

Summary Evaluation Report

Museums Association
Anti-Racist Museums Programme

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April 2025

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Context & Introduction

This evaluation summary explores the impact from and experience of the pilot cohort of the Museums Association (MA)'s Anti-Racist Museums Programme, delivered in collaboration with facilitators Talk Listen Create from April to November 2024. Across this period, six museums from England, Scotland and Wales nations attended six whole-day anti-racism training sessions comprising of taught modules & action learning and were offered two 1-to-1 coaching calls.

The programme sought to deliver three outcomes:

- Learning about racism and acknowledging the role of the individual in perpetuating this system
- Developing the skills and confidence to take action to dismantle racism
- Embodying anti-racism, using the instrument of 'self' to be the change

Using an anti-racist evaluation and largely qualitative approach, this is an executive summary of the evaluation findings. More information about the individuals involved, and the anti-racist evaluation approach, can be found in the Acknowledgements & References section.

“The sector needs to really look in the mirror at how these structures are part of our foundational story. As a sector we are founded on principles of acquisition and colonisation, and we have historical baggage to deal with.”

- Cohort Interviewee

Key Findings: *Outcomes & Impact*

Outcomes:

1. **Embodied Change:** Across the cohort, in varied expressions and to varied degrees, there is evidence of real transformation and embodied change.
2. **Equipped to Act:** The cohort found the programme equipped them to act emotionally & theoretically, providing technical & topic knowledge, increased their subject literacy and confidence, offering insight into each other's work.
3. **Community & Coalition:** By the end of the programme, the cohort understood the difference between allyship and coalition and intended to maintain connection with each other in active coalition within and outside of the sector.

Between a reflection on baseline and midpoint confidence in meta skills, the cohort saw an average 0.63-point increase in confidence.

Broader Impact:

- **Intentions to Act:** Many cohort members had clear intentions to act within their organisations, indicating the potential for organisational, and therefore sector, change.
- **Advocacy:** The cohort were happy to be ambassadors for the programme, indicating this through action – like a panel discussion at MA Conference 2024 chaired by Joshua Robertson FRSA – and verbally at the final cohort session.
- **Sector Leadership:** There is huge potential for the MA, being the first organisation to deliver a programme of this scope, and depth within the sector.

“Carry on with this work – it has been groundbreaking – has been leading in the sector. The way that museums survive is by changing, they cannot stay the same...The fact the MA is leading change is really important.”

- Cohort Interviewee

Key Findings: *Experience*

For the Cohort:

- **Value:** Overwhelmingly, the programme was a valuable and transformative experience and felt like a clear statement of intent from the cohort's organisations.
- **Vulnerability & Care:** The need for vulnerability of self and the sharing of others made care critical.
- **Facilitation:** There was universally positive feedback about the course design and delivery.

For Talk Listen Create:

- **Value:** Overwhelmingly, a positive and valuable experience for TLC & an exciting sector to work with.
- **Balance:** Balancing the needs of a cohort of mixed identities and anti-racist practice experience levels was occasionally challenging.
- **Oversight:** At times, oversight from the MA was often unexpected and therefore felt heightened.

For the Museums Association:

- **Organisational Step-change:** Delivering a programme of this complexity represented organisational step-change for the MA.
- **Disconnection & Anxiety:** There has been some internal anxiety around reputational risk and the management of programme.
- **Care & Support:** Ensuring staff members are cared for while delivering the programme, particularly as racialised people, is crucial. More broadly, a brave space is needed within the MA for this work.

Evaluation Recommendations

Strategy & Commitment

- Consider Museums Association staff and trustees undertaking comparable anti-racism training alongside (but not with) cohort two
- Set up & support an alumni network to grow with the cohort, to embed existing impact & connection
- Consider removing all barriers to accessing the MA Essentials Anti Racism online course
- Consider increasing the internal resourcing of anti-racism work within the MA
- Consider setting expectations about regular check-ins between the MA and TLC teams at the outset
- Review the MA Anti Racist Museums Programme logic model, and align it to TLC programme design
- Ensure an evaluator is brought on board earlier in the second iteration of the programme

Programme Adjustments

- Consider creating a separate support space for global majority colleagues / staff who are involved
- Consider creating time for in-person sessions, and be more flexible with working patterns & holidays
- Consider allowing more time for onboarding and sign-up, aligned with annual planning cycles
- Consider integrating more practical examples of museum work that seeks to be anti-racist, even if the purpose is to critique it
- Consider being flexible about numbers from each organisation, & encouraging trustee participation
- Solve technical and accessibility issues for next time

“Having anti-racism as a practice requires every stakeholder between you and changing a policy or introducing something new or implementing decolonization work to be on board with the concept, the process”

- Cohort Interviewee

Detailed Summary

Programme Outcomes

The key outcomes from the programme were defined by the MA as:

1. Participating individuals demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of racism and its complexities within the heritage sector in line with the learning outcomes of the Museum Essentials Supporting Anti-Racism online learning course.
2. Participants show evidence of actively dismantling institutional racism within their own respective organisations, thanks to feeling more confident and competent.
3. There is a cohort of museums that are making progress towards becoming anti-racist and which act as advocates to share learning across the UK museum sector, including the challenges and vulnerabilities faced. This is facilitated by the MA.

