

Vice-Chancellor's response to the report of the Legacies of Enslavement Advisory Group

I welcome the findings of the Legacies of Enslavement inquiry. This report represents an important step in improving our understanding of the University of Cambridge's historical connections to enslavement. In conducting this inquiry, Cambridge has followed in the footsteps of various British institutions – including the Church of England, the Bank of England, the National Trust and other universities – that have investigated and acknowledged their own historical connections to enslavement. It is, to quote His Majesty Charles III, addressing Commonwealth Heads of Government earlier this year, “a conversation whose time has come”.

A university as long-established as Cambridge would inevitably have benefitted from what was, until the 19th century, a widely accepted system of exploitation. This report helps us better appreciate the nature of those links. It also offers a glimpse into some of the ways in which individuals with links to the University had a part in promoting, knowingly or unknowingly, some of the ideas that underpinned the practice of enslavement.

The inquiry set out to add to the sum of our historical knowledge, working on the principle that as a mature, research-driven university, Cambridge is better off knowing than not knowing about its past. This includes offering a more nuanced view of the role of members of the University who campaigned for the abolition of slavery. By illustrating how they fought deep-rooted attitudes and practices, the findings of the inquiry make abolitionists' efforts seem even more remarkable.

The University of Cambridge is not responsible for the atrocities of slavery but, like many historic British institutions, it was by no means impervious to the economic and ideological systems that sustained them. It is not in our gift to right historic wrongs, but we can begin by acknowledging them. Having unearthed our university's links to an appalling history of abuse, the report encourages us to work even harder to address current inequalities – particularly those related to the experiences of Black communities.

The Legacies of Enslavement inquiry, and the Advisory Group's report, do not stand in isolation. They are part of our collegiate University's wider process of reflection about its role in a changing society. This process includes considerations about how Black and minority ethnic communities are represented and truly included within Cambridge; about what and how we teach; about how best to manage, curate and display collections in our museums; about how we engage most productively with academic institutions in other countries, and with Black and minority ethnic communities across the United Kingdom.

Though the report shines a light on the University's past, our greatest obligation is to the collegiate University's future. The report and its recommendations are not ends in themselves. Instead, I hope they will enable some of the conversations and decisions needed to make the Cambridge of tomorrow more self-reflective, more equitable and more open to all talent.

Implementing the Working Group recommendations

The University will begin the implementation of the report's recommendations by committing £1.5 million of seed funding for the creation of a Cambridge Legacies of Enslavement Fund.

As the report notes, implementation of some of these recommendations will require further work and consultation across the University. I am pleased to announce that Professor Kamal Munir, Pro-

Vice-Chancellor for University Community and Engagement, will set up and lead a group to develop and rapidly implement agreed proposals.

The resource to support this initiative will come from non-operational funds, in the first instance. The University will seek additional funding from philanthropic and collegiate sources to supplement this initial investment. This funding will be put towards the research, community engagement and partnership activities proposed in the report, and outlined below.

1. LEGACIES OF ENSLAVEMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

The report calls for the creation of a Cambridge Legacies of Enslavement Research Centre to continue the investigations initiated by the inquiry as well as to encompass global Black British histories. There are opportunities for such a centre to build upon existing inter-disciplinary activities and work will now begin on developing formal proposals for the centre, drawing on seed-funding from the Legacies of Enslavement Fund.

2. ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT WITH BLACK COMMUNITIES

The collegiate University is determined to develop a more inclusive environment for all staff and students, building on the success of initiatives such as the “Get In” campaign and the Stormzy Scholarships.

Engaging with Black students

The collegiate University has made significant progress over the past few years in its recruitment and support of underrepresented cohorts, including British Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi students. Today Cambridge has more British Black undergraduate students than ever in its history. A Black Advisory Hub was established as part of the University’s efforts to improve Black students’ experiences at Cambridge. To build on this progress the University will:

- Increase the number of postgraduate scholarships and bursaries it offers for Black British students, a cohort that is very much underrepresented at both the Masters and PhD levels. Funding from the University will be matched by philanthropic and College contributions.
- Invest additional funding for five years to enable the Black Advisory Hub to expand its work programme, including its work with the Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning to help close the unexplained awarding gap in degree classification between Black undergraduate students and their peers.
- Work with the Colleges and partners like the Cambridge Trust to create dedicated scholarships for postgraduate students from Africa and the Caribbean, while significantly enhancing our recruitment activity among those cohorts.

Engaging with Black Staff

Black academic and professional services staff are poorly represented across the University, particularly at senior levels. The University’s senior leadership team, including Heads of Schools, is already engaged in, and will step up, efforts to help recruit, retain, mentor and more generally support the professional advancement of Black members of staff.

3. FUNDING FOR NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN AFRICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Funding will be made available to enhance research partnerships in West Africa and the Caribbean, building on existing ties with universities in both regions. Full details will be worked out in consultation with the partner universities involved.

4. MEMORIALISING BLACK SCHOLARS

The University has received a generous philanthropic donation to commission a Black British artist to undertake a public work of art memorialising Black Cambridge scholars or graduates, to be located on the University estate. This funding is separate from the Legacies of Enslavement Fund.

The University will also commission and install an explanatory plaque that identifies and contextualises statues of individuals, including Tobias Rustat, housed in the Old Schools' internal courtyard.

The University will seek to name some streets and public spaces in Phases 2 and 3 of its North-West Cambridge development, and in the new West Cambridge Innovation District, after prominent Black Cambridge graduates as well as after notable abolitionists.

Recognising the link between education, research and representation, as noted in the report, the University is committing further financial support to the Black Cantabs Research Society, to enable the collection, curation, digitisation and publication of records on the history of Black graduates at Cambridge.

I am grateful to all members of the Legacies of Enslavement Advisory Group, and in particular to its Chair, Professor Martin Millett; to the postdoctoral researchers who, despite severe constraints imposed by the pandemic, have given us insights into the history of the University, and whose full, peer-reviewed research will be published by Cambridge University Press in due course; to the experts, both at Cambridge and at other universities, who offered advice, mentorship and academic oversight as the Advisory Group prepared its report; to the fellows and staff of the many Cambridge colleges who opened their archives and libraries to the researchers, and undertook similar inquiries of their own.

This has been a truly collaborative scholarly endeavour. I hope it represents only the beginning of a continuing dialogue about how we acknowledge, and build on, this complex and difficult aspect of Cambridge's past.

Prof Stephen J Tooze
Vice-Chancellor