



**'White Thinking' and the failed promise of  
diversity in Scottish heritage**

**Final Project Report**

Report authors: Churnjeet Mahn (University of Strathclyde), David Murphy (University of Strathclyde), Arunima Bhattacharya (Napier University)

## Preface and Executive Summary

This report brings together some of the learning, success and failures from four years of collaborations across two AHRC-funded projects to develop anti-racist approaches to heritage in Scotland.<sup>1</sup>

Our work has emerged from a network of academics, heritage professionals, activists, creatives, and community workers coming together to question what it means to imagine, represent, and advocate for, more inclusive worlds.

Our combined experience has tempered some of our expectations. We situate the 'failed promise' of equality, diversity and inclusion-minded initiatives within a multi-decade project to challenge racism in the heritage sector that continues to be de-funded, re-set, or forgotten.

While reports can lean into the rhetoric of success to evidence the progress and value of the work undertaken, we want to remain attuned to the ways in which the shapeshifting nature of oppressive systems and ideologies ensure that some kinds of change don't have staying power.

This report briefly contextualises the history of anti-racist heritage work in Scotland (largely led by organisations like Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) and community organisations) and what the shift of this work to the more 'legitimate' spaces of museums and heritage-related organisations has meant in a Scotland keen to advertise its civic institutions as culturally distinct from its English neighbours.

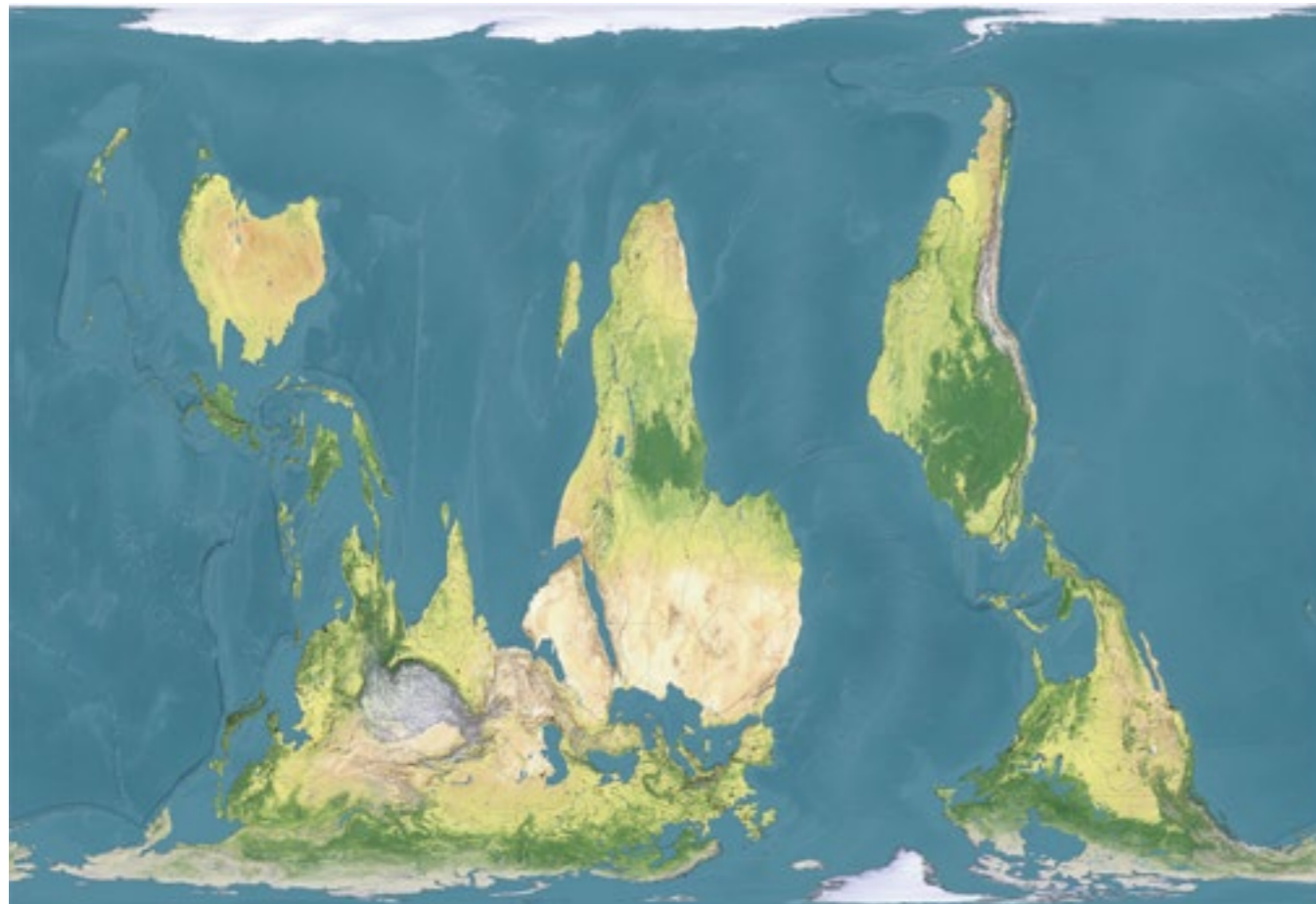
### This report features:

1. Spotlights on the impact of small-scale heritage projects led from outside the professional heritage sector.
2. A comparative account of small-scale interventions versus systemic approaches to challenging racism in organisational culture.



Report design by Emily Harding

<sup>1</sup> EDI in Scottish Heritage (AH/V010352/1) which ran in 2021-22 and White Thinking (AH/X011682/1) which ran in 2023-24.



Africa at the Centre/L'Afrique au centre (Copyright: Fondation Lilian Thuram ([www.thuram.org](http://www.thuram.org)) / Design: Lépac ([www.lepac.org](http://www.lepac.org)), 2015.

## Key Findings

### 1. Making the work real.

Enthusiasm by itself does not ensure meaningful action: institutions need to develop practices and spaces for ongoing discussion that leverage the opportunities created by short-term projects.

### 2. Documenting and evidencing practice and change.

The outcomes and legacies of projects must be made visible both within institutions and to the wider community. Anti-racism projects must be recorded and documented to ensure they can be built on and harnessed in the future.

### 3. Collaborative leadership.

Anti-racism work benefits from collaboration between partners in the heritage, education and voluntary/third sector. Partnership working across sectors encourages the development of creative practice and of collaborative leadership outside of existing power hierarchies.

### 4. Building trust with all partners.

The network of organisations created by the project was repeatedly highlighted as beneficial to heritage organisation staff. Confidence was built through semi-regular meetings to discuss the project, which in turn created the capacity for staff to develop anti-racism work in their organisations.

### 5. Understanding the collective purpose.

Those involved in each strand of the project (organisation staff, consultants, etc) but not involved in the core group that met to discuss overarching aims, lacked the wider context of what the work was aiming to achieve.

### 6. Sustainability.

A lack of time and resources led to some outcomes not being achieved as originally intended. Ensuring that outcomes are more robustly planned and implemented into workstreams, as well as the allocation of sufficient resourcing, both in staff time and finance, is essential to ensure sustainability.

### 7. Honest reflection vs reporting success.

A process of reflection on what went well/what could be done differently, ensures learning and continued focus on outcomes.

## Some key outcomes and outputs from our work include:

- Contribution to the [Empire Slavery and Scotland's Museums Consultation Guide](#).
- [New Heritage toolkit](#) developed by Thistles and Dandelions to facilitate ethical collaboration and co-design.
- 5 new heritage placements for racially minoritised young people.
- Support for anti-racist heritage initiatives through micro-funding.
- New educational resources that are available through Kelvingrove Museum, HMS Unicorn and David Livingstone Birthplace Museum.
- An organisational anti-racist action plan co-developed between the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and CRER.
- Digital illustrations to support the contextualisation and commemoration of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow's first South Asian fellow including a portrait launch of the first female fellow of the College and accompanying events.
- An extended collaboration with Lilian Thuram that spanned public events, workshops (for schools and heritage professionals), and the development of new resources at Kelvingrove Museum.

## Who is this report for and how can you use it?

This report is designed with multiple audiences in mind. We have prepared an outline of how key stakeholders may choose to use this report.

### **For researchers (including students) interested in race and heritage:**

This report takes a longer perspective on anti-racist work in the Scottish heritage sector and reflects on its impact on the narrative of inclusive heritage in policy and practice today. It evidences the 'failed promise' through community perceptions on the barriers to inclusive heritage.

### **For community organisations and collectives:**

The five strands of the project can be used as independent case studies. All the organisations mentioned are happy to be contacted for future collaboration opportunities.

### **For racially minoritised people living in Scotland:**

The case studies show that there is scope to use the museum space to build towards community resilience and empathy. This report gives visibility to new collaborative frameworks through which heritage institutions are rethinking the need for inclusive narratives of their heritage and looking into strategies to make the museum a space relevant to communities as knowledge makers and not just spectators.

### **For museums and heritage organisations:**

All collaborating museums and heritage institutions on this project are undertaking research and strategy development to enhance accountability towards the source communities of objects and narratives they house. The case studies document some of the everyday challenges involved in translating individual anti-racist projects into long-term structural change that is visible both internally and externally.

