



The Anti-Racist Curriculum Project: Work Commissioned to Edinburgh Napier University

2021-22

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What change has been/is being made?

From our evaluation of the work in [Decolonising the Curriculum in the Time of Pandemic](#) in the first phase of this Collaborative Cluster from January to June 2021, we knew there was energy for this work and an urgent need to harness this energy and amplify these discussions as much as we could. We identified three aspects of this work to take forward into phase 2:

- Learning as a sector, as institutions and as individuals - how to deal with uncomfortable conversations around decolonising the curriculum. This year's work has included steps towards creating a resource that enables colleagues to facilitate and participate in these conversations within a culture of learning where they are enabled to educate themselves.
- Supporting a network of academic developers, given their pivotal role in universities, at the intersection of strategy and practice in learning and teaching, and as critical change agents in this work. In phase 1, our first priority was the development of a wider, diverse network to inform this work in a national context. This year, we have developed this network and supported its members to explore how to support decolonising the curriculum in their own institutions.
- Finally, following the successful work with student interns in Year 1, we have worked from January 2022 with one of those student interns - Jasmine Millington - to develop the phase 1 resources and evaluate their impact in the sector.

The following deliverables were outlined in the contract and will be completed by the end of July 2022:

1. Project plan indicating key dates for meetings and podcasts
2. Two meetings of institutional network of academic developers
3. Ongoing activity for institutional network of academic developers, using Jamboard or similar
4. Resource resulting from the above meetings and activity
5. Two podcasts, to be produced by student interns
6. Feasibility study for digital artefact (proposed output for phase 3), including a clear description of the artefact, costed project plan, and considerations for hosting, version control and accessibility
7. A short evaluative report about the above activity.

Above and beyond these deliverables, however, has been a lot of reach, both nationally and internationally, of this work through conference presentations.

Why have we made/are we making it?

Decolonising the curriculum work is about ensuring diverse voices and perspectives inform and shape our curricula, which is being done here through our established inter-institutional network and also through our student partnership work.

The focus on our interinstitutional network has created a community organically and, indeed, has already helped forge connections between colleagues who are sharing practice with one another. They are able to share some of the challenges of this work and learn from one another. We hope to strengthen these connections through our meetings as well as develop new ones in institutions too. This should help staff and students feel they have a principled

space in which they belong; and strengthen all of our knowledge and self-efficacy to lead institutional work.

This work is critical to developing learning and teaching practices that support staff and student success and part of our mission is to show how the inclusive and flexible aspects of decolonising the curriculum make it meaningful and relevant for all (Hockings, 2010). For example, not requiring use of the camera in online meetings; and using less conventional but more creative, auto/biographical and exploratory approaches in presentations, lead to better understanding of student experiences, better audience engagement and better feedback. Mia Liyanage's (2020) report for HEPI has influenced our approach, in the way that it both enacts and highlights the power of amplifying different voices, 'publishing candid conversations with academics, activists and policymakers alongside each other, in order to show the transformative power they can wield in discourse about decolonisation' (58). Importantly, a student-led approach to student engagement - as exemplified in this year's podcast work - results in more nuanced and critical discussion. The Enhancement Theme Anti-Racist Curriculum resources have also provided a helpful reference point and we have often incorporated them into our dissemination work.

What difference has occurred/will hopefully occur as a result?

Dissemination as evidence of impact

Our two interinstitutional meetings have allowed us to continue to share our thoughts and ideas as we see this work developing in our institutions. New colleagues are joining this network each time and which gives a sense that this work is increasing in terms of visibility and impact. However, there are still changes, at which we look to address in the section below.

We have disseminated this work more widely and with greater reach than we had originally anticipated. Jasmine Millington and Catriona Cunningham have presented at the following events:

- QAA online event (March 2022)
As a result, we have now been joined by a colleague, Amrita Narang, who can share her research and expertise with the group; it has also led to requests to download the 'Stimulus' document, created in 2021.
- Germany-Scottish event (April 2022)
Jasmine has followed this up by sharing the project report and stimulus document with colleagues from universities across Germany who are keen to hear more.
- L&T conference Aberdeen (May 2022)
Colleagues were very positive in their feedback and noted that the format itself - a dialogic, non-traditional keynote - embodied the decolonial practices being advocated. This is an important point; if we want to decolonise our curricula, we have to rethink all of our academic practices and conventions.
- QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme conference (June 2022)
This presentation received strong positive feedback - for the content, the use of narratives to give insight, and the working dynamic of student-staff partnership. In particular, staff said it made them aware of the positions they were occupying

in discussions with students, and of the choices available to them.

