

Facilitating Anti-Racist Curriculum Conversations

This resource was developed by and for Scottish tertiary institutions as a sector-led and co-produced resource

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You just look like you've got a tan.
Do you have hair under your hijab?
Do people eat insects in your country?
I just don't see colour.
I don't think of you as black.

Call it racism.

#CallItRacism



Before Beginning

Approach these discussions with due diligence (and care for all) motivated by the knowledge that only through talking can action, and with it change, be possible. It is essential to recognise the emotional tone that these types of conversations can evoke and the toll they can take. Yet also how vital and transformative they remain. By adopting a trauma informed approach and equipping yourself and your colleagues beforehand with the knowledge, tools, and support ensures that everyone, as far as possible, feels able to engage and share safely without judgement or retribution.

The complex and sensitive nature of any discussion related to (anti) racism will inevitably lead to wide ranging as well as deeply personal matters being discussed. For example, you may be talking about the need to diversify your reading list and a student or staff member may disclose a difficult race-based classroom encounter. Curricula development can never be an isolated piece of work and naturally discourse will extend to wider contributing factors such as representation or discrimination. Being able to acknowledge these relevant and equally important issues (also in need of immediate attention) whilst steering conversations back to the curricula agenda at hand requires skill and sensitivity.

In short, be prepared for ARC discussions to be emotionally-charged (at times), probing, expansive and multifaceted. As well as highly rewarding, effective, and the foundational step on your ARC journey.

Further Reading

Anonymous (2020) *Talking about Black Lives Matter in the classroom and upholding my Professional Values* (weblog) Centre For Education For Racial Equality In Scotland (CERES) 14th October Available from: <https://www.ceres.education.ed.ac.uk/2020/09/14/ceres-blogs-talking-about-black-lives-matter-in-the-classroom-and-upholding-my-professional-values/> (Last accessed 19th August 2021)

Fodaju, Ola (2021) *Let's Talk about Race and Working at the OU* (webinar) UCAS 23rd March Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqh1jT4SoPE> (Last accessed 19th August 2021)

Homes, A and Grandison, G (2021) *Trauma-informed practice: Toolkit* (online) Scottish Government 15th March Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/trauma-informed-practice-toolkit-scotland/pages/1/> (Last accessed 19th August 2021)

Kandola, B *How leaders can identify racial trauma* (weblog) Pearn Kandola Available from: <https://pearnkandola.com/diversity-and-inclusion-hub/leadership/how-leaders-can-identify-racial-trauma/> (Last accessed 19th August 2021)

Melina (2019) *Shhhhhhhh! Don't Say the R-Word!* (weblog) The Anti-Racist Educator 26th February Available from: <https://www.theantiracisteducator.com/post/shhhhhhhh-don-t-say-the-r-word> (Last accessed 19th August 2021)

Mutuma, A (2020) *How to talk about race at work* (Guide) Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) 20th May Available from: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/conversations-race-work#gref> (Last accessed 19th August 2021)

Pirrie, A & Fang, N. (2020) Venturing from Home: Writing (and Teaching) as Creative Relational Inquiry for Alternative Educational Futures, Special Issue: "Qualitative Inquiry as Activism" in *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 14(1), 17–29

Introduction

Throughout our consultations with sector colleagues we have been continually asked for guidance on how to hold conversations about race equality, and more specifically with the aim of developing an anti-racist curriculum (ARC). It's evident that there is both an issue and a need here which, while not surprising, is a considerable barrier to the ultimate aim of designing and delivering Anti-Racist Curricula.

If we cannot talk about it, how can we change it?

This guide aims to support this need by helping colleagues facilitate ARC conversations. Informed not only from our own experiences and learnings during this project. We have also been fortunate to gather advice from peers already undertaking this work and leading these conversations in their own organisations. We recommend reading our 'Guide to running focus groups discussing Anti-Racist Curriculum' as a companion piece. We also recommend also reading our 'Guide to running focus groups discussing Anti-Racist Curriculum' as a companion piece.

