



**Royal
Botanic Garden
Edinburgh**

Racial Justice Report 2022

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Note:

This report published by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) is the result of extensive work by RBGE's Racial Justice Working Group (RJWG) during 2020 and 2021. This report and its recommendations were presented to RBGE's Board of Trustees and will form the basis of an Action Plan designed to embed racial justice work as a core aspect of the organisation's activity.

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Executive summary

The Black Lives Matter protests of summer 2020 led to heightened awareness of the colonial origins of European heritage organisations including botanic gardens. In response, and as part of broader commitments to racial justice and the eradication of structural racism, RBGE instigated a Racial Justice Working Group (RJWG) to review its history, collections, activities and external interactions around racial justice and within the wider context of its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work.

The aims of the RJWG were:

- To assess RBGE's historic links to racial inequality, including the acquisition of its collections;
- To assess how our actions and ways of working perpetuate racial inequality today;
- To identify actions required to:
 - Address racial inequalities;
 - Develop a fair, inclusive, and respectful workplace and institutional culture;
 - Build a fairer and more inclusive environment in the wider field in which we work;
 - Support wider societal change by embedding environmental and social justice in our work programmes and public engagement activities.

The RJWG conducted its work via:

- Surveys of staff, students and volunteers;
- Focus groups with leaders of community groups representing people from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, with emphasis on Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups that have traditionally experienced racism, discrimination and inequity in the UK;
- Analysis by an independent racial justice consultant;
- Consultation with a team undertaking a similar process at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Twelve cross-cutting and interlinked themes emerged from the synthesis of all these strands, each associated with valuable and realistic opportunities for improvement:

Recruitment, retention and progression. **We need to work to increase the diversity of our workforce.** We have broadened our vacancy advertising and are engaging with community organisations to widen our reach among minority ethnic groups. We need to improve the collection and reporting of ethnicity and pay gap data to facilitate setting targets, monitoring and benchmarking; and further auditing our recruitment and promotion practices to further enhance our engagement with EDI principles.

Volunteer pipeline. **We aim to encourage applications from a more diverse group of people to our volunteer programme. This may be achieved by** creating targeted, clearly beneficial new volunteering opportunities for people from underrepresented minority ethnic backgrounds and widening our advertising and recruitment process for volunteers to achieve greater representation of people from minority ethnic groups. We also make several recommendations around building a stronger and more inclusive volunteer community.

Education. **We seek to support a wider range of learners from underrepresented and minority ethnic groups at all career stages** – which we have initiated by reviewing available financial support for students. We plan to undertake an audit of advertising, applications and admissions policies and procedures including widening participation programmes; further development and publicity of funding channels; and a commitment to decolonising our curricula.

Workplace culture. **We aim to build a more inclusive workplace culture** through a combination of formal policy statements and practices – which we are already updating – learning and

development opportunities and continued internal and external dialogue. We plan to review and develop codes of conduct and further developing open forums for safe and supportive dialogue. We recommend offering further EDI training to staff, particularly in racial awareness and anti-racism.

Support. We need to ensure our staff, students, and volunteers from Asian, Black, mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds are thoroughly supported. We suggest further developing support for staff – including engaging with network and affinity groups – and reviewing the support needs of our students, and – together with our partner institutions – working to ensure these needs are met.

Language. The use of inclusive language is a key way to signal a commitment to anti-racism, and bring about organisational change. We propose the development of guidelines for internal and external communications; the use of content warnings to accompany historic documents such as the Archive; creating guidelines for the naming of plant species; and reappraising our mission statement as part of our ongoing brand development programme.

Our historical legacy. We recognise that our present work is founded upon collections and data which derive in part from exploitative, colonialist, and racist activities. We have instigated a dialogue with other heritage organisations and local communities around decolonising our collections, data, and curricula and should explore opportunities for more accurate, inclusive and collaborative storytelling. We recommend the use of acknowledgement statements to recognise this publicly, and that we extend our existing work on the environmental and social impacts of colonisation.

Overseas working and partnerships. As the privileged partner in multiple international projects, we need to make extra effort to foster equity in our collaborations. We suggest reviewing our existing overseas projects and partnerships to determine best practice examples to follow, and developing a toolkit for overseas work to assist in planning equitable partnerships. Since writing this report we have published our Ethics Policy, available online at rbge.org.uk/equityandaccess.

Access and benefit-sharing. We wish to ensure full, free and equitable access to our living and preserved collections and data, and an equitable distribution of benefits from our scientific work. We have already made considerable progress towards improving access to our collections, data and results, through digitisation and online open access. We recommend a further review of accession, registration, and – where possible - repatriation of knowledge and data to ensure credit and benefits are fairly distributed. We should consult with overseas partners regarding outstanding barriers to accessing our resources, and work to remove these in a legal and ethical fashion. We should also review existing benefit-sharing activities and develop a framework for evaluating their impact.

Inclusion and community engagement. We want everyone to feel welcome in, and to benefit from, our Gardens, collections and expertise. We are planning regular training for all staff in anti-racism and bystander intervention to further enhance the feeling of safety in our gardens for those from minority ethnic backgrounds. We will expand our engagement with members of minority ethnic groups with whom we have existing relationships and engage in consultation with others to assess how we can better meet their needs.

Public engagement and communication. Our public engagement work should be conducted in the same consistently welcoming, inclusive spirit as our other activities. We have completed a full accessibility upgrade of our online offer and will continue to audit all public engagement resources. We recommend developing a set of principles and standards to create inclusive content. Expansion of the interpretation team will increase capacity to upgrade and enhance the accessibility of our

materials, to develop new materials, to create partnerships with artists and others from diverse and underrepresented groups, and to reach new audiences.

Leadership. **Our actions towards racial justice must have a clear buy-in from leadership** – including commitment to allocating staff time and resources – and must be informed by all stakeholders. We suggest working with Scottish Government to achieve an ethnically representative Board of Trustees; and considering ways to promote anti-racism in the wider spheres in which we work, including through the editorial boards of our international journals.

Recommendations for change

To achieve meaningful change, this report is accompanied by a series of recommendations based on its findings. While we are already taking actions in relation to many of these recommendations, an action plan is currently in development. This will inform our priorities moving forward, as we work within available resources and to a reasonable timeframe. We will monitor and benchmark our progress, communicate it transparently with internal and external stakeholders, and accept and act upon honest feedback as we build a more equitable, fair, diverse and stronger RBGE.

Section/ number	Recommendation
1.1	Seek consistent collection and reporting of ethnicity data across all RBGE stakeholder groups including making calculation of the ethnicity pay gap standard in our annual reporting.
1.2	Engage in advocacy to Scottish Government to mandate reporting of ethnicity pay gaps and for a review of ethnicity pay gaps across natural and cultural heritage organisations.
1.3	Audit recruitment, progression and promotion policies and processes to ensure compliance with EDI principles and consistency across divisions.
2.1	Create new, targeted and supported volunteering opportunities.
2.2	Re-evaluate volunteer advertisement and recruitment processes.
2.3	Enhance and streamline processes for communication, learning and development opportunities, and enhance the sense of community among volunteers.
3.1	Review advertising, applications and admissions policies and procedures for all courses , including widening participation programmes, involving partner institutions where applicable.
3.2	Commit to decolonising our curricula, and develop or adopt a set of education principles and standards , guidance and a checklist for content creators, as part of a shared process with the Public Engagement team.
3.2	Further review, develop and publicise existing and potential internal and external funding channels for students from underrepresented minority ethnic backgrounds.
4.1	Review staff code of conduct and establish codes of conduct for volunteers (including short-term volunteers such as visiting speakers), Research Associates, students, the Board of Trustees – and potentially visitors.
4.2	Continue to review, update and publicise policies relating to workplace culture.
4.3	Develop and offer to all staff, students, volunteers and trustees specific training in matters relating to racial justice, and develop and encourage open forums for discussion of related issues. We aim to accompany training with support for attendees, and to allocate time in work schedules for reflection. We also aim to encourage dialogue by building regular EDI updates, encompassing racial justice, into our internal communications calendar. This may necessitate a review of the most appropriate technologies for facilitating internal communication.

