Disrupt the Discourse 2021/22 - Executive summary

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Project summary outline

The Disrupt the Discourse project (DtD) is a pedagogical change initiative which has been developed as part of London Met's strategy to respond to persisting structural inequalities in society, particularly in educational spaces. The project consists of two main components:

1. The development of an online toolkit/ digital resource.
2. The delivery of scaffolded workshop sessions (five sessions lasting 90 minute).

This intervention targeted staff from all participating pilot course teams. A feature of the project is the engagement in reflections from an individual up to organisational level with the aim to develop and share effective educational practice among course teams and the wider organisation.

The main aims and objectives of the DtD initiative are:

- To develop introspection and boost staff confidence in navigating themes of race, ethnicity, privilege and inequality as part of learning and teaching practice.
- To encourage staff and student partnerships interested in co-creating and sharing innovative practice across the School, in the form of case studies and digital/creative content.
- To form a Community of Practice (CoP) interested in developing and sharing practice across the School and eventually the institution in an anti-racist pedagogy that considers the positionality and intersections of student and staff identity as part of facilitating student learning.

Delivery information

The pilot project was delivered in SSSP during May/June 2022 with three participating course teams (Youth, Education and Early Childhood studies) targeting around 35 staff members. Six sessions (including a launch event) were delivered alternating between face to face and remote delivery over the course of five weeks with seven participants making it to the end of the five weeks.

Evaluation approach

An evaluation approach (framework) was co-developed in order to assess the process and impact of the implementation on both the DtD project pilot and further to adopt a long term approach capable to determine outcomes and impact of the initiative on various organisational levels. Course teams were encouraged to provide feedback ahead and post-delivery via feedback forms, in-session feedback opportunities and invitations to focus

groups. To complement this process, reflections submitted through toolkit and undertaken by the project lead also fed into the evaluation process.

Main findings:

<u>Positive</u>

- Participants found the offering engaging, stimulating and useful.

- Participants experienced a 'safe-space' and felt comfortable discussing session content and themes resulting in benefits noted through engagement with the project.

- Collated feedback suggests colleagues appreciated interactions with different course teams resulting in more diverse ideation for collaborations and cross-disciplinary projects.

<u>Negative</u>

- Attendance data suggests that not all staff members engaged.

- Decreasing attendance due to assessment period and marking commitments.

- Student involvement was found to be absent in the pilot delivery and from in-class discussions it became apparent to incorporate the student voice in future iterations.

Main recommendations:

In line with main findings and future proofing implications (from full report), below are the resulting **main recommendations** for future roll out:

- Promote active participation including successful engagement with the Toolkit, individual reflections and the decoded workshop sessions.
- Consider resource & staffing implications for staff delivering the initiative (AWAM) and commitment for planning, facilitating, delivering and evaluating this initiative. Also, a planned CPD objective acknowledged in My Review.
- Consider timings and scheduling of project in future roll out to support participants' ability to (pre-) engage with the DtD Toolkit and decoded workshop sessions.
- Develop a mechanism to support the role of 'positionality', this should prioritise the training team charged with teaching for 'anti racist practice' as part of this initiative.
- To make provision for guided collaborations that are scaffolded times and spaces outside of the programme to encourage collaborations and share practice.
- Enable face to face delivery (where possible) to achieve the consolidation of learning objectives & delivery should reflect mixed cohorts across curriculum areas.
- Assess level of student involvement: Incorporating guidance to enable colleagues to clarify and implement genuine Student Partnership via endorsing SPA framework.

- Importance to be given on the framing of project: there are implications for leadership (School and subject level) to counteract potential resistance from staff and achieve authentic buy-in and drive participation.

Disrupt the Discourse project main evaluation report 21/22

Synopsis of the project and rationale

The Disrupt the Discourse project (DtD) is a pedagogical change initiative which has been developed as part of London Met's strategy to respond to persisting structural inequalities in society, particularly in educational spaces. The two main components of the project are the development of an online toolkit/resource and the delivery of scaffolded workshop sessions (five sessions/90mins) aimed at staff from all participating pilot course teams.

This approach can be seen as complementary to both the ESJF (Education for Social Justice Framework) implementation and the roll-out of the Inclusive Behaviours training programme (training in equity literacy and practice) as it provides colleagues a space for exchange and reflections. A key feature of the project is the engagement in reflections from an individual up to organisational level with the aim to develop and share effective educational practice among course teams and the wider organisation. These interactions mainly occur through guided and actively facilitated decoded workshop sessions acting as a stimulus for the development of a Community of Practice (CoP) to achieve sustained change. The illustration below outlines the developmental process and key features of the initiative.