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Setting the Scene

During ARC development colleagues and students will hold varying perspectives and may feel a whole range of emotions which are likely to impact interactions and their success. Being aware of this can aid your ability to navigate these personally and collectively with compassion and thoughtfulness. Better able to anticipate how best to respond in the moment (where appropriate) but also before and after. Examples of what may come up include:

- Enthusiasm for the opportunity to finally do this!
- Happy to help and eager to get started
- Cynical – they've been here before and not seen change
- Exposed as the only person with lived experience in the space and feeling that everyone is looking to them for answers
- Vulnerable as the only person in their department who wants to do the work
- Unsure about how to proceed
- Angry or impatient with others who are resistant (for whatever reason)
- Judgemental of those who voice concerns
- Critical of the approach
- Stressed and do not feel they have the time for this

- Disinterested as this does not apply to them or their specific discipline/area
- Discomfort at the challenge
- Discouragement, disorientated, or overwhelmed at the task at hand
- Scepticism towards ARC in general
- Reluctance to engage or change
- Threatened as their expertise is being challenged
- Sensitive – interpreting that they are wrong rather than aspects of their practice may need developing
- Personally attacked that they are doing something wrong
- Offended that their current practice is somehow racist and that they themselves are being called racist
- Angry that they are being 'told what to do'

With workloads and lives as demanding as they are, change in an unknown, often misunderstood and challenged area such as ARC is an additional pressure and can heighten responses. To help you address this – even before an actual conversation has taken place – we suggest reflecting on the following questions (which may be at the root of some of these responses) thinking about how you could best communicate the answers in a transparent and inclusive way.

For the individual: consider how you would address the following questions from individual points of view across your organisation to better support staff engaging with ARC and specifically their role in it.

'How will this affect me?'

'What will be expected of me?'

'Will this mean change to my role/job/department?'

'How does this benefit me?'

'What is the point of this?'

'Why are we doing it?'

'Will I be supported to do this?'

For the organisation: consider how you would address the following questions from an organisational-wide point of view to help staff contextualise ARC and its place within wider structures.

Why are we doing this?

- Underlining the rationale and drivers for developing an ARC externally and internally reinforcing how it feeds into the organisation's strategic aims
- Illustrating the benefits of an ARC (and the disadvantages of not doing it) for everyone

What are we doing?

- Being clear about what you mean by an ARC or at least around the initial stages for exploring this
- Sharing your key aims and outcomes of developing an ARC – being as explicit as possible
- Building and agreeing on shared terms to discuss the work

Who is doing it?

- Being very clear about everyone's role and responsibility in this work
- Considering how this work will affect colleagues/ processes and how they 'sit' within in
- Highlighting ARC Champions who lead and advocate the work, especially in Senior Leadership





Calling People ‘in’

Differentiating your approach to the individuals and groups you are discussing ARC with will increase the likelihood of the conversation/s being effective. Some people will connect with datasets; some with theory; but for many people, they will connect with story and (counter) story. Different ways to engage colleagues in the ARC conversation include the following:

- **Utilise data** from your own organisation to illustrate your points. Prepare a quiz with statistics around Black, Asian, and minority ethnic students and staff to be undertaken anonymously. This process can help to counter lingering assumptions regarding intake, retention, awarding, staff representation, harassment they might have. In this way you support colleagues to interrogate and counter stereotypes/assumptions/biases within your institution and beyond and focus minds on the issues and task at hand.
- **Foreground and share lived experiences and stories.** It is hard to argue with an individual’s personal recounting and we tend to engage better with narratives than policies. Ideally, this would be from within your staff and student community but would need to be done sensitively, in collaboration and with full consent of the person/s sharing. Or, you could share the [Student](#) and [Staff Voices](#) videos we have created for this project. Or AHE’s new podcast series [Decolonising Identity](#) – tackling structural race inequality in HE.

- **Provide discipline-based ARC case studies** specific to your organisation – make it relevant to them and their work. It may be helpful to signpost external drivers too, such as anti-racist support from learned societies, funders, or PSRBs; from industry; or from alumni.
- **Having a personal experience** is the best learning tool. For instance, a short hard-hitting video or podcast which allows the viewer to engage more strongly with the perspective of the person experiencing racism can be an uncomfortable but ultimately transformative experience which will stay with them long after.
- **Utilise ARC work in the media** that you know colleagues will respect to reinforce your point. Research and resources which highlight the cumulative and compounding nature of racism within and outside of the educational settings, can also help communicate how pervasive racial inequality can be.

