

17 August 2020

Dear Profs Higgins, Hanson, and colleagues,

We are writing in response to your email to programme directors and module organisers, dated 6 August 2020, regarding initial steps to decolonise the curriculum. First of all, we appreciate the sense of urgency you communicate to complete an initial review before September; we also agree that decolonising the curriculum is long overdue. Moreover, it is clear that you understand that this will actually be a long-term process. Indeed, the term 'institutional racism' is apt precisely because of how deeply interwoven these injustices are within the fabric of our institutional systems and culture.

Such systems were not constructed in a day, and dismantling any part of them, whether we are speaking about curricular materials or work visas, will require resources, planning, expertise, and a sober comprehension of the scope of the challenge. While we applaud the School's initiative in prioritizing action, we believe the task at hand merits a more methodical and deliberate approach, embedded within a consensus-based project framework. We consider it crucial at this stage to lay a solid foundation for sustainable action in the coming months and years, including through consultations with internal stakeholders and external experts, clear process- and outcome-based indicators, earmarked funding, a public communication plan, and a transparent monitoring scheme.

Failing to put these pieces in place at the outset carries several important risks that could derail the process before it is even fully underway.

First of all, after examining the very valuable initial guidance developed by the Decolonising Global Health (DGH) group, it is clear that even this initial step will demand a substantial time commitment along with the learning of specific skills, expertise and 'ways of looking' rooted in critical race, post-colonial and decolonial theory. We fear that the ambitious September deadline and lack of extra resources – in a period marked by annual leave, extra preparation for digitised learning, and the personal challenges (for example childcare duties) brought on by the global pandemic – will place an excessive burden on academic and teaching support staff.

This could have several unintended consequences. Limited capacity, plus the absence of any monitoring scheme, could translate to subpar quality. At the same time, the provisional nature of the guidance, combined with the tight timeline, could undermine instructors' motivation to critically examine their materials now, setting a dangerous precedent for the future. Furthermore, there is a risk that junior BIPOC faculty and staff will be tasked with the work that their supervisors cannot assume, with no formal recognition or specific remuneration.

Finally, we were concerned by how the message was communicated – only to programme directors and module organisers, rather than to the entire School; referencing the influence of our group, but not including us in the thread. While the

perception that a curriculum review is immediately relevant only to these staff is understandable, we believe that decolonising the curriculum is of interest to the entire LSHTM community. An open, transparent process would likewise help to improve accountability and extend ownership to all institutional actors.

Indeed, we see many potential avenues for involving staff and students, although it will be important to establish certain preventive safeguards, including monetary and non-monetary incentives, to ensure that the burden does not fall unduly on BIPOC shoulders. Black Lives Matter-LSHTM stands ready to advise the working group at LSHTM if needed; as a first step, though, the School must recognise that the quality of the output (a decolonised curriculum) will be a direct product of the inputs invested (resources, time, stakeholder engagement, and responsive leadership).

Cordially,

Black Lives Matter - LSHTM