Supporting decolonisation in museums

Museums Association

Maasai representatives and Pitt Rivers Museum staff working together on the care of sacred Maasai objects. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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Introduction

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Introduction

Colonialism has profound human consequences. It is an expression of power that relies upon oppression, extraction of resources and silencing other ways of being and knowing. Many museums in the UK are part of the legacy of British colonialism through the collections they steward, their institutional histories, structures and wealth, and the stories they tell. Throughout history museums have helped to make the case for colonialism by collecting and cataloguing empire, and by advancing racist and prejudiced views of the world. Such views and attitudes still exist today – museums can and must play their part in righting past wrongs and creating a better world for all those affected by colonialism.

> Museums... which are so part of our national life refuse to engage honestly and sincerely with the question of how they obtained their imperial artefacts. The way we fail to acknowledge we are a multicultural society because we had a multicultural empire makes our national conversations about race tragic and absurd.
>
> The manner in which our imperial history inspires a sense of exceptionalism results in dysfunctional politics and disastrous decision-making. Our collective amnesia about the fact that we were, as a nation, wilfully white supremacist and occasionally genocidal, and our failure to understand how this informs modern-day racism, are catastrophic.

Sathnam Sanghera (2021) Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain, Viking, p208

Historical context

Historically the word 'decolonisation' referred to the political processes – including varied forms of anticolonial resistance – that ended direct colonial rule. In this context, decolonisation was about people subjected to foreign domination actively taking control of their lives, territory, and institutions as well as their cultural and national identity. Today decolonial thinking and practice recognises that, despite the formal end of colonial rule, the legacies of empire remain with us in many current political struggles and everyday experiences, from the land rights campaigns of dispossessed Indigenous peoples, to campaigns for reparations for those whose ancestors were enslaved. Decolonising practice challenges legacies of oppression and calls for an honest and accurate reappraisal of colonial history.

What decolonising means for museums today

Decolonising involves creatively reimagining the way museums work, who they work with and what they value. It covers all areas of practice and creates a framework to better support people and institutions. Decolonising is a collective activity, which can be messy, thoughtful, imaginative, and emotional. It is driven by the desire for justice and equity in that it aims to rebalance power and representation away from the coloniser narrative of history and society. This work is intersectional, as it challenges structural inequalities across the board to redress forms of historic and ongoing harm.

Intersectional refers to how various forms of discrimination based on race, gender, class, disability, sexuality, gender identity and other forms of identity, do not work independently but interact to create particular forms of social oppression and exclusion. **Definition from Oxford Reference**

Introduction

Decolonising is often confused with other areas of practice, such as repatriation or work on equality, diversity and inclusion. Both of these areas overlap with decolonising and are an important part of it. But decolonising encompasses all areas of practice, and seeks long-term structural change in museums.

This document supports decolonising practice in each of the nations of the UK. It recognises that England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each has its own complex historical and political relationship to colonialism, and that alongside this, nuances in local contexts, from different regions to rural and urban settings, can all impact upon decolonising priorities. It is important to recognise that decolonising practice is about facing up to histories of racism and exclusion – and this practice is necessary wherever you are in the UK.

Your role

Decolonising begins with respect and care for all. Museums need to meet the basic human needs of all who visit and work in and with them. This includes physical access and the ability to communicate and affect change. If museums get this right we create the foundations for change.

In the present moment conversations about decolonisation attract intense interest. You might choose to engage in this work because you have felt misrepresented, absent or marginalised by colonialism. Alternatively you might understand decolonising practice as an exercise in allyship. Rather than being self-defined, allyship is about amplifying the perspectives of the people you hope to support and being recognised as an ally by those you work with. Everyone will have different motivations for doing this work, but for all of us decolonising depends on a long-term commitment to the practice.

Allyship: an active, consistent, and challenging practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person of privilege seeks to work in solidarity with a marginalised group. **Definition from PeerNetBC, under a Creative Commons License**

Although this is essential work it may not always be possible to engage explicitly in decolonising practice in the institutions you currently work in or with. When in this position remember that decolonising is about the practice itself, taking steps where you can and connecting with those, inside and outside the museum, who can support your journey in this work.

What this guidance is for

Our 2019 **Empowering Collections report** found there was a growing interest in decolonising museums, but there was a lack of confidence in how to put this concept into practice. This document is intended as a prompt for thinking, discussion and action on decolonising. It offers tools for those who want to improve their practice through decolonial thinking and suggests initial steps for those who are committed to this work, but don't know where to start. It also aims to give strength and support to those already doing this work.

In creating this document, we are taking steps to reflect on our own structures and ways of working. We are on this journey with the sector.

Decolonising principles

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Decolonising principles

Decolonising museums is an ethical commitment. Here we outline principles to support decolonising practice. Using these alongside existing frameworks, such as our **Code of Ethics** and Culture&'s **Black Lives Matter Charter,** can offer direction and support. These principles apply to everyone working in and with museums, at all levels.

We encourage you to use these principles individually and with your colleagues, considering what they mean for your work.

01. Challenge neutrality

Museums are not neutral and never have been. The notion of neutrality maintains power and silences the experiences and histories of many. To challenge neutrality is to recognise that colonial values and biases are embedded in many museums. Challenging neutrality can ensure museums mean more, for more people.

02. Acknowledge power and privilege

Challenge structural inequalities and all forms of intolerance, discrimination and marginalisation.

03. Build relationships

Grow sustainable, meaningful and equitable relationships with those who are underrepresented and misrepresented within museums.

04. Value all forms of knowledge and expertise equally

Build knowledge through the exchange of ideas, and value it as you would institutional knowledge. Narratives have multiple perspectives and are not fixed.

05. Be brave

Sometimes ethical practice may not align with traditional 'best practice' standards. Be ready to challenge norms and encourage taking risks within your institution.

06. Be accountable

Be transparent about museum practices. Admit the challenges involved, invite and be open to scrutiny, take responsibility and commit to learning and growth.

07. Do the work

Decolonisation is active, long-term work, which requires sustained action and resourcing. Go beyond the thinking to the doing.

08. Take care

Care for yourself and all those who are part of this work.

09. Be creative

Doing the same things will get the same results. Work differently, be imaginative and inspired in creating meaningful change.

10. Aim for justice

Remember who you are doing this for and why. Work with them to achieve justice on their terms.

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Beginning the journey

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Volunteers at a training session on writing interpretive text, as part of Essex Museum's Snapping the Stiletto project.

Beginning the journey

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at desperate times you need your best friends, at times of hope I need critical friends.

Laura Van Broekhoven,
Decolonisation Guidance Working Group Member

Decolonising practice is a worthwhile journey for individuals and institutions, even if it feels that a decolonised museum is a distant destination. Whether this work is being done individually, or with institutional backing, anyone can take decolonising practice forward. Here we explore ways to start the journey, beginning with a vision for the decolonising museum.

The Decolonising Museum is:

– **a genuinely open and inclusive space**

– **a safe and comfortable space**

– **a place where all the senses are engaged**

– **a place to which everyone can bring their whole selves**

– **a place where people are encouraged to share their experiences and their creativity**

– **a place where everyone's stories can be told.**

How can museums fulfil this vision?