For TLC, the key outcomes for the programme focussed on Outcomes 1 and 2:

- **Knowing** - Understanding the complexities of racism in its everyday, institutional, and systemic expressions, and acknowledges their role in perpetuating some of these systems of exclusion and differentiation for racialised people of colour.
- **Doing** - Developing skills and confidence to take action. Includes the ability to act from a place of imperfection and shifting understanding, in the face of resistance from self and system.
- **Being** - Living anti-racism as an embodied practice and using the 'self' as an instrument of change.

Evidence of Impact

The impact of the programme is difficult to quantify; anti-racism work is necessarily internal work. However, overall, there is compelling qualitative evidence that the programme has been transformational for the cohort.

Embodied Change

Across the cohort, in varied expressions and to varied degrees, there is evidence of transformation and embodied change.

- An increased sense of community, and less caution and restraint for global majority colleagues - there is now a coalition of the willing
- Greater awareness - of recognising racism and its characteristics, and of anti-racist work within and beyond the museum sector
- A growth in confidence as agents in the dismantling of racism, partly enabled through increased subject literacy
- A growth in knowledge of anti-racist practice and theory, racism, whiteness and white supremacy culture
- Active use of the meta-skills framework, particularly around understanding and acknowledging a complexity mindset and being curious
- Nuanced and individualised reflections about identity and positionality in anti-racist work and emotional connection to the programme

“Ask yourself the question, is it the system that wants you to do this? Complacency? Norms?”

- Cohort Interviewee

Equipped to Act

The cohort found the programme equipped them to act emotionally and theoretically, providing technical and topic knowledge, increased literacy, and offering insight into each other's work.

- Cohort members reported learning new technical knowledge, particularly terminology and language around racism and anti-racism
 - This growth in literacy led to increased confidence and less fear of 'getting things wrong' and therefore more equipped to act
- Cohort members reported learning about work happening across and beyond the museum sector
- White cohort members or those new to anti-racism training found the subject knowledge illuminating, particularly about whiteness
- A challenge area which equipped the cohort to act was growth in awareness of racism, and in acknowledging past actions or attitudes
- Cohort members hoped for more sector examples, or greater opportunity to critique live work to build confidence in applying knowledge
- Structural barriers to change like funding, resource, time and buy-in were highlighted as a key limiting factor going forwards

“For me it's about where I stopped pushing for conversations... an act of disruption can be small - [like just asking] ‘is it?’”

- Cohort Panel Member contribution, MA Conference 2024

Community & Coalition

By the end of the programme, the cohort understood the difference between allyship and coalition and intended to maintain connection with each other. Convening support from the MA would foster further coalition and help the cohort overcome resource or time constraints.

- For everyone, but particularly colleagues from global majority backgrounds, or those who have undertaken past anti-racism work, the programme created community, connection and coalition
- There is significant intention amidst the cohort to build coalition with each other and others already in their networks
 - However, there is a need for a convenor and fear about time, resource, funding and competing priorities were highlighted as potential barriers to future commitment
- There is greater understanding amidst the cohort about what coalition is, and why it is a more useful framework than allyship
- Some cohort members reflected frustration around the moving line of best practice
- The cohort have formed interpersonal connections. They intend to maintain these connections, though this is dependent on resource.

“The MA could quite naturally create spaces for people to come together to have these conversations – the current cohort, next cohort and then broadening that out further”

- Cohort Interviewee

Opportunities for Broader Impact

Overall, the evidence detailed in the report so far focusses on evidence towards Outcome 1 of the logic model (see appendix). Outcomes 2 and 3 require institutional and sector buy-in, making them more longitudinal.

