

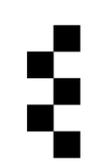


University of Essex

# **Decolonising the Library: the Student Champions Project (University of Essex)**

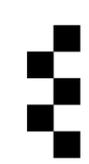
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Sandy Macmillen – Academic Liaison Librarian (Social Sciences)  
Esther Wilkinson – Academic Liaison Librarian (Arts & Humanities)  
Cecilia Bakahumura Nshemereirwe – Student Champion  
Daniella Opoku-Acheampong – Student Champion



# What we'll be talking about today

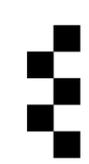
- Decolonisation and its role in widening participation – strategic context and community engagement
- Background to decolonising the Library and the Student Champions Project at the University of Essex
- Progress on the Project so far



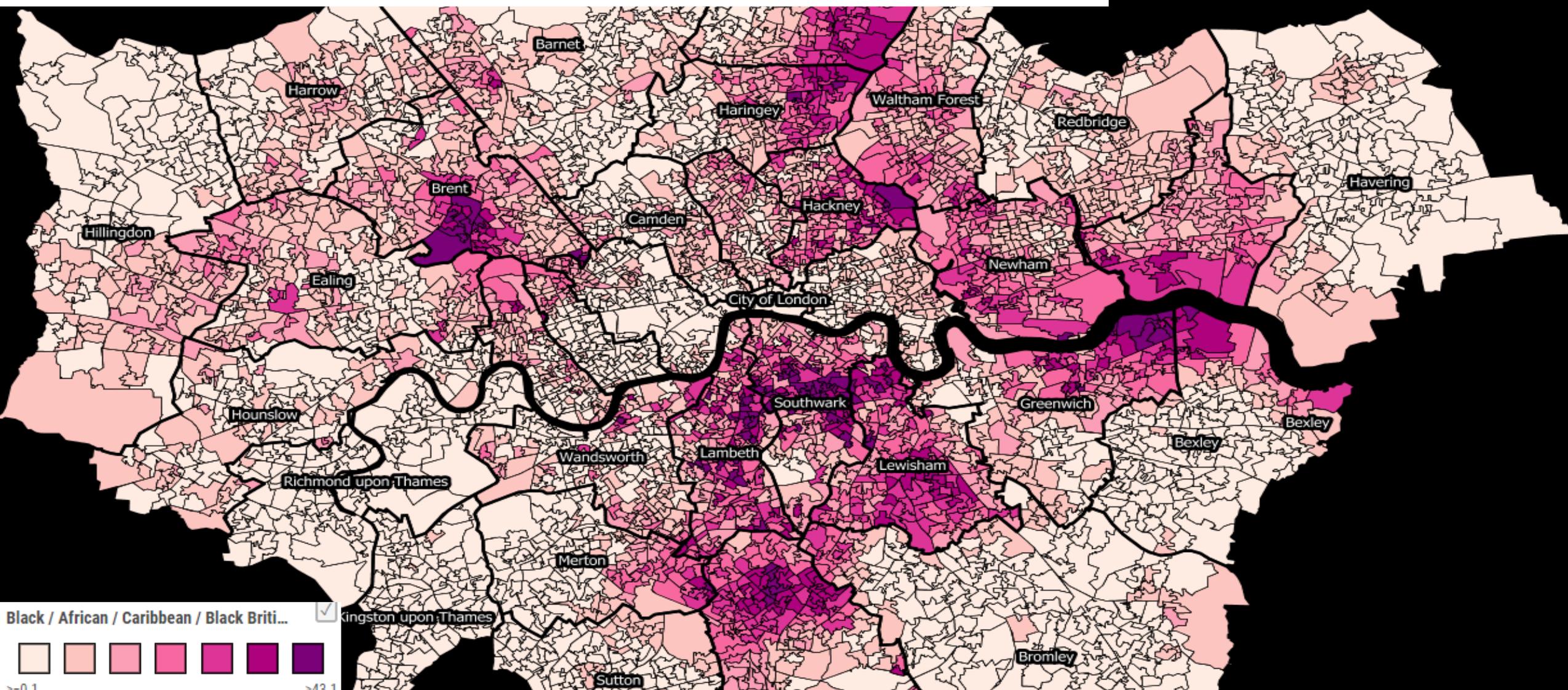
# Decolonisation and widening participation