There is no single 'right' way to decolonise museums; each institution has the opportunity to identify strategies which work for its communities, collections and those who work in and with the museum. Decolonising is best done when it has the backing of the whole institution, but here's how you can start the journey.

Who should do this work?

Everyone. Decolonising practice can be used in all areas of work and is applicable to all shapes and sizes of museums. It helps us to understand the present world and each other better. Colonialism has affected everyone and we all have an important role to play. We explore what this could mean for you and your role in the following sections.

Starting the journey

Everyone will have different starting points, circumstances and contexts, but we can all start somewhere.

We suggest working through the following questions, to consider your starting point and next steps:

– Why are you doing this work?

– Who do you need to talk to? Think about external organisations, networks, local groups and individuals.

– What can you do to create meaningful relationships outside the institution?

– What do you need to know?

– How can you ask challenging questions within and of your institution?

– What steps can you take as an insider or outsider activist?

– What are your timescales?

– How can you sustain this work?

– How can you care for yourself and those involved?

– What outcomes, targets or products are necessary to measure success?

– How and by who will success be defined?

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Beginning the journey

Decolonising actions in museums

Here, we've outlined some of the areas of activity in museums and suggested prompts for reflection, alongside actions to support decolonising. This list can be explored individually or as wider teams.

– Welcoming people: How equally are people welcomed? How does this change for different groups and why? Who feels represented? How do you know this?

– Engaging people: How do you engage with people in your museum? Who decides how this is done and why? Who is missing? How do you define volunteering from engagement that should be paid?

– Talking / writing about / cataloguing items: What do you know about the item? Who contributed the knowledge you are using? How has this source been credited, critically engaged with and reviewed? Who is considered an expert and why? What power does this represent? When was the last time this information was updated or added to? What alternative perspectives can be offered?

We use **'item'** throughout to refer to collection objects, artefacts and specimens, including human remains.

– Displaying items – How are items selected for display? Who is involved in this process? What is the intention behind the display? How are people from the communities whose history is being shared involved in how they are represented?

– Caring for, touching and moving items: What restrictions are in place to protect items or sites? How does this impact on who has the right to see, hold or know about these items?

– Supporting others to interact with items: Who can interact with items and how? Who has ownership of the item? How is this communicated?

– Growing and reducing collections (acquisition and disposals) - Who controls collecting decisions and how are these made? How can we address who has a stake in these processes? What role does or could justice play?

– Setting strategy for the museum: How are decisions made, who is part of decision-making processes and how transparent is this process?

Lived experience can be defined as the experience(s) of people on whom a social issue, or combination of issues, has had a direct impact. Definition from Baljeet Sandhu (2017), The value of lived experience in social change, **thelivedexperience.org/report/**

– Funding museums: If you are involved in funding decisions, how do you decide funding criteria? Who is involved in funding decisions? How do you decide in a competitive funding round what gets funded? How could internal processes regularly review funding decisions and assess for bias or discrimination?

The rest of this document will explore these questions in more detail.

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Participants from Creating Connections at New Art Exchange, Nottingham. The project celebrated the cultural lives of young people and explored issues of racism and difference.

Museums as spaces and places

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museums as institutions are unavoidably bound up with the history of slavery/colonialism, so there's a very real and material ethical impetus to deal with that history as part of their own identity as well as in wider social/cultural efforts to come to terms with what is for many people a very painful and still relevant past.

MA Decolonisation Survey respondent, 2020

People experience museums in different ways. Decolonising practice can create museum spaces that welcome, engage and empower everyone. We recognise that we cannot completely undo the colonial legacies of museum buildings, but here we explore changes to make our spaces more welcoming to more people.

Museum building names, statues and other commemorations

The names of buildings, institutions, individual galleries, streets and statues send a clear message of whose presence is considered important and whose is not. Although this issue can cause controversy and debate in the media, it is an important part of decolonising work.

Decolonising museums requires creating spaces that no longer celebrate historic and ongoing acts of colonial violence, whether through removing names, removing or recontextualizing statues, or commissioning artists to engage critically with this inheritance.

When considering these issues:

– Question who is being celebrated through the physical infrastructure of museum buildings?

– How transparent are museums about their origins and the sources of their funds?

– Who are museums serving through their commemoration of certain figures and who is being left out?

– How could naming practices related to funding and philanthropy be reconsidered?

When exploring changes in this area, ensure you are closely consulting with the communities connected to your museum, with transparency and accountability on how decisions will be made. It is also important to identify public events or commemorations that create opportunities to share your decolonising practice by recognising, celebrating or commemorating underrepresented histories.

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Museums as spaces and places

Case study:

Statues

The toppling of Edward Colston's statue in June 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, reignited longstanding debates on the place and purpose of statues. Many organisations, including museums, were called to account on statues of those who profited from slavery and colonialism. Below we briefly consider how different organisations have approached this issue.

Shortly after the statue of Colston in Bristol was torn down, the Robert Milligan statue, which stood outside the Museum of London Docklands, was removed by the landowners Canal & River Trust, in partnership with Tower Hamlets Council and the Museum of London. The museum issued a statement advocating for the statue's removal, recognising that the statue is "part of the ongoing problematic regime of white-washing history."

Black Lives Matter activism reenergised the longstanding Rhodes Must Fall Campaign, calling on Oxford University and Oriel College to remove its Rhodes statue. The 2020 protests led to the governors of Oriel College voting to remove the statue and setting up an independent commission to deal with the statue's future. However, in May 2021 Oriel College announced it would not move the statue due to "regulatory and financial challenges". Heritage and planning consent, along with the England government's retain and explain policy, all created obstacles.

Political pressure played a similar role in the Museum of the Home's decision to keep a statue of Robert Geffrye in place. In a public consultation, more than two thirds of respondents wanted the statue taken down. However the statue's removal was not supported by a majority of trustees in a formal vote. The board announced on 29 July that "the museum should reinterpret and contextualise the statue where it is." A report by the Huffington Post indicated that the government had put pressure on the museum to keep the statue in place.

In October that year the culture secretary sent a letter directing all national museums and arms length bodies to align with the England government's stance on 'contested heritage'.

Local context, community relationships, governance structures and government policy all play a part in how organisations respond to calls for action on statues directly linked to colonial violence.

Further resources

Museum of London's Robert Milligan statue **statement.**

Museum of London – **article** explaining the background of the Robert Milligan statue removal.

BBC **article** outlining Oriel College's decision to keep the Rhodes statue.

Museums Journal **article** looking at tougher planning laws.

Museums Journal **article** looking at Museum of the Home's position.

The toppled statue of slave trader Edward Colston on public display in Bristol, CB Bristol Design 2021

Museums as spaces and places

Provide spaces and resources for different kinds of experiences and encounters

– Taking steps to meet basic human needs can play a powerful part in decolonising. How can you understand and meet the needs of communities who do and could engage with museum spaces?

– People have different expectations and needs. Provide spaces for solemnity, reverence and reflection as well as spaces for joy, playfulness and exploration.

– Create spaces for discussion and debate, but also for care and recovery. Be aware of how these spaces are created, including who decides what's required.

– How can communities be provided with more agency and choice in how services, collections and interpretation are accessed? How can new ways of working and engaging with communities be embedded? Collaboration is key here and we explore this more in the next section.