Figure 1: Developmental process and key features of the initiative

Figure 1. School level change
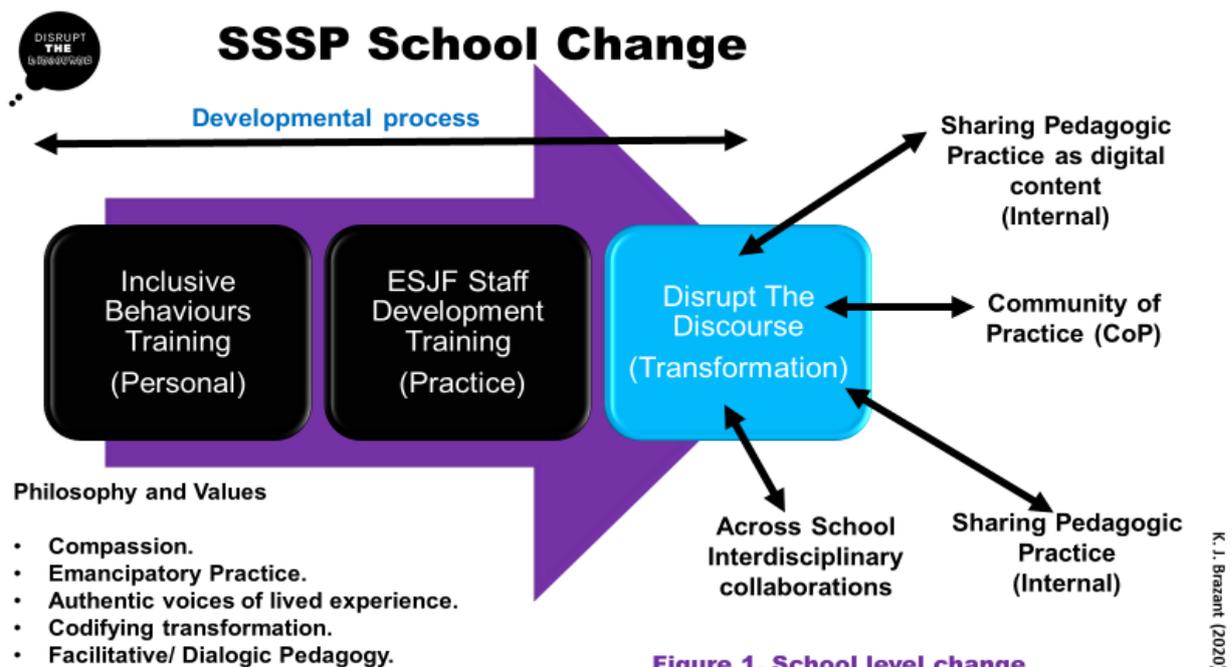
Main aims and key features of the project

The main aims and objectives of the DtD initiative are:
- To **develop introspection and boost staff confidence** in navigating themes of race, ethnicity, privilege and inequality as part of learning and teaching practice.

- To **encourage staff and student partnerships** (academics, Academic mentors, Student Curriculum Partners and others) interested in co-creating and sharing innovative practice across the School, in the form of case studies and digital/creative content.

- To **develop an ecosystem of pedagogic activity** that helps to bolster anti-racist pedagogies in partnership with students as part of teaching and learning practice.

- To **form a Community of Practice (CoP)** of academic colleagues, staff and Student Curriculum Partners (SCPs) interested in developing and sharing practice across the School and eventually the institution in an anti-racist pedagogy that considers the positionality and intersections of student and staff identity as part of facilitating student learning.

These aims tie into the broader institutional ambition:
- to enhance the external profile of the University as a catalyst for transforming education through Social Justice but also;
- to act as a driver for knowledge transfer in educational research/practice and foresee further collaborations and promote partnerships with HEIs in the sector and with ideologically aligned organisations.

Distinct and unique features of the project:
- A dialogic and collaborative approach to creating anti-racist digital content.
- Amplifying authentic voices of professionals, researchers and academics with lived experience or allyship.
- Reframing knowledge as transmission to knowledge as co-created.
- To not just explore the 'content' of anti-racist practice but to also engage in 'praxis'."***The process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, or realised. "Praxis" may also refer to the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realising, or practising ideas***" Smith, M. K. (1999, 2011).
- An innovative approach to manifesting transformative education for social justice.
- 'Creating space to talk about race.' - Encouraging lecturers to reflect on positionality as part of their practice.

