeed, findings from surveys like the current example can help raise awareness of disparities in educational experiences and outcomes relating to ethnicity, and act as a catalyst for change. For example, based on the feedback by the participants in this study, the current Dental School has identified and initiated several areas of enhancement. The reading lists for BDS and BDTH programmes are being updated to include diverse learning resources not limited to White authors from Europe and USA.

Of direct relevance to the ‘Content’ theme of the current surveys, the students and staff at the current Dental School have created bespoke learning resources for recognition of pathological skin conditions in minority ethnic patients. These resources have received excellent feedback from students and staff across the board and are now being shared with other dental schools across the UK, demonstrating an example of good practice. Moreover, the current Dental School is developing assessment items encompassing the differential presentation of disease in ME people, to facilitate the cultural competency of students. This is relevant to the ‘Assessment’ theme from the survey. It is also hoped that these steps, related to curricular and co-curricular activities, may generate peripheral improvements to the perceptions of ME students, in terms of the themes of ‘Representation’, ‘Peer Engagement’ “and ‘Language and Communication’. The current Dental School aims to repeat the surveys in the next 12-

15 months to evaluate the impact of institutional initiatives on the experiences of the stakeholders.

In addition to frontline teachers, detailed information from surveys such as the current example can inform and empower key stakeholder groups at departmental and institutional level. In this instance, the findings are being dissected by the current Dental School's proactive Equality Committee, which meets regularly to identify and mitigate suboptimal experiences of stakeholders. Approximately thirty students from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds work as Equality Ambassadors to champion Equality across all activities at the institution. The School is now working with Equality Champions to organise cultural events to celebrate students and staff from diverse backgrounds and showcase their music, dresses etc. A clear commitment to collecting data from staff and students, and then sharing it in forums like these, may help address the disparity in staff and students responses to the current surveys, as discussed earlier.

It is important to acknowledge limitations of the current surveys. They were devised to gain preliminary insight to staff student experiences/perspectives of decolonisation and the curriculum, in response to frontline developments (i.e. a steer from the Office for Students to address this agenda within the institution). Consequently, a full process of instrument validation was not completed, prior to their use. Nonetheless, to the authors' knowledge, this remains the only staff and student survey tool regarding decolonisation and the curriculum. Consequently, the current data have considerable novelty. Whilst the current authors themselves aspire to use and refine the surveys further, other investigators are also encouraged to work with them as they see fit; be it in verbatim form; as a basis for inspiring bespoke local

instruments; in conjunction with other approaches, such as qualitative data collection; or as part of a formal validation exercise.

Conclusions

This study provides useful insights into the perceptions and experiences of students and staff regarding decolonisation of dental curriculum in an undergraduate dental programme. Significant differences were noted between staff and student scores and also between White and Minority Ethnic students. The findings of this study underscore the need to take further steps to decolonise the dental curricula. Regular auditing by institutions appears to be an important tool for identifying factors which contribute to racial inequalities in higher education. Results can then inform initiatives and practices that facilitate positive experiences for Minority Ethnic students and staff in their educational and work environments.

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Conflict of Interest

None of the authors have any conflict of interest to declare.

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