ABSTRACT
Structural racism and white supremacy are hot topics that spark debate amongst UK archivists. This paper makes use of a survey created as part of a Masters in Archives and Records Management at the University of Liverpool in 2020, to examine archivists’ perceptions of white supremacy in UK archives. It demonstrates that although there is a strong appetite for change within the sector, white supremacy can be seen to influence some archivists’ judgment, and decisive action is needed to prevent this from impeding the positive progress of anti-racist activities towards countering the negative impact of white supremacy.

KEYWORDS
Archivists; white supremacy; white fragility; white privilege; structural racism; white exceptionalism

Introduction
This paper offers a picture of professional sentiment towards issues of white supremacy in the UK’s archives sector using research data gathered for a dissertation survey created as part of a Masters in Archives and Records Management at the University of Liverpool in 2020.

The survey for the dissertation made use of the statement to “End Structural Racism In Britain’s Archives Sector,” which professionals were invited to sign in April to June 2020. Note that throughout this paper the statement to “End Structural Racism In Britain’s Archives Sector” will be referred to as The Statement.¹

The Statement was created as a result of workshops held on 12 December, 2019 in London, Liverpool and St Andrews, where archivists discussed and explored issues facing the profession relating to unequal power dynamics. These workshops were prompted by slow-moving progress relating to addressing issues of diversity and inclusion in the sector, and by a Twitter debate at the ARA Conference 2019. The debate was triggered when someone shared concerns on Twitter that they were the only person of colour present, and @ARAPubAffairs, represented by ‘a senior white man,’ continually contested this view and anyone who spoke out in support of it, demonstrating a defensiveness and discomfort that ‘can be understood as the display of white fragility.’ This resulted in a statement being issued by the Archives and Records Association, and closure of the @ARAPubAffairs account.²
By interrogating the survey’s findings, this paper establishes if white supremacy and its impact on praxis is understood by archivists; it examines enthusiasm amongst participants for engaging in the anti-racist actions contained in *The Statement*; and it observes the impact white supremacy has had on archivists’ personal judgment and skills.

**Methodology**

Whilst *The Statement* concerns itself with actions to eradicate structural racism, the study this article is based upon, asked for UK archivists’ perceptions of white supremacy. The term ‘white supremacy,’ is associated with extremism of racial hatred exemplified by such far-right groups as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the US. This association prompts denial when applied to UK history, heritage, behaviours and practices. However, without white supremacy, structural racism and historical under-representation of ethnic minorities in UK archives would not exist. It was important, therefore, that literature used to examine the impact of white supremacy in UK archives and archival praxis focused on UK sources, but in exploring definitions of ‘white supremacy’ and other related terms such as ‘white fragility,’ US sources that coined the terms, or created alternative discourse, have been included, to present a rounded perspective.

Research for the Masters’ dissertation was conducted using an anonymous questionnaire. It contained a variety of multiple choice and free-text questions, gathered a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data, and split into five sections:

- **Demographic** (see Table 1), collecting information about:
  - age range starting at 16 and extending to 75 to take in volunteers and apprentices;
  - type of institution;
  - paid or voluntary, with length of service and level of responsibility, indicating whether the person works alone and is ultimately responsible, or works as part of a team;
- The participant’s understanding of white supremacy;
- Three questions as to whether white supremacy has impacted archival praxis relating to record creation, decision-making, and description (see Table 4);
- Did they sign *The Statement* (for more details, see Table 2);
- For each anti-racist action within *The Statement* (see Table 3), whether the participant believes it can be accomplished in the next year, what help is needed and if it is deemed impossible, why?

Anonymity was important to ensure a good response, as participants were being given the opportunity to provide free text responses to questions about how white supremacy has impacted the profession in the UK. With the workforce being largely female (78.1%) and of low ethnic diversity, 96.7% identifying as white, and with anonymity being of great importance, care was taken over the demographic questions, resulting in ethnicity and gender being excluded.