Catriona has also drawn on some of this work at the annual L&T Conference, University of the West of Scotland (June 22), which has helped start their institutional anti-racist conversation.

Details of the project will also be published as a European international case study of good EDI practice by the Lumina Foundation.

What has been the impact of those interventions?

It is clear from the dissemination events that there is more traction for student engagement around decolonising topics. However, there is also a sense that, as with the work itself, by presenting as a student-staff partnership, the time of change has come and that we are moving beyond academic events as typically internal and what Jasmine refers to as 'closed door'. Through this work, we are in fact decolonising our very academic identities and practices.

As a direct result of our network meetings this year, Rayya Ghul of Edinburgh University has agreed to develop and share a workshop outline and facilitators' pack for the cluster, based on a workshop she has developed on engaging academics in decolonising the curriculum, beginning with self-reflection about their own relationships to colonialism. Rayya created this resource for an invited workshop at Glasgow Caledonian University and has also agreed to run a session at Edinburgh Napier University.

There have been tangible changes that we can see through the project work: at an individual level - particularly for those working in the network; at an institutional level - often as a result of the initial work of those individuals; and at a national and even international level. These changes will be examined more closely below. Overall though, we would argue that there are two distinct changes that we can see:

1. The Danger of a Single Story (Adichie, 2009)

This work is teaching us how important it is that this work begins with the individual and the need to surface and face some of our assumptions about our curricula and about our learners. It is clear that what we see emerging is the importance of our approaches to our students and that actually *how* we teach can help this work as much as changes we make to our curricula. Arguably, this will make it easier to persuade colleagues that there are very simple steps to take to welcome their students into the classroom, such as knowing their name.

