

Cambridge University Libraries Decolonisation Working Group

Update 3 (August 2022)

Welcome to our long-awaited third update for library and archive staff across Cambridge about the activities of the Decolonisation Working Group (DWG). For those who are hearing of the DWG for the first time, we are a group of Cambridge librarians, students, academics, and more, who are aiming to help encourage and embed decolonisation in library work. Our webpages [start here](#).

It has been a long time since the last update (early September 2021), but we have been busy in this time! Since then, the DWG has met in late September, November, December, January, March, April, June, and July. Here is a summary of some of the things we have been doing.

We introduced a trial **decolonisation fund** for teaching collections with money from the Collections and Academic Liaison department's research budget and from the ebooks@cambridge budget. The idea of the fund has been to support FDL collections to develop with decolonisation-related titles (print or e) which their own budgets couldn't stretch to and/or print books that were hard to get hold of without recourse to CAL's wider supplier network. We also opened the fund up to College librarians for ebook titles. You can read about the purchases made with the 21/22 fund in the [latest CAL newsletter](#). The DWG will write in due course to confirm arrangements for 22/23.

The full-scale invasion of **Ukraine** by Russia has seen Cambridge library staff at the UL and MMLL and Scott Polar Research Institute libraries work together to think through how Russian imperialism is reflected in library collections and what we might be able to do to address it. You can read an initial summary of our thoughts in [this blogpost](#). Mel Bach, the DWG convenor, spoke about this at the recent DCDC (Discovering Collections, Discovering Communities) conference, where she put the Ukraine-focused work in the context of other decolonisation work at Cambridge. She starts speaking at about 13:40 [in this recording](#). [If you're wondering why she describes what she looks like, this was a standard part of this year's DCDC conference, with the idea of helping visually impaired delegates feel more included.]

Staff training remains a major priority. The DWG put together a brief for the kind of training we think would be good (with a focus on helping everyone feel confident about what decolonisation is and what it might mean in their work). There is a wider picture here, though, with the CUL EDI Forum undergoing transformation with two new co-convenors, and with the current EDI consultation work being undertaken by Maggie Semple for CUL, so we look forward to working with these colleagues to agree the best approach to take for training and education for decolonisation in particular and EDI in general.

The DWG has been acting as a kind of advisory group for a fantastic project supported by the **University Diversity Fund** and put forward by a PhD student to launch an online journal called Scholourship. The journal aims to open up scholarship, creating a platform for people from inside and outside academia to provide narrative histories from those with lived experience. We'll send out an announcement when the journal is formally launched. We also provided an advisory function for academics working on a funding bid for a **post-colonial heritage project** (more soon, if the bid is successful – fingers crossed).

Jenni Skinner, the African Studies Library Manager, has reported to the DWG about her involvement in the Collections strand of the **African Poetry Digital Archive** project. This work is currently focused

on identifying collections of material, especially those that are largely hidden, before a planned next stage to work on digitisation.

We have recently been thrilled to be joined in the group by JC Niala, the Head of **World Collections**, a newly formed department consisting of the libraries and archives of the Centre for South Asian Studies and the Centre for African Studies, the Royal Commonwealth Society collection, and language specialists in the University Library covering Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Hebrew, Korean, Japanese, and more.

Library of Congress Subject Headings remain a live topic. Cambridge agreed to make local changes to alter the heading 'Illegal aliens' to 'Undocumented migrants' while Library of Congress changes to the heading were delayed. Since then, LC have made their change – but to a heading that is still rather challenging: 'Illegal immigration'. We are talking to UK and US libraries about what their approaches might be. On a more positive note, a request from the Squire Law Library to ask the relevant cataloguing community about the heading 'Primitive law' has seen results. Thanks to the help of an LCSH and law cataloguing specialist in the US, this heading has now become 'Customary law'.

The DWG convenor, Mel Bach, was invited to the most recent round of **Journals Coordination Scheme** consultative committees to discuss decolonisation considerations with them. One particularly interesting conversation focused on **Open Access**. We librarians generally think of OA a purely positive thing when it comes to sharing and encouraging scholarship, but there are of course hidden financial costs which may see academics whose institutions can't support such fees cut out from journals that go fully OA (currently many are hybrid, allowing such authors to take a non-OA route). It's useful food for thought – in Cambridge we are chiefly concerned with ensuring that the University's academic output can be shared globally through OA, but we should also concern ourselves with helping ensure that scholarship more widely is also fairly available.

As ever, we're keen to use the opportunity of this update to promote the work of our colleagues in the **Decolonising through Critical Librarianship** group. In 21/22, they have published a book chapter in *Narrative expansions : interpreting decolonisation in academic libraries* edited by Jess Crilly and Regina Everitt (iDiscover [record here](#)). They have also maintained a brilliant programme of training, working with relevant library/archive colleagues to put on tailored workshops. Most recently, they have put on workshops about reader services ([blog post](#)) and about medical collections ([blog post](#)). And do remember that their blog provides an excellent place to record decolonisation-related library activities. Have you got a project you'd like to write up and share with others? Do get in touch with them!

Do you have **questions about decolonisation**? No question is too simple – we're all learning together! Or might you have **ideas about new projects**? Do contact your DWG rep with any questions or thoughts you may have, or of course you can always contact Mel at decolonisation@lib.cam.ac.uk.