5.1	Improve awareness of existing support services.
5.2	Survey the RBGE student body to identify support services required, and work to provide access to such services whether at RBGE or partner institutes.
5.3	Continue to engage and consult with network and affinity groups.
6.1	Identify resources and experts in best practice use of language and tone. Work to develop and maintain standardised organisational guidelines, and a glossary.
6.2	Develop content warning statements for those accessing the Herbarium, Library, Archives and associated catalogues online and in person.
6.3	Create a set of guidelines for authorship and nomenclature in descriptions of species new to Western science, to be applied to both RBGE scientists and to all names published in RBGE journals.
6.4	Consider revising our mission statement, inviting feedback from members of minority ethnic groups and racial justice practitioners.
7.1	Explore opportunities for more inclusive storytelling.
7.2	Research further ways in which RBGE can collaboratively address the environmental degradation caused by historic colonisation through existing or new projects.
7.3	Develop an acknowledgement statement for use in events, online, in publications and in email signatures.
8.1	Conduct an audit of overseas projects and partnerships to provide concrete information on where people are working and with whom, how partnerships are initiated and maintained, the activities carried out and project outputs currently produced, and to determine best practice examples.
8.2	Develop a 'toolkit' to support RBGE staff and students in planning equitable overseas research and partnerships, which would signpost relevant policy documents and forms, outline best-practice fieldwork procedures, and provide mentorship and support on partnerships, historical and cultural awareness.
9.1	Improve cataloguing and online dissemination of RBGE's collections, and review policies for accession and registration of material to facilitate repatriation of knowledge and data.
9.2	Consult with overseas partners regarding their awareness of and barriers to accessing RBGE's digital resources, to develop responsive opportunities for technical knowledge exchange and training.
9.3	Conduct a review of benefit-sharing at RBGE and develop a framework for measuring and evaluating benefit-sharing and a process of post-project evaluation. Following the example of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, this could be conducted as a review of activity in one exemplar year.
10.1	Ensure a consistently welcoming and accessible environment.
10.2	Provide regular, ongoing learning and development opportunities in anti-racism and bystander intervention, as well as broader EDI concepts and intersectionality, to all staff.
10.3	Expand engagement with members of minority ethnic groups with whom we have existing relationships, and engage in consultation with others to assess how we can best meet their needs.
11.1	Develop new creative content and events and foster new partnerships.
11.2	Continue our full audit of existing public engagement resources to determine visibility of minority ethnic groups, and deliver further necessary adjustments, renewals or replacements in content and imagery (external support may be required).

11.3	Develop a set of principles and standards for public engagement and a checklist for content creators, as part of a shared process with the Education team and founded upon the upcoming brand development project.
11.4	Consider time-limited ‘takeovers’ of our social media content by scholars, artists and activists from Black or other minority ethnic backgrounds to signal our commitment to co-creation of content.
12.1	Work towards achieving a Board of Trustees and Executive Team that reflects the ethnic makeup of Scotland.
12.2	Consider building an external network of EDI advisors or establishing an external EDI advisory group.
12.3	Review governance structures to ensure a pan-RBGE approach to delivering EDI agreed actions, including those related to racial justice; reinforce allocation of staff time to EDI activities in Operational Development Plans and individual work plans.

Introduction

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) is Scotland’s national botanical institute. Our work aims to respond to the twin challenges of the biodiversity crisis and climate emergency. We deliver world-leading plant science, conservation and education programmes to sustain species, habitats, livelihoods, and human health and wellbeing. Our four Gardens across Scotland (Edinburgh, Dawyck, Logan, and Benmore) are centres of engagement with the natural world, and our learning and outreach programmes build knowledge and skills nationally and internationally. RBGE currently has around 280 staff (working across our four gardens), 58 research associates, c. 200 volunteers, over 100 undergraduate and postgraduate students including 22 PhD students, and a Board of nine Trustees.

RBGE is a registered charity, a non-departmental public body sponsored and supported by the Scottish Government Environment and Forestry Directorate, an academic institution, and one of the Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutes ([SEFARI](#)) working to deliver the Scottish Government’s Strategic Research Programme. Our remit is set out in the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985 and guided by national and international treaties including the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goals and Scotland’s updated [Climate Change Plan](#): Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero.

Our work centres around three pillars:

- Unlocking knowledge and understanding of plants and fungi for the benefit of society;
- Conserving and developing botanical collections as a global resource;
- Enriching and empowering individuals and communities.

Environmental recovery and resilience are contingent upon social justice. The Scottish Government aims to meet emissions reduction targets “in a way that is just and improves the outcomes for everyone in Scotland, ensuring no one is left behind” (Scotland’s Climate Change Plan: section 1.0.2). In line with this, our [Strategy 2021–2026](#) prioritises “embedding the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion into every aspect of working practice and culture at RBGE.”

Racism is a pernicious form of inequity and discrimination globally, nationally, and within RBGE. The legacy of historic colonialism perpetuates inequality in our sector and our organisation today. While we have made progress in our EDI work – for example through digitising collections, ongoing programmes of staff training, and exhibitions exploring the impact of colonialism – **there is still important work to be done.**

There is a pressing need to confront racism and racial inequity in our activities past and present and in our organisation today. Our aim is to create an anti-racist culture at RBGE, the features of which would include:

- Honestly examining and confronting the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of racial prejudice and discrimination in our organisation, and committing to decolonisation¹;
- Opening up paths of opportunity for minority ethnic groups into more senior levels of our organisation, and into botany and horticulture more broadly;
- Combating all forms of racism and racial prejudice where they occur in our organisation, and advocating for racial justice nationally and internationally;
- Recognising the limits of our institutional knowledge, and consulting with minority ethnic groups where needed as we conduct our work;
- Equipping our staff, students, and volunteers with the tools and confidence they need to combat racism;
- Providing minority ethnic staff, students and volunteers with the support and spaces they need to talk openly about their experiences, and to push for change where they need it;
- Recognising and celebrating cultural, linguistic, ethnic and racial diversity;
- A sense of responsibility, accountability and opportunity among all community members to achieve all the above.

We recognise that a commitment to anti-racism is a commitment to an ongoing process of change and development. This report represents one step in that longer process which aims to bring forward, in partnership with all stakeholders, an ambitious, practical agenda for improvement. Our aim is to make RBGE a truly inclusive institution and a leader in policy and practice through our relationships across the world.

The focus of this report connects directly to **the Outcomes of Scotland's National Performance Framework** and, through those, to the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**². Our ongoing work in this area, then, has national as well as international impact.

Our approach

The Racial Justice Working Group (RJWG) formed in 2020 as part of our institutional response to the Black Lives Matter protests, which heightened awareness of the colonial origins of European heritage organisations. **The aim of the group was to examine racial and structural inequality at RBGE and to suggest actions to improve equality for those from minority ethnic backgrounds – particularly for Black and Asian people.**

The formal aims of the group were:

1. To assess and understand RBGE's historical links to racial inequality, including the history of the acquisition of the collections;
2. To assess and understand how our actions and ways of working today perpetuate racial inequality;
3. To identify the immediate and longer-term actions required to:
 - i) Address racial inequalities to develop a workplace and institutional culture that is fair, inclusive, and respectful;

¹ See "A note on terminology", below.

² See <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/> and <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> for more information on these.

- ii) Build a fairer and more inclusive environment in the wider field in which we work (e.g., biodiversity science, botanic gardens, horticulture);
- iii) Support wider societal change by embedding environmental and social justice in our work programmes and public engagement activities.