Decolonising digital spaces

Digital spaces offer opportunities to platform decolonising work and build engagement. However, digital spaces, like physical spaces, can reproduce existing inequalities. This can be seen in how people treat each other in digital spaces but is also part of the design and function of online spaces.

> Academic, Safiya Umoja Noble, explores this in her work **Algorithms of Oppression**, which challenges the assumption that search engines offer an equal playing field for all forms of ideas, identities and activities.

Put in place proactive plans to tackle hostility in digital spaces, ensuring people are cared for and protected against hate.

– Create a plan for decolonising digital spaces, with a focus on addressing inequality and exclusion. This could include social media projects, blog posts and website features showcasing decolonising activity in the museum.

– Act with sensitivity and care when using images of collection items and specimens in digital spaces, including marketing and retail content.

– Ensure digital content reflects work happening on the ground in the museum, or specific plans for the future, rather than standalone statements.

– Remember that digital access is not a substitute for physical repatriation of items, but it can be an important tool in sharing collections information and establishing relationships with communities.

– Put in place a take-down policy, when providing digital access. This is a policy that allows people to object to an item being publicly accessible online and provides a process to decide whether or not to remove it.

There are different approaches to using take-down policies. For example, the **Middle East Institute** in Washington DC will only give digital access if people connected to the item, such as Indigenous communities, agree. Whereas the National Museum of Anthropology, also based in Washington, will take an item down within 24 hours if someone objects to it being available digitally. Consider, which of the approaches outlined here could work for your museum?

Digital access goes beyond collections and can apply to wider engagement. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, public events, talks and lectures became accessible in ways that disabled people had long campaigned for. As events went online, live transcriptions and inclusive production became standard. Museums built connections with audiences across the world, and those closer to home who may have not felt welcome in the physical museum space. How can these approaches be embedded for the future? What digital platforms are most accessible? Alongside this, how can digital exclusion be addressed, recognising that people do not have equal access to digital resources, including devices and quality of internet connection, as well as literacy and confidence?

Collaboration

05

Multaka Collections Officer Rana Ibrahim and project volunteers welcome visitors to the Pitt Rivers Museum research space. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Collaboration

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There needs to be a letting go: the worst kind of decolonisation project is one where the museum claims that it has all the answers, and that it is going to do all the work.

MA Decolonisation Survey respondent, 2020

Collaboration is critical to decolonising museums. It gives institutions the opportunity to value new expertise and insight, build meaningful relationships with people inside and outside of the museum, and enables informed and inclusive decision-making. When reviewing the collaborative work that you do, start by considering it alongside the principles at the beginning of this guidance.

Here are a selection of suggestions and prompts for building collaboration based on the principles of decolonising practice.

Act with integrity

– Embed values of transparency and fairness in all the institution's engagement with collaborators.

– When building relationships with potential collaborators, move beyond ideas of 'hard to reach' communities.

– Question how 'things get done' or what constitutes 'quality outcomes'; be prepared to revise working practices if they create obstacles.

– Build and engage in equitable relationships where all groups are part of decision making, aims and ways of working.

– Agree roles, responsibilities and expectations for all involved, considering the use of formal agreements such as Memorandums of Understanding.

– Prioritise and plan for the legacy of relationships and partnerships from the start. Focus on creating long-term connections and embedded ways of working.

– Provide an open space in which difficult issues can be explored and where all people feel supported in sharing their thoughts and feelings.

– Recognise the emotional labour decolonising work involves and the impact this can have on all those engaged in this work.

– Remember that for many people, this work is part of a longer struggle for recognition, truth and acknowledgement. Make time for care, rest and reflection.

Emotional labour has many meanings. We refer to emotional labour as being additional emotional work, particularly undertaken by people from marginalised backgrounds when facing uncomfortable or offensive situations.

Collaboration

Case study:

National Museums Northern Ireland - Learning with partners

Decolonisation, as it relates to Northern Ireland, is more complex than is often assumed. We know that there were both Catholics and Protestants who were exploited by and objected to Britain's wider colonial project, and those who enthusiastically embraced and profited from it. Museums here must therefore be careful not to reinforce divisive stereotypes, or be distracted away from those who are already excluded.

One focus of our decolonisation work is the World Cultures collection. The European bias and power imbalances that characterised its acquisition leave a complex and sensitive legacy to address today. We recognise that much of the expertise and experiences relevant to this collection lie outside our museums. We are collaborating with and learning from partners such as the African Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland to guide our way forward.

At the Ulster American Folk Park, we recognise that the experiences of emigration presented are one-sided, with little consideration given to the impacts of Ulster emigration on Indigenous Peoples and enslaved people. We need to reveal these marginalised histories, through a genuinely inclusive and ethical approach. Collaboration is once again key to this, and we are pleased to be forging new relationships with North American Indigenous community members and the African American Irish Diaspora Network.

National Museums NI recognises we have much further to go with this work, but we are committed to act, change, listen, learn and develop.

Raquel McKee from the African Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI) advising on African material in the national collection, with Bethany Skuce, National Museums NI Object Conservator

Collaboration
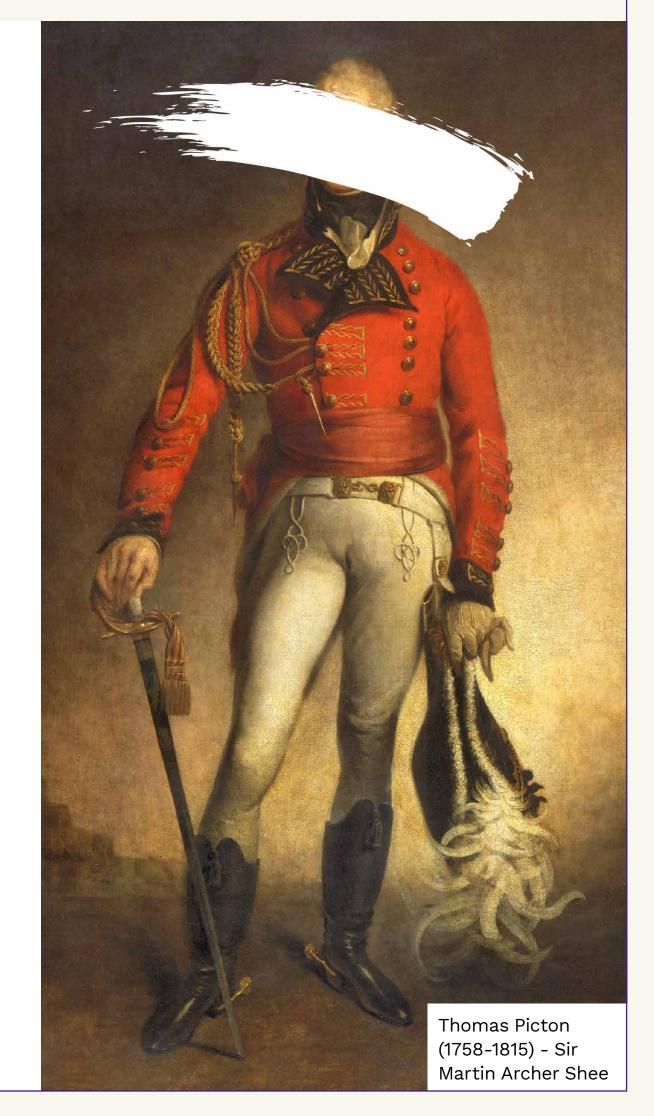
Recognise and remove barriers to collaboration

– Promoting collaboration starts with identifying and removing barriers. A first step here could be having a conversation with potential collaborators, exploring the barriers experienced and ways to address these.