### **For policy makers and funders:**

This report allows policy makers to trace the impact of small pots of funding in generating work that facilitates the development of a more inclusive heritage sector. At the same time, the report seeks to demonstrate the limitations of a funding model that often results in short-lived, piecemeal initiatives that struggle to promote a wider structural change within the heritage sector.

## Introduction to White Thinking

*'Who constructed a discourse giving White people pride of place in the hierarchy of humankind? Who is it that claims Black people are less competent? Who decided that Black people should enjoy fewer opportunities than White men and women? The answer is racialised White thinking. [...] White thinking is not exclusively the product of White people. [...] [It] is not a question of skin colour. It's a way of being in the world.'*

Lilian Thuram, *White Thinking: Behind the Mask of Racial Identity*, pp. 3, 7

White Thinking is a project that sought to address barriers to anti-racism work in the heritage sector. The project asked, 'What is the next step in transitioning small-scale diversity projects with Scottish heritage organisations to more sustainable, and structural, forms of organisational and cultural change?'

As part of a reflection written for EDI in Scottish Heritage (the first iteration of this work), Prof Ali Cathcart (one of the project co-leads) commented on the particular challenges and tensions in the study and representation of heritage and history in Scotland:

*Heritage in Scotland is largely centred around its many castles, the western Highlands and Isles and its history (from Lordship of the Isles to Clearance and crofting), empire and Clyde shipbuilding, through to Red Clydeside and de-industrialisation. There is a need to move beyond this and to incorporate minority communities and their long traditions within Scotland. The recent, and long-overdue, revision of the legacy of empire is most welcome although not without some debate. Recent scholarship has highlighted the extent to which Scotland benefitted directly from the slave trade and/or the exploitation of human capital in both the west and the east.<sup>2</sup> Indeed the University of Glasgow made a £20m commitment to reparative research following a 2018 report on the university's historic financial gains from the Atlantic slave economy. But much of Scotland has such a legacy, and this needs to be integrated more fully into Scotland's past, whether through teaching in schools or universities, or through the heritage industry.*

Our work has taken an incremental step towards addressing these legacies through building on the work that has come before us (notable examples include CRER's work on Black History Month), and by working in collaboration across sectors and communities.

The project had five work strands, each consisting of a heritage organisation (museums and colleges of various shapes and sizes) that was paired with an organisation or individuals to undertake a piece of work around histories of slavery, empire and colonisation within their institution, within the wider remit of anti-racism<sup>3</sup> work. The various heritage organisations had signalled a commitment to longer-term changes, and this work offered a chance to consider how that change might take shape.

All of the activities in this report, no matter how big or small, started with a shared vision and hope, something much bigger than all of us. While we are often compelled to metricise our success to justify funding and collaborations, bringing together the people in and around this report and having the collective space to think, and to care, was one of its most important outcomes. The reality of 'doing' this work is the reality of working through precarity (different partners and collaborators experienced funding issues at various points), working through real-world racism (experienced by the people on the project and around the project) and working through scepticism and resistance (especially as a consequence of media representations).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Mullen, *The Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy: Scotland and Caribbean Slavery, 1775-1838* (University of London Press, 2022); Andrew Mackillop, *Human Capital and Empire: Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British imperialism in Asia, c.1690-c.1820* (Manchester University Press, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Racism can be defined as prejudice against people from ethnic backgrounds which have been racialised. The concept of a 'racial group' is derived from outdated anthropological approaches claiming that humans could be divided into racial groups based on shared language, nationality and physical and behavioural traits. The current use of the terms 'race' and 'racial' have developed because false notions of racial difference have become embedded in the beliefs and behaviours of society, especially in Western nations. These notions influence all areas of life in Scotland to some degree, from social attitudes to the way organisations are run, making inequalities for Black and minority ethnic people continue over generations. This is known as 'structural racism'. It can be seen on a personal level in people's attitudes and behaviours; on a social level in how people talk to each other and make decisions; and on an institutional level in how organisations conduct their business ('institutional racism'). Anti-racism encompasses the many varying ways of tackling racism. Source: Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights. Racism in Scotland. Available from: <https://www.crer.org.uk/what-is-racism>.

As a consequence of more funding being released for anti-racist initiatives, we saw growing competition between similar initiatives, all of whom were having to respond to the 'originality' of their work (to secure their funding) which enabled a form of exceptionalism in their work (we are the first to...). These inadvertent market drivers towards differentiation have stood in the way of broader coalitions of sympathetic work.

We have watched the complex power play between community groups and heritage organisations as they have collaborated.

For some community groups it provides an opportunity that can lead to more funding.

For some academics it has been a way of showing 'impact' for their institutions.

For some heritage organisations bringing in community groups becomes a proxy for authenticity or 'anti-racism'.

In the most complex interactions, we saw power play out in complex ways to achieve larger aims around legitimacy and resources in separate spheres (the university, the 'community', the museum).

Who can afford the time and the risk involved in building anti-oppressive coalitions when funding imperatives help to deepen the grooves separating minoritised groups and ideas about 'expertise'?

Who can afford or sustain spaces for honesty and vulnerability?

Who can sustain spaces of anti-racist creativity and critique that aren't sidelined or shut down?

Our resistance to this language of competition and exceptionalism has been to think of cumulative change. **Cumulative change** is the power of smaller sedimented layers coming together over time. This includes the layering of expertise.

We were mindful of the power and privilege that comes with working at universities, but we were also struck by the number of times this was used to frame our expertise as not belonging to the 'real world' or as **'too academic'** (meaning pedantic or bookish).

While we all agree that the 'too academic' charge is important, we were mindful of how devaluing academic expertise was a way of showing frustration with **challenging language**.

To put it another way: yes, we could be wordy and difficult. But we also believe the journey to better worlds is predicated on different kinds of difficulty.

In terms of **sustainability**, we worry about how many of the changes in this report are tied to people (who themselves became single points of failure for some of the work). Can we create change that outlasts people? Or is that the nature of this work? That it's less about changing systems and more about changing people?

Our collaboration with Lilian Thuram demonstrated the power of **inspirational role models** from outside the heritage sector to ask difficult questions and connect with new audiences. We recognise the uniqueness of Lilian Thuram as a celebrity but what can be replicated by other projects is his fundamental commitment to finding a language that makes museums relevant to wider audiences.

Any project changes and adapts to its environment. We were continually led by the urgent needs and priorities of our partners as they faced very real challenges around staffing and growing public scrutiny of their work. There have been a number of significant developments in the sector in Scotland, notably Stephen Mullen's extensive research on Scotland's involvement in slavery (including *It Wasn't Us: The Truth About Glasgow and Slavery* from 2009), and the Museums Galleries Scotland's report on *Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums* (2024) which was commissioned by the Scottish Government.

Recommendation 1 from the report, 'Scotland should create a dedicated space to address our role in empire, colonialism, and historic slavery. A new organisation should be created to lead this work' gave new visibility to CRER's long standing campaign to develop a new national museum (the Scottish Museum of Empire, Slavery, Colonialism and Migration has begun a new chapter of this work). This work has been enabled by the expertise behind internationally recognised change programmes like 'Curating Discomfort' led by Zandra Yeaman at the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow.

Our work was part of a developing ecosystem of practice and expertise, but part of the challenge was understanding how to get this work to 'stick' in different kinds of organisations. In larger organisations, having champions in strategic positions was transformational. But we were always worried about our work with heritage organisations falling into the 'well we've done it, now let's move onto something else' category.

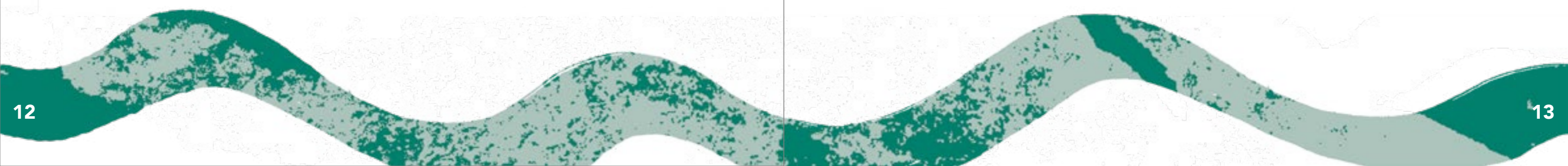
Feedback from some of our project partners underlined the **transformative potential of micro-projects**, especially when funding was available to conserve or document its processes (see the testimonies below from Gauri Rajee and Nadine Jassat for responses to this earlier work).

We hope our case studies demonstrate the processes that made different kinds of change possible. Each strand and case study is a resource for people to use and remake for themselves, but we

remain painfully aware that toolkits and workplans are no substitute for the real and embedded cultural change – the heart and minds piece is the most challenging one.

We sometimes worried that by producing outputs we were developing tools that could 'reproduce' results at a superficial level (for example engaging with particular knowledge, language or communities) but could ultimately be damaging because the quality of the process, and the investment in people, wasn't there.

The second part of our introduction is from one of our key partners. Amy Rich from CRER, offers the perspective of an organisation in its third decade of challenging systemic racism in Scotland. As the founders of Black History Month (Scotland), CRER have always been attuned to the role and importance of heritage in building effective anti-racist movements.