To manage the complexity of these tasks, the RJWG divided into four subgroups: History, Heritage and Art; Data and Collections; Science and Horticulture in Practice; and Public Engagement and Education. A further subgroup was added later, with a focus on Translating Actions for Change. **Each subgroup set its own priorities for research, consulted with relevant comparable organisations, sought advice from actual and potential stakeholders, and determined recommendations for action.** The subgroups met regularly to exchange ideas and findings and consulted with a similar group at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Sources of Evidence

We designed and launched an online survey to investigate the experiences and perceptions of racial inequality at RBGE. This was circulated to staff (137 responses, including PhD students), students (23 responses) and volunteers (32 responses).

Independent market researchers ScotInform conducted a study of equity and access **among 10 local community groups with members from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds.** For each group, this involved an hour-long, online focus group with three representatives, four follow-up interviews, and an online survey among the wider membership of the groups, the latter receiving 30 responses in total.

An **external consultant was engaged** to provide independent advice, a confidential ear for any staff who wished to share their experiences, and to appraise our external-facing materials including website and social media.

These various lines of evidence produced twelve cross-cutting themes or focus points for our work on racial justice to focus on. These themes form the major sections of this report, and have recommendations attached.

- 1) Recruitment, retention and progression
- 2) Volunteer pipeline
- 3) Education
- 4) Workplace culture
- 5) Support
- 6) Language
- 7) Our historical legacy
- 8) Overseas working and partnerships
- 9) Access and benefit-sharing
- 10) Inclusion and community engagement
- 11) Public engagement and communication
- 12) Leadership

A note on terminology

During consultation, community groups highlighted a concern over the potentially homogenising effects of acronyms such as BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic), POC (People of Colour), or BPOC (Black People and People of Colour), so we avoid their use as far as possible. At the same time, we aim to maximise consistency with other public bodies to facilitate future benchmarking.

Consequently, in line with the Scottish Government and where relevant, we use ‘minority ethnic’ to describe minority racial and ethnic groups (including white groups). Where possible, we specify the ethnic groups concerned.

‘Minority ethnic’ includes white minority groups as well as Black, Asian, mixed and multiple ethnic identities. We acknowledge that the issues facing white minorities differ from those facing our staff of Asian, Black, mixed or multiple ethnicity: particular inequities and discrimination are associated with skin colour, and unique challenges face specific ethnic groups at different times.

This report also makes reference to “decolonisation”. This term refers to the process of undoing systems and processes which reduce the power and agency of Black and Indigenous people around the world. It is used here in line with [guidance from the Museums Association](#) to signal our commitment “to rebalance power and representation away from the coloniser narrative of history and society”.

Credit

This report is the end point of a large body of work undertaken by our Racial Justice Working Group, and we wish to acknowledge their investment of time and energy. We are grateful for the responses to our surveys and information gathering exercises by all staff, students, and volunteers, and to ScotInForm for work with community groups. We wish to particularly thank the members of those community groups for their time and contributions.

1. Recruitment, retention and progression

Workforce demographics

Community surveys indicated that people from Asian, Black, mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds would feel more welcome in our gardens if they saw themselves reflected in our staff – including senior staff and Board of Trustees. A focus on the diversity of our staff would, then, have a wide reach. Our aim should be for the make-up of our workforce to at least reflect the population from which it is drawn – rural Scotland for our Regional Gardens; Edinburgh and Lothians for the Edinburgh site, and ideally to reflect the global scope and reach of our activities.

Comprehensive Equal Opportunities (EO) data is a prerequisite to addressing inequality. While we encourage our staff to complete EO monitoring data, and while engagement is increasing year to year, the process is voluntary and our data is not complete. 182 of our 270 staff (i.e. 67%) had completed an EO monitoring form by August 2021. Six of those staff selected “Prefer Not to Say” on our ethnicity monitoring question, meaning we have ethnicity data on 176 staff – 65% of our workforce at the time.

Currently we do not record ethnicity for research associates, online students, or Certificate students. Since our undergraduate and MSc students are enrolled at external institutions (e.g. the University of Edinburgh), data on these students is dependent on external academic partners’ processes. For PhD students, only nationality is recorded.

Of the 176 staff declaring their ethnicity, 40 (23%) identified as minority ethnic, in line with Scottish Government usage (i.e. including white minorities). Of those 40, 26 (19% of the total staff for whom we have data) identified as white minority ethnic (white Polish, white Irish, and white other). The remaining 7 staff (4% of the total) were from Asian, Black, mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds.

The 7 staff describing themselves as having Asian, Black, mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds worked at the Edinburgh Garden. All regional garden staff who submitted data were white.

According to the 2011 Scottish Census, 8% of Edinburgh's population is Asian, Black, mixed or multiple ethnic, dropping to 4% in Scotland's population overall. **We therefore have some way to go to ensure our workforce in our gardens are at least representative of comparator populations.**

Science is the most ethnically diverse division, likely as a consequence of the international nature of academic botany and taxonomy. Of the division's 63 staff members at the time, 48 (76%) returned ethnicity data. Of those, 17 (35%) identified as minority ethnic, including 4 Asian, Black, mixed or multiple ethnicity staff (8% of the science staff for whom we have data).

There are very few people from Asian, Black, mixed or multiple backgrounds working in horticulture or the environmental sector overall: UK horticulture workers are 98.5% white, 95% white British³. RBGE Horticulture staff are 98% white, 80% white British, so our diversity is slightly above average for the profession in the UK, particularly in terms of numbers of white minority horticulture staff. In England and Wales (figures not available for Scotland), the environmental sector is the second least diverse, ahead only of farming⁴.

While engagement with our equalities data monitoring is improving, we need to encourage staff who have not yet returned data to do so. As part of our wider aim to reduce inequality, we also need to develop – with their agreement – the capacity to record, and securely store, ethnicity and other equal opportunities data for Research Associates, PhD students, all other students and volunteers. For students, this may require information sharing with partner institutions.

See Recommendation 1.1

Ethnicity Pay gaps

An 'ethnicity pay gap' describes a situation where staff from minority ethnic groups are paid less – on average – than white majority staff. Ethnicity pay gaps are not routinely reported, so benchmarking this data against other organisations is difficult. In order to improve our ability to monitor and address our own pay disparities (where they exist), and to push for sector change, we should join attempts to advocate for the regular reporting of ethnicity pay gaps in government, non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and corporate organisations.

See Recommendation 1.2

At RBGE, staff who identified as white earned 7.5% more on average⁵ than staff who recorded themselves as Asian, Black, mixed or multiple ethnicity. This is likely due to a lack of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds in senior positions: for staff describing themselves as Asian, Black, mixed or minority ethnic, no woman was found above grade D⁶ (maximum pay currently £34,957 p.a.), and no man above Grade E (maximum £44,054 p.a.). RBGE's ethnicity pay gap is smaller than our gender pay gap, in which staff who identify as men earn 8.7% more on average than staff who

³ Pye Tait Consulting. 2019. *Horticulture Sector Skills Survey: A Report for the Ornamental Horticulture Roundtable Group*. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/pdf/horticulture-skills-report/horticulture-sector-skills-survey-report.pdf>

⁴ Norrie, R. 2017. *The Two Sides of Diversity*. Policy Exchange. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-two-sides-of-diversity-2.pdf>

⁵ All averages reported here are means.

⁶ RBGE has a pay structure based around eight grades, A to H, with H being Director level.

identify as women, although an intersection exists for minority ethnic women on our staff, where the two effects combine to form a greater disparity.

It should be noted that the numbers of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds available for calculating the figures above were very low, and thus the direction and size of calculated pay gaps may reflect the effects of individual appointments rather than institution-wide trends. As we increase the diversity of our workforce, we should monitor the ethnicity pay gap closely.

Recruitment

Building a more diverse workforce will require enhancing RBGE's profile as an inclusive workplace, and horticulture and the environment as desirable careers among minority ethnic groups.