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Facilitating the Conversation

A comfortable and supportive space is central to, and conducive of, fruitful conversations about ARC development. It is not just about what you say but how you say it. Providing helpful parameters and guidelines for discourse ensures everyone has a shared ‘social contract’ to refer and adhere to. Here are some practical ways to facilitate and support ARC conversations:

- Send out a safety document beforehand – **see example 1 in appendix**
- Detail exactly the content of your session/workshop/webinar – **see example 2 in appendix**
- Include any specific content notes (aka trigger warnings) on sensitive materials/activities to help people decide whether they want to expose themselves to that content – **see example 3 in appendix**
- Include a slide around Principles for Respectful Conversation detailing the behaviors the collective will need to adhere to for a safe space – **see example 4 in appendix.** And reiterate those principles should you break into smaller groups or before a particular part of the conversation you know is likely to raise different opinions for example.
- Set out your boundaries of scope and be clear what baselines understandings are ‘taken as read’ at the start of the session, and are not being opened for debate in this particular space. For example: noting that there is a substantive body of research that an ethnicity awarding gap exists. Or, acknowledging that there are a variety of inequalities in higher education, all deserving of attention, and today attention is going to be paid specifically to ARC.

- Anticipate, discuss (with facilitators), and put a plan in place for issues that may arise during discussions. Key tips on how to be an active bystander can be found [here](#). For example,
 - a. An inappropriate term is used and needs to be addressed during a session
 - b. A colleague is made to feel uncomfortable and leaves a session
 - c. A colleague ‘calls out’ another colleague for racist behaviour
- Build in and promote options for people to opt-out of activities; leave discussions which are proving uncomfortable or distressing; communicate when they have an issue with what was said or done during a session; all in a way that does not draw undue attention to them.
- Signpost in-house and/or external sources of support for staff or students who may be affected by the content.
- Provide alternative (less exposing/public) ways for staff to engage with ARC conversations such as anonymous entries to a padlet or via a named facilitator or representative.
- Consider the power dynamics in the space and how this might inhibit how forthcoming colleagues feel they can be.
- Be sensitive to the ratio of Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues in the group, room or break-out sessions. Being the only person of colour in a room discussing anti-racism can be deeply uncomfortable and re-traumatising.
- It may be useful for the facilitator(s) to directly address their own positionality to the work and conversation.



“We aim to make this workshop a space where all of us can engage bravely and thoughtfully with difficult content.”

Creating Bridges

Everyone is at a different stage of their anti-racism and ARC journey. Yet it is only by starting to have these conversations with each other, in the first instance, that we can truly start to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ where we are, the changes required, and our reasons why the change is so needed. Dialogue will be the way to begin to bridge those chasms (big or small) and connect with fellow travellers.

By creating safe spaces, providing support pre/during/post discussions, and managing those interactions in a compassionate and constructive way will help us to have these vital and productive conversations. Building a foundation of understanding, reflexivity, and collaboration to then move towards the wider changes we wish to make in developing an ARC.



APPENDIX

Below we offer some examples of supportive measures which could be adapted for different ARC conversations in the sector. These are shared for discussion and inspiration rather than being prescriptive.

Example 1: Safety Document

Keeping safe (online ‘race’ equality work).

Introduction

It can be challenging to deal with the intellectual and emotional reactions that arise when we hold conversations about ‘race’ equity, diverse identities, and experiences. Many of us know the personal toll of this work: we carry our own experiences of living in a racially unjust society into our work, and we engage with the risk that the work may cause us anxiety or pain.

What is true in our wider work is true in this workshop. The content and discussion in this programme will necessarily engage with challenging issues, and may use materials that are designed to help us dig deeply into the issues before us, on order to progress in our organisation and our own roles. We aim to make this workshop a space where all of us can engage bravely and thoughtfully with difficult content, honour and respect the experiences that we bring to our learning, and take care of ourselves and of each other.

Specific Content Note (please read):

Please note that this session will

- engage with discussion of racism and race equality.
- include materials which contain the following [high level warning eg ‘racial slur’; ‘an account of a racial abuse’; ‘an account of how racism impacted mental health’]

Please always ask the facilitators if you are unsure of the exercise or do not wish to participate.

Ways of working

As **facilitators** we will:

- Agree a set of principles for how we work together as a group.
- Describe the activities in the workshop in sufficient detail to allow you to decide whether and how you wish to participate (and respect that decision: though note this may impact on your learning outcomes).
- Pay attention to your feedback.
- Make space for you to share your experiences and thoughts, and respect your right to decide how much you wish to do this.
- Be available for a short time after the workshops for further discussion where appropriate.