Gauri Rajee underlined the importance of documenting the experience of a generation of women living in Glasgow who were born as subjects of the British Empire and lived through Partition:

*[Our project focussed] on sharing recipes by older Indian, Pakistani & Bangladeshi women who arrived after Partition as refugees or newly married brides without much English language fluency to Scotland between 1950s - 70s.*

*The project has a specific emphasis: The recipes needed to be those wherein they had to adapt the recipe when Asian ingredients were not available or were scarce in Glasgow, Scotland and the UK in the 1950s - 1970s. Most of these older women had come as young brides and had to adapt to a completely different way of living, cooking and feeding their families.*

*The stories are about the difficulties in finding ingredients and the ways they found to make adaptations whether by growing plants on their windowsills or finding equivalent Scottish herbs as substitutes. It is a micro-story-study on how migrant women got to know their new country, its ecology and culture.*

*It also gives a voice to single elderly migrant women, who are often completely invisible and voiceless in their family and social life are often not represented within the 'often-heard' migrant narratives.*

Nadine Jassat reflected on how access to small pots of funding could enrich the experience, quality, reach and durability of micro-projects:

*Launched in 2021, Responders of Colour is an exciting project from Glasgow Women's Library combining creative writing with archives, led by poet and part time National Life Long Learning Development Worker Nadine Aisha Jassat. In Responders of Colour, we examine depictions of women and girls of colour in our Girls' Annuals archive – with annuals ranging from the 1920s to 1960s and more – and use creative tools to respond to these narratives. We take stories where women of colour have been spoken over and spoken for, and instead write our own, new narratives - responding to the history held in our annuals' archive, and telling new stories with our imaginations and voices front and centre.*

*However, we wanted the annual we would create to have more of a legacy than that, and for the contributors to be paid for their creative work, and consequently with the funding from the EDI in Scottish Heritage fund we have been able to fund the creation of approximately 200 copies of a colour illustrated annual, to be gifted to organisations working with people of colour – in particular young women of colour, reflecting the Girls' Annuals we were exploring – across Scotland. We have been able to commission illustrator and graphic designer Hannah Moitt to bring our writing to life, and are so excited for our new annual – one grounded in lived experience and wisdom of women of colour – to reach hearts and minds of others.*

## The Role of Museums in Anti-Racist Activism in Scotland (Amy Rich, CRER)

When thinking about anti-racism work in the Scottish heritage sector, we need to situate this work within Scotland's participation in the British Empire. Scotland's economy was closely interlinked with imperial trade and conquest including the enslavement of Black African people.<sup>4</sup> The profits from these activities helped to build the urban infrastructure that is still part of Scottish society today.

When slavery was abolished in 1834 and compensation was given to enslavers, Scottish people were overrepresented. Despite only making up 10% of the UK population at the time, Scots made up 15% of the enslavers compensated.<sup>5</sup> The compensation scheme highlights how Scottish people were active beneficiaries of the British empire.<sup>6</sup> Scottish colonial ventures developed racial hierarchies informed by racial pseudo-science that still inform social structures, institutions and mindsets in Scotland today. Much work remains to be done to acknowledge how slavery and colonialism shape Scotland's built environment and social life as it exists today. Their histories and consequences often remain unacknowledged, unknown, or deliberately obscured.

Empire, and the ideology of white supremacy it relied on, underpinned museums and museum practice historically. Public museums grew as the process of collecting became institutionalised across the British Empire.<sup>7</sup> Museums are also impacted by structural racism similar to other areas of Scottish society. Collections are shaped by slavery and empire, buildings are connected to colonialism, while structural barriers prevent Black and minority ethnic communities from being part of the heritage workforce.<sup>8</sup> Nineteenth-century public museums responded to the local desire for objects and artefacts from across the world, collected via imperial expeditions and governance. In some instances, objects were looted from battlefields across the Empire and made their way into museum collections in the UK. These objects have historically been displayed, without recognising the racism that underpinned the practice of collecting, showing how we are still grappling with our role in perpetuating these systems of oppression through the narratives we create.

Museums are in a unique position to shape the way we tell stories about our history and influence local and national culture. For this reason, heritage has become a focal point of anti-racist work. Consultation shows that the general public wants museums to share narratives about and from communities experiencing the legacies of empire, colonialism and historic slavery.<sup>9</sup> This makes museums unique spaces to educate, to reflect and to engage critically with historical racism.

Museums play a pivotal role in visualising how a shared colonial past shapes our present in Scotland. Scotland's African, Caribbean and Asian communities have very specific historical contexts that

<sup>4</sup> S. Mullen (2009). *It wisnae us: the truth about Glasgow and slavery*. Edinburgh: The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland on behalf of Glasgow Anti Racist Alliance (now Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights.)

<sup>5</sup> University College London. Legacies of British slavery ownership: Scotland and slavery. [Online]. [Accessed 24 February 2025] Available from: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/media-new/pdfs/lbsscotland1.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> T.J. Curry (2022). Decolonizing the Ethnological Epoch of the Scottish Enlightenment. [Online]. [Accessed 24 February 2025]. Available from: <https://www.museumsgalleryscotland.org.uk/blog-article/decolonizing-the-ethnological-epoch-of-the-scottish-enlightenment/>

<sup>7</sup> S. Sanghera (2021). *Empireland: How Imperialism has Shaped Modern Britain*. London: Viking.

<sup>8</sup> Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group, (2022). *Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group Recommendations*. [Online] [Accessed 24 February 2025]. Available from: <https://www.museumsgalleryscotland.org.uk/project/empire-slavery-scotland-museums/>. Note on terminology: CRER's use of the term Black and minority ethnic (BME) encompasses all minority ethnic communities as appropriate to the context and evidence of disadvantage in contrast to the majority ethnic white Scottish population. The word 'Black' is used in solidarity with those individuals who identify strongly with a Black political identity. This does not imply that all those who face racial inequalities identify in that way. CRER also uses the acronym BME and the term minority ethnic interchangeably where these better fit the sentence structure.

<sup>9</sup> M. Lima (2022). *Museums (Re)Told: The Legacy Report*. p.3.

connect with empire, transatlantic slavery, colonialism and migration. Indeed, the racial and ethnic composition of Scotland changed partly as a result of the role that Scots played in these contexts. In that sense it is a shared, inter-connected history.

There is a burgeoning recognition of the need to represent the realities of empire, slavery, colonialism and migration, and the specific Scottish context of these histories. Yet outside of formal heritage spaces, Black and minority ethnic communities have been at the forefront of work that acknowledged these histories through shared stories of their Scottish heritage, creating a space for reflection and learning. In Scotland, a collaborative programme of events to celebrate Black History Month has been organised by the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) since 2001. The Black History Month programme explores the histories of African, Caribbean and Asian people in Scotland, highlighting that these communities have existed in Scotland for longer than recent migration patterns and suggest a distinctive historical narrative of Scotland's role in empire.

An example of CRER's (formerly known as the Glasgow Anti Racist Alliance or GARA) early work was to mark the bi-centenary of the Wilberforce Act and the abolition of the transatlantic slavery trade in 2007 much in advance of the anti-racist work undertaken by mainstream heritage organisations. GARA in collaboration with the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust worked with Stephen Mullen to create an exhibition, later the basis of the book *'It Wisnae Us'* (2009) by Mullen. *'It Wisnae Us'* and the exhibition illuminate Glasgow's mercantile past and the extent of the city's involvement in transatlantic slavery.

Since 2014, CRER, and its partners, have campaigned for a permanent physical space to tell these stories. The vision was that within the decade, Scotland would have its own museum of empire, slavery, colonialism and migration. This would include looking at the contributions of Black and minority ethnic communities, as well as exploring Scotland's role in imperialism and slavery. The campaign had a website with interactive online exhibitions and little-known stories from Black Scottish history.<sup>10</sup>

Ten years on, Scotland is yet to have this permanent space, but the Scottish Government in 2023 ratified a series of recommendations made by the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group, including recommendation one: 'Scotland should create a dedicated space to address our role in empire, colonialism, and historic slavery. A new organisation should be created to lead this work'.<sup>11</sup> While work continues to make this a reality, existing museums and heritage sites must continue to build on their research and engagement with histories of slavery, colonialism and migration in their collections.

In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer and mass Black Lives Matter demonstrations, many Scottish institutions released public responses to the movement, acknowledging actionable areas of their work where an anti-racist consciousness could be introduced in practice. In 2022, CRER investigated the progress made by organisations in the period following these Black Lives Matter statements. The survey asked what, if any, anti-racist actions had been taken since their statement, what impact these had on BME staff/service users, and future action plans. The survey revealed some of the ways in which organisations in Scotland have been attempting to address and acknowledge legacies of slavery and colonialism in their

<sup>10</sup> Empire Museum. Welcome to Empire Museum: About Us. [Online]. [Accessed 24 February 2025]. Available from: <https://empiremuseum.scot/about-us/>

<sup>11</sup> Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group, (2022). Available from: <https://www.museumsgalleryscotland.org.uk/project/empire-slavery-scotlands-museums/>

institutions.<sup>12</sup> Analysis showed that between 2020 and the publication of the report in 2023 there had been little progress on anti-racism in many areas. The report includes a specific section on action to address institutional legacies of slavery and empire.