Delivery approach and implementation

Initially, the DtD online resource has been conceptualised and co-created with the support of academics and researchers highlighting "lived experiences" and trialled by a selected group of staff members and students. During this developmental stage, feedback has been obtained which focussed on the design, layout and the subject content within the resource. This process helped to shape and improve user-friendliness of the toolkit and guided the

pilot roll-out at the later stage of the academic year 21/22. The Academic Mentor for Social Work, Youth Work and Community Development and Leadership within the School of Social Sciences & Professions (SSSP) is the Project Lead and led on the production of the resources, toolkit and workshop session delivery with key advice and support provided by the Head of School, Head of CPED and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching & Learning.

Selection of pilot courses

After conducting several planning meetings with the Head of School, Heads of Subject and the Project Lead in SSSP, three courses were identified and selected for the pilot implementation based on the following factors: courses identified with the largest degree awarding gap (APP), student outcomes data and cohort size. The participating staff group was made up of around 35 staff members delivering the three UG courses below;

- Bsc Youth Studies.
- Bsc Education Studies.
- Bsc Early Childhood Studies.

Session outline, participation and engagement

The project commenced with an online launch event followed by five workshop sessions held during May/June alternating between remote and face-to-face delivery. All 90 minutes sessions were themed and organised around key topics highlighted in the online toolkit.

Table 1: Overview of session themes, delivery mode, and participation rates

Session theme	Delivery mode	Attendance (excl. facilitator) Target group: 35 staff members
Disrupt the Discourse pilot launch	Online via MS teams	Target group + HoS, HoSE/AO, Heads of Subjects, Assoc. Director CEI, Director for L&T
What does compassionate pedagogy look like at London Met?	Face to face	17
Disrupting Hegemonic Whiteness	Online	17
Understanding the student experience at London Met	Face to face	14
Applying Critical theory to praxis in our classrooms	Online	11
Feedback and Evaluation - Next steps to a collaborative future	Face to face	7

Staff engaging with the project were asked to complete a pre-session survey to identify their hopes, wishes and perceived challenges in participating in the programme. On the whole, initial thoughts appeared to be positive about the prospect of engaging with the programme. The following table illustrates the collective responses from participants ascertaining their hopes, wishes and perceived fears of engaging with the programme.

Table 2: Quotations lifted from survey responses contrasting participants' "hopes" and "challenges" of engaging with the project

What are your hopes for engaging in this project?	What would be the perceived challenges for engaging in this project?
"Advancing my knowledge, improving my practice and student and staff outcomes"	*"Dealing with other's opinions on what constitutes supportive teaching practice"*
"To empower our students with social justice principles so that they advocate for their communities."	*"Speaking my mind"*
"To inform my learning and teaching."	*"The nuts and bolts of incorporating and organising the ideas in teaching materials etc."*
"Improve outcomes for students and develop my own CPD in the areas I am less confident in."	**"My personal defensiveness!"**
"For a more cohesive school then university wide approach (less reinventing of the wheel). For more of my work to be informed by theory and research."	*"Time constraints. I am fully overloaded with work at the moment. Dedicated time should be given perhaps, as part of our professional development and not rely on good will. This might ensure that any project embarked upon can then be integrated into mainstream practices."*

Overall, there was keen and active participation in the workshop sessions by colleagues from course teams who were included in the pilot. However, based on attendance records, it was noticeable that only a few staff members were able to attend the majority of workshops and overall attendance dropped over the course of the five sessions.

Online vs Face to Face

Our intention was not to record the sessions so we could create a safe space for colleagues to engage and exercise sensitivity in exploring the session themes. We noticed that active engagement with the content and discussions was more easily assessed by the "face to face" sessions as opposed to "online".

The main feature of the project is the active engagement with the toolkit followed by the submission of individual reflections on the themes and materials engaged as part of the toolkit. For far more advanced academics already engaging in anti-racist practice, there is an

opportunity for them to submit case studies in the form of (effective) practice examples accompanied by (personal/group) reflections during the delivery of the themed session.

Evaluation approach

Ahead of the delivery of the workshop sessions, an evaluation approach (framework) was co-developed in order to assess the process and impact of the implementation of the DtD project on different organisational levels (see table 3. below). The evaluation particularly focuses on the process of the implementation and how impact can be evidenced/measured by developing indicators/outputs including corresponding outcomes expressed through participants' changes in understanding, awareness and behaviour. The framework also lists suggested medium to long term impact anticipated in the four areas outlined below.