We ask **you** to (where possible):

- Find a private space for the session (eg use headphones, be mindful of others in the household – some content is not suitable for children and vulnerable adults).
- Be prepared for the workshop to arouse a range of intellectual and emotional reactions.
- Listen respectfully to the experiences of others, particularly people of colour.
- Pay attention to your own emotional well-being – take time out if you need to, and note the support available to you after the session (see below).
- Set aside time (where possible) after the meeting for reflection and self-care. >>



Example 1: Safety Document continued

Exercises and activities:

During the session we will hold discussions (in plenary or in breakout rooms), and other participatory activities (polls, posts) to support the learning outcomes. Depending on the session and the group, these may ask you to:

- Consider different understandings and current challenges relating to (in)equality and inclusion in your professional roles and conversations (including related wider research, case studies, and testimonies).
- Listen to and reflect on challenging conversations or situations, with a view to learning how to approach similar issues in the future (you may be asked to share general impressions or reflections here, not specific experiences).
- Critically review and reflect on current practices, policies, cultures, with a view to identifying opportunities for enhancement.
- Reflect personally on your learning, positionality, identity and response to this workshop and training (note you will not be asked to share details of your personal characteristics or background).
- All exercises and activities will be conducted according to our 'principles' which will be agreed at the start of the session. Please always ask the facilitators if you are unsure of the exercise or wish to abstain from the exercise.

Support signposting

If you feel you would like further professional or pastoral support or guidance please note the contacts below:

[Provide contact details and information about the types of support available, with the permission and understanding of the signposted services (so that they can be prepared).]

Example 2: Detailing session content

Specific Content Note (please read):

Please note that this session will

- engage with discussion of racism and race equality.
- include materials which contain the following [*high level warning eg 'racial slur'; 'an account of a racial abuse'; 'an account of how racism impacted mental health'*]

Please always ask the facilitators if you are unsure of the exercise or do not wish to participate.

Example 3: Content Notes

(aka trigger warnings)

- a. This x contains a racial slur.
- b. Please be aware this film includes race-based harm.
- c. This x explores themes of racial trauma.
- d. Please be mindful this session may be triggering for participants.



Example 4: Principles for Respectful Enquiry

In a slide or invitation to an event

Principles of Respectful Enquiry or Conversation

- Honour confidentiality
- Pay attention to each other as if we were together in person
- Welcome and respect the diversity of voices in the room, particularly Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues
- Be kind about the challenges of working online
- Be mindful of the impact of what we say
- Give and receive caring feedback
- Practice and respect self-care

Sent out before a session or a part of a briefing paper

- a. In order to create a space where everyone feels welcomed, respected and safe we would like to suggest the following collective commitments:
 - We will listen to the contributions of everyone with respectful attention and appreciation;
 - We will honour confidentiality. We won't share other peoples' personal experiences unless we have permission to do so;
 - We will value the visible and invisible diversity of the conference community, pay attention to our own privileges and biases, and welcome this opportunity to engage with people who are different to ourselves;
 - The language we use and opinions we have may differ and we may not always navigate those differences as well as we would like. We will welcome feedback and challenge, seeing them as an opportunity to learn. When we give feedback we will do so constructively and with kindness.
 - The conversations that we have may provoke strong emotions or responses, which may vary depending upon our lived experiences. We will look after ourselves, doing what we need to do to pay attention to our own wellbeing, and be respectful that others are doing the same.
- b. We are keen to create a safe and comfortable space to have open conversations and challenge each other in fruitful ways. However, we ask you to be mindful that these conversations can often be difficult and find people vulnerable or emotional. If you haven't already, we would encourage you to familiarise yourself with the concept of respectful enquiry and the race literacy glossary which was developed as part of the Tackling Racism on Campus project, available [here](#).
- c. We are really looking forward to this session being the place where we have exciting and invigorating conversations about ARC that are often seen as challenging, charged or taboo. We hope that you will feel inspired and empowered, and encouraged to share your own thoughts and experiences – and we recognise the courage that can take. In the spirit of encouraging and embracing a plurality of voices and narratives and a broadening of our curricula horizons – many words, terms, and lived experiences will naturally emerge. This can cause confusion and a fear of 'saying the wrong thing' which is wholly understandable, however, we can listen and learn from each other to ensure that these vital conversations continue and be used as an 'opening up' rather than a 'shutting down'.

AdvanceHE



QAA



Offensive questions, stereotypes and 'jokes' have a lasting impact on individuals, affecting their mental health, career progression and overall welfare at college or university.

It's time to stop sweeping these microaggressions under the rug.
Call racism out for what it is and challenge unacceptable behaviour.

It's time to take a stand.

#CallItRacism

Call it racism | Challenge racist behaviour | Change racist structures