Museums shape our interpretation of the past and our understanding of the present which places them at the forefront of anti-racism work. They can provide a place and context to confront and engage with the history and legacies of systems of oppression to create a more equal future for us all.

<sup>12</sup> Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights. (2023). Do Black Lives Still Matter in Scotland? [Online] [Accessed 24 February 2025]. Available from: <https://www.crer.org.uk/s/CRER-Do-Black-Lives-Still-Matter-in-Scotland.pdf>

## Strand 1—‘Sticking Points’: Barriers to the implementation of anti-racist policies in Scottish heritage-related organisations

The first strand of White Thinking involved a collaboration between The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (SoAoS), one of Scotland’s oldest organisations dedicated to heritage, and the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, an established Scottish anti-racist organisation, with additional expertise and support from Museums Galleries Scotland.

In 2022, SoAoS responded to CRER’s survey about progress made in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement in summer 2020. The Society was able to reflect on its race equality work to date and consider how it wanted to implement various small changes into the structures of the organisation.

This strand was therefore designed to take the next step in identifying the challenges to embedding change in heritage by bringing together two organisations with distinct influence in Scottish culture and politics. This strand had the widest remit, with the most potential for long-lasting and structural change.

### Our planned intervention

The work aimed to identify priority areas for anti-racism and inclusion work and to develop an action plan including piloting 2-3 initiatives.

Initial meetings between the Society and CRER introduced the organisations to each other’s work and provided a chance for staff at SoAoS to hear about the White Thinking project. A review was undertaken, looking at the Society’s internal policies and the ways in which they might be considered through an anti-racism framework. Training in anti-racism was provided to staff and trustees by the West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (WSREC).

### What actually happened

After identifying key areas where work could be pushed forward, new policies and a framework for EDI action-planning were developed by SoAoS and reviewed by CRER. Learning from this process will be shared across the sector through Museums Galleries Scotland in particular via their Anti-Racism workshops and toolkit. Restructuring and the appointment of new staff within SoAoS meant that timings aligned, creating the ability for this work to have a significant impact on the organisation’s anti-racist capabilities.

### What worked/what didn’t work

- Development of an Action Plan involving regular staff discussion, including consideration of how SoAoS reports on, and communicates, progress on anti-racism work.
- SoAoS has 24 laws and a Royal Charter (dating from 1783) which were reviewed by CRER and the Society’s EDI statement was developed as part of its Vision, Mission and Values. Advocacy positions on topics such as heritage in conflict zones and the sale of human remains were reviewed and amended as required.<sup>13</sup>
- New Terms of Reference were developed for the Society’s Editorial Advisory Board to begin the process of diversifying expertise, advice and ultimately authorship. Language notes were created for some editions of the Society’s journal, the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (founded in 1851). In addition, language notes were drafted, reviewed and put in place on certain archival documents to give context to historic and out-of-date language. Author surveys were undertaken for certain types of publication, such as the Dig It! Discover articles, for which payment is now also offered.
- Work on expanding and diversifying the Society’s membership (known as a ‘Fellowship’) was explored, initially through work on the programme of public lectures, with analysis of speakers and topics, and offering speakers payment, helping to ensure a diverse programme. SoAoS participated in its first Black History Month programme in October 2025. The Society also started to build a robust understanding of diversity amongst both its current and potential membership, through regular surveys and review of what data it collects.
- During this period the Society began in earnest to fundraise for a new building, which is likely to have a major impact on the Society’s activities. CRER fed into discussions around this, especially consultation with external groups.

### Why this matters and what changed

Work on this strand helped equip the Society to both proactively plan for future improvement as well as respond to opportunities. As the project was drawing to a close, the University of Edinburgh undertook a review into that institution’s links with slavery. One University benefactor had also provided funds for SoAoS’s Gunning Jubilee Award, which enables experts to visit museums, collections or materials of archaeological science. The award is named after Dr Robert Halliday Gunning, a Scottish medic who moved to Brazil in the late 1840s and earned considerable wealth through investments in gold mines that relied on enslaved labour, while also holding enslaved people on his private estate. After his return to Britain, Gunning established a number of awards and prizes, many of which are still in effect today.

In consultation with the University, SoAoS funded research into Gunning and the establishment of the award. The Society removed his name from the award, published a news item on the findings of the research, hosted an online event on the research and provided a short update ahead of the opening public lecture of the 2025 programme, as part of Black History Month. The research results will be published in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* and SoAoS is

<sup>13</sup> We are proud to be an actively anti-racist, pro-equality and pro-diversity heritage charity in Scotland. We believe that no one holds a monopoly on Scotland’s history and that it should be shared by and for everyone; the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland is committed to working towards equality and accessibility in the Scottish heritage sector and beyond. The Society will ensure that:

- All members of our community and stakeholders are treated with fairness, dignity and respect.
- We uphold and value protected characteristics and will not discriminate on grounds of, including but not limited to, age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or gender reassignment.
- We will challenge inequalities and remove barriers to equality and diversity in heritage activities.

in discussion with the University team tasked with their institutional response. The Society is also looking to collaborate with institutional partners on wider initiatives to explore SoAoS's connections to historical slavery and colonialism and the ways in which these have shaped both their work and the development of modern thought. This work has the potential to unveil the development of racist narratives in Scottish society, and how slavery and colonialism contributed to, and was justified by, these ideas.

Project work continues to be an important component of anti-racist work within the Society: e.g. *Make Your Mark*, the campaign to increase the number and diversity of heritage volunteers. The action planning process has made it easier for learning from the project to be embedded within the Society. Staff are in turn more confident in contributing to the project through sharing resources and approaches.

SoAoS is also working to improve data: for example, it has begun to collect equalities monitoring data as part of its recruitment process and is looking to collect comparable data for all aspects of activity, from publication to grant-giving to Fellowship. The Society surveys both members and non-members and is starting to see greater diversity within Fellowship recruitment and EDI experience (and lived experience) on the board of trustees. This understanding of the demographic of job applicants, as well as fellows and grant applicants, allows for a deeper understanding of who is engaging with the Society, and also what barriers are still in place, for example, in preventing people from progressing to the next stages of job interviews or into employment or fellowship. This understanding will allow the Society to target further anti-racist and anti-oppressive action going forward.

CRER's support was central in enabling SoAoS to pursue these developments. This is not a story of continuous progress; it is better characterised as bursts of activity alongside gradual change. Future opportunities include the fundraising appeal, the potential for improving and harnessing Society data, and exploring training impacts and requirements. Policies continue to be developed, and the Society will look to both support and learn from other heritage sector organisations.

Beyond formal measures, building confidence with the staff team remains an important legacy, with aspects such as the CRER-led walking tour of Glasgow for Society staff acting as an important way to help ensure that taking anti-racist work forward is a mutual enterprise. The participation of two staff members in the MGS Museum Activist programme has also helped energise the action planning process and continue momentum. Decolonisation and anti-racism work draw their most promising results from active involvement across all staff in an organisation, with dedicated time, resource and commitment from senior leadership to anti-oppressive objectives.



SoAoS staff on Black History Month Walking Tour in Glasgow

The collaboration with CRER offered SoAoS the chance to engage in dialogue with an external organisation, which was beneficial for driving forward work on racial equality. By developing a structured approach to embedding anti-oppressive practice, this models a clear drive for change. Pairing up two organisations allows for a culture of accountability and follow-up that so often is lacking in internal anti-racist initiatives. SoAoS was able to point to collaboration with CRER as a motivator to advocate for the continuation of this work. However, when partnership work inevitably ends, the question remains of how to progress. The long-term implication of these changes, the impact they have on widening who tells Scotland's stories, and what parts of these histories are told, remains to be seen.

## Strand 2—Museums of Empire: Challenging racist interpretations at the Kelvingrove Museum

The starting point for this collaboration was the opening of Kelvingrove's new, permanent exhibition, 'Glasgow, City of Empire' in October 2023. The exhibition reflects on both the city's entanglement in histories of slavery and empire, and the ways in which the museum itself was originally conceived as an institution designed to celebrate empire. The exhibition emerged from a process of dialogue both within the museum and with external partners, following the appointment of a Curator (Legacies of Slavery and Empire) in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in 2020. A series of earlier interventions (which EDI in Scottish Heritage contributed to) within the space of the museum had drawn greater attention to its imperial past and the 'Glasgow, City of Empire' exhibition was the clearest statement yet of a desire to foster the decolonisation of an institution that originated in empire. However, Kelvingrove is a large municipal museum (the most visited heritage site in Glasgow), and change occurs within the context of specific decision-making processes and straitened budgets in a period of economic hardship for many councils. The aim was to ensure that the 'Glasgow, City of Empire' exhibition would become a starting point rather than an end point for reflection, especially within a context of public sector cuts that is increasingly affecting the heritage sector.

### Our planned intervention

This collaboration initially aimed to forge a dialogue between Lilian Thuram, former international footballer, winner of the World Cup in 1998, and now one of France's leading anti-racist activists (founder of the Lilian Thuram Foundation for Education against Racism), and curators from Kelvingrove Museum. Thuram has extensive experience of working with museums in France to devise exhibitions that foster anti-racist thinking on colonial-era collections. Our aim was thus to embed anti-racist strategies within the museum's ongoing process of decolonisation, using the 'Glasgow, City of Empire' exhibition as a platform for further developments.