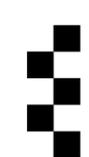
## Strategic context

- Student Champions Project: funded by the Education Strategic Fund to engage and involve students in decolonising initiatives
- Decolonisation is key to the Education Action Plan at Essex (objective 4) which: "*supports every student **from every background** to achieve outstanding outcomes*"
- In the Education Strategy it also relates to Objective 16: "***benefit individuals and communities** by reflecting ... social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges*"



# Decolonisation and local communities



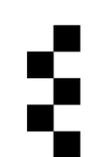


# Decolonisation and widening participation

## Essex student backgrounds & recruitment

- Essex - many home ethnic minority students, esp. from the London area
  - Essex: average across departments 38% ethnic minorities
  - Economics 61%, Essex Business School 58%, Law 56%
- Student recruitment and diversity
  - An expressed commitment to decolonisation and diversified collections presents a fantastic opportunity for Essex to attract even more talented students from the region. The Library needs to explore this further with Marketing/Recruitment and departments

**Outcome:** decolonisation can contribute to strengthen links between Essex and minority communities in the region & aid student recruitment (and retention)

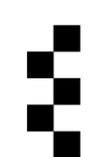


# Decolonisation and widening participation

## Benefits for the University and its students

- Ethnic minority students
  - Often research topics relating to their experiences and interests, e.g. racial / ethnic aspects of gender, class, education, sexuality, crime, health, employment, etc.
- Liaison Librarians
  - seek to provide resources & 1:1 support for students researching decolonial topics
- Student engagement, retention and satisfaction
  - Attendance and engagement is a problem! Reading lists, library shelves, presentations & subject guides, and e-resources that reflect the whole student body are vital. Students won't engage if teaching & resources are not relevant to them

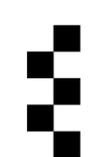
**Outcome:** engaged students are more likely to succeed



# Decolonisation and widening participation

## Benefits for students & communities

- Reducing attainment gaps
  - Essex is committed to reducing attainment gaps for minority students. Decolonisation has a role to play in this. Students have to feel that the library and the university reflects their needs and interests to succeed
- Employability
  - Engaged students that attain good degrees are more likely to be motivated seek & gain rewarding employment in their local communities, and many go on to play key roles in helping build and sustain those communities (more research needed)
- **Outcome:** success at Essex and levelling up in minority communities

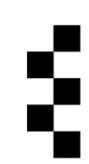


# Decolonisation and widening participation

## Benefits for the community

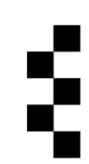
- Community engagement & the civic agenda
  - Key focus of government policy in relation to HE, see <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/> (especially KEF, Levelling Up)
  - Attracting a wider range of users has many potential benefits to HE and communities: recruitment (esp. first generation), business links, philanthropy
  - Decolonised collections (incl. leisure reading) assist in breaking down barriers and draw in residents from all communities. Currently liaising with a London social enterprise with a decolonial collection, with a view to offering some content in Colchester

**Outcome:** good integration with local residents, organisations and business across diverse communities can help build stronger universities and communities