60% of contributors to community surveys (18 out of 30 responses) showed an interest in joining RBGE staff but identified the high proportion of white staff members as a barrier. It is of vital importance, then, that we work on attracting a wider diversity of people to our workforce.

Focus groups revealed that we may be advertising job and volunteering vacancies on channels not often used, or in themselves inaccessible to, minority ethnic people. While we have recently reviewed the wording of our job adverts to make them more accessible to potentially excluded groups, adding statements regarding our commitment to equity and access, we should find ways to further improve our advertising and recruitment processes. We have started engaging with partner organisations representing minority ethnic groups to advertise our vacancies to their communities and should look to expand this to encourage more applicants from Asian, Black, mixed and multiple ethnic backgrounds. We will continue to assess advertisement placement for visibility among these communities, and to seek advice from minority ethnic stakeholders (e.g. via the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations Scotland). We will also review and, where relevant, update our recruitment policies to ensure continued alignment with EDI principles.

Work experience schemes and apprenticeships are an important way to attract people to careers in horticulture and environment. They are, however, known to primarily attract people who are already engaged with or have contacts in the field, so under-represented groups may not have access to opportunities. We should therefore work on increasing early engagement with our networks and activities, and on finding funding to widen access to opportunities for experience and training that may not currently be open to all (see [Education](#), below).

RBGE should continue to utilize and publicise potential recruitment mechanisms such as the Scottish Government's [Youth Guarantee Scheme](#). Although the regulations around visas for overseas nationals to enter the UK have changed post-Brexit, RBGE has partnered with UKRI (UK Research & Innovation) to be able to bring in staff through the new Government Authorised Exchange visa mechanism, as well as the new [Graduate Route](#) for international students at UK universities wishing to remain in the UK upon graduation.

See Recommendation 1.3

Another useful pipeline for enhancing academic staff diversity could be via retention of PhD students, since they are (anecdotally) an ethnically and culturally diverse cohort, as well as being one of the most aware in terms of EDI. Moreover, feedback from international PhD students suggests many are keen to join the staff body after graduation. Further increasing the number of PhD students from minority ethnic communities could be achieved by creating ringfenced funded PhD studentships.

Alongside recruitment of staff, targeted appointments of Research Associates and volunteers (see [Volunteer pipeline](#)) may also provide useful mechanisms to widen engagement, bring new perspectives, and fill gaps in expertise.

Unpaid Honorary Associateships have been previously conferred as a lifelong honour to recognise distinguished services and provide 'official status' to those who continue to contribute actively to RBGE's work. These could be reinstated to amplify the status of researchers, including early career researchers, in the Global South⁷, providing them with access to the collections held at RBGE and opportunities for mentoring by RBGE staff.

2. Volunteer pipeline

Volunteering emerged repeatedly in our review as a potential pathway to enhancing diversity within the institution. 63% of respondents to our community surveys (19 out of the 30 responses) said they would like to volunteer with RBGE.

We currently have around 200 volunteers, making them a significant component of the RBGE community. Our volunteers provide vital services across the organisation and make an important contribution to institutional culture and the visitor experience. Given their number and public visibility, the diversity of the volunteer body is a key determinant of the inclusivity of the RBGE community as a whole.

At present, a lack of demographic information for volunteers (see section 1) hampers targeting and monitoring interventions to remove barriers and widen participation in the volunteer body. We are nevertheless aware that **we have a low proportion of Asian, Black, mixed and multiple ethnic volunteers**, and that this is in itself likely to discourage applications from people with similar backgrounds.

Other barriers to volunteering include:

- A lack of awareness about volunteering opportunities;
- Financial factors, such as the need to do paid work rather than unpaid volunteering, or the inability to pay for travel to RBGE's Gardens;
- A lack of clear benefits to volunteering at RBGE, including possible pathways to a career and a sense of being part of a community.

These barriers are likely to be particularly felt by minority ethnic communities, who may feel our volunteering programme is 'not for them'. To raise the number of applications from minority ethnic people, we should extend our work with organisations representing minority ethnic groups and develop and publish volunteering opportunities through them. At the same time, we should develop a more supportive and attractive culture for volunteers from minority ethnic backgrounds via mentoring or 'buddy' systems, and further training in racial awareness and bystander intervention. We have already sought advice from [Backbone](#), and [CEMVO Scotland](#), who contributed many ideas to this section.

⁷ The term "Global South" is used to refer to economically disadvantaged countries which are often in the process of industrialising, and which have frequently faced colonisation or exploitation by Global Northern countries (particularly Europe). While the term is not strictly geographical (i.e. Australia and New Zealand are in the Global North) its use acknowledges the fact that countries in the Northern Hemisphere have tended to dominate countries in the Southern.

We want to create targeted and supported volunteering opportunities for people from underrepresented minority ethnic backgrounds. These opportunities must have clear benefits attached, such as the learning and development of transferable skills, or employability. To minimise financial barriers, these could also include ringfenced funded internships for people from underrepresented minority ethnic groups, with a guaranteed minimum Living Wage.

See Recommendation 2.1

We will publicise new and existing volunteering opportunities more widely among local community groups, such as those already involved with our community engagement activities or through our community focus groups, acting on their recommendations of appropriate advertising channels, such as local radio and social media sites, and using appropriately representative imagery. We will work to create a welcoming, supportive community for our volunteers.

See Recommendations 2.2 and 2.3

3. Education

Formal education at RBGE spans early years, primary, secondary and tertiary (both further and higher education) courses, lifelong learning and continuing professional development, and certified professional qualifications. It also includes our online suite of programmes, available through [PropaGate](#) to learners across the globe.

As noted, ethnicity data is currently not collected for our students (Section 1), making it difficult to set EDI targets, monitor and benchmark progress. Several of RBGE's courses are delivered in partnership with other institutions: MSc students are co-registered with the University of Edinburgh, and HND/BSc students with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC; degrees awarded by the University of Glasgow). We aim to work closely with these institutions moving forward, both on data collection and more widely on racial justice and student support services (see [Support](#)).

We recognise the vital importance of positive childhood experiences with nature in encouraging a lifelong relationship – and perhaps career in – environment, botany, or horticulture. Ethnicity and socio-economic status have well-established impacts upon children's access to nature. Further and higher education, alongside professional and vocational qualifications, are also extremely important pathways into the industries we represent, so it is important that barriers to education at all levels are identified and removed.

These barriers can appear in multiple areas, and throughout education. Areas for work include: encouraging engagement in childhood and at school; offering support during the course application process; ensuring a supportive and welcoming student experience; and financial support.

Encouraging engagement in childhood and at school

We can encourage childhood engagement in horticulture, science, and the environment by continuing to develop and widen our early years and primary provision, possibly also connecting with schools elsewhere in the world via Learning for Sustainability Scotland's [Connecting Classrooms](#) initiative. At the same time, we will continue to develop our careers programme for secondary school students, including profiling past and current students and staff from minority ethnic groups.

Offering support during the course application process

We should work with our academic partners to support their Widening Participation programmes, and work with schools, colleges etc, to reduce barriers, improve equity, and support potential

applicants from underrepresented groups. We could expand our reach further across Scotland using the Scottish Funding Council's [Access Initiatives](#).

As an international institute, we can look more widely to attract students from overseas and aim particularly to focus – to mutual benefit – on boosting the number of successful applications from the countries and cultures in which our collections originate.

See Recommendation 3.1

Ensuring a supportive and welcoming student experience

The 23 responses to our student survey revealed a strong desire to see course content decolonised and made more relevant to diverse audiences. This finding is supported by further conversations taking place with students by course leaders and tutors. Our students want courses that incorporate the full colonialist context of horticulture and botany, and which are open and honest about the origins of RBGE's collections. Students also express a clear desire for an institutional culture which celebrates the unique contributions brought by an ethnically diverse student population.