2. Changing staff-student relationships

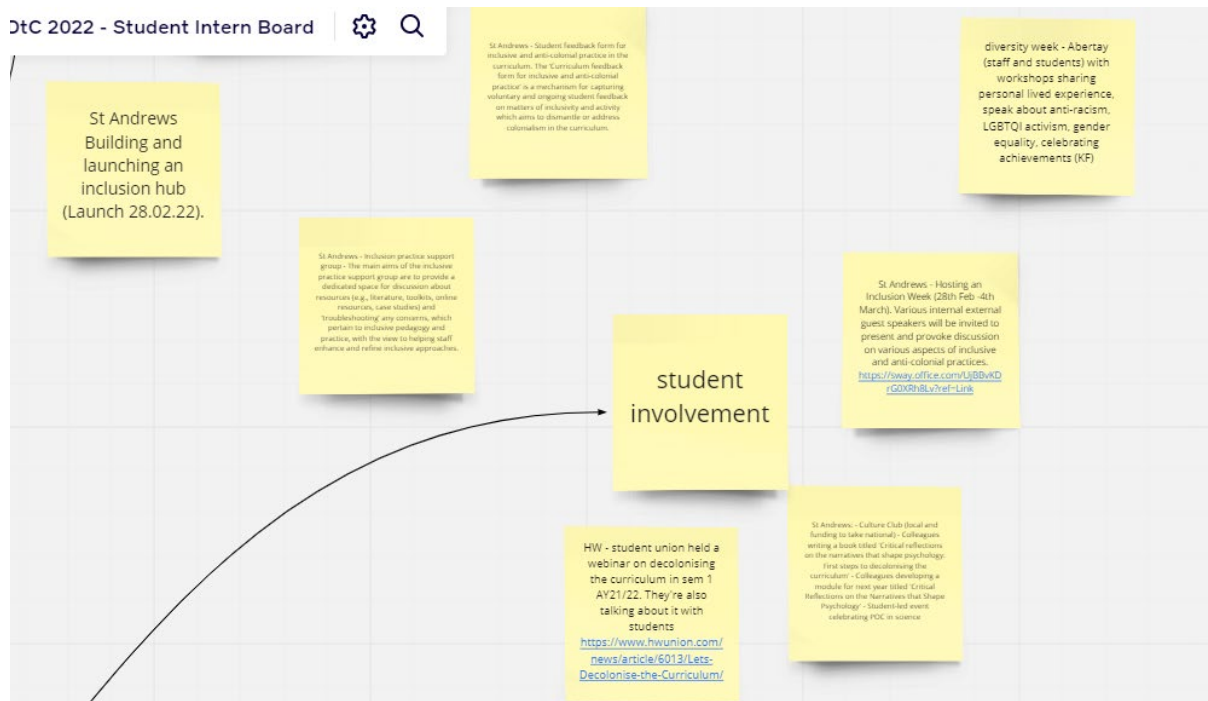
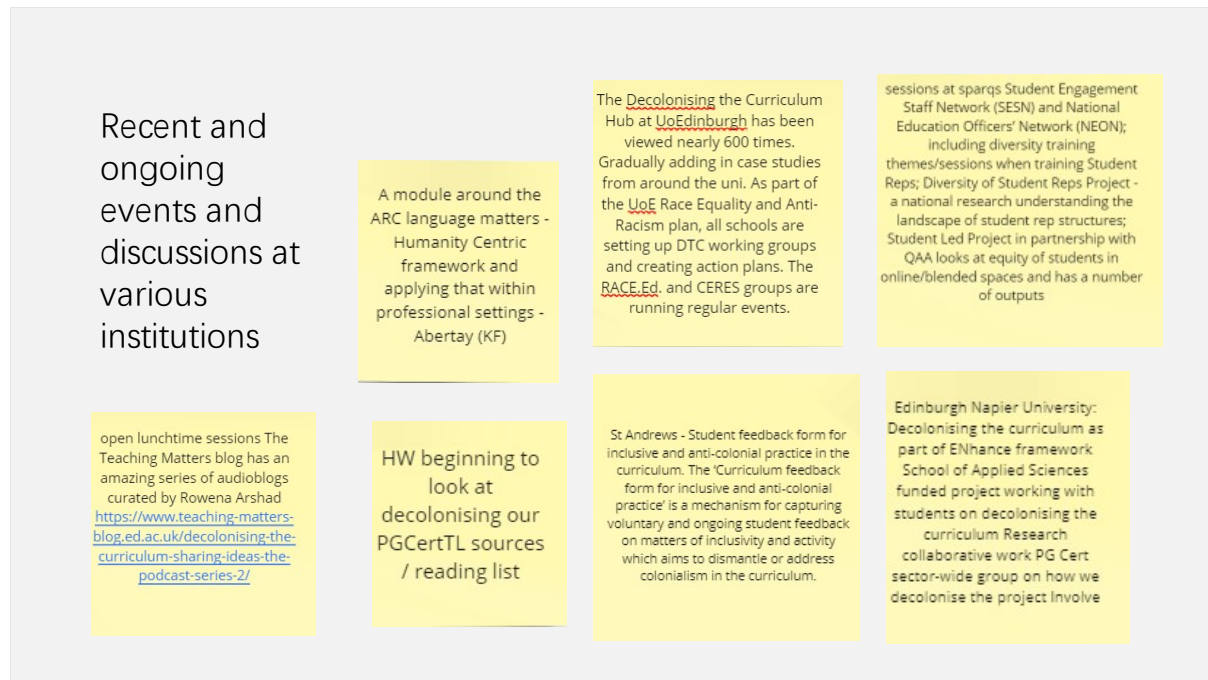
Given the way that decolonial practices force this dismantling or, at the very least, this questioning of our curricula, there are significant (and we would argue exciting) implications for the ways in which we listen and talk to our students. This work aligns with emerging literature on relational pedagogies and pedagogies of 'mattering' (Gravett et al, 2021)

The Danger of a Single Story

'How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.' (Adichie, 2009)

This quotation, taken from the Nigerian author's famous TED talk - 'The Danger of a Single Story' - resonates powerfully, even though it is now over a decade old. What we heard in our institutional network and in the conversations at the different events we attended, both

formally and informally, are many, many stories that have never been widely shared and that this project is an opportunity to share. Individuals in our network have gone on to effect change in each of our institutions as the Miro board below indicates. The context, of course, means that this is different in each institution, but we can see from this snapshot alone that there is appetite for this work and that changes are also happening at disciplinary and institutional level. There is clearly recognition for this work to take place, as the initiatives below indicate. What we really need to know in a year's time, or longer, is the impact.