### What actually happened

The project began (March 2024) with a school visit to explore the types of educational resources that might be used to encourage schoolchildren to engage further with the topics raised by the exhibition. The Thuram Foundation has long experience of working with schoolchildren and young adults, and advocates for the creation of resources that will speak to younger generations.

When he first toured the exhibition, Thuram picked up on key issues to explore with pupils on the planned school visit, focusing in particular on: the importance of the words we use to speak about slavery and empire; and, secondly, what this choice of words reveals about how we position ourselves in relation to history. These ideas were explored the next day in a workshop with a visiting group of approximately twenty secondary school pupils across the age range from S2-S6. Thuram's use in the workshop of his Foundation's 'upside down' map of the world, which places at Africa at the centre of the



Lilian Thuram delivering workshop at Kelvingrove Museum (June 2024)

globe and in its true proportions, proved particularly successful in encouraging pupils to question their perceptions of history. The session was also attended by senior curators and educational staff from the museum.

In follow-up meetings between staff from the University of Strathclyde and Glasgow Museums, it was agreed that the most productive next step would be for Thuram to deliver a similar workshop for museum staff (curators and educational staff from Kelvingrove and a range of other Scottish museums). Within heritage institutions, efforts at decolonisation are often driven by motivated individuals but this does not guarantee wider institutional 'buy in'. How then might we seek to embed a wider institutional culture in which all staff feel motivated and sufficiently knowledgeable to engage with a decolonial agenda? The staff workshop in June 2024 began with a collective tour of the 'Glasgow, City of Empire' exhibition, following some of the ideas developed in the student tour several months previously. Feedback from participants indicated that the workshop provided a rare space to discuss race and anti-racism within the work environment, revitalising staff enthusiasm and commitment to the task of decolonising collections.

In October 2024, the University of Strathclyde hosted a public event as part of Black History Month to showcase the work that had been carried out across all strands of the project with a particular focus on the Thuram Foundation's collaboration with Kelvingrove Museum. In a dialogue with Nelson Cummins (Curator of Legacies of Slavery and Empire at Glasgow Museums) and David Murphy (University of Strathclyde), Lilian Thuram talked the audience through different ways in which he had engaged with the 'Glasgow, City of Empire' exhibition, encouraging visitors and staff to think again about their perceptions of history and to ask probing questions about how we choose to represent that past.

The event was attended by a wide range of people, from school groups to heritage sector professionals, interested members of the public, and even included an entire refugee football team from East Kilbride. This was a far more diverse audience than is usually attracted to events at the University: 81% of those who replied to a follow-up questionnaire indicated that they had not previously attended an event on campus. Can such an audience thrive within the confines of the institutions and knowledge practices which undergird heritage? It is ever more urgent to find workable solutions to these problems. For, while we might decry the tokenism of some EDI efforts to promote 'diversity', the right-wing backlash against so-called 'critical race theory' in the UK and the current Trump government assault on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives in the US are a stark warning that the clock can be turned back on even the timid progress of the past few decades.

### What worked/what didn't work

It was agreed by all participants in this strand that Lilian Thuram's stature and ability to communicate across audiences from senior management staff in the heritage sector to the general public had helped to advocate for the importance of the work being undertaken at Kelvingrove Museum. Obviously, not every heritage project can call on a World Cup-winning footballer, but Thuram's participation focused attention on the importance of developing a communications and public engagement strategy to try and embed the ideas being developed in exhibitions such as 'Glasgow, City of Empire'.

This project took place during a period when staff across the sector were managing heavy workloads and busy schedules, with ongoing cuts making it a difficult time for many staff, limiting people's ability to think about the future. Addressing slavery and empire within the heritage sector is an endeavour that seeks to fundamentally change and reinterpret our museums. This would

be challenging under any circumstances, but it is even more so in a context of smaller budgets and less staff time. Yet, staff across the organisation found the time to attend and contribute to the workshop, demonstrating that, given the right circumstances, it is possible to foster wider engagement with this work across institutions.

It is important, however, to be realistic about the potential impact of Thuram's session with Kelvingrove staff members. There's no doubt it offered an important source of new momentum for anti-racism work, yet what happens after this momentum has passed? How do we stop people forgetting about the workshop and the takeaways from it?

Also, this work focused on a relatively small subsection of the museum's collections. Is it possible to replicate the work done with Thuram across the museum and if so, how? How do we use this process again across other exhibitions and stories in Kelvingrove Museum? By repeating this process of analysis as a pathway for education, Thuram's approach might be used to foster organisational change on a large scale.

### Why this matters and what changed

Taken collectively, the impacts from this strand have sought to embed processes that go beyond individual projects or exhibitions in order to foster a form of questioning about racial hierarchies that can be applied across all aspects of a museum's work:

- The Thuram Foundation's 'upside-down' map of the world has been installed in Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum as part of the 'Glasgow, City of Empire' exhibition.
- Educational resources are being developed including a workshop specific to the 'Glasgow, City of Empire' display, but the principles and guidance can be applied more broadly. The workshop itself is now open for bookings and has become a very popular workshop at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum for both schools (primary and secondary) and third-level groups. Learning staff presented educational material related to 'Glasgow, City of Empire' at an Anti-Racist Curriculum workshop session as part of a Museum Galleries Scotland Symposium, in February 2025. Staff have also delivered sessions for Glasgow schools Anti-Racist Conversations sessions, delivered by EDI and EAL teachers, who work with secondary school anti-Racism clubs from across the city. This work has taken place both in the City Chambers and in Kelvingrove. A CPD session in October 2025 for teachers further promoted resources. The resources created as a result of the project can be accessed [here](#).
- In November 2024, some significant reinterpretation and redisplay changes were made to the Conflict and Consequences gallery, which were in part shaped by Lilian Thuram's approach to the language we use to speak and make sense of historical events (e.g. 'revolution' v 'mutiny'). For information on this wider project, see [this blog](#). A style and language guide for the exhibition is at an early stage of development, building on conversations across the project workshops as well as discussions with the David Livingstone Birthplace Museum and Museums Galleries Scotland; the language used in the workshops has also filtered into the broader Kelvingrove language bank. The framework for talking about race and thinking about these histories can be applied across Glasgow Museums.
- Staff at Kelvingrove have developed a blog and [webpage](#) reflecting on the project. This reflects our commitment that outcomes and legacies should be made visible both within institutions and to the wider community. This visibility creates a public-facing institutional record of the work done and offers models to external stakeholders looking to draw on existing case studies for future work.

*'As an early-career curator, it has been incredibly inspiring and confidence building being a part of the project, the time spent working with the Thuram Foundation and the wider project network has been invaluable in helping to shape and grow my understanding of anti-racism work within the heritage sector and spend valuable time with understanding and supportive colleagues.'*

Nelson Cummins, Curator for Legacies of Slavery and Empire at Glasgow Museums

*'Having Lilian Thuram visit our City of Empire exhibition and engage with our teams in workshops as part of the White Thinking project has had a very positive impact on Glasgow Life Museums. The opportunity to discuss the approach we are taking with audiences, and specifically schools, with Lilian was very well timed as part of our reflection on work to date on the exhibition and the on-going creation of resources for teachers and schools. It was really valuable to have him share his insights with us, we took time to reflect with him and his enthusiasm for our work was inspiring. Personally, I found his way of framing thoughts around Anti-racism e.g. the way we look at the globe and what this means vital to consider in all we do.'*

Katherine West, Senior Museums Manager – Operations and Curatorial

## Strand 3—Working with young people in the African diaspora in Scotland to address the legacy of David Livingstone

The third strand of the project involved a collaboration between the University of Strathclyde and the David Livingstone Birthplace Museum (DLBM). The museum has faced a specific set of challenges in developing an anti-racist approach to its collections, as Livingstone has long been celebrated in Scotland as a humanitarian who sought to do good in Africa. However, the museum has a rich recent history of engaging in a probing, thoughtful fashion with some of the problematic aspects of its collections and the dominant narratives that have circulated regarding Livingstone's 'civilising mission' in Africa: its legacy room, in particular, is a model for other museums to follow.

Where Strand 2 was concerned with embedding a decolonial agenda within a large, municipal museum, this strand was focused on a small and very dynamic heritage organisation with a firm commitment to decolonisation, but this is largely dependent on external income to fund discreet decolonial projects. In these circumstances, how might smaller heritage organisations be enabled to develop more secure, longer-term decolonial plans? And, paradoxically, might the leaner and more agile structures of a small institution lead to initiatives that offer models for large institutions?

### Our planned intervention

We planned workshops for teachers and pupils at Calderside Academy, a school local to DLBM. There were plans for creative workshops for the public and to create educational material for visitors to the museum, in particular school groups. The aim was to use creative co-design and support from education professionals to develop best practice in professional resource development that schools throughout Scotland can benefit from.

### What actually happened

The work of this strand focused on developing an [educational resource](#) for secondary school pupils. EDISH funding had facilitated the initial development of these resources but, when this funding ran out, the museum lacked the staffing resources to complete them. We thus discovered at the outset of the project that a more sustained period of work than anticipated would be required to develop and supplement the materials already prepared. This meant that we were obliged to omit some of the participatory elements of the project that had originally been planned.