The questionnaire was distributed to UK archivists via the Archives-NRA professional email list service supported by JISCMail and to Archives and Records Association related accounts on Twitter, inclusive of @ARANorthWest, @ARAnewprofs, @ARALondonRegion, @ARAScot, @ARANorthern, @ARASouthEast, @archivehour, and @UKNatArcSector.
Archivists outside the UK were excluded via a preliminary question at the start of the survey, necessary because of the timescales required to gain additional ethical approval. Records managers were also excluded because the survey was making use of The Statement and its associated actions intended for archivists.

Possible problems with distributing the survey in this way and maintaining anonymity were self-selection bias and its reliance on archivists engaging with social media. As such, the data is more likely to represent the view of archivists who have strong feelings about the topic, and offers a sense of the variety of views held, rather than a quantitative analysis of the perception of the profession.

Definitions of ‘white supremacy’

Before going any further, it is worth gathering some information about how ‘white supremacy’ is defined. US journalists Kevin Drum and John McWhorter both wrote about how the term ‘white supremacy’ is being used provocatively to describe actions or events instead of using the term ‘racism.’ Both believe the term ‘white supremacy’ is being abused and is best used to describe the extremist activities of far-right groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Robin DiAngelo challenges this viewpoint stating: ‘White resistance to the term white supremacy prevents us from examining this system. If we cannot identify it, we cannot interrupt it.’

Briana Toole’s study reinforces this point in finding white supremacy to be ‘A resilient epistemological system’ because it is ‘a method of social control that succeeds’ due to it being ‘difficult to fully identify or describe.’

Frances Lee Ansley when giving their definition of the concept, makes a point of stating they are not referring to white supremacist hate groups, but:

- a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.

Ansley’s definition shows there to be multiple nuances involved, and her reflection on politics, economics, culture, and thinking is used by Mills. Mills’ discussion of white supremacy’s far-reaching consequences and potential impact, presents us with six ‘spheres of manifestation,’ and these are used (appearing italicized) in the review of literature, when analysing the lasting effects white supremacy has had on the UK archives sector:

- Juridico-Political Sphere – where the state and legal systems use their power to enforce standards and practices in their institutions, that disadvantages nonwhites rendering them to be instruments of suppression;
- Economic Sphere – focusing on how nonwhites have been exploited for their labour and lands through various flavours of colonialism and other forms of exploitation;
- Cultural Sphere – where there is a rejection of non-European culture as savage and inarticulate;
- Cognitive-Evaluative Sphere – relating to group privilege and its rules, where pseudo-scientific reasoning is developed and rules are formulated to subordinate a person of colour, for instance, denoting them of an inferior culture when compared to other cultures;
Somatic Sphere – focusing on how a person looks, their skin colour being mocked through concepts like minstrelsy, leading to the person trying to change themselves, e.g. through skin bleaching;
Metaphysical Sphere – where ethnic minorities are seen to be sub-human, and White people are raised up to be some sort of higher echelon of being.

Each ‘sphere’ inter-relates with others perpetuating a system of White power, and through their description, Mills articulates how the politics and society of White people have developed ways of executing power over marginalized ethnicities.10

The British anti-racist educator, Layla Saad, provides this definition at the start of her book Me And White Supremacy: ‘a racist ideology that is based upon the belief that white people are superior in many ways to people of other races and that therefore, white people should be dominant over other races.’11

In her workbook, Saad also provides the reader with definitions of other terms associated with white supremacy, that are useful when considering how people interact and communicate about white supremacy and with one another:

‘white privilege,’ coined by Peggy McIntosh who likens it to ‘an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances ....... blank cheques;’
‘white fragility,’ coined by Robin DiAngelo ‘a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves;’
‘tone policing,’ a practice whereby those with white privilege draw attention away from the content of what is being said by criticizing how the matter is expressed;
‘white superiority,’ the racist belief ‘people with white or white-passing skin are superior to and therefore deserve to dominate over people with brown or black skin;’
‘white exceptionalism,’ where a person with white privilege considers themselves ‘exempt from white supremacy,’ because they are or believe themselves to be anti-racist.12

