

Allyship in developing an anti-racist curriculum

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

It was written by working group member Melanie Smith with input from the working group members of the Anti-Racist Curriculum (ARC) project

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

INITIAL RESPONSES of MANY WHITE PEOPLE WHEN DISCUSSING ANTI RACIST CURRICULUM



Allyship in ARC

This sketch captures some common responses felt and often voiced by predominantly white colleagues when talking about ARC, at least initially. **We share this in recognition but also in challenge:**

To honestly reflect where the ARC journey begins for many people. This, we feel, is an important part of the process of 'call it what it is'.

To acknowledge the fears and concerns many have when considering an ARC and their role in leading, developing, supporting, or teaching it. To be aware of what may come up in conversations.

To invite colleagues to reflect upon those concerns:

- do any of these resonate?
- do any of these frustrate?
- where do they come from?
- who are they actually about?
- what are they justifying?
- who are they helping?
- what are they blocking?
- is discomfort a bad thing?

To galvanise and ask: how do we move from reasons to stop (reading these as statements to end discussion) towards reasons to act (reading these as questions to further discuss and explore)?

To build bridges: to encourage and support colleagues to move past these initial responses and into a space of allyship and coalition for the shared endeavour of developing and embedding ARC.

It is important to acknowledge that foregrounding these concerns can be seen as problematic in and of itself, often referred to as 'white fragility'. Further Research: Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility" (International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 2011).



Allyship will be a crucial aspect of developing and embedding an ARC"





White Allyship

Allyship, and specifically white allyship, has naturally come up a lot in our discussions around developing an ARC. Namely, how crucial the role of the ally is to the success of ARC. This is particularly true of those in positions of power and influence within our FE and HE institutions – who are predominantly white, and often men. Such are the current demographics of the Scottish tertiary education landscape, with its continued lack of representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues in all positions, but especially in senior roles. The SFC commissioned Advance HE project [Tackling Racism on Campus](#) has undertaken critical work in this area via the short-term working group [Tackling Underrepresentation of Ethnic Diversity in the Workplace](#).

In practice, this means that often the key players – those who will be ensuring ARC is prioritised and embedded at a strategic and operational level – will more often than not be white allies. An example of this kind of (leadership) allyship was the landmark commitment from Scotland’s university, college, and sector agency leaders who signed the [declaration against racism](#) to say **‘We stand united against racism’** in August 2020.

We need this kind of allyship for the developing and embedding of an ARC across the tertiary sector to happen. And we need allies to feel empowered, informed and supported to do this work and in turn empower and support others to do as well – all in collaboration with, and in support of, their Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues. Allies can then share their platform, listen to and amplify diverse voices, and practically value ARC by allocating substantial resources, time and support. We cannot underestimate the power of modelling good practice and how important that can be during a culture change. This kind of allyship goes beyond talking about (your) privilege; it goes to using it effectively, recognising that anti-racist work is everyone’s responsibility and that,

likewise, ARC development is everyone’s responsibility. Of course, not everyone is in a position of great influence (we do not need that to be an ally); white privilege affords us advantages and favourable conditions which we can use (to be the best ally we can be) within our spheres of influence, however small they may be.

We must move away from historical assumptions and the habitual temptation to silo ARC, and re-examine who this work is for, who should undertake it, who should advocate for it, who should provide the (often free/underappreciated or acknowledged) ‘labour’, and who knows best in this area. Listening and amplifying lived experiences remain fundamental to ARC development at every step, but many of us, regardless of background, are at the start of our ARC journey. We should not always equate lived experiences with expertise in this area as it is not always the case nor should it be an individual’s burden to ‘fix’. It cannot fall to the few. We should all have a vested interest and the role of the white ally will be crucial in sharing this cultural and pedagogical shift within our institutions.



What is an Ally?

‘An ally is someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognise their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways. Allies commit to reducing their own complicity or collusion in oppression of those groups and invest in strengthening their own knowledge and awareness of oppression.’

[Race Literacy Glossary](#)
Tackling Racism on Campus Project Resources

Much has been written on allyship and is readily available online, which we encourage you to explore. To help you consider what type of ARC ally you can be, taking into account your role, remit and opportunities to engage within your respective organisation, we share the seven types of allyship as explained by Jamila Archibald below built on the work of Karen Caitlin’s [‘Better Allies’](#).

The Sponsor

When an ally takes on the role of sponsor, they vocally support and endorse the work of colleagues from underrepresented groups in all contexts, but specifically in situations that will help boost those colleagues’ standing and reputations. This is not to be confused with the role of a mentor: a mentor lends their perspective, while a sponsor gives opportunities.