In the initial phase of work on this strand, Dr Navan Govender, the Education lead on the project from the University of Strathclyde, assessed the existing materials, activities were added, and supplementary materials developed to create a full workpack for secondary pupils visiting the museum. It was agreed that the resources would best suit History and English classes, but that there was some relevance to Modern Studies and other subjects also.

A call was circulated to practising secondary teachers and teacher educators to review the draft materials on a tour of the museum space. One of our priorities was to involve teachers of African heritage in the shaping of the materials. Finding teachers to pilot the material proved to be extremely difficult due to several factors, including timing, heavy workloads, and the lack of diversity in the workforce, particularly in the History subject area, where no teachers from a Black or minority ethnic background were identified.

Despite these challenges, a small group of teachers visited the museum with Dr Govender in

Spring 2024. Other teachers who were unable to attend also submitted written feedback. Specific connections were made between the texts chosen for the student workpack and objects/display panels to help situate the materials within the physical space of the museum. Adjustments were also made where it was advised that there was too much or too little material in relation to specific areas of the museum.

### What worked/what didn't work

Having teachers pilot the material in this way was crucial in ensuring that resources were accessible and engaging, as well as tailored to the Curriculum for Excellence. As a result of feedback, activities for students were made more interactive and enquiry-based, using questions and prompts with strategic points of input to foster engagement. This process also ensured that the resource would provide sufficient information to equip teachers to discuss histories of slavery and colonialism with students. There is also potential for the materials to serve as professional development for teachers.

Overall, the materials developed a new framework for visitors to interact with the museum and its existing resources. They were piloted with pupils from Calderside Academy and are now ready to be rolled out to other schools. Glasgow City Council has also expressed interest in connection with its anti-racism and education work.

As was mentioned above, the legacy room in DLBM is located at the very end of the permanent exhibition and the weary visitor may not dwell long enough to engage with this important decolonial intervention. These educational materials draw attention to important interventions earlier in the museum space and complement the work in the legacy room.

The main challenges encountered in this strand centred on the workloads of the different individuals and organisations involved. Given their busy workloads, teachers have limited capacity to become involved in external projects. In addition, teachers often feel unprepared for engagement with histories of slavery, colonialism and anti-racism. In order to address this, conversations on these topics would need to be made part of the introduction to education and we are currently exploring the possibility of introducing the materials into teacher training at the University of Strathclyde. As DLBM relies heavily on volunteer guides, a positive future development might involve anti-racist training to allow volunteers to feel more confident guiding visitors through the decolonial interventions that have so enriched the museum in recent years.

### Why this matters and what changed

The main impact here is obviously the creation of a new set of educational resources to supplement the rich pedagogical material available on the DLBM website. As was outlined above, smaller heritage organisations often struggle to find the capacity to develop initiatives such as this. However, they are also more agile, can work with relative autonomy and previous anti-racism work is often remembered and preserved within the institutional memory, which can lead to significant change, as DLBM has demonstrated through a series of decolonial projects in recent years. The educational resources that we have developed during this project offer the possibility of enriching the museum's engagement with school groups through a process of interactive learning. Above all, this strand involved fruitful conversations across different sectors (second- and third-level education, heritage sector) to rethink how we engage with those who have long been framed as 'white heroes'. It is this commitment to dialogue across different types of institution and their respective missions that offers rich possibilities for the future.

## Strand 4—Raising public awareness of the contribution of South Asian doctors to Scotland through medical archives

The collaboration with RCPSG was a follow-up on a short archival research placement that was part of the earlier EDISH project. The archival placement, titled, 'The Reframed' project had initiated work on encouraging awareness and research on the Royal College's exclusionary past and helped build structural support within the organisation towards promoting inclusive heritage. This placement initiated some of the early research on the first ever South Asian doctors licensed at the College. It also indicated the extensive research necessary to understand the historic connections that the college fostered between Glasgow and South Asia over the 18th and 19th centuries. This research would not only reevaluate the College's role in the international medical community over the last two centuries but also create a meaningful legacy for current South Asian doctors in the UK and in South Asia.

Institutions like the RCPSG have long played a role in training South Asian doctors to serve British needs. From the staffing of the Indian Medical Service during the days of Empire to working on the front lines of both World Wars to playing a foundational role in the NHS, South Asian medics have been essential to British healthcare. Yet the impact of the deliberate nature of their migration is too often overshadowed by anti-migrant sentiment. Engaging with this history is timely and vital to understand the roots of modern British medicine and recognising the diverse heritage that continues to shape it.

### Our planned Intervention

The collaboration aimed to inculcate public awareness of the contribution of South Asian doctors to Scotland through public-facing events. This strand is supported by the research of a University of Strathclyde doctoral candidate, Monique Lerpiniere working in collaboration with the archive-based and heritage-related staff of RCPSG. The public event included an exhibition accompanied by a website, and a blog series hosted on the RCPSG website. We also planned to engage with the South Asian communities in Scotland to raise public awareness of this shared history. The intended audience were the general public, medical students and professionals, and NHS staff.

### What actually happened

The initial work involved supporting the portrait launch of Dr Jamini Sen the first female fellow of the College and a Bengali doctor, as an entry-point to initiate a public interest in the aligned histories of medicine in UK and South Asia.



Portrait of Jamini Sen by Grace Kumar Payne

The Edinburgh based artist Grace Payne Kumar was commissioned to paint Sen's portrait, unveiled on 21 August 2024—the first woman licentiate represented in the College Hall's permanent collection of portraits. Promotional graphic materials designed by artist Malini Chakrabarty helped share Sen's story with visitors. The College leveraged this work to demonstrate a new commitment to inclusive interpretation by participating in Glasgow Doors Open Day, which included talks on Lerpiniere's research, an interview with Sen's niece and biographer, supported by interactive activities inviting visitors to map their heritage in relation to the College's global ties through fun activities.

Jamini Sen, the RCPSG's first female fellow, was born in Basanda, Bengal (now West Bengal) in 1871. In 1890 she was one of the first women to attend Calcutta Medical College, passing her licentiate of Medicine and Surgery in 1897. She worked from 1899 to 1909 as physician to the Royal Family of Nepal, focusing on women's health. She identified that there were few trained women doctors in gynaecological health, and she decided to study modern methods. Under the British Raj for medics in India to progress they were expected to come to Britain to gain a qualification. This took Jamini to Dublin and then to Glasgow and the Royal College where, in 1912, she became the first woman to pass the Fellowship exam. As a woman she was not allowed to hold office, and indeed, no woman followed her as a Fellow until 1924. She returned to India where she devoted the rest of her life to women's health. Her career though illustrious was limited by the structural hierarchies of a colonial state. She died in 1932.

This was followed by an interactive session and presentations by Claire McDade and Monique Lerpiniere for Black History Month Scotland.



Monique Lerpiniere's talk at the RCPSG for Black History Month

While the initial portrait launch drew mostly regular College attendees, the later events reached wider audiences, including representatives from Bangladeshi Medical Association and Colourful Heritage. Attendance by the Vice President and senior staff signalled growing leadership engagement with a more inclusive understanding of the College's history.

### Why this mattered and what changed

In 2025 medics from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka made up 22.3% of RCPSG's total membership and this has remained consistent over many years. This, of course, does not take into account the many medics who now reside in the UK who were born in South Asia. We know that the NHS is one of the most diverse employers in the world, massively underpinned by staff of South Asian heritage. The Royal College's current archival research into registers from the 1800s is revealing the names of medics who travelled to the UK to gain a medical license (records of the first ethnically South Asian individual dates from the 1870s). Much more research is required as some of these early doctors had anglicised names from birth or from before they came to Scotland, making them harder to identify in the records. This work is beginning to bear fruit, and the College is forming collaborations with sister Royal Colleges across the UK whose records mirror similar associations and with similar problems of identification.

The RCPSG have invested staff time into archival research that would lead to community projects in Govan, Glasgow. Staff have also made links with South Asian Community organisations who are keen to participate in future exchanges.

### What worked/what didn't work

#### 1. Building trust within the institution

The project aims to make the RCPSG's heritage research relevant to current Fellowship holders. A key recommendation is to foster institutional mindset change by building organisational support and gathering feedback from minority-background fellows to encourage long-term trust and participation in building institutional heritage, while also reassessing communication and advertising practices to ensure events engage with the diverse heritage central to the RCPSG fellowship experience.

#### 2. Outputs and Access

Small anti-racism grant projects often face limits of time and scale. Institutions can help by creating

knowledge-sharing channels between partners and maintaining a central, accessible information hub (with copyright/confidentiality allowances). This approach allows project goals to evolve in line with institutional history and current needs.

In our project, the initial plan for artist-collaborator Malini Chakrabarty to create a graphic novel on Jamini Sen shifted toward producing a flexible set of images for stationery and PR, which the College found more practical.

#### To make outputs useful for future work, institutions need:

- Standard processes for internal and external visibility of outcomes
- Multiple contact points for accessing project materials
- Clear storage locations on the institution's website
- Digital-upkeep costs should be budgeted from the start to ensure outputs remain accessible and reusable.
- Institutions should also establish a standard public-access policy to maximise use of project resources.

