

University Library statement regarding the decolonisation of collections and catalogues

Introduction

The University Library comprises the Brynmor Jones Library, and the Hull University Archives. The collections and catalogues of both are managed by the Collections Development Team which is a part of the Collections, Learning & Research Group.

We need to serve all our user communities equitably, and ensure our practices and language are respectful and inclusive. To do this we must recognise that historically, white, male, middle- and upper-class voices of the Global North have been privileged in publishing and, therefore, in library collections. This is slowly changing with marginalised voices starting to be more widely heard, but the Global North remains over-represented. Therefore, we are working to decolonise and diversify our collections, and the ways in which these are described in our catalogues and other public sites.

There is no single, simple definition of decolonisation. On our [Diversified Collections](#) page we give three, and there are many more.

Diversification focusses on ensuring many voices and perspectives are heard. This means purchasing materials created by, and about, marginalised people. Marginalisation may arise from society's perspectives on, for example, race, ethnicity, physical ability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class. We recognise that many people are negatively affected by the intersectionality of two or more of those societal prejudices.

We will undertake critical re-evaluation of our practices and policies, engage with our communities, and communicate our workplans for transparency and accountability. This document outlines how we will progress this work.

University context

The University's [Social Justice and Inclusion Strategy 2025](#) states:

Our commitment to social justice and inclusion is integral to our core values and at the heart of our vision for a fairer, brighter future.

This involves celebrating our differences and standing united against intolerance, ignorance and discrimination in all its forms. And we recognise that there is more we need to do to tackle structural inequalities and to ensure that every member of our University feels safe, valued, respected and supported at all times. [...]

Our drive to shape a society that is built on equity, integrity and respect will be reflected in the social impact of our education, research, knowledge exchange and civic engagement, and in the culture and working practices of our University community.

The [Education Strategy 2020-2025](#), reiterates the commitment “to create a truly inclusive University”, also evidenced in the [Inclusive Education Framework](#):

An inclusive approach celebrates diversity and embraces differences throughout all areas of university life.

Inclusivity at the University of Hull not only places students at the heart of this transformational change but actively empowers students as partners. Being inclusive means that all students are given an equal opportunity to succeed, independent of their background, identity or demographic characteristics.

One way the Library can contribute to this is by recognising that, in common with libraries across the UK and elsewhere, our collections-related practices privilege wealthy, traditionally educated, white male voices from the Global North. This is evident in the materials we collect and the ways in which we describe them in our metadata.

Library classification

We use the Library of Congress classification system, and acknowledge the need to redress its biases. We also note that assigning classifications is not a neutral process, and that preference for one classification over another may obscure peoples, histories, voices, and perspectives. However, our initial focus will be on descriptions as these are in English rather than the coded language of classmarks, and so more likely to cause harm, distress, or concern.

Catalogue descriptions

We are adopting the Cataloguing Code of Ethics, published in 2021, because we recognise that:

Cataloguing standards and practices are currently and historically characterised by racism, white supremacy, colonialism, othering, and oppression. We recognise that neither

cataloguing nor cataloguers are neutral, and we endorse critical cataloguing as an approach to our shared work with the goal of making metadata inclusive and resources accessible¹.

We are committed to critically reviewing the language used in our resource descriptions, notably subject fields in bibliographic records, and description fields in our archive catalogues. We will identify problematic terms, research preferred language, and remediate new, and existing records.

We will encourage users to report harmful or outdated terminology, and keep them informed of our progress towards eradication and redress.

We will be respectful of how peoples and communities wish to be described. We acknowledge this raises challenges for consistency in subject headings, and has potential implications for discovery. We will actively engage in professional and educational discussions, and work collaboratively to find solutions to these issues.

We are committed to accurately representing the individuals and communities in our archive collections, and enabling researchers to locate under-researched and under-represented voices. We will work to improve representation and access through our archive catalogues and research guides.

Collections

We are developing more inclusive physical and online collections through different strands of activity including, but not limited to:

- purchasing titles about decolonisation, including in the higher education context
- reconsidering our collection development policies and practices
- supporting colleagues to decolonise their reading lists
- providing students with ongoing opportunities to suggest titles
- highlighting publishers and resources that promote works by peoples of the Global South, and other marginalised communities
- making available curated collections of eBooks, journals, video etc. created by people from diverse nationalities and backgrounds, and/or focused on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)
- providing access to resources that focus on EDI in relation to particular disciplines or subjects
- providing users with a single-point of access to titles purchased to diversify and decolonise the collections through the [Diversified collections](#) page
- adding the subject heading 'Diversify the library collection' to all such purchase to aid discovery in Library search
- contributing to the University's competence-based higher education, specifically the attainment of competence in knowledge management which will allow readers to critically evaluate material

¹ <https://sites.google.com/view/cataloging-ethics>

from sources traditionally considered not to be “academic” but in which marginalised voices can be found

Timeframe

Our collections and catalogues have been developed over decades. To effect change through review, and remediation is not a short-term project with an end date. Significant time and effort are needed, and we commit to this work as a long-term responsibility, whilst planning specific activities within current and future iterations of the University’s three-year planning cycle.

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