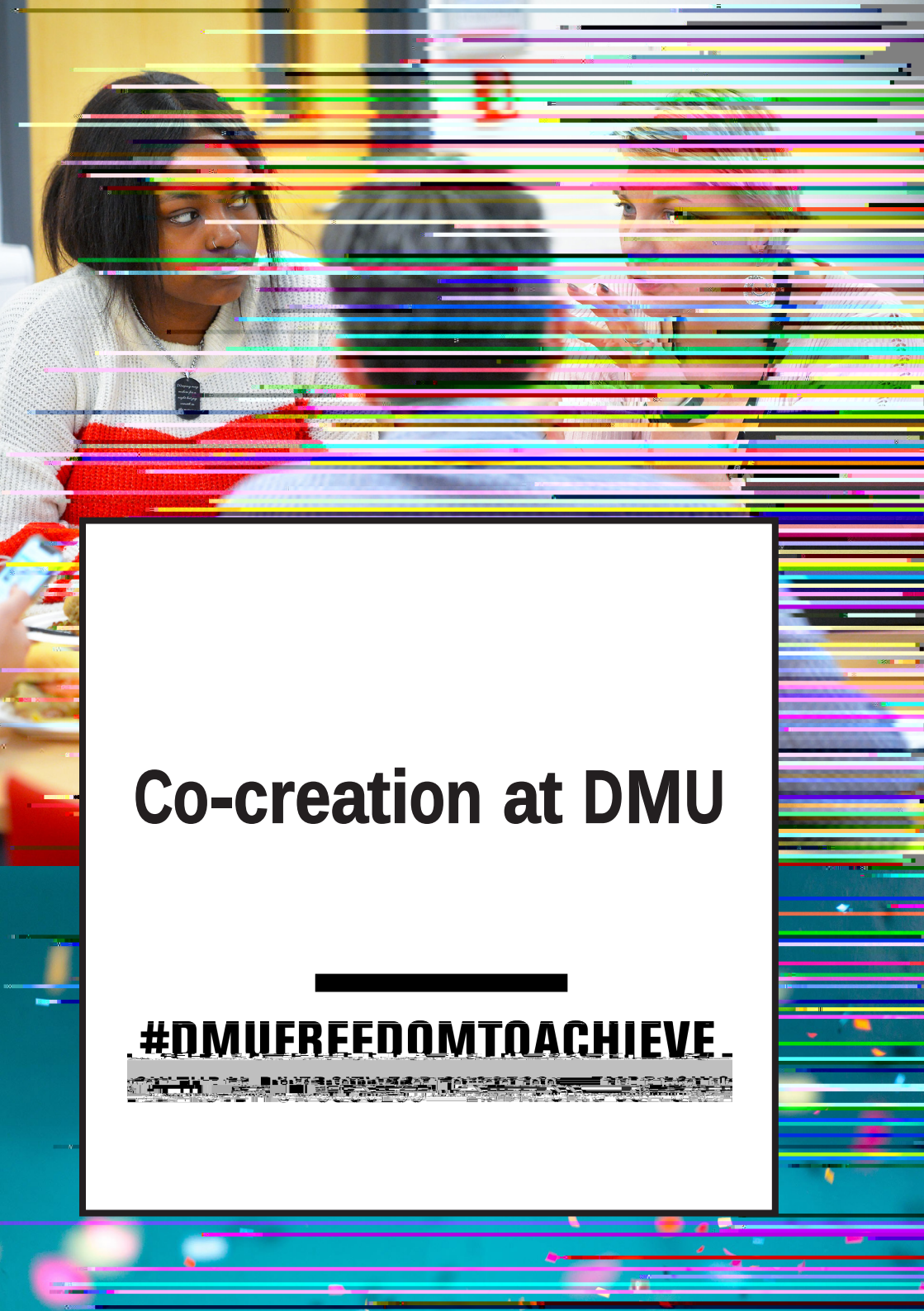

Co-creation at DMU

#DMUFREEDOMTOACHIEVE

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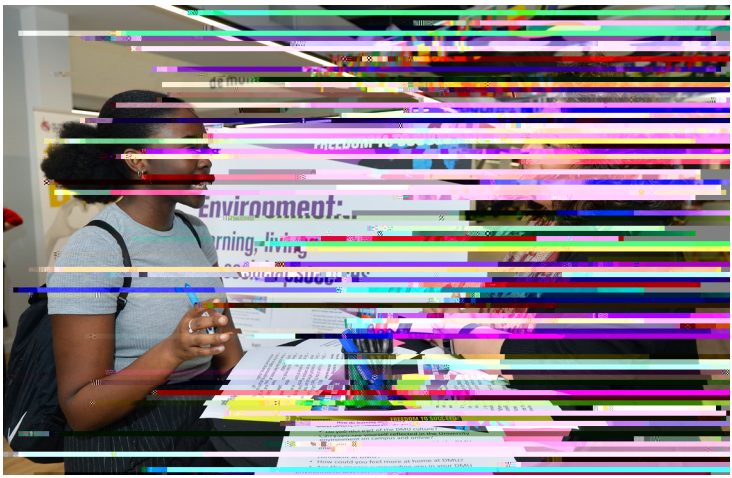