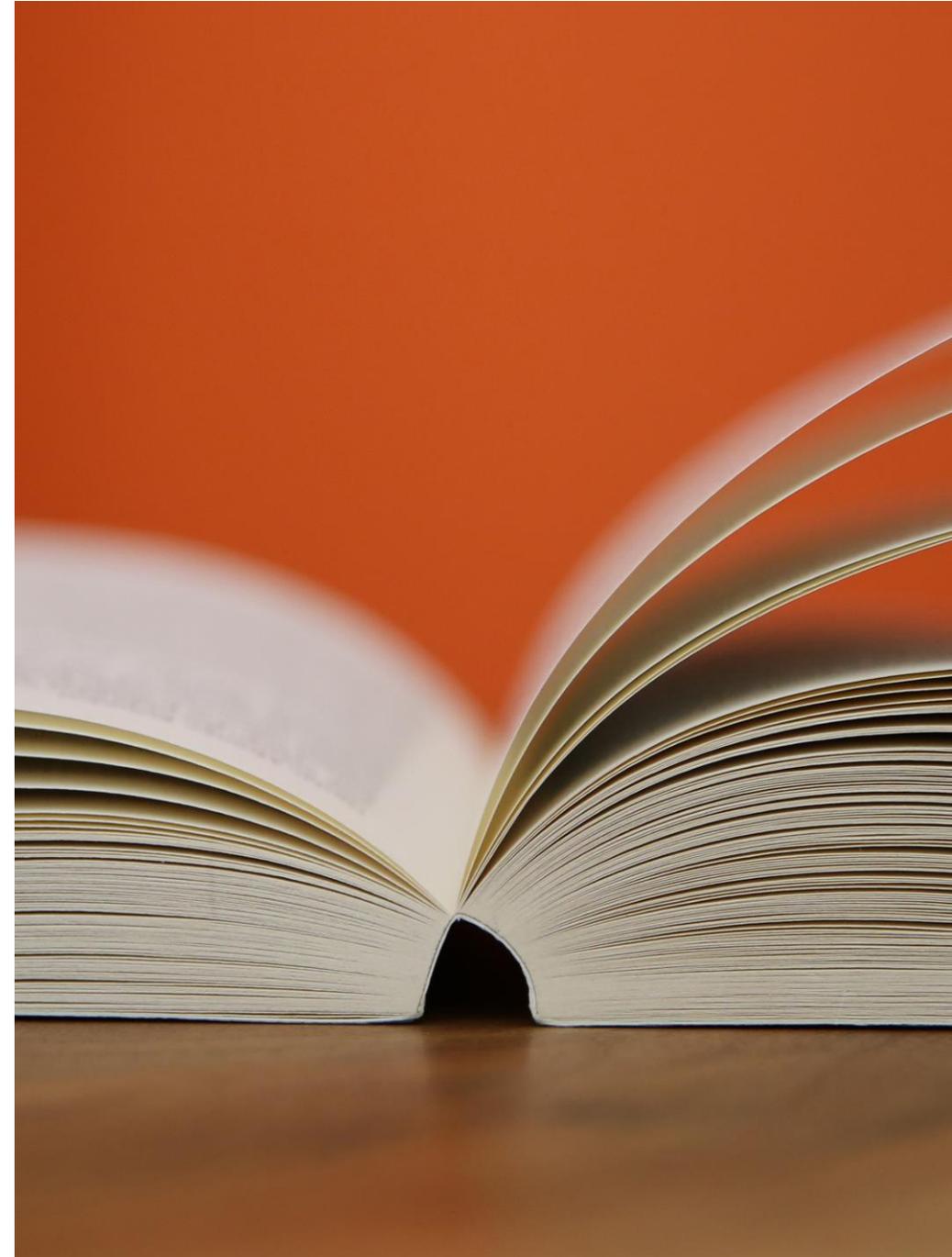
# Background

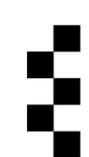




## Library decolonisation work pre-2020

- Collection development undertaken by Academic Liaison Librarians historically included a diverse range of material
- Students and staff have always been encouraged to suggest books and other resource for purchase
- Library and academic colleagues from across the University had been maintaining a "Decolonising the curriculum" reading list





## 2020-2021: Library Action Plan

- University of Essex taking action to close the student attainment gap, including decolonising the curriculum across all academic departments
- In line with this, the Library's 2020-2021 Action Plan included an action on embedding the core principles of equality, diversity and inclusion into our collection development/management and the support we offer



# Library & Cultural Services

[My Account](#) - [Staff](#) - [Libraries](#) - [Your Library](#) - [COVID-19 Updates](#) - [Book a Study Space](#) - [Arts](#) -

## Decolonising the Curriculum

- [Welcome](#)
- [What is decolonisation?](#)
- [Decolonising your reading list](#)
- [Resources](#)

### Welcome

This guide aims to highlight and curate useful Library and open access resources relating to decolonisation in the first instance. We intend to add further resources relevant to EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) and hope to provide easy access to these in one place, and to include resources of all types: books, articles, and physical archives, art collections and websites, etc. The guide also highlights the support available at the Library in these areas.

