

Inclusive education: co-creating a reading list diversity toolkit with student input

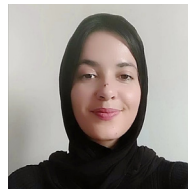
This article introduces the initiative by library staff and students at the University of Leicester, co-ordinated between 2020 and 2022, that focused on creating a reading list toolkit to support academic staff in diversifying their module reading lists. Developed through collaboration with student volunteers and academic staff, the toolkit provides prompts for academic staff to critically assess and diversify the resources on their reading lists, addressing biases and ensuring representation across dimensions such as race, gender and socio-economic background.

Keywords

reading lists; diversity; student collaboration; collection diversity; inclusive education; reading list toolkit



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Inclusive Collections Group

The University of Leicester Library's Inclusive Collections Group¹ was set up in 2019 to discuss steps the library could take to diversify its collections. The group includes members from all teams within the library and discusses ways to support academics who want to decolonize or diversify their teaching. The group also discusses resources with the potential to diversify the collections. More recently, it has also started to look at the issue of harmful or offensive language in metadata. It seeks to make links between the library and institutional initiatives, and to keep itself and colleagues aware of sector developments and debates.

The group helped to organize a Mercian Collaboration decolonization workshop in 2020. The Mercian Collaboration is a network of higher education institutions in the English Midlands. At the workshop, we learned of some of the frameworks later evaluated by

2 student volunteers. The toolkit developed by the group was presented at meetings of the Welsh Higher Education Libraries Forum (WHELP) and at the UKSG November conference in 2022.

Library Champions

This project began in 2020 with the Inclusive Collections Group looking at reading list toolkits and frameworks developed by other institutions with a view to recommending the toolkits that worked well to academic colleagues. As a starting point, we decided to test out toolkits we were aware of to see how effective they were with reading lists at the University of Leicester.

The Inclusive Collections Group worked in collaboration with Library Champions for this initial work. Library Champions are students who volunteer with the library to work on library-related projects.² They include students from all levels of study and across all subject areas at the University of Leicester.

'Library Champions are students who volunteer with the library to work on library-related projects'

The work on testing toolkits started with the 2020–2021 Library Champions cohort who tested reading list toolkits produced by three institutions:

- Manchester Metropolitan University reading list audit³
- Northumbria Intersectionality Matrix⁴
- University of Surrey reading list audit⁵

The three toolkits were divided amongst 12 Library Champions who each applied a framework to one of their own module's reading lists, as well as consulting the module leaders who created those lists for feedback. Based on feedback received from all Library Champions, two main aspects came through:

- Each framework focused on author characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, nationality etc. Students who tested the toolkits found it could be difficult to try to find this information about authors and that it could be problematic if people tried guessing author characteristics based on names or photographs.
- The toolkits needed to be developed further when examining the diversity of reading lists by also taking into account the topics covered within the items included on reading lists. These were missing from the toolkits we tested.

In order to take these aspects into account, the Inclusive Collections Group drafted a new reading list toolkit that would address points raised by Library Champions. As a result, a draft version of the 'Diversifying your reading and resources list toolkit' was developed.⁶

Feedback from academic colleagues

This draft was then presented to academic colleagues in 2022 for feedback at the University of Leicester Education Leadership Group, which included academics from across all three Colleges. Some of the main points of feedback from these staff members included considering:

- different types of resources – e.g. YouTube videos, TedTalks – to increase the diversity of topics, authors and formats
- changing terminology from 'reading list' to 'resource list' to encourage staff to consider a range of resources
- linking to University Education Strategy and other toolkits on inclusivity so that staff can see how it fits in to the wider aims of the university
- incorporating the toolkit into programme/module approval processes when academic staff will be setting aside time to develop reading lists.

- 3 The toolkit was further amended to include prompts based on this feedback. The toolkit was also shared with the Students' Union for their perspective, through which we received positive feedback.

What is included in the toolkit?

Consequently, the final version of the University of Leicester toolkit was developed based on feedback from Library Champions, the Students' Union and academic colleagues, and was published at the start of the 2022/23 academic year. (Supplemental File – available at the end of the article.) The toolkit consists of a number of prompts to help colleagues consider the resources used in module reading lists and to begin to think about how to include more diverse resources. Prompts include looking at the types of resources included, the topics covered within the resource and who has written the resource. The toolkit is not a checklist in so far as all advice needs to be utilized; instead, it is a document that can be used by all disciplines taught at the university with the caveat that not all aspects of the toolkit will be relevant to all subjects.

