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Decolonising the Arts Curriculum: Perspectives on Higher Education zine

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My name is Lucy Panesar and I'm from the University of the Arts London (UAL). I'm presenting today a paper co-authored with Rahul Patel, also from UAL. This paper tells the story of how staff and students at UAL have worked together over the past year to share and develop understanding of what it means to decolonise a curriculum, and in particular the arts curriculum. I will talk you through the journey, and instead of showing slides, I will refer to specific pages of the Zine that is before you, and pages of the Zine website.

Decolonisation has become an increasingly important issue for British universities and is resulting in various forms of institutional decolonisation strategies. UAL have done much work in the past decade to address inequalities related to ethnic and national identity, including support for the establishment and successful development of [Shades of Noir](#), founded and directed by Aisha Richards. Yet such issues of inequality persist, and are indicated by gaps in attainment between students of colour and their white peers. These gaps are persistent across the UK higher education sector, and are particularly wide in Art and Design, compared to other subjects. There are many [factors known](#) to be causing these gaps, and one factor is the narrow nature of the curricula offered at most UK universities, and of particularly exclusive practices in arts pedagogy.

This is something that UAL continue to strategically tackle, and in the last year, one approach has been to create a space for staff and students to share perspectives on decolonisation. At the start of 2018 Rahul and I from the UAL Teaching and Learning Exchange and Hansika Jethnani of the Arts Student Union came together to develop the approach. After much discussion the decision was made to create a Zine to which both staff and students could contribute; an interpretative space, inviting stories, experiences and ideas about decolonisation, rather than a didactic 'how to decolonise' guide. A call went out, and the responses were plenty and much more diverse than we had imagined, in content and in form. After some very light touch editing and design the Zine before you was produced.

I'd like to invite you now to read with me from the Zine... [select pages]

After compiling all the contributions to the Zine, we invited our Visiting Professor in Race and Education Dr. Gurnam Singh to write a commentary. In his piece, on page 1, Dr Singh suggests that 'the project of decolonisation is less about seeking out authentic culture as

such but more about the opening up of creative spaces to facilitate the production of culture informed by indigenous thinking and doing'. This suggestion has been helpful, not only in explaining the aim of the Zine, but also what has happened subsequently at UAL, which I will now go on to describe.

Last June we launched the Zine at [Central Saint Martins](#), one of our colleges. We secured a small space in the reception area to display extracts from the Zine, and adopted a small stage that had been left in the space as a platform for any willing contributors to speak from. It being the end of term, we were not expecting many to attend, but word soon got around and more contributors came forward to speak, and numerous passers-by stopped to look and listen. The feedback on the event was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees really appreciated hearing people give voice and life to their written contributions, and the opportunity to be able to share and discuss in person.

So over the summer Arts SU and the Teaching and Learning Exchange reconvened to strategise for the opening up of further creative spaces, in the form of a year-long UAL wide series of exhibitions and events. I will talk you through the journey so far via documentation on our website: <https://decolonisingtheartscurriculum.myblog.arts.ac.uk/>

We have begun to refer to the exhibition and events series as a Caravan, as it has become a movement of people, moving together for a common purpose, across challenging territories and borders. Contributors to the Zine have spoken at each event, and have evolved their contributions as live performances, and the exhibitions have evolved to include additional materials and events from staff and students at each of the colleges. The UAL Library Service has been an avid supporter of the project and has offered spaces for the exhibitions, and encouraged library staff to get involved. At the [London College of Communication](#), in addition to a large scale exhibition and Spotify playlist, librarians pulled from their collections old colonial publications and examples of other Zines addressing issues of inequality, and produced an additional publication to critically frame these entitled 'Practice: Special Collections and Decolonisation'.

Academics of colour at each college have also been approached to guest curate parts of the display, an opportunity for them to respond to the theme of decolonisation from a personal perspective. One of the guest curators at LCC worked with other colleagues of Asian origin on a display and publication entitled 'New Model Minority'.

At the [Wimbledon](#) College of Art, librarians conducted a poll to determine the top ten films related to decolonization, sharing this as a new playlist on Box of Broadcasts. And across [Camberwell](#) and [Chelsea](#) College of Art, academics held lunchtime talks about books that have helped them to develop understanding of decolonisation, including Chelsea's new Fine

Art course leader Mary Evans who spoke about *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe in relation to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

The Zine is currently being exhibited at the [London College of Fashion](#), with additional displays guest curated by Zac Chaudri entitled 'Fashionistan' and Iris Lau entitled 'Iris's Silk Route'. The LCF librarians have also created a Padlet wall of book titles which they believe are decolonising their library collections.

The Caravan is having a generative and accumulative effect, picking students and staff, of all levels, up along the way, and creating space for them to develop and share their perspective on decolonising the arts curricula. The Zine is also being used as a resource for promoting and assisting inclusive pedagogies across various teaching, learning and enhancement work at UAL, including the [PgCert in Academic Practice](#) and the [Academic Enhancement Model](#) which supports courses to address their attainment gaps. There has also been much demand from across the sector for the Zines as academic development resources, from as far as Denmark.

The next step is to try to capture some of what has evolved since the CSM launch in a second Zine which will be out in the Spring Term. That is the story so far. Thank you for listening!