– Many people in the organisation – especially in front of house roles – can provide insight into barriers.

– Question how ideas of hierarchy, academic training/qualifications and status influence what is recognised as knowledge, specialism and expertise.

– Question how internal communication styles and habits can create barriers. Address this through active listening and attention, self and organisational-awareness and the willingness to do things differently.

– Consider, what role does volunteering and unpaid labour play in approaches to collaboration? Whose labour might be considered to be exploited? How can we ensure volunteering is ethical, essential and meaningful?

– Ensure the labour of individuals and organisations is fairly paid. Make use of our 2017 Salary Guidelines and Arts Council England's **Fair Pay Guidance.**

– If you don't have budget to pay collaborators, design ways of working with genuine exchange that is mutually beneficial. Be transparent in your approach.

Case study:
Amgueddfa Cymru / National Museum Wales - Reframing Picton

National Museum Cardiff has worked in partnership with the Sub-Sahara Advisory Panel on a youth-led project, Reframing Picton, which uses art to create greater awareness of our colonial past and its impact today. You can read a full case study on this project **here.**

Thomas Picton (1758-1815) - Sir Martin Archer Shee

Collections

06

Members of the Sudanese Community in Sussex
at the Royal Engineers Museum in September 2021,
as part of the Making African Connections project.

Collections

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I think there is room for depth, multivocality and nuance in how history is told.

MA Decolonisation Survey respondent,
2020 Survey respondent.

Collections can be a point of access to peoples' stories, rights and power. Approaches to caring for, talking about, describing and displaying collections can create new possibilities for remembering the past and imagining a better future for all.

Museum collections have historically developed as the result of particular choices about what is worth preserving, collecting and displaying. Decolonising practice asks us to challenge whose value system was used to make these choices and whose stories have been misrepresented or erased. It asks us to acknowledge that there has been a partial version of history being presented as the whole and to actively work to tell more and different versions of our shared history. Decolonising compels us to address issues of control and ownership of collections.

Here, we suggest approaches, actions and prompts for reflection when decolonising collections work. Collaboration is central here, so keep the suggestions from the previous section in mind.

Exhibitions and displaying collections

– Review permanent displays and use the creation of new displays to make colonial connections and legacies explicit. Be transparent about how museums have traditionally privileged elite white perspectives. Address the legacies of colonialism in society today.

– Think about how you can create room for conversations around knowledge gaps in your collections.

– Collaborate and consult with relevant communities to ensure that exhibitions and displays provide a genuine and respectful treatment of their subject matter and enable audiences to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.

– Document, share and acknowledge a range of perspectives and expertise, moving beyond a focus on 'specialist' collections knowledge. Keep in mind that interpretation is a method of delivery and does not have to be rigid or fixed.
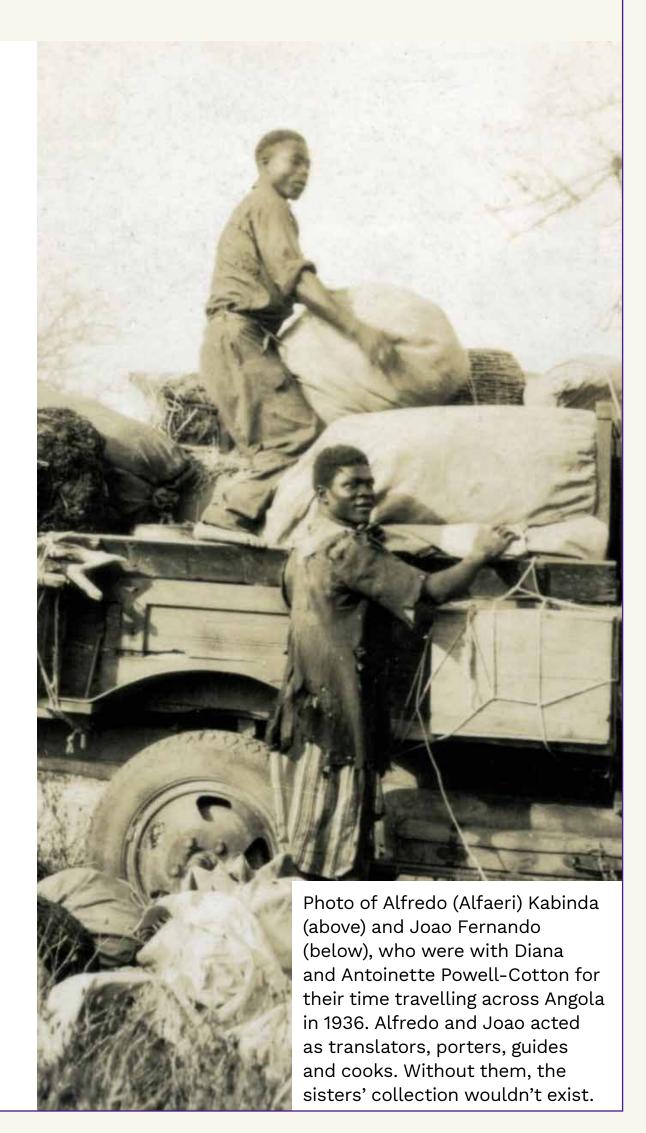
Case study:
The Powell-Cotton Museum –Reimagining the museum

The vision of the Powell-Cotton Museum's 'Reimagining' programme is to be a museum for everyone, making space for people who have historically been silenced. The museum started laying the groundwork for this programme in February 2020, however the COVID-19 pandemic and the level of societal inequality it exposed shifted its focus on what matters. This work was brought from behind the scenes into the public eye, providing an opportunity to radically rethink what the museum does and how they do it. In June 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, the museum shared a statement supporting Black Lives Matter. The museum acknowledged its colonialist, racist past and went on to share its aims for decolonising on social media. The museum is now working to embed its commitment to change. You can read more about the vision, aims and values of the Reimagining the Museum programme **here.**

You can read a case study on the museum's decolonising museums social media activity **here.**

Photo of Alfredo (Alfaeri) Kabinda (above) and Joao Fernando (below), who were with Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton for their time travelling across Angola in 1936. Alfredo and Joao acted as translators, porters, guides and cooks. Without them, the sisters' collection wouldn't exist.

Collections

Researching collections

Provenance research offers an opportunity to interrogate collections, asking how, why and when were items acquired? Research ties in closely with the second principle of the **Code of Ethics**, 'Stewardship of collections' and can be a way to 'generate knowledge and engage the public with collections'.

– In many collections, this work can seem like an overwhelming task. You may want to begin by interrogating the histories of items identified as relating to marginalised identities, including those around race, (dis)ability, gender, sexuality and class or those originating from outside the UK, with particular attention to how those items came into the museum and who was involved.