We would like the guide to be an evolving, community-led project, with input from students and staff. You can contribute by suggesting topics and resources for inclusion, or by [asking us to buy books](#) or other material for the Library's collections - so please do get in touch by email if you have any suggestions: [libdeco@essex.ac.uk](mailto:libdeco@essex.ac.uk)

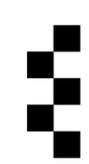
**STOP PRESS!** - we currently have a student survey on decolonisation running until May 13 2022 to give your opinion on the library collections in relation to decolonisation. All responses are anonymous. See [the survey here](#). See also the short video created by your Decolonising the Curriculum Student Champions on [YouTube](#)



# LibGuide

<https://library.essex.ac.uk/edi>

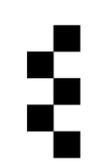
- "Decolonising the Curriculum" library guide created, using Springshare/LibGuides
- Aimed mainly at academic staff, but also accessible to students
- Provides a central point for accessing library resources for decolonising the curriculum, as well as links to other useful resources/websites



# Engagement event

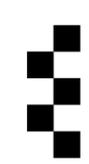
- Zoom meeting held in June 2021, to which all students and staff were invited
  - **Update** on library decolonisation project so far
  - **Breakout rooms:** Discussion about what decolonisation means in the context of library collections, what's important in resource selection (author, publisher, subject matter) and what resources/support the library should provide
  - **Book selection:** Time for participants to look at and select books in their own subject areas from the ProQuest EDI collection