**Literature review**

In 2015 the Archives and Records Association and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals reported a general acceptance within the profession that archives are dominated by a White workforce, showing evidence of the state and legal systems’ Juridico-Political impact: ‘96.7% of the workforce identify as “white” compared to 87.5% identifying as “white” in UK Labour Force Survey statistics.’13

The National Archives’ workforce development strategy looks to resolving issues relating to diversity within the profession,14 however, when considering the absence of ethnic minorities from archives, the Economic sphere’s impact and injustices of colonialism together with what could be the Cultural sphere’s exclusion of the victims and their non-European heritage, provide further evidence of the impact of white supremacy.15 To counteract this, individual organizations, such as the Black Cultural Archives have been set up to preserve materials. So what is it about our archival heritage that has led us into this situation?

Hannah Ishmael compares and contrasts the practices in the UK of Hilary Jenkinson and, in the US, of his contemporary, Arthur Schomburg, with the intention of emphasizing the importance of Schomburg’s contribution to the profession.16 Both Jenkinson and
Schomburg shared common beliefs in preserving archival material through defined theories and practices, and both were key in setting up institutions and organizations. But their theoretical practices diverge.

Ishmael tells us Jenkinson was ‘a civil servant – at the heart of colonial administration,’ and ‘colonial thinking has influenced the development of English archival theory and practice,’ and the contents of Jenkinson’s Manual.\textsuperscript{17} Jenkinson, was concerned with what is known to be and already exists, resulting today in our knowledge of the absence, or ignorance, of ethnic minorities in archival collections. With the White society of his time, Jenkinson exhibited white supremacy, for instance, in his \textit{Cognitive-Evaluative} differentiation between Black Indians and Black Africans he stereotyped Black Africans as being of an inferior culture, resulting in them being either misrepresented or absent from state archives.\textsuperscript{18}

Schomburg at an early age was told by a teacher that ‘African people had no history.’ Forever after, he championed Pan-African heritage through the Harlem Renaissance,\textsuperscript{19} advocating the seeking out and finding of what is undiscovered and must be recorded and preserved, encouraging others to set up their own independent concerns, showing the profession a path of recovery and reparation.\textsuperscript{20} The legacy of Schomburg’s work and Pan Africanism has a direct and indirect connection to ‘three Black-led archives in London: the Black Cultural Archives, the George Padmore Institute and the Huntley Collection held at London Metropolitan Archives.’\textsuperscript{21} In his writing of a chapter for the \textit{New Negro} anthology, “The Negro Digs Up His Past,” Schomburg states:

> The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future. Though it is orthodox to think of America as the one country where it is unnecessary to have a past, what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes the prime social necessity for the Negro.\textsuperscript{22}

Andrew Flinn reflects on developments after the Second World War, when there were massive movements within UK archives in changing how history was to record society, politically and otherwise, in academia and beyond. The objective was to give a voice to the silenced, and to seek out innovative ways of collecting, for instance through use of autobiographies and oral testimonies.\textsuperscript{23} But Ian Johnston’s article, “Whose History Is It Anyway?” points out failure to fully develop such practices, as records of the elite still occupy most space, testifying little provision has been made to provide a voice for Black organizations or people.\textsuperscript{24} Johnston states there is a need to understand better the underlying \textit{archival mission} and the professional theory needed to support gathering material from marginalized communities. Significant transformations of procedures are required. These vary from archive collection policies that give free rein to the archivist over what is gathered, to having a refined, clear and focused mission statement that contributes value to the aims and objectives of the organization concerned with preserving the heritage of those marginalized.\textsuperscript{25}

Flinn reminds us that the archival profession works across a plethora of types of organization i.e. public, private, national, local, specialist, regional. Each may need to engage marginalized communities, requiring the building of interpersonal skills, as well as rethinking archival praxis, policies and procedures.\textsuperscript{26} Flinn says community collections can also present problems, as some items are seen to be ephemeral and lack value. This can include oral testimonies, their reliance on memory, and individual personal emotion and expression, rendering them prone to error.\textsuperscript{27} The \textit{Juridico-Political}, \textit{Economic} and \textit{Cultural} spheres of white supremacy are demonstrated in how oppressed people are prevented by those wielding \textit{Juridico-Political} power to \textit{Economically} exploit those who are regarded of
a lesser Culture from acquiring the necessary skills to facilitate other means of communication. Johnston points out we can see this in countries where literacy skills are scant and non-existent. Yet these are places where the oral tradition is central to cultural heritage, and Flinn emphasizes the importance of balancing off these perceived flaws in oral history records, against how the information can be used and how rare it is.