Case study:
The Museum of Cornish Life
– Under the Eaves

The Under the Eaves project at the Museum of Cornish Life used collections research as an opportunity to discover hidden stories. Julia Webb-Harvey led the project research, as a volunteer on the Citizen Curator's programme. Her approach to researching the collection was influenced by decolonising museum debates and actions in other museums, as well as the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. You can read more about her research and findings on the Under the Eaves project blog **here.**

These assegai were the objects in the museum's collection that initiated the Under The Eaves project. They remain a mystery as to origin, donor and why they ended up in the collection.

– When undertaking collections research, reflect on who could do the research and what the research questions could be. How will the resulting knowledge be shared and how will those involved be acknowledged? What is the intended impact of the research? What role could participatory research methods play?

– Do the relationship building work to collaborate with people and groups for whom collection items are culturally significant.

– Be quick to share research through your online database, being mindful that museum documentation can be limited, inaccurate or non-existent.

The **University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA)** is running an in-public investigation into 11 African works from its collections as part of the Wish You Were Here: African Art and Restitution exhibition.

– Share collections data and research with organisations and researchers in countries of origin. Examples of this work in action include Local Contexts – Grounding Indigenous Rights, the International Inventories programme and the Reciprocal Research Network.

– Consider who can edit and add to publicly accessible information about collections.

As an open knowledge source, Wikipedia can be a tool for change, involving more people in how information is documented and shared. **AfroCROWD** is an initiative encouraging more people of African heritage to contribute to Wikipedia.

Collections

Cataloguing collections

Recognise and challenge the limits of documentation systems. Museum inventories and databases tend to reproduce the outmoded, inaccurate labelling and descriptions of the past. Review, revise and update terminology when cataloguing – see the **Language and Terminology** section for more information on this.

– Take time to train staff undertaking updates of terminology, and collections tagging and bring in more expertise if needed. Proactively address the risk of reinforcing current outmoded and inaccurate terms, for example tagging collections items as 'BAME'.

BAME: A decolonial perspective

Racialised people in the UK are frequently labelled BAME, an abbreviation for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. Sometimes it is used as a noun, Bame, like it's a word with meaning, which it is not. Who exactly is the 'Bame Community'? Readily adopted by the media, Government, local government and museums, BAME is a catch-all term for anyone who is not White British. Its use suggests that White British people don't have ethnicity while Black, brown, mixed race and 'others' do. In the pages of equality, diversity and inclusion action plans and policies, many museums and galleries have readily adopted BAME to refer to large swathes of people past and present. The abbreviation has seen exponentially increased use since the summer of 2020 as the UK's racial reckoning gathered pace following the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. The indiscriminate use of this term is inaccurate and obliterates cultural experiences and understanding. How can the majority diversity of most of the planet be reduced to four letters? It is othering, pejorative and polarising, and perpetuates white-centredness.

Its use signals a lack of interest or ability to engage with the huge multiplicity of experience of people of colour, whether British or not. The National Portrait Gallery uses BAME as a 'tag' for their online collections, resulting in nearly 1,300 portraits of people as diverse as Diane Abbott, the first Black woman elected to the UK Parliament, and Abdul Aziz, the 19th-century Sultan of Turkey. The public-facing keyword is now 'Diversity'. Neither are particularly helpful for research or interpretation. If cultural background or ethnicity is important, spell it out, learn the words used by those cultures and incorporate those into your documentation and policies.

By Tehmina Goskar,
Curatorial Research Centre

Further resources: Following their #BAMEOver Campaign, Inc Arts created a **Statement** for the UK with preferred terms of reference for people.

– Develop collections management systems which can record diverse perspectives in non-hierarchical ways. Explore options for including audio and video content to include oral histories in multiple forms and languages.

– Question how documentation is enabling or preventing people from engaging with collections. Consider how collections systems function for users and how easy these systems are to search.

– Take steps to embed research, display text and other findings into collections management system. Use this as a way to keep new work in the institution's memory.

– Put collections data where people can genuinely find and use it, and encourage people to use it through marketing and promotion. Explore options for open access data.

– When starting digitisation work, consider ways to prioritise, considering collections related to marginalised identities and items from outside the UK. Contribute to initiatives like the **International Inventories Programme.**

– The following blog post from Ananda Rutherford offers more insight on this work: **Documentation and Decolonisation.**

Collections

Language, terminology and labelling

"Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge."

Toni Morrison,
1993 vocality and nuance in how history is told

Reviewing language to ensure that it is accurate, inclusive and up-to-date helps to avoid reproducing a vocabulary that excludes and discriminates. This applies equally to text used in exhibitions, displays and cataloguing, and often involves working across departments within a museum, as well as in consultation with external stakeholders.

The following questions are a starting point to help reappraise or create a text:

– Does the text treat the coloniser version of history as the only perspective?

– Does the text recognise the humanity of individuals, groups and communities?

– Has the text been informed by biases and stereotypes? Does the text use any offensive terms?

– What other sources of information or narratives could help to provide more context? Who could you work with to develop the text?

– Are you using clear explanations? Can you avoid using jargon and academic language? Use plain English and clearly explain what you mean and why it matters.

– Does the text acknowledge how an item or collection was acquired by the museum?

Further resources

There are a number of useful resources which can help you to further identify specific words and language that may require changing in your museum:

– The TropenMuseum in the Netherlands has published a pamphlet called **Words Matter** which provides a substantial discussion of the issues of language in museums, in addition to a useful glossary of words that the museum is choosing to change within its collections and interpretation.

– The Tate is leading a project called **Provisional Semantics** which will publish further research on how museums can adapt their language in the context of a digitised national collection.

– **The Decolonial Dictionary** is an ongoing resource that provides an in-depth examination of specific terms relating to decolonisation.

– Inc Arts have produced a **statement** on why arts organisations should cease to use the acronym BAME.

– Alicia Chilcott provides a useful academic discussion of offensive language in archives in her article **"Towards protocols for describing racially offensive language in UK public archives".**

Contents ←

Collections

Talking about and sharing collections

– Listen first, talk second. Engage in new conversations with communities and build relationships. Front of house colleagues are often well placed and can draw on wide-ranging experience, as shown in our Charter for Change work, to play a leading part in these conversations.

– Think about approaches to collection enquiries and how to make sure these interactions are based on mutual learning and knowledge sharing.

– Work in collaboration to better understand collections, in a process of mutual learning. Amplify, acknowledge and credit marginalised perspectives.

– Reinterpret, review, revise. Find ways to write and talk about collections with people who don't often get the opportunity to do so. Keep in mind the suggestions from the **Collaboration** section to support work here.

– Enable collections mobility, including loans to and from a wide range of venues, and between institutions in the Global North and Global South. Be prepared to take risks with collections so as to ensure the widest possible access.

– Prioritise resources to support museums in other countries to receive loans and, where appropriate, to build and share skills and capacity.