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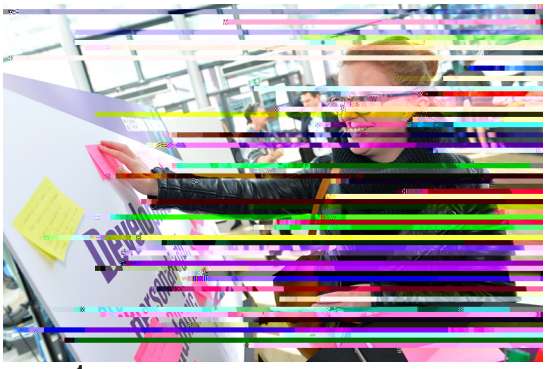
What is co-creation?

Within the Freedom to Achieve project, co-creation is understood as students and lecturers acting as joint constructors of knowledge, working as equal partners in a co-operative process of finding new knowledge and perspectives in the classroom (Willis and Gregory 2016).

> *Being able ail deg ee n*
> *in e e nd b edl make f a m e engaging*
> *e e ience*
>
> - Third year marketing student

Co-creative practices allow for a more dynamic learning experience and are crucial to the development of an inclusive curriculum that is more rounded, relevant and meaningful (Hockings 2010). Student involvement in the design of their own learning landscape ensures for higher levels of engagement and often improved attainment.

The attainment gap between Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and white students within UK Higher Education is well documented and DMU are part of a ground-breaking project to positively address this issue. The Freedom to Achieve project places an explicit focus on the experiences of BAME students at DMU and the ways in which positive change can be evoked through a variety of means, including the recognition and use of co-creation practices.



The Attainment Gap

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students across the nation are finding themselves at an institutional level disadvantage. The likelihood of students from this group achieving first class or upper second honours degree certifications has been found to be consistently lower than that of their white counterparts and identifying the reasons behind this bias is an ongoing journey. Universities nationwide have pledged their dedication to working to improve, and eventually close, the attainment gap. Here at De Montfort University this takes shape in the form of the Freedom to Achieve (FTA) project, an initiative designed to ensure there is an equal playing field and level of opportunity for every student, irrespective of their ethnic background.

Hope for the future

The attainment gap is an issue being recognised at higher education institutions worldwide, with DMU being at the forefront of tackling the issue through working to ensure learning curriculums, environments and assessment methods are reflective of the increasingly diverse make up of our student body. Through the Freedom to Achieve project we are working to improve the BAME attainment gap by analysing the accessibility of course materials from a BAME perspective, encouraging the wider-implementation of co-creative teaching methods and increasing the numbers of opportunities for BAME student opinions to be heard in both formal and informal settings. All work on the FTA project is in partnership with six institutions with whom DMU have united in the fight to close the attainment gap.

Best practice at DMU

Staff and students have been working side by side to implement co-creation practices across the university. The following case studies should provide inspiration and ideas as to how you too can diversify your teaching methods and allow students a greater sense of ownership within their own learning.

S meh e m inc a e an in ellec al ad en e in m de n da eaching and e ea ch. We need c e and di ec i n, b al dige i n and e ec i n.

- Dr Ruta Furmonaviciene

Best practice at DMU

Blogging assessment in BA English Language

Students studying the Structure and Meaning of Language module on this course are assessed using a unique blog assessment they work on over the course of the academic year. Students are instructed to produce three blog posts analysing the effects of language in a setting of their choice. A range of blog structures are welcomed, with audio-visual content encouraged also. Students upload their blogs to online class portfolios and are assessed not only for their written work but the quality of feedback and interaction they show with the work of their classmates.

Within this module more often than not students will analyse prescribed texts or case studies and so this assessment has equipped students with autonomy they were yet to experience academically. In lectures, students learn the theory that informs their understanding before utilising this to analyse a text of their own choice that is relevant to them personally. Guidance is offered for those students who are unsure of a subject to focus upon, however it is noted the majority of students find this assessment extremely engaging and enjoy the chance to focus on different content. One student used the assessment to combine her extracurricular activity in theatre at DMU with her academic passion for language as she chose to blog from the viewpoint of her own fictional talent agent.

Beca e I a all ed ch e m ic I a eall engaged and f nd m elf ending m e ime e fec ing he k bef e handing i in han I all ld hich eall im ed m g ade.

- Second year Game Art student

Best practice at DMU

Student involvement in #DMUGlobal trip design

The #DMUGlobal scheme has allowed for thousands of students to internationalise their academic mindset whilst experiencing new corners of the world, and these trips are a huge opportunity for staff and students to co-create. The mere act of incorporating free time into daily schedules allows students the chance to shape their trip and the experiences they encounter.

The 2017 trip to San Francisco organised by Mark Prescod and a former student of his is a perfect example of co-creation. Alumnus Dion McKen ie went on to work in the US and founded company Colorintech, a non-profit aiming to make the landscape of the tech industry more diverse and inclusive. Dion worked alongside Mark when designing the trip itinerary which included visiting Google HQ, speaking with start-ups and visiting the Oakland area; home to the beginnings of the Black Lives Matter movement. Mark drew on the experiences of his students and designed a trip that would be inspiring, engaging and relevant.