Achieving reparation and recovery and arresting the perpetuation of Mills’ spheres of white supremacy is a long-term necessity, according to Johnston, requiring greater investment of resources and better planning of priorities towards ‘creation of clearly focused and more proactive acquisition strategies.’ He reminds us of Howard Zinn’s coining of the Activist Archivist concept in 1970, when Zinn addressed the Society of American Archivists, telling them they needed ‘to abandon the screen of professionalism and neutrality in order to humanize their ordinary work and not to limit their concern with political issues to their spare time.’ Charlotte Berry’s extensive experience as an archivist at the University of Exeter complimented Liz MacKeith’s experience of working with Black cultural heritage, their Activist Archivist collaboration creating the university’s first exhibition for Black History month. Their humanizing of the collections being used, gave visitors a unique experience through the voicing of a forgotten and silenced slave’s life, supporting the view that Archival Activism has the potential power to counter discrimination and facilitate social change.

As well as information being missing, the Activist Archivist is also challenged by the presence of terminology that is not fully understood, but continues to be used and maintained. Jasspreet Thethi champions and speaks out for all who are marginalized in her blogs. Thethi reminds us of damaging processes in the past where colonizers viewed ethnic minorities as savages, an attitude reflected in discussions about archival description impacting information maintained for these and other marginalized groups, such as LGBTQIA+, disabled, neuro-divergent and gender non-conforming people. This can result in misinformation, absences, and the use of inappropriate terminology. Thethi provides us with an excellent example showing the Somatic and Metaphysical manifestations of white supremacy, where she tells us about the description of a Khoikhoi woman with protuberant buttocks, ‘a female Hottentot.’ The Somatic-Metaphysical term ‘Hottentot’ whilst bringing awareness to the person’s appearance, i.e. the Somatic, also Metaphysically frames the unusual clicking sounds of Khoikhoi speech negatively, the term ‘Hottentot’ coming from the German for stuttering or stammering.

Caroline Bressey’s research tells us the stories she found of Black people in Victorian Britain. Specification of ethnicity as a demographic factor was not required in the Census till 1991 indicating a reason for historical under-representation. Before this, the denoting of someone as being Black is random, and if it exists, tends to be buried in record detail, or only evident by looking at photographs. An example similar to Jenkinson’s Cognitive-Evaluation where a Black African person is regarded as of inferior culture when compared with a Black British person is evident, and there are other examples of possible racial prejudice found, one being where a governess reports White people being given preference for work, another where skin colour is recorded at birth to see how many generations are needed for the colour to become white. Bressey points out that even though British archives appear on the surface to only record White people, the stories of people who are Black or of mixed ethnicity are present but rendered invisible, stating ‘The imagined Whiteness of our national archives is one of the most blatant examples of the Whitening of Britishness.'
Alicia Chilcott’s article of 2017 describes more recent research relating to protocols for describing racially offensive language in archival records. It establishes ‘A “good, better, best” practice model’ by examining how practices that engage with indigenous culture and related material compare in the UK with those in North America and Australia. The model can be flexed to fit within the limitations of the archive’s available resources to deal with the extent of the problem, with the objective of achieving improvements that can be built upon as time and finances allow.\textsuperscript{45}

It is only in more recent years that archivists have been directly called to action in the UK, some examples being:

- The #ARAGlasgowManifesto at ARA 2018;\textsuperscript{46}
- Jasspreet Theti’s delivery of “Empowered Collaboration” at ARA 2019;\textsuperscript{47} and
- The Statement.