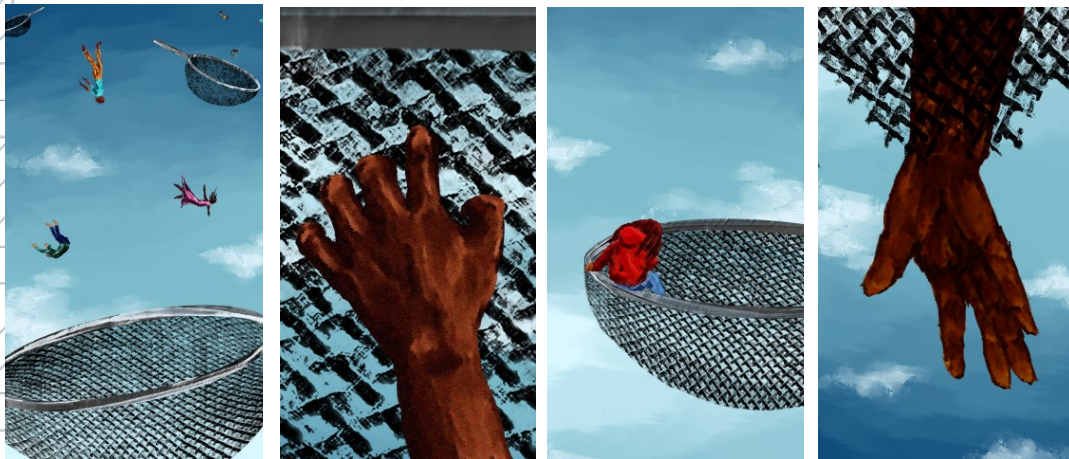
For full details of the activities taking place, please view the [Miro board](#).

Staff-student partnership

Four student interns from four different Scottish universities worked with us in 2020-21 and one of these, Jasmine Millington, has continued to support our work in 2021-22. A distinctive set of visual representations of student experience by Jasmine, developing ideas co-created by the four of them, have since been printed as posters and displayed at the QAA Enhancement Theme conference. These images are based around the metaphor of the 'sieve' and can be seen below.



Artist: Jasmine Millington



The power of these images can be felt palpably in the room - whether in Germany, at the QAA Conference or in Aberdeen. Colleagues respond strongly to the images and they also resonate. We know of one colleague at Strathclyde who has found the 'sieve' metaphor so useful that she is bringing it into her own writing and work. What colleagues tell us is that these images make them see very clearly how we, as a sector, are letting students fall through the holes. We need to extend that hand to catch them. We are keen to capture those connections we made through this unexpected reach and impact of our engagement through these images and our other presentations, and build them into next year's work to continue to raise awareness and share stories.

In July 2021, our student interns wrote a detailed evaluative report of the Year 1 workshops and their subsequent recommendations. Some of their data analysis informed our approach to Year 2. For example, participants felt that there was often not enough time in our workshops to explore issues in sufficient detail, and that the breakout rooms in particular were of mixed success. Part of the issue here was that workshop popularity meant we struggled to identify a sufficient number of breakout room facilitators. Unfacilitated breakout rooms are effectively unmonitored learning spaces, where racial and other power dynamics may play out in ways which make them psychologically unsafe for participants from a variety of positionalities (for example, Noxolo, 2020). Because of this, we decided to focus Year 2 on consolidating our network of enthusiasts - many with strategic roles in educational development - across a maximum number of institutions. This allowed for more focused meetings exploring particular issues, focusing on supporting these people in their enabling of others to engage in decolonisation, in their own university contexts.

However, this overview only scratches the surface of the level of detail of their data. I quote some examples below of the possible solutions they propose, based on their analysis:

- learning about and creating 'identity safe' classrooms
- allow anonymity and collect written submissions, projected to class (Mentimeter, Jamboard or similar); students can compare their own responses and become more confident
- encouraging students to bring and discuss different perspectives and creating a space to do so
- always involving students and putting them at the heart of everything we want to achieve - not just assuming we know what to do
- taking wider and more critical lens to the discipline, by opening up curriculum more for co-partnership with students
- identifying sieves can help reduce them; reviewing teaching materials and asking: 'What sieves will students have to pass through to engage with this?'

We would like to create a resource drawing on both the images and the report that could be used as a workshop to run with staff. The materials and the reflective points are there, and we would welcome QAA Scotland's support in collating these into one resource.

Our reflections on these recommendations in Year 2 have led us to plan for these proposals and the data behind them to form the evidence base and foundation for the planned digital artefact that will be the focus of Year 3's work, drawing out a range of different 'student stories' and experiences of university.

How do we/will we know?

For us, the changes are difficult to 'measure' in terms of metrics. We can, of course, offer the numbers of attendees at workshops and at the events. However, the ambition of the project is much more focused on facilitating longer-term attitudinal and institutional change. We share our individual reflections on this complex issue below.