Museums are anti-racist organisations

“For me, was much more important almost symbolically as a confidence building and statement of intent – doing this programme is a significant way to say we are beginning something we’ve spoken about”

- Cohort Interviewee

Intentions to Act

Part of the final session was a presentation about planned or intended actions by cohort organisations. These fell into the below categories:

- *Strategy, organisational values and working groups*
- *Public commitments and pre-existing programmes or events*
- *Internal consultation, staff training and professional development*

It is worth noting again that funding and resource limitations were a strong theme. One cohort member noted: *“[In the] final session, we identified that power comes with money and that is something that dictates work we do in museums – unless those funding the work are behind anti-racism”*. In addition, much of the evidence to date is about intentions or embedded programmes rather than new planned work. Follow up evaluation will seek to evidence more actions taken by cohort organisations.

Advocacy

The panel discussion at the MA Conference with representatives from Amgueddfa Cymru Museum Wales and Birmingham Museums Trust began this process. Further advocacy from cohort museums could support recruitment for the second iteration of the programme.

The MA is a leader in the development of an anti-racist UK museum sector

“[The MA should] continue in this vein – [as a] convening body that equips but doesn’t absolve individuals or organisations from doing the work”

- Cohort Interviewee

Amidst little else currently existing in this form within the museum sector, the Museums Association could become a leader in the development of an anti-racist UK museum sector by building on the learning from this pilot programme.

The cohort highlighted that the MA needs to engage with funders and political bodies. This work depends on funding from Arts Council, NHLF and Art Fund – the MA is an important advocate and the relationship with government, particularly in England, is important. More broadly, the MA could engage with the NHS on social prescribing and other community interventions and highlight short-termism issues with project funding and anti-racism.

“The problem is that it’s a closed room with senior leaders working in 200-year-old structures set up by white men. We still follow some of their process. I worry this will feed into the code of ethics.”

- Cohort Interviewee

Experience

For the Cohort

Value

Overwhelmingly, the programme was a valuable and transformative experience and felt like a clear statement of intent from their organisations. The programme felt like a privilege – cohort members described it as life changing, and that they are proud and feel satisfaction having finished. The cohort felt it is a critically important subject matter, but also that the timing of the programme was right for their organisations and the wider world. Finally, it was nice to have something positive to do, and being part of the programme felt like the cohort were ‘doing’ something.

“Really valuable on a personal level as well as a professional level”

- Cohort Interviewee

Care

The need for vulnerability of self and the sharing of others made care critical for the cohort.

Significant care taken for mixed cohort – global majority and white colleagues – although a separate reflective space would be beneficial.

“Silence is exhausting and stressful, this [programme] is the opposite... Facilitators very effective setting up the context and space, particularly affirming of, sensitive to my position in the group.”

- Cohort Interviewee

Facilitation

There was universally positive feedback about the course design and delivery. Particularly, the TLC facilitator’s knowledge, experience and delivery methods and how they brought their own racialised identities and used them to spark discussion.

One to one coaching and action learning sets were particularly critical to learning. For some, this was more effective than others, due to personality matches and levels of engagement and attendance by their peers. Similarly, the reflective method suited some more than others, depending on learning style and willingness or ability to engage in emotional depth of work.

For the Talk Listen Create Facilitators

Overall, the selection process resulted in a strong cohort:

“I think there were a bunch of people who were ready for this work. Some of them knew a lot more than others at the start, but all of them, I felt, were really willing to engage.”

- Facilitator Interviewee

There was a need for balance by the facilitators in balancing the needs of a mixed identity cohort, as well as the challenge levels for individuals who were more experienced in anti-racism work, and those who weren’t. TLC were given an appropriate level of freedom to design the curriculum and bring their own experience and frameworks to the work, and while the budget was somewhat limiting, the redistribution of resources enabled them to bring on a fourth Action Learning Set facilitator.

The involvement and oversight of senior Museums Association colleagues was ad-hoc, and often unexpected – programming this in from the beginning would be appreciated next time. Indeed, internal work by the MA on anti-racism could be beneficial to support the further rollout of the programme and progression of practice across the sector and within the organisation.

Experience (cont.)

For the Museums Association

For the Museums Association, this programme represented an organisational step change.

This was because the Anti-Racist Museums Programme was an opportunity to deliver sector leading content on a crucial topic to senior leadership, leading European museum practice. It also opened the opportunity to offer anti-racism as a supported practice and created the potential for unlocking systemic change through leadership level professional development. In addition, the programme encouraged organisational self-reflection on the MA's own outdated Anti-Racism action plan.

Finally, the diversity of museums involved, and the four-nation approach meant that the programme was representative.

The Anti-Racist Museums Programme has caused some disconnection and anxiety within the MA.

There has been anxiety around reputational risk and the management of programme. This has manifested as a sense of disconnection with external facilitators, the content, and the impact of programme, and difficult internal management and support.