These examples and others including Chilcott’s can be found in “Against Whitewashing,” an article that describes anti-racist work in British archives from 2017 till the death of George Floyd on 25th May, 2020, an event that marked a period of protest and anti-racist activism worldwide during a global pandemic. The paper ‘offers a statement of the problem of white supremacy in the UK’s archives sector,’ and reports on organizations such as the Black Cultural Archives, The National Archives and the Archives and Records Association, including the efforts of other grassroots sources giving overviews of their organizational development, painting a picture for the reader of why each came to be and the objectives of their anti-racist endeavours. The paper describes what happened on Twitter at the “ARA 2019” conference, and reports on the meetings that happened in December 2019 resulting in the creation of The Statement. It concludes by pointing out that whilst the profession is more engaged with issues, one of their greatest problems is inaction.\textsuperscript{48}

How archivists engage with one another regarding racism within the profession is challenging. A good example, which was criticized in this paper’s background survey, took place on the Archives-NRA listserv, a professional email group for archivists to use, and is also mentioned in “Against Whitewashing.”\textsuperscript{49} A brief summary of what took place follows, maintaining anonymity of those involved.

In the wake of the toppling of the Colston statue,\textsuperscript{50} a debate ensued about statues and the significance of their removal as records.\textsuperscript{51} Within 24 hours over 20 people had joined the conversation, and the debate became heated when some archivists questioned why:

- The conversation was not about how white supremacy had impacted archival holdings and archival praxis;
- Those committing to The Statement and working on anti-racism initiatives were mainly new entrants to the profession;
- Senior archivists with more experience were not leading the way.

A number of archivists responded either denying there was a problem with the discussion or stating they disagreed with The Statement, some because they did not believe structural racism was evident in the profession. A senior archivist asked questions that diverted focus from issues within UK archives causing deep offence to colleagues of marginalized ethnicity. In response, some archivists, in the spirit of ally-ship, expressed
disappointment, and one person’s response was viewed as indirect bullying of the senior archivist, attracting fierce condemnation, causing those sympathizing with the senior archivist to send them messages of support. The points made by those in denial were summarized by one participant, who pointed out that their comments could only come from a place of white privilege and white fragility.52

In summary, reviewing the UK archival literature alongside Mill’s spheres,53 illustrates how white supremacy has impacted archival praxis, and impacted the content of archives and archival description. Focusing money on long-term endeavours rather than short-term projects, would be a solution.54 But this is countered by the Juridico-Political influence of the ‘State’ playing a central role in setting priorities, rules and attitudes to how efforts and funding are appropriated.55 If this is compounded by a failure to recognize problems and give priority to resolving issues, then UK archives are rendered incapable of developing a long-term strategy to facilitate change.

The findings

There have been numerous UK studies of how ethnic minorities are not catered for within the profession and within archival holdings.56 This study supplements these by questioning what UK archivists understand about the heritage of white supremacy, how they believe it has impacted archival praxis, and reparative actions they can take.

From the demographic data collected, see Table 1, 96 people completed the survey. Institutions in general did not provide a specific pattern for responses, Local and University institutions dominated the results with an even distribution provided by other categories, Private ones being in the minority.

Table 1. Demographic questions.

| Question                      | Choice                                      | Count/Percentage % |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Age Range                     |                                             |                    |
|                               | 16–24                                       | 1/1%               |
|                               | 25–43                                       | 64/67%             |
|                               | 44–55                                       | 19/20%             |
|                               | 56–74                                       | 8/8%               |
|                               | 75+                                         | 1/1%               |
|                               | Would rather not say                        | 3/3%               |
| Type of Institution           |                                             |                    |
|                               | Business                                    | 10/10%             |
|                               | Private                                     | 4/4%               |
|                               | Local                                       | 22/23%             |
|                               | Special                                     | 11/12%             |
|                               | National                                    | 12/13%             |
|                               | University                                  | 27/28%             |
|                               | Other                                       | 10/10%             |
| Paid – Level of Seniority     |                                             |                    |
|                               | Entry Level (<5 years of service, does not work alone) | 21/22%             |
|                               | Medium (≥5 years of service, does not work alone) | 31/32%             |
|                               | Senior (works alone or has 1 or more direct reports) | 38/40%             |
| Volunteer – Length of Service |                                             |                    |
|                               | <1 year                                     | 1/1%               |
|                               | >1 year and <5 years                        | 3/3%               |
|                               | ≥5 years                                    | 2/2%               |
Of the paid employees, Senior and Medium categories were near evenly represented with Entry level being less. Six volunteers took part, one having less than a year’s experience. Coupled with experience comes age, 67% of participants were in the age band, 25–43, 20% in the 44–55 band, with each of the other age bands being less than 10%.