Jasmine Millington

In the recording sessions with student guests, a number of themes emerged. In the expected bracket of topics under the headlining title 'Decolonising the Curriculum' were conversations on racism, xenophobia, immigrant and migrant culture, ethnic stereotyping and language barriers, which were all addressed in numerous moments between the guesting student and the host student. However, it also became clear that many other elements tie into what it means to 'decolonise' an academic space, as there were also many discussions on neurodivergency, disability, gender identity, queer identity, power dynamics and structures, safety in spaces, linguistic differences, mental health, support systems, and accessibility in its various meanings. Having these conversations is actually not uncommon between students (in my experience at least), but the difference in room tone was palpable when the microphone was turned on, and again when it was turned off at the end of the session.

During the conversations immediately after recording, which sometimes went on for hours, we would talk about our dry amusement at the voices we slipped into using and the language that had been employed, even in a space designed for natural conversation. The pressure of being somewhat academic, professional, and well-spoken was felt by all of us, even though the discussions were far from textbook and not at all clinical or cold. This small phenomenon will be something to bear in mind when listening to the final podcasts – in all that the voices and stories contained are genuine and spoken with true-to-life intonations, there was still masking of verbal cues and linguistic trends in the name of 'being taken

seriously', providing a case-in-point contextual example of what many students have mentioned as barriers of contribution and engagement within education and academia.

A final further takeaway from this project is that there was often an underlying sense of wary nervousness shared between us. As students, we have never seen the likes of these conversations actually being perceived by 'the other side', and so at times it became a tightrope exercise in 'Is my story/experience/conversation up to acceptable standard?' and 'Will anyone listen and actually find any use in what I have to say?'. Having this be part of the experience highlights the necessity of the project, as it shows just how deep and unspoken the barriers to the current academic systems can really be.

Catriona Cunningham

If I were to tell the story of how our change is measured, it certainly wouldn't be a fairytale with a happy ever after ending. One thing that is clear is that there is no 'ending' to this work at all. Everyone is at different stages of beginning this work. Some, those with lived experience, want to share their stories of what they have experienced. Others do not. Some want to listen, want to learn from those experiences and work out how they can use their privilege to amplify voices and stories that have been invisible for so long. Others don't see there is an issue. Amidst these different perspectives, the desire to make change is unwavering. For me, one of the most positive experiences in this work has been a genuine staff-student partnership with Jasmine. Through listening to her perspectives on what it means to live as a student in our post-colonial world (Eringfield, 2021), and through (many) thoughtful conversations, I have come to realise how much I have still to learn. Decolonising the curriculum is an academic endeavour, yes, but it is also a process of unknowing and unlearning. So many assumptions and ideas about the very purpose of higher education come into these conversations. My one takeaway from the story so far is that I will listen more to my students. Before I can get them to do that, though, I need them to trust me. Building that trust, creating an open space for conversation. This is where the story starts.

Marita Grimwood

The impact of this second year's work will be easier to measure in the future, as it has included processing and engaging with the impact of the work of the first year; and scoping and laying the groundwork for the third year. For example, we have continued to provide a supportive network for sector colleagues, in response to demand from last year; and through Jasmine's work on the podcasts, we are gaining richer and more authentic insights into student experiences and how these impact their sense of belonging and ultimately their learning. These will support the scoping and development of a digital artefact next year. With respect to my own work, they have informed an ongoing critical engagement which had led me to plan approaches to engaging staff in developing inclusive learning spaces and curricula. I will be co-presenting on work relating to this with Dr Hardeep Basra at the Advance HE conference in Newcastle, July 2022. Below, Catriona mentions that this work is unending. In my view, another important point is that it doesn't stand alone - it's part of a wider and growing pattern of activity in the Scottish sector that, together, will lead to the shared understanding and momentum needed for long-term impact.

Who has been/is involved in making any judgements?

Our colleagues in the Cluster have been involved in many conversations along the way - please see their names below. With every event that we attend, we add more colleagues from different contexts and with different experiences and expertise to share. As colleagues, we do not make judgements against each other's work as such, but we do work collaboratively to discuss and share learning, and to make connections among ourselves. Conversations take place formally, but many more take place offline and informally too. Again, we are keen to continue to harness this for next year.

- Julie Blackwell-Young, Abertay University
- Lindy-Ann Blaize-Alfred, University of Sheffield
- Alison Eales, QAA Scotland
- Kathy-Ann Fleet, Abertay University
- Rayya Ghul, University of Edinburgh
- Heather Gray, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Jasmin Hinds, University of St Andrews
- Kevin Leomo, University of Glasgow
- Rosemary McIlwhan, Heriot Watt University
- Joan Ma, Queen Margaret University
- Paula Miles, University of St Andrews
- Derek Robertson, City College Glasgow
- Saima Salehjee, University of Strathclyde
- Melanie Smith, Advance HE Scotland/University of Strathclyde
- Nathalie Tasler, University of Glasgow

At our second meeting, in May 2022, we had a useful discussion about the value of this work, but also the challenges, some of which you can see in the screenshot below.