To complement this framework, the project lead also utilised individual notes taken after each session focussed on commentary about participants behaviour, expressions and engagement using a 'Participant Observation' approach used in ethnographic data collection used in the field of Anthropology.

Table 3: Evaluation approach and framework

Project Aims	Evaluation approach	Indicators/outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Culture Change (Macro level) - The DtD project aims to support the development of a community of practice among academics and students across the institution	Measuring engagement with toolkit (staff/students)	Data on engagement with toolkit and resources available (feedback form) Number of events held Partnerships/Collaborations (number, composition & remit)	increased confidence to engage in conversations about race Enhanced awareness and understanding of anti-racist pedagogy	Development of active, cross-departmental ecosystem (culture change) increase of successful outcomes for all students
London Met Decoded sessions (Meso level) Facilitated through DtD toolkit the CoP will function as catalyst to rethink education as vehicle to advance social justice	Measuring engagement of target group with DtD activities Assessment of level of influence on L&T practice	Attendance data on workshop sessions & assessment of influence via in-session feedback & form Capturing examples (case studies, digital artefacts/content creation, group reflection) where practice has been influential Students as Partners and role and contributions of students in the process	Enhanced staff confidence to navigate & apply concepts to own L&T practice sharing of (best) practice Active engagement with toolkit	enhanced institutional conversations about race, ethnicity, and social justice through CoPs & collaborations enhanced use of anti-racist pedagogy in practice
Digital content creation (Micro-individual level) DTD resource aims to support the engagement, development and critical reflection with anti-racist pedagogies and resulting in best practice example application to teaching practice in interdisciplinary settings	Ascertain influence on practice & personal development by illuminating lived experiences and helpfulness of toolkit and community	Feedback form responses, Interviews and focus groups with staff & students		

Feedback form

Even though colleagues have been encouraged (reminders sent via email) to complete the feedback form, we only received two responses after concluding the final workshop session. The following comment illustrates both the helpfulness of the toolkit but also challenges for effective engagement: "*[..] rich and plenty of relevant and exciting materials from a wide*

range of sources - the digital tool kit is user-friendly, and extremely well developed and presented. It allows to dip in as well as getting immersed in it. Time pressures (assessment period) did not allow me to engage with the toolkit as much as I would have wanted to, I look forward to engaging with it in the upcoming period which is quieter."

Similarly, the following comment about scheduling, lack of time and limited prior notice about the workshop sessions hindered colleagues to fully explore and utilise the offering: "*I enjoyed the sessions I was able to attend, with a preference for online which were more flexible given that the intervention took place during the marking period and with limited prior notice. This limited the amount I was able to engage particularly with the online resources in between sessions, though there's lots here that would be of interest to take a more detailed look with more time."*

Focus group

A doodle poll was created to capture colleagues' availability to attend a focus group after all workshop sessions were delivered. The aim was to thematically discuss core aspects of the toolkit and workshop sessions and to gain a deeper understanding about the challenges/benefits experienced by engaging with the initiative. Unfortunately, only two colleagues provided availability so that it was not possible to arrange a focus group. However, it will be the intention to follow up with focus group discussion in the new academic 2022/23 year to assess the influence of the toolkit and sessions on participants' practice.

In-session feedback (Mentimeter)

The final workshop session was dedicated to provide an overview of and discuss the suggested evaluation approach with colleagues to allow them to provide feedback on the process itself. Additional insights were generated through Menti questions eg. assessing colleagues' benefits experienced when engaging with the toolkit and workshop sessions which are illustrated below (7 responses out of 10 attendees - statements rated on a scale from 1 - 10).

Figure 2: Menti question on experience with toolkit/workshop sessions

It enhanced my confidence to navigate themes of race/ethnicity and inequalities within the L&T context — 8.3

It prompted personal reflections and discussions with colleagues about the topics covered in the resource — 8.1

It supported me in developing ideas for applying concepts from resource to my own L&T practice in future — 9.1

It provided a developmental space for exchange and inspired me to share ideas for partnerships & collaborations — 7.6

It can be noted that responses given via Menti were on the positive end of the scale for all four statements indicating personal improvements which aids demonstrating positive outcomes for those who submitted. However, for the following Menti questions colleagues repeatedly raised the unfortunate timing/scheduling and marking commitments as reasons for their limited engagement and suggested to arrange delivery either at the beginning of the academic year and/or consult with colleagues on suitable timeframes. In order to enhance the implementation of anti-racist pedagogies, feedback from course teams highlighted the use of peer mentors & collaborations, sharing of good practice and additional time allowance (AWAM) for this process to happen.