Our students, apprentices and work experience trainees from minority ethnic communities must feel welcomed into a community where their experiences and knowledge are valued, and where they will be supported should they experience racism or discrimination in any form.

With this in mind, all existing education materials should be audited to ensure consideration of racial justice and wider representation, and staff training introduced where needed to support change. We intend to introduce material on 'decolonising botany' for the 2021–2022 MSc cohort. There is also enthusiasm among the Education team to create a new course for schools, discussing diversity, ethnicity and racism based around RBGE's collections.

A more inclusive culture among our student body should be fostered by including EDI statements in both prospectuses and syllabuses, and by ongoing discussion of our zero-tolerance of racism and all forms of discrimination, including specifically during induction to all courses (see also codes of conduct in [Workplace culture](#)). We should explore setting up a student anti-racism, or EDI Committee – a step which a majority of students surveyed said they would support.

See recommendation 3.2

Financial support

Our development team have carried out significant research on the availability of scholarships and apprenticeships, and the possibilities of creating new ones. Several of the funding schemes we have identified are also associated with mentorship opportunities to develop future leaders from among minority ethnic communities.

Further possibilities to enhance financial support for students from underrepresented backgrounds include paid summer work placements for secondary school and university students, and training bursaries for students linked to regions and cultures from which the collections held at RBGE originate. We should highlight relevant fellowships, scholarships and bursaries on our website and social media, potentially in multiple languages, and via relevant partners.

Feedback from RBGE's existing donors suggests some interest in setting up new scholarships for both Scotland-based and international students, which we will look at channelling into underrepresented and underprivileged groups.

See Recommendation 3.3

4. Workplace culture

Alongside recruitment policies and practices (see [Recruitment](#)), the continuing maintenance and development of an inclusive, welcoming, safe, supportive and anti-racist workplace is crucial to maintaining a diverse community of staff, volunteers and students.

Survey responses show that our staff clearly recognise the importance of workplace diversity, as indicated by the work of the EDI Group, which is open to any staff member to join. While no specific racial justice work had been undertaken at time of survey, general improvements over the last few years as a consequence of the work of the group were noted. These improvements include EDI initiatives, an increasing sense of openness and willingness to engage, and support for minority staff.

Updates to all policies in our Staff Handbook are underway, and should be conducted in consultation with staff, particularly those from Asian, Black, mixed and multiple ethnic backgrounds, trade unions (e.g., Prospect), and external experts. The facts that 1) RBGE's codes of conduct for staff and trustees do not explicitly mention racism, and 2) that there is no code of conduct for volunteers, Research Associates, visitors, or students were highlighted as another top priority for change. The development of clear, garden-wide codes of conduct will be critical in encouraging individuals to take responsibility for collective workplace culture.

See Recommendations 4.1 and 4.2

The staff survey revealed a strong desire for more and broader conversations on racial justice and anti-racism, alongside training in their core principles. Some staff reported that the demands of their role reduced the time available to engage with existing opportunities. The Visitor Welcome Team, for example, have working schedules which require them to be outside in the gardens when at work, so they cannot easily attend relevant meetings or conversations. Students also reported a lack of information on EDI matters, while volunteers told us they often felt left out of key discussions.

Training and conversations put in place following this report should include all staff, volunteers, and students from all four gardens. Communication strategies and rotas should be carefully considered, building on the successes of communications channels developed during the Covid lockdowns, which staff appreciated.

See Recommendation 4.3

5. Support

An anti-racist organisation will provide support to members of minority ethnic groups, particularly staff, students and volunteers from Asian, Black, mixed and multiple ethnic backgrounds, who may have to negotiate both internal and external pressures related to racism. While support systems exist for both staff and students at RBGE, we identified a need to publicise our existing support mechanisms more widely, and to continue to review their efficacy.

For RBGE staff, the Employee Assistance Programme (provided by ELP Optima) can provide counsellors with specific ethnic backgrounds on request. Members of RBGE's recognised trade union, Prospect, can also consult their union representative in confidence for advice and support. We can also ensure that managers and senior staff receive training in racial awareness, so that they can support a racially diverse workforce.

Since many of our students are formally enrolled at partner institutions (e.g., University of Edinburgh or SRUC), which have their own student support systems, we need to ensure that details of these support systems appear in all relevant handbooks, and that course leaders and supervisors are

aware of them. We can, additionally, investigate extending our own, in-house support system for students, by either replicating or collaborating with the support systems run by our academic partners. Our students expressed a clear need for such support in the light of recent verbal, physical and online racist attacks on students within Edinburgh, which have made our students from Asian, Black, mixed and multiple ethnic groups feel unsafe in parts of the city. As part of a programme of student support, we might additionally investigate setting up English language support or, again, clearly signposting these services where they exist in our academic partners.

See Recommendation 5.1 and 5.2

There should be a proactive and personalised attitude to supporting our community members. All staff should be encouraged to reach out with care, empathy and understanding to those who might be affected by racially traumatising events occurring locally, nationally, or internationally. A direct communication of support to the relevant groups from senior management and the Board of Trustees would be very welcome at times of heightened racial tension, and mechanisms will need to be put in place to facilitate this. Internal communications on racial justice should address fears of any public backlash, and for senior management to emphasize their commitment even in the face of criticism.

We should also engage with network and affinity groups (employee resource groups) at other organisations (such as the University of Edinburgh [Race Equality Network](#)), through the NDPB (Non-Departmental Public Bodies) Equality Forum, and Visit Scotland, and consider development of one at RBGE.

See Recommendation 5.3

Networking outside the institution can be an important source of support and guidance for staff or students from underrepresented minority backgrounds. RBGE students could be signposted to student societies, such as [Edinburgh University African-Caribbean Society](#) or the National Union of Students' [Black Students' Network](#), while staff and students could link with organisations such as [Black British Professionals in STEM](#), [Black Professionals Scotland](#), and the Scottish Trade Union Congress [Black Workers' Committee](#). We should aim to work with partner institutions to invite representatives of these organisations to address our staff and/or students.

6. Language

The use of inclusive language is key to building a workplace environment that is welcoming and respectful of diversity. Language can indicate the sincerity, or otherwise, of organisational commitments to eliminate racism. Issues relating to language were highlighted across RBGE as an area for improvement. Priorities for change are centred around:

- Developing a consistent, inclusive approach to the way we discuss ethnicity, diversity, racism and anti-racism, internally and externally;
- Developing an appropriate mechanism for managing instances of marginalising and offensive language found in materials relating to RBGE's history and collections;
- Educating ourselves around the use of language in all communications moving forward

We aim to reach out to international experts, other Scottish heritage organisations, and local communities for guidance and training on the use of language, and to be responsive to the wishes of our staff, students, volunteers and audiences from Asian, Black, mixed and multiple ethnic backgrounds. We will aim to produce organisational guidelines and a glossary to support staff and

volunteers producing internal and external content across our website and social media, interpretation and course materials, talks, guided tours, internal and external communications, and to support this with relevant training where needed.

See Recommendation 6.1

Historical documents in our archive and collections may contain colonialist, offensive and/or distressing racist language. We should identify and allocate resources to developing appropriate content warning statements – in multiple languages – to notify readers where this appears. We can draw on examples of similar work conducted by the National Library of Scotland, where a dedicated internship project recently reviewed the descriptive practices relating to offensive language and cultural sensitivities in historic documents, or at the Field Museum in Chicago.

See Recommendation 6.2

Scientific names for plants have often been given by Western scientific institutions, and often celebrate their white, European discoverers. This practice erases the Indigenous names for plants, and the Indigenous knowledge systems from which they come, effectively silencing Indigenous people. Just over a quarter of new plant species described by RBGE between 2000 and 2016 were named for people outside the species' country of origin, and predominantly for people of white, British backgrounds. Our naming conventions need to be examined to avoid perpetuating colonialist power structures which emphasise Europe as a “discovering” or “exploratory” force. Postgraduate research could support this work, while workshops and courses could be used to explore and raise awareness of this issue, and to disseminate new guidelines.