The Advocate

An advocate is someone who publicly supports the diversity and inclusion agenda and under-represented groups. They use their power and influence to bring peers from underrepresented groups into exclusive circles. The advocate recognises and addresses unjust omissions, holding their peers accountable for including qualified colleagues of all genders, races and ethnicities, abilities, ages, body shapes or sizes, religions, and sexual orientations.

The Scholar

The scholar is a knowledge-seeker who actively seeks to learn as much as possible about the challenges and prejudices faced by colleagues from marginalised groups. Scholars do their own research to seek out the relevant information and seek to learn, unlearn and relearn what they know.

The Amplifier

When an ally takes on the role of amplifier they work to ensure that marginalised voices are heard and respected. This type of allyship can take many forms, but is focused on representation within communication. It has been recognised that ethnic minorities, women and other underrepresented groups often experience their voices being ignored, spoken over or interrupted. It has been said that one of the reasons the Obama administration was the most diverse was because of its ‘amplification strategy’ adopted by the female staffers in meetings. When a woman made a point, other women would repeat it, giving credit to its author. This forced the room to recognise the source of the contribution and amplify the idea in the meeting.



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The Upstander

An upstander is the opposite of a bystander and is someone who speaks out or intervenes on behalf and in support of someone when they see or hear something is wrong. These can be everyday microaggressions or micro-inequities. This person pushes back on offensive comments or jokes, even if no one within earshot might be offended or hurt. Passive silence can be tantamount to active complicity.

The Champion

A champion acts similarly to a sponsor but does so in a more public setting. Champions willingly defer to colleagues from underrepresented groups in meetings and in visible, industry-wide events and conferences, sending meaningful messages to large audiences.

The Confidant

A confidant creates a safe space for members of underrepresented groups to express their fears, frustrations, needs and goals. Simply listening to their perspective and trusting that they're being truthful creates a protective layer of support.

A word of warning to look out for 'optical allyship', 'performative allyship', or 'opportunistic allyship'. This is where a person or organisation may be seen to be an ally via public expressions of support, for example, but with no real action or even contradictory actions behind the scenes, or because it is within their best interest to be seen to support rather than from a deep-held conviction. On a personal level, we may identify as allies but how does that manifest in our day to day living and interactions with others around race equality and developing an ARC?

Taken from Archibald, J (2020) *Law Society of Scotland Blog: Bias and Allyship* (weblog) Available from: <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/news-and-events/blogs-opinions/black-history-month-bias-and-allyship/> 30th October (last accessed 19th August 2021)



True allyship is the authentic alignment between practising values, learning and action"

Further Reading:

Akala (2018) *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*, Two Roads

Becnel, B. (2020) *CERES Blog: Black-White Allyship: How strong are the ties that bind?* (weblog) Available from: <https://www.ceres.education.ed.ac.uk/2020/10/19/ceres-blogs-black-white-allyship-how-strong-are-the-ties-that-bind/> 19th October (last accessed 19th August 2021)

Eddo-Lodge, R. (2018) *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race*, Bloomsbury

Educational Institute of Scotland (2019) *Side by Side for Equality: how to be an anti-racist ally* (webinar) Available from: <https://www.eis.org.uk/Past-Webinars/Sidebysideforequality/howtobeananti-Racistally> 19th November (last accessed 19th August 2021)

Kendi, I.X. (2019) *How to Be an Antiracist*, Bodley Head



We must move away from historical assumptions and the habitual temptation to silo ARC, and re-examine who this work is for, who should undertake it, who should advocate for it, who should provide the (often free/underappreciated or acknowledged) 'labour'."

Lamont, A. (2021) *Guide to Allyship: An open source starter guide to help you become a more thoughtful and effective ally* (online guide) Available from: <https://guidetoallyship.com/> (last accessed 19th August 2021)

Saad, L.F. (2020) *Me and White Supremacy*, Quercus

University of Bath (2021) *How to be an anti-racist and white ally* (online guide) Available from: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/how-to-be-an-anti-racist-and-white-ally/> (last accessed 19th August 2021)



Blog 1:
Reflections on Allyship
in the ARC project
 by Melanie Smith

Allyship was at the forefront of our minds when constructing this project. It informed how we built our Executive Group, appointed our Chair, selected our Researcher, populated our Working Groups. To ensure that voices of lived experience were represented at all levels and that they were a majority rather than a minority in the 'room'. We thought about how to amplify the Black, Asian and minority ethnic voices in our meetings and working group sessions – to consult, to listen and to honour what was shared. Building safe spaces and multiple ways to engage with us was important in supporting colleagues who were often sharing personal experiences of racial harm. We didn't always get it right but we took responsibility to learn from our mistakes. We kept in mind that all of this should (where possible) be a base minimum and not something to highlight as 'good practice', but just be standard and expected given our remit.