'The toolkit consists of a number of prompts to help colleagues ... think about how to include more diverse resources'

Promoting the toolkit

The University of Leicester Institute for Inclusivity in Higher Education⁷ has produced a Racial Inclusivity in the Curriculum Toolkit. The 'Diversifying your reading and resources list toolkit' is linked from that and is available with it from our internal Education Hub with other resources on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in teaching and learning.

To promote the toolkit, academic librarians (subject librarians) are presenting it at committee meetings they attend in their departments with staff and students. For example, in medicine and health, it has been presented to a meeting of the Medical School's MedRACE student/staff group,⁸ and at the Spring Forum 2023 of the University Health and Medical Librarians' Group (UHMLG).

Contributions from a Student Curriculum Consultant

During the 2022/23 academic year, the toolkit was applied to reading lists through a Curriculum Consultant project. Curriculum Consultants are students who are paid by the University to participate in projects looking at inclusive education within the university.⁹ The library was assigned a consultant from the School of Psychology who applied the toolkit to two module reading lists. Through her application she found the prompts worked well but that the toolkit was missing two final points that would develop the work:

1. A prompt to get academics thinking about how they could draw attention to the diversity of reading lists.
2. A prompt to address lack of diversity within a reading list where there are challenges with finding diverse material.

Both aspects could be explored further in discussions with students during taught sessions such as seminars or lectures, so that students gain a better understanding of the context of what they are being asked to read and any gaps not addressed by the resources.

Khadidja Kelalech: Library Champion and Curriculum Consultant

My contribution to the 'Diversifying your reading and resources list toolkit' was based on two different roles that I held at the University of Leicester. The first was volunteering in the role of a student Library Champion, and later a Lead Library Champion, a role I occupied for three years. As a Library Champion, I contributed to different library-related projects, including the Evaluating Reading Lists Project where Library Champions applied each of the above-mentioned frameworks to one of their own modules' reading lists. To achieve this,

- 4 I obtained the consent of the module leader at the school where I am based and applied the Northumbria Intersectionality Matrix to a module reading list. The matrix compares the gender and class of authors, which helped me develop a clear statistical comparison between the authors. However, it was difficult for me to track the gender, ethnicity and class of each author due to a lack of information about some authors on the internet. The matrix also gave a greater focus on the background of the author rather than on the content of the material they had written.

The second role was the student Curriculum Consultant role that I occupied as part of the University of Leicester's 'Leics Decolonise' project in 2021. The aim of Leics Decolonise is to diversify the curriculum and to make it as inclusive as possible.¹⁰ My role in the project was to interview teachers and students at the school where I am based to improve the university's services, mainly on how to accommodate the needs of its campus-based and distance-learning students. As a result of these interviews, I provided suggestions to my Leics Decolonise project supervisors, and transferred some of these suggestions to the 'Diversifying your reading and resources list toolkit' project. These suggestions are discussed in the following section.

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Contribution to the 'Diversifying your reading and resources list toolkit' project

My involvement in these two roles helped me to identify three interrelated areas that the 'Diversifying your reading and resources list toolkit' project could focus on, as follows:

Language and Accessibility

When I interviewed teachers about their strategies for diversifying their reading lists (as part of my student curriculum consultant role), some teachers answered that they only read in English, and, therefore, there might be a vast body of knowledge that is written in other languages to which they do not have access due to language barriers. I suggested that we add a section to the toolkit in which we discuss the language barrier and propose strategies to minimize it.

Student-staff contribution

As I suggested in a previous section, students and staff can work together towards diversification and inclusion. Students can, for example, suggest materials written in other languages that they find contributing to knowledge in their areas of expertise. Staff members can respond to these suggestions by including these student contributions in their reading lists and inform the library so they can provide the original and translated copies of these materials, when possible.

'students and staff can work together towards diversification and inclusion'

Multilingual resources

In addition, since access to materials that are not written in English can be difficult for reading resources designers who only speak English, I suggested to the project leaders that materials written in languages other than English could be located through the help of multilingual staff and international students who might be able to identify important materials that are related to their courses.

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Future plans

The next phase of this project is to encourage academic colleagues who are looking at diversifying their reading lists to use this toolkit as a starting point. We will be working in collaboration with colleagues from the Education Services department who work with academic staff on making their curriculums inclusive. Together, we will be targeting

5 academic staff who are working on inclusive curriculums and presenting the toolkit as one of the resources available in supporting them with their work. We will continue to improve and update the toolkit based on feedback from academic colleagues who test it out on their reading lists. The toolkit is available as a Supplemental File to this article.

Supplemental File

The supplemental file for this article can be found as follows: <https://doi.org/10.25392/leicester.data.24291076>

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>.

Competing interests

The authors have declared no competing interests.

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