There are broader concerns around funding and the continuity of the work, as while the second year is likely to be internally funded, further years depend on external support. More broadly, differences of opinion around the Code of Ethics may prevent embedding anti-racist principles.

There has been a lack of support for some people connected to the programme.

There was a contradiction between the strategic level of this innovative programme and the scrutiny experienced by staff delivering it. For one member of staff, there was a lack of emotional or wellbeing support, particularly around undertaking anti-racism work as a racialised person. To enable growth, the large administrative burden of programme and planned alumni network needs more resource. More broadly, a brave space within the MA is needed to continue this work.

Access and Organisation

There were some barriers to access for the cohort, which if removed would make the programme more accessible.

For one cohort member with visual impairment, some sessions were less accessible. There were also some barriers to accessing the online course which limited engagement: the individual membership requirement, and its length, depth and academic nature.

The focus on senior leadership was highlighted as a barrier. Requiring 3 senior leadership team members from smaller organisations was highlighted as difficult. There was also a broader question around who counts as senior leadership, and whether trustees should attend.

Action Learning Set experiences were quite varied – some seemed to be less well attended than others and the efficacy of this part of the programme depended more on individual engagement. In addition, follow ups would be beneficial, along with a clear alumni network plan.

Finally, technical issues with Teams had an impact on the delivery of the programme for everyone.



Conclusion

“I would hope in 6 months this is all still very live with us, and that we have found ways to support other members of staff to learn and to develop those skills. Really from the programme – the massive overarching thing – it is that personal change that is going to make the difference.”

- Cohort Interviewee

This summary report has sought to highlight the key findings from the MA’s Anti-Racist Museums Programme evaluation. It highlights embodied change and a transformational shift in perspective within the cohort which speaks to the profound and valuable experience of the group whilst taking part. This change has the potential to catalyse significant movement across the sector, led by the cohort, and those that follow them. While their experiences were undeniably individual, the cohort was universal in their vulnerable and meaningful reflections about the change they have experienced, and the excellent delivery and design of the programme.

The caveats to this, and the evaluation recommendations highlight the fundamental connection between internal embodied change & practice and advocacy, funding & commitment. To dismantle systemic racism in a sector fundamentally connected to Empire, slavery and racism requires a growing brave space within which our colleagues, particularly those who are white, can form active coalition.

As the evaluation identifies, there is now a coalition of the willing who have been fundamentally changed by their participation in this programme, and who now plan to act. For the sector and for the MA, therefore, by harnessing and building on the cohort’s newfound understanding and clarity around anti-racism and coalition, there is significant potential for systemic transformation on a larger scale.

“There's never been a better time to create miracles in chaos”

- Anti Racism in Museums Panellist, MA Conference 2024

Acknowledgements

It is important to acknowledge the following people for their kind, honest and open contributions:

- **From the MA:** Joshua Robertson, Sally Colvin, Sharon Heal
- **From Talk Listen Create:** Cheryl Garvey, Julian Walker, Jamie Spurway
- **From the Cohort:** Sian Harrington, Deborah Farley-Persaud, Craig Miller, Philip Walker, Michael Dunn, Bethan Lewis, Sara Wajid, Rowena Dean, Karl Chapman, Lyn Stevens, Gill Findlay, Karen Macdonald, Linda Coode, Liberty Melly, Sioned Hughes, Toby Watley, Rob Lewis, Nia Williams, Matthew Plowright, Steph Burge, LizConnolly, Nicola Price, Amy Barker

The programme evaluated in this report was ideated by Joshua Robertson, and designed by Cheryl Garvey, Julian Walker and Jamie Spurway from Talk Listen Create.

References

Anti-Racist Evaluation Principles

As evaluation can perpetuate characteristics of white supremacy culture as detailed by Tema Okun*, this evaluation has sought to use the following anti-racist principles:

- **Working with complexity** by representing complexities, contradictions and tensions
- **An anti-perfectionist interpretation** of largely qualitative and complex data
- **Acknowledging the journey** rather than progress as anti-racism work is not linear
- **Introducing subjectivity** by taking an anti-racist stance and highlighting contradictions and difficult findings
- **Using elongated timelines** by following up in April 2025 and resisting urgency around demonstrating impact
- **Centring the voices** of global majority colleagues
- **Care about contributions** and honestly but anonymously representing voices
- **Collaboration** to develop the structure of this report, its contents and key findings

These principles have guided the development of the evaluation framework, and these findings, alongside other existing anti-racist evaluation frameworks. More detail about these and the datasets and methodologies can be found in the full evaluation report.

* Tema Okun, *White Supremacy Culture*, <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/>