Individual/group reflections

Another aspect of the project was the written submission of individual reflections completed by participants. These individual reflections intended to ascertain how the understanding and perception of the participants has changed since engaging with the themes raised in the toolkit and workshop sessions. Across the cycle of the first cohort only two reflections were submitted. There were some issues around the submission of these reflections, with some colleagues separately contacting the project lead to identify whether or not the reflections could be anonymised due to the sensitivity of the topics being explored. As these reflections will also be used as formal evaluation data an informed consent process and info sheet is suggested to be used. In response to this challenge using 'image mediated dialogue' as part of group reflections could help to detach participants through the use of images, enabling abstract expressions, but still does not protect individual members sharing and making disclosures.

For those who did engage with the toolkit and submitted individual reflections the quality of the feedback suggested an appreciation for the content and the learning elicited. The content that appeared to resonate with these colleagues were the themes concerning 'whiteness', 'privilege' and 'allyship.'

Case studies

Case studies were encouraged for more advanced colleagues who are already applying anti racist practice as part of their pedagogy. There were no Case studies submitted despite participants indicating in the workshop sessions that they were engaging with these themes as part of their practice. On reflection, this may have been an additional ask for academics as the pre engagement questionnaire indicated that the cohort were only "fairly confident" about Anti-Racist Practice, in particular Critical Race Theory, and this programme was designed using a threshold concepts curriculum design (assumes learners are new to the subject matter and content). For future iterations of the project it has been suggested, see recommendations that the programme is delivered in two parts (1) Engagement with the toolkit and workshop sessions and (2) to share practice experiences.

Feedback from Participant Observation reflections

Given the sensitive nature of exploring themes of race, ethnicity and how this intersects with other aspects of identity, the project lead has indicated the importance of considering their positionality (e.g. gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ableness) and that of future trainers as part of recruitment and the subsequent delivery of this initiative. This thinking derives from an auto ethnographic approach to understanding the trainer's personal experiences and position as part of a wider cultural experience. Alongside the delivery of the sessions the project Lead/facilitator undertook written notes using a participant observation model to capture how colleagues were responding to the problems and questions posed as part of the decoded sessions and how his role as facilitator also impacted this process. These notes were more suited for face to face delivery where colleagues' body language, facial expressions could be documented along with utterances captured from contributing to the main discussions and activities. These notes have been written from across the full five weeks of delivery and have been themed into subheadings with commentary of observations listed below.

Creating 'safe' developmental spaces

There has been a sense that across the sessions participants have been on a journey of anti-racist practice, with colleagues building trust and safety in the process with each other. Even in tackling difficult and more sensitive topics of exploring 'whiteness', white fragility' and lived experiences of 'trauma' or 'racial battle fatigue.' There were instances of colleagues appropriately correcting one another on use of language and certain terms. This raised questions of what the conditions had been to enable authentic sharing. Staff who identified as white felt open and not attacked and equally those identifying as being from another ethnic background other than white also felt able to share and be vulnerable. In fact, it was noted that some colleagues were seen in a different light as a result of the space and time afforded for engaging in this project. All staff appeared to appreciate the opportunity to develop ideas locally and across curriculum disciplines.

Visible division between managers and academic staff

There was a sense that there was a division between managers and teaching staff. This was evident through the seating arrangements (managers sat at the front of the room) academics sat at the back. Despite encouraging colleagues to move so power roles and status was less obvious, colleagues remained seated in their chosen seats. Will need to think about managers' involvement in future sessions and how this impacts on the delivery of sessions and authenticity of those sharing and contributing given the sensitivity of the topics explored.

This theme of teaching staff feeling frustrated with management was expressed when some colleagues raised that as an institution and School we will need to think about how the HoS will host, support and sustain the ESJF beyond teaching within the university and as part of work based learning and placements. This process was described as managers needing to successfully 'manage the ESJF on the fringes of the University.'They raised questions and points around the tensions of implementing the ESJF and how it translates as part of the following:

- Partnerships with professional agencies (as part of student placements e.g. Social Work placements, educational teacher placements, youth work etc.)
- How do they deal with harassment of students and issues of racial microaggressions etc.