Findings from the survey pivot around responsive information coming from participants when asked if they had signed *The Statement*, see Table 2. Their answers can be correlated to those from other questions, revealing to us their perception of white supremacy, justifying the existence of *The Statement* and the 20 anti-racist actions therein.

**Table 2.** Signing *The Statement*.

| Question                        | Choice                                      | Count/ Percentage |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Did you sign the petition?      | Yes                                         | 40/42%            |
|                                 | No                                          | 46/48%            |
|                                 | Would rather not say                        | 10/10%            |
| Why did you sign the petition?  | Freetext                                    |                   |
| If you did not sign the petition please state why. (Please select an answer or select ‘other’ and leave comments.) | I was not aware of the petition | 21/22% |
|                                 | I do not believe there is a problem with structural racism in Britain’s archives sector | 7/7% |
|                                 | Other                                       |                   |
|                                 | Freetext                                    | 18/19%            |
| Please provide further details. |                                             |                   |

There was an almost 50/50 split between those who did and did not sign *The Statement*. Reasons given for signing indicated a strong enthusiasm for change, and were:

- It was the right thing to do;
- Being disturbed by racism on Twitter following the ARA Conference in 2019,57
- Wanting to commit to making changes for the better.

*The Statement* was circulated on Twitter for several months and on the Archives-NRA listserv on JISCMail. About half of those who did not sign said they were unaware of its existence. The remainder gave varied reasons for not signing. Four favoured focusing on their own anti-racist actions, one stating they had been and were using Michelle Caswell’s “Dismantling Whiteness” poster and had already made changes in their institution.58 One respondent disagreed with use of the term stating, ‘The issue is historic under-representation not a white supremacy ideology.’ Another complained about the tone of *The Statement* as being ‘rather strident,’ using US concepts inappropriate for British race relations, and ‘exaggerated and extreme’ language that is ‘counter-productive,’ resulting in the impression that those who did not fully agree with its approach would not be tolerated. This same sentiment was shared by those who did not sign because they were put off by the discussions on the Archives-NRA listserv, with the one about statues being cited.59 Whilst one person claimed it to be a ‘heated debate’ they felt they could not contribute to it because of lack of information, others saw it as ‘bullying,’ and ‘actively
promoting violence not community,’ where you risked ‘being labelled as racist and in denial of white supremacy’ if you did not fully agree with all of The Statement. It was also pointed out that the publication of signatories’ names was of concern to those wanting to maintain a ‘low profile’ or be seen to be involved with anything ‘too militant.’ One respondent questioned how structural racism could be eradicated when society is structurally racist, and another believed in intersectionality where other supremacies interact with one another playing their part in supporting interrelated injustices in society saying white supremacy was only part of the problem.

Amongst those who did not sign, were seven participants who did not believe there is a problem with structural racism in the sector. Five fell into the experience category of being Senior, with one Medium and one being a volunteer. They split across the age bands as follows:

- One in the ‘75+’ band;
- Three in ‘56–74’ band; and
- Three in age band ‘Would rather not say.’

Whilst the correlation between age and experience is inconclusive there was a pattern in their responses to actions where instead of answering they provided negative statements and rhetorical questions. Examples from one, Person X, are as follows:

- For action B, about listening to the lived experiences of ethnic minorities, they said they were running a small archive not a ‘Maoist re-education camp;’
- For action F, they contradict their response to Action B by saying they are running long-term recording and research projects with the ethnic minority community; and
- For action S, which is about positively influencing the history taught in schools to encourage engagement with those who are excluded, they said ‘Teachers, I’ve realised after 30 years of trying to engage with them fundamentally cannot be arsed. Less so now than ever.’

