

## **Convenor: Legacies of Enslavement Special Initiative**

### **Background**

The Collegiate University has focussed intently on its historical links to enslavement and the slave trade. An Advisory Group was formed in 2019 to determine the extent of Cambridge's historical links with enslavement and to determine its approach to these legacies. In [establishing this inquiry](#) the Vice-Chancellor wrote: *"History is inescapable in Cambridge. It is inconceivable that a British institution as old as our University would not have been touched by colonial practices of enslavement and enforced labour – whether benefiting from, helping to shape, or indeed challenging them. A society's historical baggage and its modern-day challenges are inextricable. Understanding our past and shaping our future are not separate projects. The University of Cambridge is exceptionally well placed to undertake both of them. The legacies of enslavement form a part of who we are today, and inform what we wish to achieve. We can never rewrite history, or do away with our heritage, but we can try to address prevailing inequalities. This process begins through greater self-knowledge and self-reflection"*.

An initial report of the Advisory Group in 2020, and its [final report](#) in 2022, precipitated a number of academic initiatives focussing on particular aspects of 'Legacies', both within Departmental areas and within individual Cambridge Colleges.

The Advisory Group has recognised that *"... enslavement and its legacies are not reducible to an object of academic study, nor are they issues that lend themselves to simple institutional solutions. Rather, enslavement and its legacies carry a whole history of racial violence, terror, exploitation, and long-term harm inflicted on specific parts of the world and communities of people, in particular on communities of African descent and on the global South. Our starting point is that Cambridge, like many other major UK and North American institutions, benefited both directly and indirectly from enslavement, the slave trade, and imperialism more broadly, so an understanding of that involvement should be central to the University's efforts to address some of the structural inequalities that are a legacy of enslavement, in particular around the continued impact of racism in our own community"*.

Activity in collegiate Cambridge forms part of a wider national and North American initiative, with significant work occurring at other British universities such as Glasgow and UCL and of many North American universities. Other sectors, such as heritage organisations and financial bodies, have started to engage in significant work into the legacies of enslavement: in September 2020, the National Trust published a report with a stated commitment to 'research, interpret and share the histories of slavery and the legacies of colonialism at the places we care for', and the British Museum, National Gallery, and other comparable centres of material culture have engaged in this research. To quote the Advisory Group again:

*"Slavery can no longer be thought of as a peripheral issue in histories of the British Empire. In reinterpreting the Empire's origins, growth, and development, scholars have a newfound understanding of slavery's end that is far more paradoxical than the triumphant histories of centuries past. Historians have revealed that the legacies of this 'slave empire' endured long after the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833 in the form of new modes of coerced labour and racist ideologies. These legacies can be seen throughout the United Kingdom in the universities, marbled museums, expensive artefacts, expansive cities, and bustling ports that once depended on slavery and the slave trade for their prosperity. In the shadow of this wealth and privilege, these legacies also drive the racism, inequality, and prejudice that affects communities of colour in the form of higher infant mortality rates, poorer education outcomes from primary school onwards, a lack of sense of belonging at institutions (including Cambridge), and a glass ceiling that restricts Black Britons' access to high-paying jobs – thereby leading to higher Black unemployment in an advanced, modern economy, such as Britain"*.

The University has identified a number of challenges to intensify its work on 'Legacies' and to ensure sustainable and connected activity into the future, including:

- Formalised research group/research centre for Legacies of Enslavement
- Enhancing engagement with Black communities
- Developing partnerships in West Africa and the Caribbean
- Memorialising Black scholars

These will form the framework for an initial three-year initiative designed to build momentum and ensure sustainability.

### **Role purpose**

The Convenor for Legacies of Enslavement provides strategic leadership to the University's interests in this area. Working in close partnership with a diverse network of scholars and organisations, both within and without Cambridge, the Convenor drives forward strategic development of the 'Legacies' portfolio, negotiates contributions of relevant stakeholders, and ensures a compelling national and international profile for this work. They encourage and motivate interested parties, galvanise

investment and plan for the future. The Convenor will represent the Legacies initiative to national and international communities, and the wider UK public.

### **Key responsibilities**

- Direct the overall operation of the Legacies initiative, with due regard for promotion, inclusion and connectivity
  - Foster collaboration and engagement across a diverse network of scholars and organisations
  - Decide on activities, prioritise and manage investment
  - Support two dedicated postdoctoral researchers to work on priority areas
  - Ensure effective and persuasive communications
  - Develop and lead outreach activities
- Promote the profile of the initiative locally, nationally and internationally, including strategic management of connections with other relevant networks at UK and international Universities
- Overall responsibility for the University's Legacies Fund, to include annual and periodic reporting; bids for supplementary funding; evaluation.

### **Person specification**

The Convenor will hold a senior academic post in a relevant academic subject area. They will have extensive experience as a researcher and leader in areas relevant to Legacies, preferably with an internationally-recognised research profile.

### **Arrangements**

The Convenor will be expected to commit around 60% of normal FTE (3 days per week on average), with a clear expectation that work patterns may be more intensive in [Full Term](#), with a regular base in Cambridge on those days. The Convenor will be appointed or seconded for a period of three years from as early as possible in 2025. The Convenor will need to make arrangements to be released from their substantive role during the three years and, where appropriate, it will be a condition of appointment for the postholder to arrange deferral of sabbatical during the three years.

The University will offer reimbursement or honorarium at senior rates, pro-rata for a part-time appointment. Provision of a research allowance will be discussed with the successful candidate as part of the package.