See Recommendation 6.3

Related to the previous point, our mission statement – to Explore, Conserve and Explain the World of Plants for a Better Future – was identified as an area for attention since the use of the word ‘explore’ may connect to the practices associated with European colonialism, in particular the activities of the “explorer-scientists” of the time. Its current use by RBGE is intended to reflect the ideal of botanic science as a global, inclusive, and exciting activity – an engagement with discovery – and we should look for ways to make this meaning clear, while acknowledging our connections to the past. Our forthcoming brand development project may provide opportunity to engage with this issue.

See Recommendation 6.4

7. Our historical legacy

The legacy of historic colonialism perpetuates inequality today. Our organisational aims of documenting, protecting, and sharing knowledge of biodiversity are founded on collections and data which derive in many cases from exploitative, colonialist and racist activities. Community surveys and focus groups gave strong support for the transparent and open acknowledgment of RBGE's connections to colonialism, slavery and historic racism. In our focus groups, people from Asian, Black, mixed and multiple ethnic backgrounds emphasised the need for RBGE to act to address this legacy.

Established as a physic garden in 1670, RBGE became one of Europe's premier centres for international plant science, later joined by London's Natural History Museum, and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, as centres of plant expertise. Our history is closely connected to European colonialism: a proportion of the living and preserved specimens in our collections were acquired

through colonialist or bioprospecting expeditions to British colonies, while the larger process of plant transfers across the British Empire was a key element of colonial expansion. The movement of plants around the world during this period of history was fundamentally connected to slavery, exploitation, and racism. It is crucial that we thoroughly investigate our own history and acknowledge and better communicate the connections of our historical collections and data to colonialism and slavery. This is a vital step in the broader project of decolonising the knowledge we curate. We must expand our narratives beyond their traditional focus on Europe, to include the countries and cultures in which the collections originated, striving actively to undo systemic racism where we encounter it.

See Recommendation 7.1

We should rectify past injustices that have seen people left out of RBGE's story. New interpretation materials that specifically credit the diversity of people who contributed to RBGE's history and expertise are an important way to engage with this process. Moving away from an exclusive focus on white, European plant hunters will make the garden feel more accessible to groups who previously may have been excluded. Similarly, telling the story of the gardens in ways that move away from a focus on the Regius Keepers, senior staff, and famous plant collectors – to the exclusion of Indigenous people, junior staff and volunteers – is a key way to reframe and expand the history of the gardens, adding to our sense of collective history.

Historic colonialism is connected to present day environmental degradation via the forced movements of plants and people, the creation of plantations, and the spread of invasive non-native species, pests and pathogens. Focus groups highlighted RBGE's involvement with this and emphasised a need to address it. Some of our current scientific activities could help meet our responsibility here. Several of our collaborative overseas projects – including those in China, Nepal and Tanzania – already carry out relevant work, and this is something that could be reframed and extended, linking racial justice with the IUCN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (see [Overseas working and partnerships](#)).

See Recommendation 7.2

Historic plant specimens collected without permits, permissions, or adherence to access and benefit-sharing agreements can be considered stolen from Indigenous people. Acknowledging where this has occurred is an important first step towards social justice and inclusion. The use of acknowledgment statements – similar to Land Acknowledgments used in many colonised parts of the world to acknowledge the taking of land from Indigenous people – may be a useful way by which RBGE can signal its commitment to these broad aims.

See Recommendation 7.3

Continuing dialogue with other heritage institutions and developing opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange will be helpful here as we move through a process of sector-wide self-examination. Hosting seminars or public lectures on our own history, and that of Scottish and British colonialism – for volunteers, staff, students, and the public – are effective ways to tell our own story in a racially just way, and to communicate the general principles of decolonisation and anti-racism beyond our organisation. Involving speakers and audiences from impacted communities and linking events to existing initiatives such as Black History Month will be crucial here.

Our volunteers will play a key role in exploring and communicating our history through developing and delivering content, talks and tours – particularly if we are successful in encouraging local minority ethnic community members to volunteer. Equipping the volunteers with knowledge and

skills to do this effectively will not only assist here but will further add to the benefits accrued by volunteers in terms of skills enhancement.

An exhibition exploring colonial themes – Silence in the Archives – is planned for Inverleith House in 2023. This is a good opportunity to broaden our perspective, build capacity, create a new talent pipeline, attract new audiences, and develop long-term relationships. It could also be used as a springboard for additional historical research, involving researchers and students from relevant ethnic groups, for which funding should be sought.

Asylum seekers and refugees have often had their education and career disrupted by the political legacies of colonialism around the world. The creation of specific learning and development opportunities and employment pipelines for forced migrants would be a further way by which RBGE can address its own responsibility as a consequence of global history (see [Education](#)).

8. Overseas working and partnerships

Our work aims to address the biodiversity crisis and climate emergency, support sustainable development, and promote a green recovery. RBGE staff, research associates, volunteers and students act in partnership with hundreds of organisations, communities, and individuals in around 40 countries, many in the Global South. While engaged in this work, RBGE has responsibilities to confront and acknowledge our colonial legacy, to ensure that past inequalities are not repeated or reinforced, and to address historic injustice.

RBGE is often the more privileged partner in collaborations, as a product of our organisation's size, location in the Global North, and structural and historic relationship to colonialism. In addition, Western viewpoints which reinforce racist and colonial attitudes are embedded in the principles of science itself. It is important to take active steps to acknowledge the contributions and expertise of Indigenous people and Indigenous scholars to fields like botany and horticulture.

RBGE already takes part in multiple, fully collaborative, co-creative projects with local partner organisations in communities around the world, including South America (where we help coordinate the [DryFlor](#) network), Vietnam (partnering with the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology), [Nepal](#), [Tanzania](#), [Tajikistan](#) and Yemen ([Soqotra](#)). In many of these projects we seek to engage with and amplify Indigenous and local knowledge systems and environmental stewardship techniques to achieve long-term, sustainable natural resource management and conservation.

See Recommendation 8.1

Our overseas work aims to co-develop in-country research capacity, with the objective of making ongoing underpinning capacity development by RBGE unnecessary. Formal and informal twinning agreements with overseas institutes – as we have in China with Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden and Kunming Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Science, for example – can help forge equitable, long-lasting connections via mentoring, exchange, and shared learning opportunities. These aims can be supported by our Research Ethics Policy, which provides clear ethical guidance on all projects involving people and communities, at home or overseas.

A series of internal and external conversations around fairness and equity will be key to establishing a set of consistent standards for collaborative working, applying to local and global, scientific and horticultural partnerships. Such standards should include, for example, ensuring all projects are co-designed, that in-country voices are heard, and that expectations regarding benefit sharing are set on both sides (see [Access and benefit-sharing](#)). Training will be key in helping staff meet these

standards, and we should seek to develop a toolkit to support our staff and students in planning equitable overseas research.

See Recommendation 8.2

We seek to amplify the work of our overseas partners by taking an inclusive approach to awarding the distinguished RBGE Medal, which recognises outstanding individual contributions in any field related to our work. Recent awardees included Dr Saw Leng Guan, previous Director of Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM)'s Forest Biodiversity Division and FRIM Research Fellow (2016), and Dr Sanjeev Kumar Rai, Director General of the Department of Plant Resources, Nepal (2018), with further overseas colleagues to be recognised in 2021/22.

9. Access and benefit-sharing

Collections

We should work to ensure that access to our living and preserved collections is fair and equitable, and that benefits from our scientific activities are equitably distributed. A key component of this work is ensuring that our Herbarium, Library, and Archive collections are accessible online. At present, a sizeable portion of our collections – such as the Library Reprints Collection – are accessible only on-site via handwritten or print records, limiting access to those researchers who have the resources to travel to RBGE and/or to interpret written English catalogues.