Case study: The Making African Connections project

Delivered as a collaboration between a range of partners in the Global North and South, the Making African Connections project researched historic African collections held in Sussex and Kent museums. The project adopted a critical, participatory, practice-based mode of research to build new African connections through digital and co-curation strategies. The first stage of the project involved researching and digitising 600 items from three specific Africa colonial-era collections, with items from Botswana, Sudan and the Nambia/Angola borderlands. You can find out more about the project and explore the digital archive **here.**

MAC partners examine the Botswana collection at Royal Pavilion Museums Trust, Brighton [RPMT]. (From left Tshepo Skwambane, RPMT, Winani Thebele, National Museum of Botswana and Scobie Lekhutile, Khama III Memorial Museum Serowe.)

Collections

Developing and caring
for collections

– Consider who controls collecting decisions and how these decisions are made.

– Ensure that your collections development policy enables your museum to actively collect underrepresented stories in order to build equitable relationships, and rebalance marginalised narratives.

– Consider carefully whether to collect items that celebrate colonialism, including items that have been removed from the public realm such as statues or plaques. Your response should take into consideration your own collections development policy, the Code of Ethics, and local community consultation.

– When carrying out fieldwork and developing scientific collections, consider the ethics of fieldwork and how we credit and recognise Indigenous communities.

– Consider who has a stake in disposal processes, especially for material with colonial connections.

– Consider how you can balance current access needs with responsibilities for long-term collections care.

Case study:
The Object Journeys programme

The Object Journeys programme aimed to embed more collaborative approaches of creating community-led displays and interpretation. Participating museums across the UK worked with community partners to collaboratively research collections, produce displays and lead events. One of the Object Journeys projects included a partnership between the British Museum and members of the London Somali community, leading to the development and design of a new display 'Objects of Survival: the beauty of Somali craftwork' which remains on display in the museum's Wellcome Gallery. Fashioning Africa was the third national Object Journeys partnership project, led by Brighton Museum and Gallery and two community curators, Edith Ojo and Tshepo Skwambane. Forming part of the larger Fashioning Africa project, it worked to address the lack of post-1960's African fashion and textiles in many museum collections. Find out more about the object journeys projects **here.**

Project partners Hinda Ibrahim and Hiba Haid conduct an object handling sessions with visitors during Somali Family Day, November 2016. Image courtesy of British Museum.

Collections

Repatriation and restitution

The repatriation or restitution of museum items can be a powerful cultural, spiritual and symbolic act which recognises past wrongs and restores items to their original community. Decolonisation requires an open, proactive and positive approach that places justice at the centre of proposals for repatriation and restitution.

Defining repatriation and restitution

The terms 'repatriation' and 'restitution' are often used interchangeably, but they have slightly differing meanings: repatriation refers to the return of cultural property to its place or country of origin, while restitution refers to the return of cultural material to its original owners. Repatriation and restitution are often discussed as being synonymous with decolonisation, yet they are only part of the work that needs to be undertaken by museums.

Procedures for repatriation and restitution

There are few legal obstacles to repatriation and restitution for most museums. With the exception of some national museums, most items in the ownership of museums in the UK are covered by UK property laws, and the owners can determine if and how to transfer ownership or repatriate an item, subject to any conditions placed on individual items (such as via a legacy). In the vast majority of cases of repatriation and restitution, museums should not be restricted by legal statute.

Good procedures are vital in ensuring that items are properly considered and returned to the appropriate person or group. All museums should have a repatriation policy or procedure in place that sets out how any proposal for repatriation will be managed. Most UK museums able to make returns will include the standard clause on repatriation in the institution's collections development policy, but developing a more detailed policy or procedure can be helpful. In England, Arts Council England (ACE) guidance will provide practical advice on how museums can implement effective repatriation and restitution procedures.

While policy and procedure is important, it should not obscure the ethical imperative to pursue repatriation and restitution in a proactive and collaborative way. This aligns with our **Code of Ethics,** which states that museums should: "Deal sensitively and promptly with requests for repatriation both within the UK and from abroad." Here we set out some key issues to consider when working in this area.

Collections

Case study:
The University of Aberdeen – Return of Benin Bronze

Although the University has previously repatriated items from the museum collections, the decision to return a Benin bronze Head of an Oba was the first time the process was initiated by the University. Provenance research showed that although it had been bought in 1957, it was one of those looted during the attack and destruction of Benin City in 1897. The first step was to contact relevant people in Nigeria, helped by a professor of law based in Nigeria who arranged for a proposal to be made in July 2020 by the Nigerian Federal Government, with the support of the Royal Court of the Oba of Benin and the Edo State Government

The University's published procedure was followed, which has non-prescriptive criteria to guide discussion by an Advisory Group on Repatriation involving academic, curatorial, and managerial staff from the university, a representative of the governing body, the director of another museum in Scotland and a member nominated by the people making the proposal. The Group's recommendation to return the item was based on the history of looting and so the lack of moral title.

The University's governing body agreed and the decision to return was announced in March 2021, after which immediate and long-term plans for what to do with the Head of an Oba and the arrangements for its return were determined by the Nigerian parties. Their discussions led to them proposing a ceremonial return in Aberdeen in October 2021 to coincide with a visit by a high status delegation to a meeting of the Benin Dialogue Group.

Bronze sculpture depicting an Oba (king) of Benin

Collections

Repatriation and restitution: issues to consider

– How can you take a proactive and collaborative approach? Be proactive in researching collections, identifying priority items that may be of interest for repatriation and restitution, and communicating about them with potential stakeholders. Collaborate with the person or group to whom an item may be returned, working together to understand the issues, concerns and motivations at play, and exploring all possible outcomes.

– Collaboration can result in a positive ongoing relationship with the museum – but this should not be expected or used as a main motivation for repatriation and restitution. Returning an item does not place any obligation on those involved to continue the relationship.

– Can you take a co-ordinated approach with other museums when contacting a person or group about a possible repatriation or restitution? Where more than one museum is working on items relating to a specific person or group, it is important to avoid duplication or overwhelming partners. There is a growing role for Subject Specialist Networks in this area of practice.

– How can you create an equal and respectful relationship? Many groups undertake cultural work on a voluntary basis and have no or limited recourse to funds. Provide guidance which supports groups to understand your museum, your motivations and your processes. Ensure that this is available in the relevant languages.

– Recognise and be respectful of the interests and expertise of partners and stakeholders. Wherever possible observe the appropriate cultural and spiritual protocols in terms of collections care and management. If full restitution or repatriation is not requested, explore other collaborative models to inform the care, storage, display and interpretation of collections material, for example via collections management agreements or memoranda of understanding.

– The language of repatriation and restitution tends to encourage a reactive and adversarial stance from museums. Instead of talking about 'claims' and 'claimants', you could instead refer to 'proposals' for restitution. A proposal for repatriation or restitution could be made by the museum as well as an originating community or national government.

Further resources

Museums can access support, including templates and advice on recording and researching the process of repatriation and restitution, **here.**

The Museum Ethnographers Group also has a regularly updated resource relating to repatriation **here.**

Museum workforce

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New Museum School Graduation, Queen's House Greenwich 2019, Liz Isles Photography. Courtesy Culture&.

Museum workforce

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I am very tired of museums claiming that "we'd like to pay more, but we can't", or "we'd love to have a more diverse workforce, but they just don't apply". Try harder, but also, be honest and reflective about how your existing structures make this happen, and stop pretending it is outside of your control.

MA Decolonisation Survey respondent,
2020 Survey respondent.

