

M25 Wellbeing case study: support for Learning Community, reading for pleasure and collaborative use of spaces and collections in the Templeman Library.

There is increasing recognition across the University of Kent and sector of the importance of reading as a means to increase understanding of self and social identities, empathy, knowledge of other cultures, relatedness, community cohesion and developing social capital. The Templeman Library spaces at the University of Kent offer opportunities for us to play a key role in engaging and supporting the development of 'Learning Communities', a key NSS satisfaction area.

There is research to show by the Reading Agency and other institutions that show a clear link between activities that foster community and empathy, which help to build confidence in sense of self and building relationships with others. This subsequently improves well-being and can reduce symptoms of isolation and depression.

The following headings will outline activities and practices aiming to promote belonging in Library spaces:

Library Events working group

Through 2018/19, we saw an increased level of academic interest in engaging students with their research and wider reading in the Templeman Library.

Developing support for a range of reading-related national and University of Kent campaigns and events for 2019/20. This included the liberation months such as Black History, Disability History and LGBTQ+ History months. To ensure a sustainable and scalable approach, we are setting up a matrix team Library Events Group. This provides opportunities for staff to get involved, work on collaborative events and activities and make suggestions for best practice in supporting campaigns in the Templeman Library.

Through this working group, we seek to bring together much existing, and tested, activity to achieve an efficient approach that enables effective cross team working, and harnesses staff expertise. We already maintain a working document that details planned activity across the academic year. This provides future scope to link planned events and exhibitions to academic areas of interest, research and wider student community initiatives through promotion and related activity such as displays, digital carousels, exhibitions, online reading lists and student-led book groups etc. An existing toolkit is being further developed to support IS staff to participate in supporting and overseeing planned campaigns.

Library Displays & Exhibitions

We are utilising a space permanently in the Library café to have a regular calendar of events, which consist of book displays (often linked to online reading lists), digital carousels, exhibitions, author talks and related social media promotion/campaigns.

The first display in this was Black Excellence for Black History Month including a planned talk in collaboration with Kent Union by alumni Elijah Lawal on his recent publication *The Clapback: Your Guide to Calling Out Harmful Black Stereotypes*.

We support this by creating online reading lists for the awareness months, purchasing titles, creating publicity and promoting via blog posts and a variety of social media channels. Students are encouraged to interact with the online-curated lists and share their comments and pictures on social media including recommendations for titles that are absent. We received several suggestions for new titles and the lists themselves receive good engagement, evidencing the appetite for these titles.

Book Groups

During February 2019, Kent Union facilitated a physical book group aligning with LGBTQ+ history month and the online-curated list. The book group met over four consecutive weeks and had a core of fifteen regular attendees who met to discuss themes in the chosen book – *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin. The Library provided the space to meet and resources (books and staff resources in promoting), whilst the group itself remained student-led, which was significant in its success.

Cross-University collaboration resulted in continuing liaison and planned activity with Student Services & Wellbeing (SSW) and Kent Union (KU). It also resulted in funding support for the purchase of reading group titles through SSW, and facilitation and promotion via KU. Subsequent to this, we have developed in partnership a role description around book group leadership with graduate outcomes and employability points as incentives, these will be promoted across University of Kent teams that support students to encourage further book group activity.

Student focused campaigns

There is work ongoing to develop messages/branding for students to engage with directly. Following collaboration with input from student interns, we are drafting a web page to give context to the identity and belonging work that has been happening and to offer the opportunity for students to get involved. This page will provide information on a range of activities such as history months, book groups and reading lists. It will include other library initiatives that aim to represent and develop students such as bibliotherapy (wellbeing), employability and best practice on keeping up to date on research interests.