The screenshot shows three distinct text boxes on a light grey background. The first box is yellow and contains a challenge question. The second box is light blue and contains a reflection on staff contributions. The third box is purple and contains a question about expertise recognition. Below the yellow box is a light blue box with bullet points. In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for 'Enhancement Themes' consisting of a blue and purple triangle.

Challenge How do we engage those who are not in the room and who don't see that there is a problem?

I also think it's going to be particularly interesting how staff react to evaluating student contributions while also having to navigate a different norm of demographic language, as there's only so much "meet in the middle" that students can do before it actively prevents them from contributing

Many individuals have developed expertise in this area in recent years, yet still feel unqualified to make changes. How do we recognise expertise - in others, but also in ourselves?

- Decolonising work is not built into staff workloads.
- In my experience, members of staff who do undertake decolonising work are usually on more precarious contracts (GTAs, ECRs) and/or PoC which is problematic. It's also usually the same people who do this work, which contributes to burn out etc.

Enhancement Themes

We are critical in our remit - in our desire to effect change through this work, but it is clear that there is still work we need to do, as individuals (emphasising again that this work is a never-ending process) but also within and across our institutions.

The post-its on this Miro board show we are extending the work individuals carry out in individual institutions and that this work is gradual, knowledge-building and contextual.

This year has demonstrated the value of networks, and of providing supportive spaces in which to explore complex and often sensitive issues. As a result of this, Marita will be partnering with a colleague in the School of Applied Sciences at Edinburgh Napier - Eva Malone (National Teaching Fellow) - to establish such a network internally, for those actively engaged in decolonisation work. Part of the impetus for this came from the positive response to an internal Edinburgh Napier University (ENU) workshop on decolonisation with a powerful contribution by Dr Omolabake Fakunle of Edinburgh University, to which Dr Malone and colleagues also contributed. There was clearly appetite for further discussion. This workshop related to the Global Outlook theme of ENU's new curriculum framework - ENhance. This strategic innovation is an opportunity to support decolonial thinking across the University, and to model the learned processes of engagement we have developed in this cluster.

Into phase 3

Jasmine, our student intern, shared the following reflections which support our plans for creating a story-based digital artefact that allows for the possibility of anonymous dissemination of richly-qualitative accounts of student (and staff) experiences:

As the student closely involved in the project work, it was an interesting exercise to step into the shoes of multiple experiences that may not have directly belonged to me, but to my fellow students and friends. As I presented the work alongside Catriona, a curious sense of visibility and intangibility emerged, in that there were facets of myself and my student experience reflected in the narratives we spoke of, while as an individual I was able to see the response without it being inflicted in a personal scope (as by design, I was essentially hidden behind a fourth wall). In those moments, I found that often attendees would be comfortable admitting to seeing different perspectives, only to have a somewhat different response when I might bring up my own lived experiences to support the narrative stories we had just presented.

The intersection between a narrative being seen as 'from the wider student demographic', and a narrative being seen as my own lived experience, was in effect a narrative of its own - it's often easier to show and hear a character from a story, even if the character is partially self-portrait in disguise. Having people respond to the characters and scenes that were an amalgamation of many experiences shared between students, it was most intriguing that in my position of storyteller, I was often treated to be in a conversational blindspot, as if I was assumed to be exempt from the experiences in order to share them. This is not a criticism that I was unseen or unheard (quite the opposite; everyone I've worked with has treated me with appropriate respect and kindness), but more an observation on how individuals would choose to engage with a narrative if it was presented as a story that had some distance from them, or as an experience that came across as too personal to be comfortable and too unique to be usable.

Her reflections on making the podcasts also highlight the need to reflect intersectional identities, and the value of paying students, such as herself, to conduct this kind of work, to at least partly mitigate the burden of sharing their lived experiences.

Any things you have stopped/need to stop doing?

Using Microsoft Teams for an interinstitutional network has limitations. It is very easy to overlook messages from external teams, and this has on occasion slowed progress. We have overcome this to a large extent by using email for communications.

Certain interactive elements of workshops and presentations were well-received, but the integration of remote and in-person interaction could be hard to gauge in the moment. This is something we will reflect on as we plan phase 3.

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