Decolonising the workforce is about who museums work with and how people are valued and supported to thrive. It involves changing ways of working, being critical of structures and gaining buy-in from the whole workforce for decolonising practice.

The Code of Ethics states, under principle 3, Individual and Institutional Integrity, to 'Abide by a fair, consistent and transparent workforce policy for all those working in the museum, including those in unpaid positions.'

Here we consider what fairness, consistency, transparency, and care of the workforce means to decolonising. This includes everyone who works with museums, including volunteers, staff, freelancers and partners.

Leadership and organisational change

A commitment to organisational change can embed decolonising practice and support practitioners to sustain change. Here we are speaking to decision makers and those who can influence decisions in an institution.

– Engage proactively with trustees to gain buy-in and support for decolonising practice, policy and recruitment. Communicate and demonstrate leadership and trustee commitment to decolonising.

– Make decolonising a core institutional priority, with strategic objectives, long-term actions and transparency.

– Explore what decolonising means across the institution and how you can have a shared understanding and responsibility. As decision-makers, you will likely have time and space to think plans through – ensure all involved have time to do their own thinking too.

– Make an organisational and sector-wide commitment to challenge specific forms of racism (including anti-Black racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, antisemitism and Gypsy, Roma, Travellers (GRT) racism).

– Analyse where your institution is at present and set goals and targets to measure change.

– Develop benchmarks for positive change to enable your institution to self-reflect and improve. Our **Measuring Socially Engaged Practice** toolkit offers support here.

– Ensure decision-makers are actively aware of potential biases that may influence decision-making, along with other factors, such as time pressure and fatigue, that can influence decision-making.

– Set up external organisational peer-review or mentoring for long term accountability. Where possible, recruit and pay for this work fairly.

– Develop a clear programme of CPD to ensure all individuals understand and buy into this area of work, recognising the role we all play. Ringfence time and resources for decolonising practice learning.

– Tackle siloed working on decolonising, and address the pressure on dedicated people having to work on their own. Share the work across staff members and teams. Mainstream decolonising across your organisation.

– Pay meaningful attention to those outside the institution who are or could be part of this work.

– Use Equality Act (2010), Public Sector Equality Duty (2011), Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) and positive action to support diversity.

Museum workforce

Case study:

Manchester Museum – Indigenising Museums Toolkit

The Manchester Museum (University of Manchester) launched its Indigenising Manchester Museum (IMM) programme, supported by the John Ellerman Foundation, in January 2021 with the appointment of the first ever Curator of Indigenous Perspectives, Dr Alexandra P. Alberda (Jemez Pueblo/Mixed). The programme includes supporting museum staff and volunteers in developing their own practices. This work is being built through the Indigenise Speaker Series, which has public talks and internal workshops, and the development of an Indigenising Museums Toolkit.

The speaker series aims to create spaces for staff to encounter and discuss Indigenous perspectives collectively while the toolkit is meant to support individual, focused engagement with decolonisation/indigenisation specific to different people's roles and pre-existing comfort and expertise.

Responding to 1:2:1 meetings with colleagues, Alex started to build a focused and thematised collection of multimedia resources that could be easily navigated. It was first populated with resources related to colleagues' expressed interests and needs, foundational resources, and materials from our existing partners; now, with the speaker series workshops underway resources are being added that respond to needs identified in discussions and knowledge provided through speakers' presentations.

The toolkit aims to be released publicly and freely at the end of 2022, when the speakers series finishes. It is currently being shared and developed collaboratively with students, researchers, and museum professionals. The toolkit is meant to reflect decolonisation and indigenisation as processes and practices – and not end goals – so that it can adapt to support growth with the museum and its unique staff and partners.

'Resources' case in Living Worlds Gallery, Manchester Museum by Ant Clausen. The exploitation and disconnect between the natural world and 'humans' is colonialism. The Indigenising Manchester Museum programme seeks to build narratives of reconciliation around issues like this.

Contents ←

Museum workforce

Recruitment and selection

– Advertise widely to attract the broadest field of applicants. Work with a wide range of networks and partners to build relationships before recruitment.

– Ensure job or role descriptions and other recruitment materials are inclusive and relevant, for example accessible and meaningful titles, Living Wage pay structures, access to professional development and support. Consider, what needs to be in everyone's role descriptions?

– Be critical of contract terms, including short-term, casual and zero-hours contracts. Question the expectations for poorly paid or unpaid labour. What is the pay disparity between senior and junior staff?

– Challenge assumptions around the requirement for academic or other specialist qualifications for all roles.

– Create opportunities for familiarisation with the museum, making the process more of a two-way approach. This could include open days showing the connection between roles and their environment.

– Ensure selection practices are accessible, transparent and inclusive through diverse panel membership and training for objective decision making.

– Make time to give feedback and cover expenses.

– Remember that taking a holistic approach to decolonising, across all areas of practice, will positively impact on recruitment and improve your reputation.

For more good practice ideas see **Fair Museum Jobs manifesto**, Museums Freelance **resources** and Arts Council England's recruitment advice.

Workforce wellbeing

– How does or could the idea of care apply to all the people you work with? Move from 'duty of care' references to a clearly defined and resourced 'health and wellbeing policy', delivering an ethical commitment to the wellbeing of the workforce.

– Ensure decolonising activities are assessed for potential physical, psychological and emotional impact. Provide support for those who may suffer abuse or threats in the course of their decolonising practice.

– Make sure everyone understands their role in creating a culture of wellbeing, including volunteers, freelancers and partner organisations.

– Establish clear commitment to supporting those within the institution who face marginalisation or emotional labour by ringfencing time for reflection, support and supervision.

– Challenge the expectations placed on new staff and volunteers to be advocates for change. Who is expected to undertake emotional labour? How is this represented across different jobs and disciplines, such as Front of House, Learning and Engagement and Conservation?

– Burnout is real – recognise its impact for yourself and the people you work with. Value each other, have policies in place and build in breaks for mental and physical health so this practice is sustainable.

Burnout is a state of physical and emotional exhaustion which can occur when someone experiences long-term stress or has worked in a physically or emotionally draining role for a long time. **Definition** from Mental Health UK.

Public messaging

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Mangubadijarri Yanner (Gangalidda) and Esme Ward (Director, Manchester Museum) at the official handover of 18 culturally significant objects to the Gangalidda and Nyamal Nations, Australia House, 2019–Photo credit David Tett.

Public messaging

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We should not be afraid to tell the factual truth about colonial histories, whether it makes people uncomfortable or not.

MA Decolonisation Survey respondent, 2020.

Talking about your decolonising practice

How will you or your museum communicate about your decolonising practice? Institutions can start by creating a clear and publicly accessible policy or plan which sets out the rationale for engaging with decolonisation. Be clear about aims, motivations, and what actions will be taken. Be honest about the journey ahead. Talk about decolonisation as an ongoing process, rather than a one-off project or event, and be careful to avoid over-claiming for individual actions or events.