I a he m in i ing hing I e e e d ne in m life.

- San Francisco trip participant

Best practice at DMU

Where to begin

Co-creation is an approach that is both vast and diverse in nature. Here at DMU, we have focused on the implementation of co-creative practices along four key themes: community, development, teaching and learning, and relationships (Atkins 2018; Mountford-Zimdars et al. 2015).

Community refers to the creation of an inclusive learning environment in which all feel welcomed, respected and represented. Co-creation within this theme might include working with students to organise extra-curricular activities within your programme.

Development of key skills both inside and outside of the classroom: feedback from students on what they feel they lack can open a door to co-creative practices and inform the direction of what skills mayTw t9u.i08

Co-creation: top tips

Place value upon student feedback

Take note of responses in student surveys, feedback boxes and course representative meetings. Keep student feedback at the forefront of your mind and do not hesitate to escalate the most frequently raised issues.

Look for opportunities to collaborate

Co-creation is all about bringing heads together to work towards common goals. The planning and introduction of co-creative teaching activities need not be a completely autonomous task: brainstorming alongside colleagues – some of whom may have already been involved in similar initiatives or consulting the DMU Student Curriculum Advisors and staff on the Freedom to Achieve project can equip you with more support.

Encourage student involvement with extracurricular activities

Engaging with extra-curricular activities can greatly improve student networking and communication skills and bringing this new found confidence into the classroom can be key in ensuring the efficiency of co-creative schemes.

Co-creation: top tips

Give students a greater sense of ownership of their learning

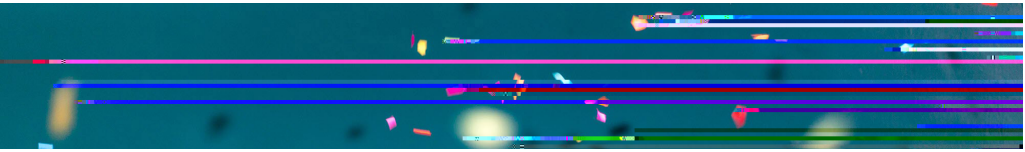
Having chosen their course, upon arriving at university students will naturally find areas of the curriculum they favour over others. Giving students some input in either what is studied or how it is assessed can enable them to feel a greater sense of ownership of their learning, and in turn a greater sense of responsibility to self-motivate, engage and produce work of their best quality.

Start small, think big

Starting small can mean you have some natural momentum and buzz on your side before embarking upon larger projects. For example, before pitching a new #DMUGlobal trip to a location proposed by a small group of highly engaged students one may create a bi-weekly discussion group in which course-related current affairs, literature, media and their impact are discussed. After the initial few months you may find you have a larger group of students than expected and you now have a captive audience to consult about aspects of the trip and their potential application.

Offer incentives

The minds and e-mail inboxes of students are often inundated, meaning offering attractive incentives can often be the simplest and easiest way to ensure students are truly present and engaged during the time you have with them. In the classroom, these incentives can be in the form of RPS credits for high level participation, recognition and acknowledgement in employment references & HEAR document or priority over other students when it comes to the allocation of dissertation projects.

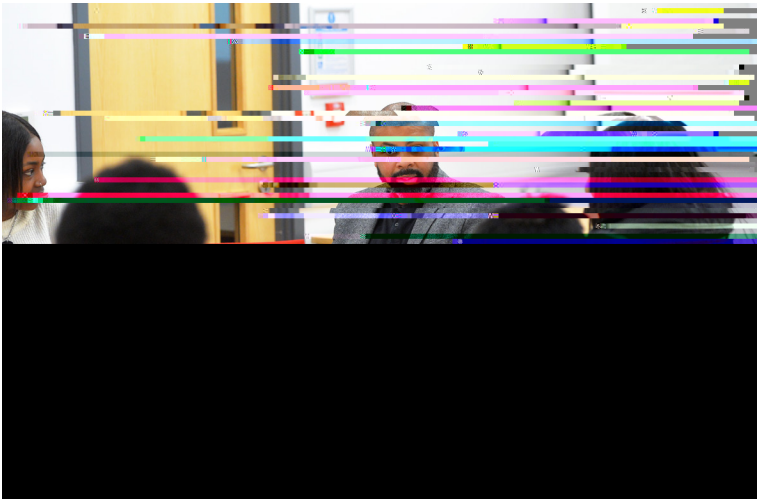


Final note

Higher education: an ever changing landscape

The profile of those studying at higher education institutions has changed dramatically over the past century, with UK statistics showing year on year record numbers of students entering university, with an increasing number of these being BAME students. These facts along with continuous worldwide developments in technology, legislation and the world of work mean that teaching methods require careful review and consideration. It is our responsibility as education providers to ensure every student in the classroom has equal opportunity and all are free to achieve to the best of their ability.

Co-creation is about staff and students coming together to make decisions about how and what is taught, this will aid efforts to close the attainment gap and create an atmosphere of respect, trust and community and dramatically improve student experience, paving the way for further improvements downstream.



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