While physical access to the collections for some underrepresented groups may be facilitated through our membership of schemes such as the EU [Synthesys](#) programme, online cataloguing is crucial for facilitating access.

With the aim of decolonising our collections, we should ensure that our online and card catalogue records contain clear information on each item's provenance and creators, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge and names are recorded, and should ensure that the work of local or Indigenous botanists is credited. We will need an accession and registration policy, developed in close consultation with people of the countries and cultures of origin of the collections. Particular attention should be paid to documenting conservation living collections, to facilitate repatriation and conservation translocations, recognising that repatriation policies may need to be responsive and flexible.

See Recommendation 9.1

Making the collections fully accessible will require substantial management and curation – particularly for living conservation collections. High curation and records management standards also underpin potential for future repatriation of data and knowledge.

Digitization of our herbarium collections has been a major focus in recent years, with over 500,000 of our three million specimens already available to view in high resolution online on the RBGE [website](#) or via GBIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facility). The Archive has thus far received less investment in terms of access than the Herbarium and is yet to be catalogued and disseminated in detail. We should audit our archive – and invest further in a comprehensive process of cataloguing and digitization to fully maximise benefits to all from this unique asset.

While online access to digitised specimens and data is central to improving access, digital access raises equity issues, primarily regarding connectivity and language. We could explore making core facilities such as the Library, Archives, Herbarium and Living Collection Catalogues and Taxonomic

Resource Centres multi-lingual, although this would require substantial support from translators and interpreters. We should also align with and advocate to global data providers such as [GBIF](#), and crucially should dovetail with provision of opportunities and support for professionals in the Global South.

See Recommendation 9.2

Scientific output and benefit-sharing

Our scientific and horticultural output is relevant to diverse, global audiences, and needs to be widely accessible in language, content and format. We recognise that holding data from non-English-speaking cultures and countries within an English-based system presents a barrier to access that can only be mitigated at the curation and records management stage.

Many projects already produce accessible, user-friendly outputs, such as *Plants and You*, a series of bespoke identification guides to the plants of Nepal, in English and Nepali. We are already on track to achieving Open Access to all scientific papers authored/co-authored at RBGE via the [Research Scotland](#) repository. Both our in-house journals (*Edinburgh Journal of Botany* and *Sibbaldia*) have moved to a 'diamond open access' model, whereby all papers are free to publish and free to read, and *Edinburgh Journal of Botany* has recently implemented dual-language abstracts. Our [website](#) is available in multiple languages via Google Translate.

We will continue to promote a culture where benefit-sharing is seen not only as a procedural necessity, but as a form of compensation to Indigenous peoples and a means of achieving meaningful collaborations to the benefit of all. Our Research Ethics Policy requires researchers to consider the issue of equitable benefit-sharing, providing a consistent framework whereby the equitable distribution of benefit is formally agreed by partners prior to research taking place. Our Material Transfer Agreement ensures that the use of material already in RBGE's collections is compliant with the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and its [Nagoya Protocol](#). Increased communication between different research teams may be necessary to determine a full picture of existing practice, opportunities for training and collaboration, and potential connections with international organisations among which we could promote greater equity in knowledge exchange.

See Recommendation 9.3

10. Inclusion and community engagement

Everyone should be able to access, and benefit from, the health, wellbeing and learning opportunities offered by RBGE's Gardens, collections and expertise. We are aware that members of minority ethnic communities may not always feel as welcome or comfortable as others in our Gardens, on our courses, or at our events.

Our survey and focus groups suggest this may be partly due to low numbers of minority ethnic staff or volunteers visible in the gardens, while community survey participants indicated that they wanted the Garden to become a more inclusive and diverse space in general.

To no small extent, following the recommendations in other sections of this report – for example increasing staff and volunteer diversity – will lead to the Gardens becoming more welcoming places for diverse audiences to visit. Other possibilities include generating and publicly displaying a code of conduct for the Gardens, which turns our commitments to anti-racism and diversity in general into a set of principles we expect all staff, volunteers, students and visitors to follow. This would make it clearer that the Gardens are a welcoming place for everyone, and that disrespect and prejudice will

not be tolerated. To back this up, we will need to roll out further anti-racism and bystander training to all our staff, and in particular our public facing teams.

See Recommendation 10.1 and 10.2

Regular skills-sharing and co-learning programmes including members of a range of minority ethnic groups are delivered by the Community Engagement team. These activities – often centred around the Botanic Cottage and Engaging Gardens project – involve around 80 different community groups, more than 15 of which represent people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Capacity is limited, and groups are prioritised on a ‘first come, first served’ basis, which may mean some groups who would benefit from engagement are being left out. For example, there are currently no African or Caribbean groups among those engaging with our programmes and activities.

We intend to continue close dialogue with the community groups who took part in our Edinburgh focus groups, and to encourage them, along with others who attend events at the Botanic Cottage, to enjoy the wider Gardens. To do this, we could extend invitations to events, exhibitions, or collection tours, or offer our spaces for use in their own events. We should investigate the potential to work towards paid consultation and co-curation of projects with these contacts, and ensure they are aware of volunteering, employment and learning and development opportunities. We also need to build relationships with community groups beyond Edinburgh, through the Regional Gardens.

We want to ensure that minority ethnic groups feel welcome in the Gardens, and that they hear about the work we are doing: Community focus groups highlighted our overseas activities as areas about which they would in particular like to hear more.

See Recommendation 10.3

11. Public engagement and communication

Our archives, expertise, and influence must become more available to minority ethnic communities, artists, and other collaborators. Public engagement and clear, accessible communications will be crucial in achieving this.

Public Engagement at RBGE comprises multiple spheres of activity: community engagement (see [Inclusion and community engagement](#)); interpretation and design; creative programmes; and marketing, media relations and digital engagement.

Interpretation and design

Interpretation is the audience-focused explanation of a subject, where the central aim is to create emotional and intellectual connections with the interests of the audience. Equitable interpretation materials comprise audience-targeted content that demonstrates cultural and historic awareness through accessible and inclusive design, while catering for those with specific access needs

Much of the interpretation found in RBGE’s Gardens may be untargeted, UK-focused, or outdated in presentation and, as such, is inaccessible to various groups. Resolving these issues is a long-term and resource-intensive task, requiring a clear and consistent new model. We have responded to this need with the expansion of our Interpretation and Design Team to upgrade our existing interpretation offer, and to ensure we take an intersectional approach when developing new materials, e.g., for Edinburgh Biomes. This will involve a formal evaluation and consultation processes, with input from minority ethnic stakeholders and other audiences with limited engagement.

Focus groups suggested that minority ethnic people may feel more comfortable visiting the Regional Gardens in groups than alone, so we will explore funded visits to those gardens for community groups with which we engage. In this we could work with [Backbone](#), who regularly hold learning and development opportunities and networking retreats for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in rural parts of Scotland.

Creative programmes

Our Creative Programmes encompass exhibitions, events and art collections, often centred on Edinburgh's Inverleith House. Significant international relationships have already been built with both artists and audiences from a range of backgrounds. Through the recent repositioning of Inverleith House as 'Climate House,' we are harnessing the arts to inspire awareness, dialogue and the motivation to protect our collective future on Earth, while amplifying the voices of the most vulnerable. We should work to develop partnerships with minority ethnic creators that foster the co-creation of knowledge and content, strengthening and embedding the presence and influence of artists from diverse ethnic backgrounds working in diverse cultural and spiritual traditions. Specific support will be needed to allow artists and collaborators to develop their practice and knowledge, and to create a physical and cultural environment of safety for artists from minority ethnic backgrounds, in the light of ongoing online and physical violence against Black artists and their work in Scotland.