Case study:
National Museums Scotland
– Communicating Work
on Colonial Legacies

In 2020, National Museums Scotland published a detailed commitment to work on colonial histories and legacies in its collections and to engage with external partners throughout this work. Their commitment acknowledges the colonial legacies of the museum and the enormous amount of work to be done in changing narratives, engaging with others and understanding the collections the museum holds. You can read NMS's commitment **here.**

A tea cup from the tea set designed, commissioned and used by the Empire Café project, inscribed with a poem by Fred D'Aguiar. The Empire Café project was a contemporary exploration of Scotland's relationship with the transatlantic slave trade.

Decolonising practice in cultural organisations has become increasingly contested in recent years as some politicians and media organisations seek to generate conflict around history and cultural issues. The potential for negative media attention should not dissuade you from doing decolonising work – but you can take proactive steps to ensure that your work is understood.

– Publish a policy that outlines why the museum is taking a decolonising approach and the planned actions.

– Consider what language is appropriate when communicating this work publicly. In some cases, it may be counterproductive or difficult to use terms like 'decolonisation' and alternative language may be more suitable to describe the work.

– When publishing new material about decolonising practice, plan for possible positive and negative responses from the media and other stakeholders. Develop dedicated FAQs for both internal and external use, which clearly articulate the rationale and value of decolonisation. Tailor these to specific exhibitions or projects where and when needed.

– Identify individuals within the organisation – especially those working directly on decolonising projects, those working in social media and those in front of house positions – who may be subjected to abuse or threats. Ensure that a programme of active support is in place to support them.

– Museum leaders have a particularly important role in communicating support for decolonising practice. Leaders must demonstrate their support for decolonising practice when communicating publicly. This also helps to ensure the wellbeing of staff, volunteers and collaborators.

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Sector support organisations, funders and policy makers

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Volunteers at
MA Conference
in Brighton, 2019

Sector support organisations, funders and policy makers

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If your policies need to change to accommodate problems caused by your own colonial practices - well, change them.

MA Decolonisation Survey respondent, 2020.

Decolonising practice needs resource, support and advocacy to thrive in the sector. There are lots of opportunities for organisations to play a supporting role in decolonising. The following suggestions outline the role different bodies can play in supporting decolonising practice:

– **Funders:** Be brave in advocating for and funding decolonising work, as well as communicating support for this work. Fund provenance research and collections development. Address the boundaries and limitations of research funding - ensure expertise in all forms is recognised. Design funding schemes that promote equitable collaboration and remunerations to non-museum workers – ensure that any funding provided gives adequate support for people involved, both internally and externally. Encourage applications that emphasise process over predetermined outcomes. Offer flexibility in funding to facilitate the process of decolonising. Avoid a one size fits all approach and ensure access to funding for overlooked or marginalised groups, collections and organisations.

– **Subject specialist networks (SSNs):** Enable peer-to-peer support and collaboration with existing SSNs to support decolonising practice across all networks.

– **Sector support organisations:** Create grassroots networks of mentors to support decolonising practice on the ground. Advocate for the fact that diverse workforces make for a successful sector. Offer structural support for inclusive recruitment and more flexibility in development and progression routes in museum careers. Build skills and confidence, and embed decolonising practice in CPD programmes.

Case study:
Contemporary Art Society
– Doing the Work

Open to Contemporary Art Society (CAS) members and wider professionals, Doing the Work was an online workshop series co-produced by Ilaria Puri Purini at the Contemporary Art Society and Anjalie Dalal-Clayton at the Decolonising Arts Institute, University of the Arts London. The workshops aimed to support colleagues wanting to engage meaningfully and practically in anti-racist and/or decolonising practice. The workshops offered space for people to discuss the particular challenges faced in doing this work and to use discussions to develop tools and initiatives to test back in the workplace. You can find out more about the workshops series **here.**

Claudette Johnson, Doing Lines 1 (Lockdown) Line Journeys, 2020, oil pastel on paper. 102 x 77.5 cm. Presented by the Contemporary Art Society to the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum in Coventry through the Rapid Response Fund, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist and Hollybush Gardens.

– **Education and training providers:** Museum Studies courses and training providers have the opportunity to teach decolonising practice and recruit a more diverse range of students and participants.

Glossary of terms used in the guidance

For terms used in this guidance and in wider decolonising practice, we recommend consulting the **Glossary** established by the Curatorial Research Centre.

Our way of working

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Our way of working

Established in 2019, the Decolonisation Guidance Working Group have been collaborating to develop and produce this guidance. The working group was set up as a sub-group of our Ethics Committee, and has met regularly to create the guidance. Our working group members included:

Rachael Minott
Chair of Decolonisation Working Group

Tehmina Goskar
Director & Curator, Curatorial Research Centre and former MA Ethics Committee member

Neil Curtis
Head of Museums and Special Collections, University of Aberdeen and MA Ethics Committee member

Miranda Lowe
Principal Curator, Natural History Museum

Sadiah Qureshi
Senior Lecturer in Modern History, Birmingham University

Liam Wiseman
Senior Relationship Manager, Arts Council England

Navjot Mangat
Senior Interpretation and Participation Producer, V&A Museum

Laura van Broekhoven
Director, Pitt Rivers Museum

Helen Mears
Inclusive Collections Officer, Wellcome Collection

Dianna Djokey
Communities Curator, John Hansard Gallery and MA Board member

Sharon Heal
Director, Museums Association

Alistair Brown
Policy Manger, Museums Association

Antonia Canal
Policy and Campaigns Officer, Museums Association

The Working Group initially collaborated through quarterly meetings, and later took part in workshops to develop the guidance content. Some workshops were led by working group members, but we also worked with the following facilitators:

Tshepo Skwambane
Community activist

Marenka Thompson-Odlum
Researcher, Pitt Rivers Museum

Subhadra Das
Writer & Curator

Tamsin Russell
Workforce Development Officer, MA

In addition, we were supported by our Ethics Committee and a group of critical friends. The Ethics Committee includes:

Michael Terwey
Head of Heritage Services and Consultancy, National Trust for Scotland

Rowan Brown
Chief Executive, Woodhorn Charitable Trust

Hannah Crowdy
Head of Curatorial, National Museums Northern Ireland

Neil Curtis
Head of Museums and Special Collections, University of Aberdeen

Tehmina Goskar
Director & Curator, Curatorial Research Centre

Victoria Hollows
Chief Executive, Renfrewshire Leisure

Adrian Parkhouse
Partner, Farrer & Co.

Chanté St Clair Inglis
Head of Collections Services, National Museums Scotland

Jackie Winchester
Senior Officer for Participation, Bristol Culture

Our way of working

Some of our critical friends included:

Sheila Asante
Project Manager: Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums, Museums Galleries Scotland

Alex Bird
Museum Development Officer: Workforce & Skills, Museum Development North West

Stella Byrne
Head of Investment – Northern Ireland, The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Errol Francis
Artistic Director and CEO, Culture&

Sioned Hughes
Keeper of History and Archaeology, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

Abira Hussein
Researcher and Producer

Chao Tayiana Maina
Co-founder, Museum of British Colonialism

Arike Oke
Managing Director, Black Cultural Archives

Adele Patrick
Director: Creative Development, Delivery and Engagement, Glasgow Women's Library

Owain Rhys
Head of Volunteering and Engagement, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

Julia Webb-Harvey
Volunteer Researcher, Museum of Cornish Life

We are grateful for all the time and energy invested in this work.