### 3. Cultural change

As a prestigious institution, the College can appear grand or intimidating from the outside. Its strong self-identity means that reshaping this identity through heritage work must be embedded across the organisation. Cultural change is needed to include new stories about the College and involve all areas of the workforce—from HR and communications to senior leadership. Effective anti-racism work requires integrating the examination of colonial legacies into everyday organisational culture. Since organisations more easily change behaviours than attitudes, cultural transformation will come through actively doing the work, setting clear goals, and measuring their impact.

*'Being part of a supportive and collaborative network of colleagues across the sector has been great on a personal level but also on a strategic level. It has helped to raise the awareness of our EDI work internally with our senior managers as well as externally.'*

*The project has also enabled us to widen our outreach work, building engagement with more diverse communities across Glasgow. It is having an impact across our College as colleagues understand that researching and sharing our history of empire and broadening our euro-centric worldview is important and morally the right thing to do.'*

Claire McDade, Heritage Lead at Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

In conclusion, strand 4 aimed to raise public awareness, so the first step was delivering events that attracted diverse audiences across Glasgow. The work focused on building external networks and increasing internal understanding of South Asian doctors' stories.

A key challenge was measuring impact. While attendance figures were recorded, broader awareness develops over time. The question remains: how can these events continue to resonate with the public and across the College?

Effective anti-racism work requires accountability and regular evaluation. Because only some staff were involved in the wider White Thinking project, a knowledge gap emerged between those aware of its context and those who were not. All staff need ownership of the work, and a progress-tracking system would help maintain continuity when personnel change.

Through delivering these three public events, the College has begun identifying the next steps for its anti-racism and colonial-history work. Future priorities include strengthening internal and external collaboration and producing a range of outputs—digital and print publications, exhibitions, and events. A clear, organisation-wide action plan will be essential to sustaining this momentum.

## Strand 5—Access and inclusion at small community-centred heritage sites

[The work with HMS Unicorn](#) built on the EDISH project exhibition and research by Yashasvi Jingar. The exhibition highlighted the museum's engagement with vulnerable and marginalised young people in Dundee, including children with disabilities, and explored the ship's diverse history—particularly its role as a training venue for women of the Royal Naval Services (WREN). It was informed by community interviews reflecting on the museum's legacy and relevance to local communities.

The HMS Unicorn partnered with the 'White Thinking' project to broaden participation and increase the ship-museum's relevance to Dundee's diverse communities and underrepresented age-groups who are not part of its usual visitor intake. The agenda for this collaboration was a recognition and acknowledgement of whiteness in practice and as embedded in the institutional philosophy. This and other parallel projects running at the Unicorn helped explore the 'white-other' category—a section of white population of the city missing from the museum's audience base. It was to inform and understand the impact of the intersection of whiteness with class, regional, and gender categories, that determined one's access to museums.

### Our Planned Intervention

The collaboration aimed to host a community consultation to frame an action plan for widening inclusion of communities who were not represented in the regular visitor footfall. The primary query was: While there is growing capacity for diversity work in Scotland's larger cities and institutions, how can we grow capacity in smaller organisations which have limited staff and resources?

### What actually happened

Strand 5 aimed to diversify narratives at HMS Unicorn by broadening its audience, exploring new ways to engage beyond its usual demographic and welcoming potentially non-English-speaking/ or non-museum going individuals and families into a small, community-focused heritage space. Despite challenges, the strand produced valuable work and key learning to advance anti-racism practice.

Two freelance curators and community engagement workers, Calum Rennie and Zainab Imran were employed to design and facilitate two creative-response workshops. The first workshop included a walk-through and presentation from the facilitators with a panel discussion on the history and stories of the ship and the museum. Participants were asked to respond with creative writing to different prompts and ideas (available on the MGS webpage hosting this report) and think about how the

past and the present impact the experience of the museum space, connecting British maritime history with the museum's current relevance to community. The focus for these workshops was the significant student population in the city who are not currently attending the museum in a high number, even during the busy summer months.



Creative response workshop at HMS Unicorn part 1

After the first session, the facilitators, a staff member from HMS Unicorn and the academic lead from this strand reviewed the first writing workshop noting what worked well in terms of eliciting enthusiastic response, and improved the second workshop based on feedback and word-of-mouth responses to the first one. The review considered making participants comfortable in the ship-space, building in more reflection time within the workshop, and generating flexible prompts to support expression through writing, drawing, or speech.

The second session focused on open creative writing and zine making later shared on the HMS Unicorn website and social media. Participants in both workshops included current volunteers at the museum, Dundee University students, and local heritage professionals. Feedback was collected through post-workshop forms.



Creative response workshop at HMS Unicorn part 2

### What worked/what didn't work

Alternative narratives do not take away from 'historic truth'. HMS Unicorn as a small heritage site has a dedicated group of alumni, local visitors, and volunteers who are invested in the narratives of the ship and its naval legacy. Our objective was to create variations in the homogenous narratives of the museum that centre on the Royal Navy and the World War. Responding creatively to spatial, structural quirks of the ship and the current displays, volunteers were able to imagine alternative ways to think about the ship without fracturing existing relationships. These workshops created space for multiple narratives to exist and demonstrated that the ship can mean different things to different communities. The creative process equipped participants to find their unique ways of 'belonging' to the ship. Feedback mentioned that participants enjoyed the opportunity to try a new experience and that they were able to produce a creative output which they had not expected at the beginning of the workshop. Museum Volunteers who attended these workshops expressed interest in participating in similar activities going forward.

*'With this being one of the first projects I took on starting in this new role, the biggest impact was that it opened up new stories and narratives about the ship to me. It was great to get a range of perspectives on what stood out to people about the ship's interpretation and what they felt was missing. The work completed in this project is helping to form the foundations of future sessions we plan to run, and I am looking forward to seeing what stories come next.'*

Caitlin MacLeod, Volunteering, Engagement and Learning Officer at HMS Unicorn

### Making the experience 'stick' with the museum's daily operations

Conversations around how to ensure the discussions from the workshop stick in the institution's collective memory demonstrate the challenge of transforming a short-term project into long-term change. Including the zine on the museum's website ensures the availability of these stories to future audiences and is the first step in integrating them into HMS Unicorn's history. By bringing the feedback and output from the creative sessions into play when considering the future of HMS Unicorn's approach to discussing its own past and interpreting its collection, the museum can continue to see the impact of the workshops into the future. The sessions' outcomes can be used to identify themes for future exhibitions and additional interpretations to pre-existing exhibits. The facilitators also developed a template for creative workshops that can be used by the museum to encourage conversations around topics that are often branded as challenging or complicated. As volunteers from among the museum guides participated in the workshops and found them useful, it can be anticipated that they will carry perspectives and strategies from this practice into their daily exchanges with visitors.

### Staff changes and building continuity

Challenges in this strand involved ensuring continuity and the maintenance of knowledge. Throughout the project there were changes of staff at the HMS Unicorn and of the facilitators themselves for personal reasons. This meant that some of the original ideas for the project changed, including who the target audience of the workshops would be. With members of staff changing and leaving there are concerns around information and learning from the project being lost which

presents a challenge to futureproofing the outcomes of the project. Changes to members of the team in small heritage sites are inevitable, and more discussions around the pillars of the project would ensure clarity and continuity in project aims

### **Suggested adjustments**

Adjustments that could be made to the workshops include advertising further in advance to reach different audiences as well as giving facilitators, staff and academic leads more time to plan and organise the workshops. The facilitators were not involved in wider White Thinking group meetings and therefore were not able to engage with other people working on the project, meaning there was a disconnect with some of the wider discussions around aims, challenges and resource sharing. By closing this gap with a more focused brief to the facilitators, and chances for them to think creatively within this, the flow of the workshops within the wider project would be clearer.

A short-term project depends heavily on the host institution's existing network of local community and partner-institution contacts. Building trust that will enable positive sharing of narratives, experiences and spaces needs sustained respectful connection over time. The museum will be unable to benefit from relationships that part-time facilitators build with local communities unless the core working staff at the museum are actively involved in building trust and sustainability.

Engagement with young students added new perspectives to narratives that already hold a specific and documented role in people's imagining of HMS Unicorn's presence in Dundee's history. It asked how do we widen the scope of historical analysis without creating a sense of conflict or loss of faith in prevailing narratives? Staff, volunteers, and regular community groups rightly feel apprehension around taking key ideas and objects on which people place cultural and reputational value and changing this relationship. The workshop proved useful for internal structuring of the ship's narrative among staff and volunteers who participated with established ideas and knowledge about the ship. The activities demonstrated how creative methods can be used to build engagement and enthusiasm for thinking about alternative histories.

## **Reflections and Conclusion**

Museums are not neutral. For years they have been complicit in perpetuating the ideologies of the past.

Anti-racism work must be built on a deep understanding of the structural barriers that are in place when looking to highlight histories of slavery and empire, and when looking to diversify staff, audience and outputs. Key challenges such as lack of resources, lack of staff time and capacity, and financial constraints, need to be tackled with a comprehensive planning process before committing to particular anti-racism heritage projects within wider anti-racism work.