Personal Reflections (and responses) on Allyship

The irony of my being a white project lead for an anti-racist curriculum project was not lost on me. I mentioned it to my all white interview panel. And while it is (sadly) unsurprising and maybe even fitting, given the demographics mentioned before, it does afford me some helpful reflections on what it means to be a white ally in this space. I acknowledge that to even do that feels like taking up unnecessary space from a position of privilege. And then to share that concern feels somewhat indulgent and to share that is unhelpful self-flagellation and on it goes. This is an insight into my inner monologues over these past few months which I offer only to encourage colleagues with similar thoughts to push through: we need you! Layla F Saad captures white allyship perfectly when she says it is "knowing that *you* are a part of the problem and that you are *simultaneously* also a part of the answer" (p. 210, *Me and White Supremacy*). Opposite are some thoughts and responses to consider in your allyship development:



Thought	Response
It should be someone with lived experience leading this	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, that would be ideal but isn't always possible/appropriate/helpful. • Also, this is shared work, not a person/s with lived experience sole responsibility. You don't have to be directly affected by something to care about it or advocate for it. • Look at it as a way of putting your privilege to great use. • See this as an honour and opportunity to share the load/work, and very much your job too! • Recognise your privilege – voice it when you introduce yourself in ARC conversations. • Think about how you can bring individuals with lived experience into the conversation – foreground their voices and recognise their contributions – make it a key principle of your practice. Be a champion but leave your ego and saviour complex at the door, nobody needs it (least of all those with lived experience).
I don't know enough/ I'm learning as I go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most people don't know enough in this area but you won't improve that position if you stop now. There are certainly lots of ways to educate yourself and increasingly fewer excuses not to. Recognise that you are learning and that much of your learning has come from Black, Asian and minority ethnic work and generosity to share in this area. • Imposter syndrome is to be expected and absolutely not heeded. (This is easier said than done I know only too well!) However, use it. Let it inform your approach and make you honest and more inclusive, and compassionate with others who feel vulnerable in this work too. • It's likely that as you begin both a self and professional examination of your own positionality that what you thought was correct/appropriate a month ago may change and so on. It is a steep learning curve and (at times) very uncomfortable. Make friends with that discomfort – these are growing pains and a great sign – it indicates a new consciousness which is a key requirement when undertaking anti-racist work.
I'm getting it wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, you will make mistakes and that is ok. Expect and accept this as a natural part of this work. • There is no way to progress or change without setbacks and detours. • Recognise and acknowledge your mistakes. Own them and apologise wholeheartedly for them. • Reflect on your mistakes. Learn from them. Then move on! Do not let them inhibit you but rather further motivate you to do better next time.
It's so overwhelming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lot of information 'out there': a lot to read, watch, and listen. It is very easy to become overwhelmed, intimidated and demotivated about your ability to learn, keep up, or contribute in a meaningful way. True allyship is the daily commitment, however small, to continue this work. To unlearn old patterns and ways of thinking, to doggedly return to uncomfortable places, and search out the next step even if you cannot see the whole path ahead. This is a paradigm shift after all and one in which we're all learning. • It can also be very tempting to defer to others, especially colleagues with lived experience. It can be tempting to hide behind those colleagues – asking them to provide answers, to check you're on the right track, to assuage your guilt, to legitimise what you're doing, and ultimately 'protect' you. However, this is your work to do.
Am I doing enough? Am I being a 'good' ally?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can always do more but it's important to be realistic about what you can do with the time and resources you have. • Keep looking at the bigger picture and what you are trying to achieve. Cultural change, which is what ARC ultimately is, takes time. This is hard to accept for something which is already so long overdue and continuing to impact so negatively upon our students and staff. Feel that frustration and let it fuel you. • Be kind to yourself and others but remain challenging and steadfast. Be patient but not complacent. Be mindful of burnout of yourself or your ARC colleagues. Build ally networks and safe spaces for colleagues to connect, to share their wins and losses and bolster each other. • Recognise that while much of this (allyship) is new to you – this is everyday (racism) for your colleagues with lived experience. And while you can choose to explore and educate yourself in this area – this is not a choice for your colleagues – it's not 'opt in' or 'out' situation. Offer support and be mindful of wider national/local events around racism which will, at times, impact on colleagues' ability to engage and sustain with ARC.

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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