Limitations

Due to the relatively low engagement with the evaluation process (low numbers of those who provided feedback), the feedback received might not create a true reflection of the experiences of all participants. However, we were able to successfully trial the evaluation instruments and approaches for the anticipated institutional roll-out following this pilot. We endeavour to continuously enhance and utilise further feedback from colleagues to improve our current evaluation and delivery strategy. Despite the aforementioned challenges with gathering feedback, it nevertheless provided insights and helped to steer the overall implementation of future delivery of the initiative.

Future proofing (sustainability and processes of project)

Voluntary participation vs being mandated (BAME degree awarding gap internal data): The project's initial engagement strategy was to adopt a communities of practice (CoP) approach which in theory consists of bringing colleagues together with a genuine interest in solving a mutual problem. There were some colleagues who had a genuine interest in participating in the project. The backdrop to engagement with the project was initially framed around the degree awarding data and this became a main sticking point at parts of workshop delivery, as there appeared to be unresolved questions about the data. Commitment and attendance waned at points (it felt as though colleagues were forced to be there) this became more palpable when we discussed far more sensitive topics around race and lived experiences. This raises questions as to whether or not this is the best course of action to engage colleagues in the project and future roll out.

Timing/scheduling to allow for active engagement: suggested delivery is in two parts one from Oct-Dec with five sessions (including embedded evaluation session) and part two at the end of June (end of Marking period) to share good practice (via L&T conference) and identify ways to share knowledge innovation.

Framing/commitment requirements: In order to drive and promote genuine engagement with toolkit and subsequent sessions, the framing and communication strategy surrounding the project and expectations are paramount. School/subject level leadership is instrumental here and forms a crucial role in conveying the importance of the initiative to counteract potential resistance from staff and achieve authentic buy-in.

Cascaded train the trainer approach: In order to generate sustainability and quality assurance in the delivery of the initiative in other Schools in future, dedicated staff members such as the ESJ Leads who have the remit would prove apt for a wider roll out. Other colleagues may need to be identified and trained so that subject/discipline knowledge can be taken into consideration when delivering this initiative within their respective Schools. This

aspect also refers to the level of baseline awareness/understanding of participating staff in relation to themes/topics covered in the toolkit/workshops. Furthermore, a log book to document aspects of delivery (behaviour, expression and engagement) utilising taking the form of a reflective log or post self evaluation of each session.

Student involvement: Incorporating guidance to enable colleagues to clarify and implement genuine Student Partnership - SPA framework.

Outlook & implications for AY 2022/23: guidance needs to be developed to enable associate trainers who could be partnered with committed SSSP members of staff, acting as peer mentors in other Schools to deliver the initiative as intended. In anticipation of an institutional roll out, staff members (in other Schools and/or subject areas) will have to be consulted in advance to create awareness and identify suitable time frames for delivery.

Main findings & recommendations
- Participants found the offering engaging, stimulating and useful despite course teams' decreasing attendance due to assessment period and marking commitments
- Attendance data suggests that not all staff members engaged.
- Participants experienced a 'safe-space' and felt comfortable discussing session content and themes resulting in benefits noted through engagement with the project.
- Collated feedback suggests colleagues appreciated interactions with different course teams resulting in more diverse ideation for collaborations and cross-disciplinary projects.
- Student involvement was found to be absent in the pilot delivery and from in-class discussions it became apparent to incorporate the student voice in future iterations.

In line with main findings and future proofing implications, below are the resulting **main recommendations** for future roll out:
- Promote active participation including successful engagement with the Toolkit, individual reflections and the decoded workshop sessions.
- Consider resource & staffing implications for staff delivering the initiative (AWAM) and commitment for planning, facilitating, delivering and evaluating this initiative. Also, a planned CPD objective acknowledged in MyReview.
- Consider timings and scheduling of the project in future roll out to support participants' ability to (pre-) engage with the DtD toolkit and decoded workshop sessions.
- Develop a mechanism to support the role of 'positionality', this should prioritise the training team charged with teaching for 'anti racist practice' as part of this initiative.
- To make provision for guided collaborations that are scaffolded times and spaces outside of the programme to encourage collaborations and share practice.
- Enable face to face delivery (where possible) to achieve the consolidation of learning objectives & delivery should reflect mixed cohorts across curriculum areas.
- Assess level of student involvement: Incorporating guidance to enable colleagues to clarify and implement genuine Student Partnership via endorsing SPA framework.
- Importance to be given on the framing of project: there are implications for leadership (School and subject level) to counteract potential resistance from staff and achieve authentic buy-in and drive participation.