### **Working in silos and short-termism**

As White Thinking only involved a few members of staff from each organisation, staff were at times working in silos or having to offer feedback to their colleagues who were not necessarily engaged in the wider strategic anti-racism aims of the project. Many of the staff engaged in anti-racism work and community engagement were also on fixed-term contracts, leading to uncertainty around whether it will continue to be taken forward and an inability to plan long-term.

Multiple strands were interested in engaging in discussions with their board of trustees to ensure they were informed and onboard with the ongoing work, and were able to support it to be sustainable and have continuity. The support of partner organisations when discussing these areas of work with the board would have been beneficial in stressing the importance of anti-racism work and its growth across the sector.

### **The impact of organisational size**

The size and scope of organisations participating in the project varied significantly, and these variables greatly impact the ways in which work is undertaken. The size of an organisation has both positive and negative implications that influence their capacity to do work that sits outside of their usual remit. Larger organisations such as Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum employ hundreds of staff members and involve multiple levels of seniority and bureaucracy. This type of institution might have more capacity for engaging with anti-racism due to its larger staff base and ability to allocate time and resources. However, as with any initiatives, work that is done must make its journey through the machine of these organisations, being reviewed and moulded by multiple staff and teams. In a larger organisation, this slows down the pace of work and can mean that they are less able to respond energetically to evaluation, unable to easily change or remould as a result of learning processes.

Conversely, smaller organisations work with smaller staff teams and will often find themselves with limited capacity and resources due to staff members being responsible for multiple remits of work, as was the case with the David Livingstone Birthplace Museum. This limits the ability of smaller organisations to work on new projects or take part in different changes despite their desire to be involved. Yet, smaller organisations have the benefit of relative autonomy, and this enables their work to operate in a more dynamic style. Smaller organisations can more readily create and deliver on anti-racism work in the short term and can undertake more flexible evaluation with learning processes incorporated into their regular practice.

### **The role of funders and funding**

Throughout this project a common issue was the lack of funding, capacity and resources allocated to ensure the work's quality was of a high standard. How do we make anti-racist work more viable? We

exist in a precarious political landscape, with the advent of culture wars and some of our common values being used to score political points. Due to the economic pressures that result from this and other factors, anti-racism work is often seen as underfunded, under-resourced and precarious. In Scotland there is a rich tapestry of heritage organisations, many of which are undertaking funded projects, development of displays, exhibitions, and new content. The resources exist, but how much of that is directed towards anti-racist work? We have collated some examples of anti-racist heritage projects in Appendix 1 of this report, as a way of capturing what has been done so far, and what work can be built on. These projects also speak to the availability of funding, when looked for, to conduct anti-racism work and the way in which this area of work is growing and should be capitalised on.

Other factors can also play into the precarity of anti-racist heritage work. After the Black Lives Matter protests and movement of 2020, there was a flurry of work around anti-racism, and a feeling that this was happening for the first time. Yet as we have discussed earlier in the report, anti-racism work in Scotland has been ongoing for much longer than the last few years. The branding of an initiative as 'new' and 'pioneering' can add importance and reputational significance to work and so there is the risk that we are invested in the precarity of anti-racism work and the ability to market it to funders, senior staff and audiences as the first of its kind. We must move beyond the first steps of anti-racism, and create robust, wide reaching action plans that acknowledge and build on the work of our predecessors.

### People can make a difference

White Thinking sought and continues to seek to fundamentally reinterpret and widen how our heritage organisations in Scotland operate, what stories they tell and for whom they tell them. It was a multifaceted project that included many different ways of approaching these histories, many different ways of seeking out new audiences and many different ways of working collaboratively. Yet, even in its specificity, it has provided a template and tools for other organisations looking to address histories of slavery and empire, and the legacies we are left with today. The required culture change that began with this work must be sustainable, dynamic and have full support in terms of resources (staff time, capacity and funding) as well as leadership. These histories will continue to shape our future. To guide the Scottish heritage sector from white thinking towards inclusion, we must now forge a creative and expansive way forward.

The collective and collaborative approach was signalled by many individuals as a strong benefit to being part of White Thinking. The meetings, where everyone was working to address histories of slavery, colonialism and empire in their heritage institutions, acted as platforms to support each other, obtain feedback, and foster a community working towards common goals beyond the limits of their individual organisation. This network of support will last beyond the formal limits of the project. In our current political and cultural climate, support and a space to discuss learning and evaluation is crucial to ensure the sustainability, dynamism and resilience of anti-racism work.

## Appendix 1: Anti-Racist Heritage Projects in Scotland

### List of anti-racist heritage projects compiled by CRER

- She Settles in the Shields oral history collection book, Glasgow Women's Library 2011 [She Settles in the Shields | Glasgow Women's Library](#)
- Empire Cafe in the Briggait, Glasgow 2014 [University of Glasgow - Colleges - College of Arts & Humanities - College of Arts & Humanities Research - Arts Lab - Our Labs - Empire Café](#)
- Tinkers' Heart, Scottish Travellers' commemorative monument research with Historic Scotland (now Historic Environment Scotland), 2015 [Tinkers' Heart, Scottish Travellers' commemorative monument 820m E of Ardnò \(SM13615\)](#)
- Oral History Project in partnerships with Glasgow Museums and representatives from councils across West Central Scotland, West Central Scotland, 2015 [F\\_OralHistory.pdf](#)
- New Shoots, Old Roots project and books, Volume I and II, African Caribbean Womens Association with Street Level Photoworks, 2015 and 2020, [Resources — BLACK HISTORY MONTH SCOTLAND](#)
- GlaswegAsians exhibition at Scotland Street School Museum and at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum with Colourful Heritage, Glasgow, 2017 [GlaswegAsians Exhibition - Colourful Heritage](#)
- Roots Scotland project with West of Scotland Regional Equality Council and Historic Environment Scotland, 2018 – present, [Roots Scotland - West of Scotland Regional Equality Council](#)
- The Hidden Stories Map virtual map, in partnership with CRER, Graham Campbell, Hoskins Architects and Stuco, 2020, [Glasgow, United Kingdom. Free audio guided tour for iPhone and Android: The Hidden Stories Map](#)
- 'Black Oot Here' Online Exhibition [Exhibition — Black Oot Here.](#)
- 'Curating Discomfort' intervention at the Hunterian Museum with Community Curators, Glasgow, 2021 [The Hunterian](#)
- 'Managing Imperial Legacies' project with Historic Environment Scotland, University of Edinburgh and CRER, Scotland, 2020-2022, [MANAGING IMPERIAL LEGACIES](#)
- 'Respect! Caribbean life in Edinburgh' exhibition at Museum of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 2022 [Respect! Caribbean life in Edinburgh | Museums and Galleries Edinburgh](#)
- Lascars – Forgotten Seafarers display and Scotland's Lascar Heritage book at Riverside Museum with Our Shared Cultural Heritage and Bangladesh Association Glasgow, Glasgow, 2023 [Lascars – Forgotten Seafarers — Glasgow Life — GlasgowLife.Umbraco — Glasgow Life — GlasgowLife.Umbraco](#)
- 'Glasgow – City of Empire' permanent display at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum with Our Shared Cultural Heritage, Glasgow, 2023 [Glasgow - City of Empire — Glasgow Life — GlasgowLife.Umbraco](#)

- The Missing Chapter: Black Chronicles at Hillhead Library, 2024 [Black History Month: New Shoots Old Roots + The Missing Chapter: Black Chronicles - Street Level Photoworks](#)
- Conflict and Consequences reinterpretation at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, 2024 [Reinterpreting and Redisplaying Conflict and Consequences — Glasgow Life — GlasgowLife.Umbraco](#)

## Appendix 2: CRER's Recommendations for Planning Work on Anti-Racism

### Development of anti-racism work needs to include:

- Planning processes which begin with the desired outcomes and work backwards to identify viable, meaningful, measurable actions
- Meaningful involvement with Black/minority ethnic staff and service users which should take place throughout strategy development and implementation
- Strong evaluation mechanisms built in during the development process – creating demonstrable change is the goal of an anti-racist approach
- Setting milestones, targets and similar specific goals, ideally in numeric/percentage terms which can be robustly measured
- Gathering baseline data to measure future progress

### Actions designed from an anti-racist perspective:

- Reflecting anti-racist principles
- Worded to express the change to be achieved in the lives of people from minority ethnic communities
- Clearly focussed on what will work to tackle racial inequalities; always asking the questions 'will it work?', 'how will it work?' and 'how will we know if it worked?'

### Responsibility mechanisms:

- All anti-racist actions to be agreed with the relevant organisational area and formally 'signed off' by a named person at an appropriate level of seniority before publication
- Direct leadership and responsibility at senior level, for example through mandatory personal and/or departmental objectives
- Risk and mitigation sections within action plans, with clarity on who is responsible for risk management
- Responsibility for delivery assigned to a specific post at operational level

### Processes to monitor and review anti-racism work need to include:

- Accountability mechanisms: Specific plans and timetables for progress reporting
- Formation of a group with a scrutiny function, potentially involving internal and external stakeholders
- Transparent communications on strategies, plans and their progress
- Regular evaluation which compares progress to baseline data and initial targets