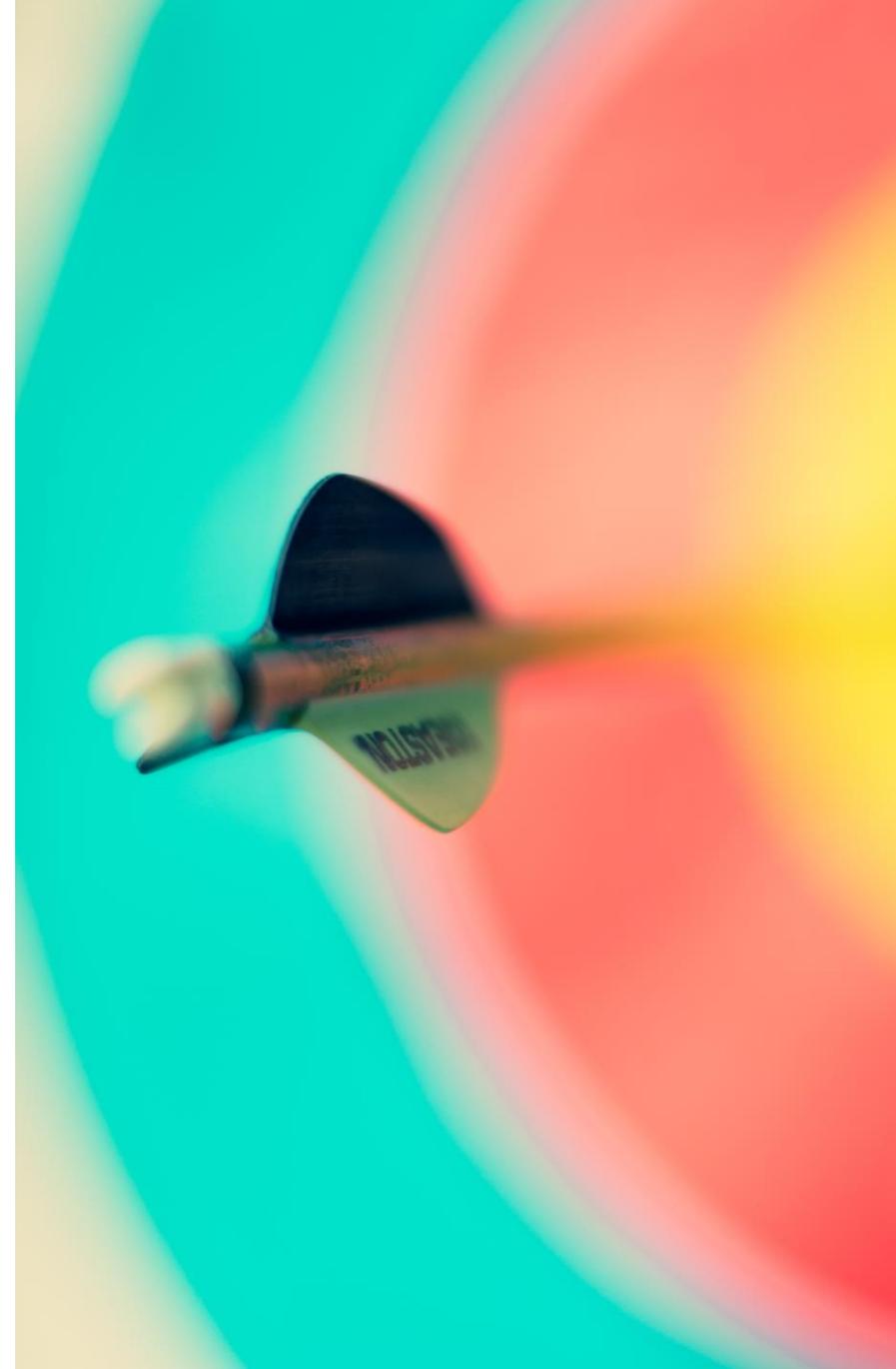
# Student Champions

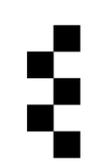
- The time we were able to spend on the decolonisation project was limited by other duties/commitments
- We also wanted to have more student input into and engagement with the project
- So...the Library applied to the University's Education Strategic Fund for a grant for two Student Champions to work with us in the spring and summer terms, and the application was successful
- Cecilia and Daniella (Essex students) joined the Library in February and will be working with us until July



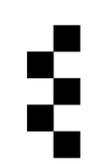
# Student Champions: objectives

- To engage students to analyse library collections, identifying gaps and imbalances in non-western perspectives and knowledge
- Role includes selecting new and diverse library materials, producing guidance and recommendations for the University community, and planning events and other engagement activities on the theme of decolonisation



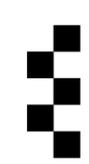


# Student Champions



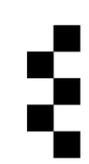
## Why did we get involved?

- Pre-existing interests in Decolonisation
- Opportunity to use skills and engage students
- Need to make positive change happen – seeing lack of diversity on reading lists and modules, and not accepting this



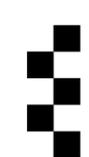
# What we have done so far: meetings

- Organised two taster events (in person and online) to gauge interest and enable students to speak freely on decolonisation and library resources
- Attendance has been modest (engagement varies between departments), but students are passionate
- Suggestions/points raised:
  - Library tours and inductions should explicitly include a decolonial element
  - Regular displays of books and other resources relevant to decolonisation would help



## **Suggestions / points raised in meetings**

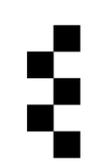
- Inductions in university departments should state what they are doing to address decolonisation and invite student involvement
- Some modules/reading lists lack diversity or display tokenism. This is reflected in sections of the library, e.g.: Law, Politics, Literature
- Support for researching topics not always available
- A diverse leisure reading collection would be welcomed and help students feel at home
- Some students unclear what decolonisation is or why it's relevant
- Hold decolonisation events in person and earlier in the year