See Recommendation 11.1

Marketing, media relations and digital engagement

While we have recently audited our web presence to ensure accessibility via compliance with [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#), **we are aware that our marketing may not previously have been targeted sufficiently to reach and engage members of minority ethnic groups.** A tendency to overrepresent white people in images in online and print media and marketing materials was widely noted, by community focus groups as well as staff. While we have already taken steps to address this, a new RBGE brand development project began in winter 2021, which will instigate further improvements in these areas. We have initiated a more inclusive approach to image selection in our publications and online, which will help us engage further with a wider range of audiences, and increase the diversity of our potential volunteers, students and employees. While we already take an inclusive approach to inviting speakers for public events from seminars to major conferences, for example our hosted debate [Halting Plant Extinction](#), we need a core set of principles and standards for public engagement, ensuring that the work of our content creators is accessible for all.

See Recommendations 11.2 and 11.3

Social media were identified by staff as a significant area of opportunity, particularly for reaching new, younger and more diverse audiences including academic and activist groups, engaging with global realities and topical issues, and inspiring potential scientists and horticulturists of the future. We can also use our social media channels to springboard Black or minority ethnic content creators, or to provide a platform for Black or minority ethnic experts, artists, and activists to engage with our audiences, perhaps via time-limited 'takeovers' of our social media accounts.

See Recommendation 11.4

New online content will continue to prioritise inclusivity and anti-racism in line with our EDI action plan, and accessibility in line with digital accessibility guidelines. We also need to be responsive to comments from people questioning the relevance of inclusivity or anti-racism in a botanic or

horticultural context so training key staff in confidence and awareness, and supporting them with relevant policies and processes, will be crucial.

Social media also has an important role to play in sharing our progress on racial justice itself. Community focus groups indicated they would welcome honest posts on our colonial legacy, alongside a clear explanation of current and future plans regarding racial justice, decolonisation, EDI, and our strategies in general. They also told us that that existing public statements such as [our Statement for Racial Justice](#) did not include enough information on who was involved or consulted and how change would be achieved. Future communication must aim at full transparency, use a range of channels, and make provision for full accessibility. This may help to encourage closer engagement with target audiences and would align with other heritage organisations in Scotland on a similar journey such as the National Museum of Scotland and V&A Dundee.

12. Leadership

RBGE is managed by an Executive Team made up of the Regius Keeper and the Directors of our six Divisions: Science, Enterprise and Communication, Resources and Planning, Development, Horticulture and Learning, and Estates and Facilities. We are governed by a Board of nine Trustees appointed on four-yearly re-appointable terms by Scottish Ministers.

The makeup of the Board of Trustees is recognised as a symbol of the ambitions of any organisation. A survey of the Board, conducted in August 2021, found that all current Trustees were white (including one white minority Trustee). **Our aim should be to have a diverse Executive Team and Board of Trustees** that reflect, at minimum, the ethnic makeup of Scotland, and ideally the global reach of our activities.

See Recommendation 12.1

To increase Board diversity, we should advertise vacancies via appropriate channels and umbrella groups and directly to local community groups. We should advocate to Scottish Government to appoint Trustees from underrepresented backgrounds, and work to remove barriers to participation, including financial barriers.

RBGE has recently appointed a new Director of Resources and Planning, with a background in EDI in higher education and continuing professional development environments in national and international contexts. This has led to the additional recruitment of an EDI Manager, signifying RBGE's ongoing commitment to embedding EDI in all our activities.

It is important that any actions towards achieving racial justice, and EDI objectives more broadly, have clear support from leaders (i.e., the Board, Regius Keeper and Directors), and that internal communications from Leadership are clear, supportive, and encouraging. We should however avoid a 'top-down' approach: All actions must be informed fully by the views and experiences of stakeholders within RBGE and the communities with which we work.

To do this, we will explore opportunities for paid consultation among relevant groups. This could take the form of external EDI advisors or an advisory group including local, national and international representatives of groups with protected characteristics, with appropriate honoraria for membership.

See Recommendation 12.2

RBGE should also show leadership on national and international platforms to challenge the policies of governments and funders that result in inequality. For instance, equitable international partnerships are impacted by access to funding, freedom to travel, access to online data and meetings, and the need to meet academic standards determined by scientists in the Global North.

Internally we must not allow the burden of EDI work to fall disproportionately upon our colleagues from the groups most affected by discrimination and marginalisation. The work of our own EDI group continues to be invaluable, and we must ensure it is appropriately credited within work plans.

See Recommendation 12.3

Our aim is that working towards racial justice – and achieving our EDI objectives more broadly – will be a core aspect of our activities. Staff will be encouraged to embody best practice in pushing for wider social change, leading by example in adopting anti-racist practices and standpoints wherever and whenever we engage, for instance as editors, reviewers, or members of external committees.

Final reflections: Translating intent into action

This review is the starting point of a far-reaching commitment to eradicate structural racism, and forms part of a broader movement to ensure justice, equity and inclusion among all those with whom we work and upon whom our work impacts.

That commitment depends on a programme of concrete action, which our community focus groups specifically asked us to develop. Accordingly, the recommendations in this report have been translated into rigorous, measurable, time-limited actions which will be shared openly and for which we are held accountable.

Our next steps will be:

1. RBGE Board of Trustees to monitor our progress against a prioritised Action Plan with timescales, milestones and measurable outcomes;
2. To embed racial justice into a fuller version of our current EDI strategy and action plan, and thereby into our culture, structures, policies and procedures;
3. To take the agreed actions towards achieving racial justice;
4. To monitor and benchmark progress, and develop mechanisms for ensuring accountability;
5. To communicate progress in appropriate and accessible ways to all stakeholders;
6. To listen to and act upon feedback.

We must be transparent, consistent and accountable when embedding racial justice into our wider actions on EDI, making full consideration of intersectional issues and demonstrating awareness of barriers to access. Our community focus groups made clear that we must communicate our commitments and progress publicly via regular updates on multiple relevant platforms, including social media feeds, the RBGE website and press releases. Continued consultation among all stakeholder groups is essential, not least because response rates to previous surveys among certain groups (e.g., volunteers, community representatives) were low. Local community groups requested that future consultations be direct, rather than through a third party.

The recommendations made throughout this report will form the basis of our action going forward and will be prioritised according to the findings from the community focus groups, and the responses from staff, students and volunteers. These latter were highly consistent, giving us a clear internal steer on important actions to take, but we should be aware that they were generated by a predominantly white group, and may not match the priorities that would emerge from a more diverse group. All cohorts highlighted the need for resources (i.e., funding and staff time) to be

allocated to action these priorities. Actioning this report will be a key priority for the EDI Manager, and the recommendations identified therein will be governed by the appropriate EDI group tasked with overseeing the delivery of all EDI actions across RBGE.

It will be essential to evaluate and document the results of our actions – highlighting changes that have been made and their impact – while holding ourselves accountable for their success or failure. This will help us revise and develop an ongoing action plan to achieve meaningful improvements in racial justice. Our actions and their impact will be reported publicly, e.g., in annual reports.

Benchmarking against other organisations will help us assess our progress towards racial justice. We note that most organisations in Scotland are in only the preliminary stages of work to achieve racial justice, and lessons may be learned more readily by comparison with co-sectoral organisations across the UK or internationally, adjusted for a Scottish context. One possible way to assist with monitoring and benchmarking would be to investigate charters such as the Business in the Community [Race at Work Charter](#) or [Advance HE Race Equality Charter](#).

In working on these aims, we recognise that social justice is intersectional and cumulative. This means that a) we should not lose sight of the wider systems of oppression and marginalisation that work alongside race and ethnicity, and which cause particular problems for e.g., Black LGBTQ+ people, and b) that our work on racial justice has the capacity to make improvements for other protected characteristics, and vice versa. Our aim is to make our Gardens and all our activities welcoming and accessible to everyone.