# What we have done so far: student survey

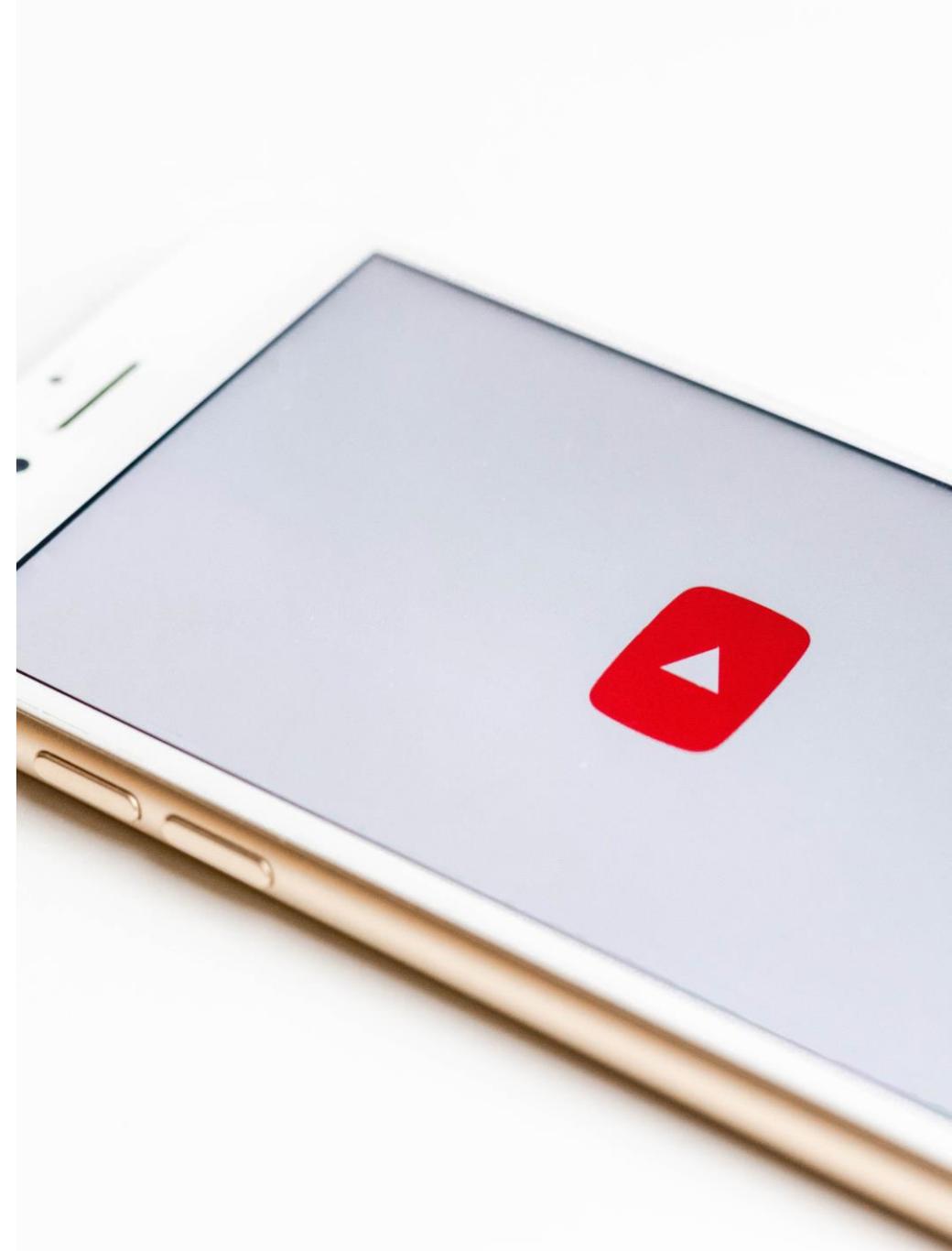
- Some students can't or won't attend events - the survey is an alternative way we can gather information from students about library resources
- We used LibGuides (LibWizard) to create the [survey](#)
- Closing date is 13 May; to date we have over 30 responses

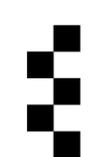




## What we have done so far: explainer video

- Educational aims of the project include: making sure students understand decolonisation (in a library context) and addressing misconceptions. This is encapsulated by the [video](#) we made
- It's also great for engagement purposes!



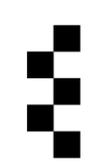


# INTRODUCTION TO DECOLONISING THE LIBRARY



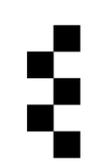
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**Library**



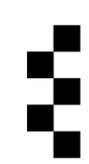
## **How we have worked so far: strategies and tips**

- Working with partners - in particular the SU
- Using social media (pros and cons)
- Communicating through a variety of channels, including emails to departments, students and interest groups, banners on library website, posters & flyers



# What happens next?

- Analyse the survey results and organise final follow-up event to discuss survey results and de-stress from exams (trivia night)!
- Encourage students to ask for decolonial resources through a "more books" campaign
- Select specific areas of the collections and work on them with interested students to identify gaps and suggest additional resources
- Produce a guide for students researching from decolonial perspectives
- Reporting on the project



**Questions?**