Others gave responses such as ‘vague,’ ‘wish,hashy,’ some with strong views and opinions mentioning ‘academic freedom’ being compromised, positive discrimination being encouraged, and people’s thoughts being controlled. One person asked for a definition of structural racism, when they had stated they did not sign The Statement because they did not believe there was a problem with structural racism in the UK’s archives sector.

Even with such views being expressed, results for the 20 actions making up the final part of the survey, showed a great appetite for change. For each action, the respondent was asked if it was achievable in a year, and if they answered ‘Yes,’ to provide text explaining what would help achieve the action, and for ‘No,’ why the action was unachievable. This resulted in 414 pieces of feedback indicating what would help, and 473 responses indicating constraints.

The actions with their percentage scorings can be seen in Table 3, where A to K are individual actions to be taken in organizations and archival practice, and L to T are collective actions to take to influence the sector. Notably, 16 of the 20 actions scored ‘Yes’ for over 60% of those taking part.
### Table 3. Statement actions.

| # | Question                                                                 | Yes (Count/Percentage) | No (Count/Percentage) | Blank (Count/Percentage) |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| A | Be braver. Critically examine ourselves and our assumptions and biases. Find out what our unconscious biases are. | 86/90% | 8/8% | 2/2% |
| B | Listen to communities. Create spaces for conversations about race and representation, power and social justice. | 77/80% | 15/16% | 4/4% |
| C | Speak out at work. Support colleagues experiencing racism and other prejudices. | 82/86% | 10/10% | 4/4% |
| D | Educate ourselves. Read some critical race theory. Make learning opportunities for ourselves and others. Take advantage of free training programmes from charities for staff. Use the Archivists Against collective’s resources in our workplaces. | 81/84% | 11/12% | 4/4% |
| E | Connect. Seek allies and commit to allyship. Work with more diverse networks. | 71/74% | 19/20% | 6/6% |
| F | Reassess acquisitions and collecting policies. What is valued and who is being represented? | 65/68% | 26/27% | 5/5% |
| G | Critically rethink our tools and techniques. How are we cataloguing? Which records are prioritized for cataloguing? | 66/69% | 24/25% | 6/6% |
| H | Look at our own operations. Are our values embedded in our procedures, hiring practices, corporate language, etc? | 65/68% | 25/26% | 6/6% |
| I | Think historically, and think globally. Acknowledge colonial legacies. White supremacy is built into and on our collections and helps to determine our place in the international archival community. | 67/70% | 24/25% | 5/5% |
| J | Pay up, and pay forward. Commit to finding funds to pay trainees. Recruit trainees who have the potential to change our profession for the better. | 25/26% | 64/67% | 7/7% |
| K | Celebrate positive action, loudly. | 78/81% | 11/12% | 7/7% |
| L | Support and participate in current ARA and TNA efforts to address structural racism in the profession. Insist that these efforts are expanded or continued until structural racism is eliminated. | 61/64% | 29/30% | 6/6% |
| M | Ask ARA to appoint paid advisors to conduct a thorough internal review of its structure, culture, and practices to discover what needs to change within the organization to make it a safer, more inclusive professional body. | 67/70% | 23/24% | 6/6% |
| N | Insist that all accreditation guidelines, competency frameworks, etc surface and work to correct structural biases. | 61/64% | 27/28% | 8/8% |
| O | Recognize that British archives hold records that don’t belong to us. Through ARA and TNA, do something about that. | 40/42% | 48/50% | 8/8% |
| P | Support the work around descriptive protocols for racist records. | 74/77% | 15/16% | 7/7% |
| Q | Expect the university courses to decolonize their curricula and reassess the skills they teach, with a greater focus on human-centred approaches and skills for challenging and speaking up, handling difficult conversations and conflicting perspectives. | 40/42% | 46/48% | 10/10% |
| R | Support alternative routes into the profession that diversify the sector, without de-professionalizing it. | 60/63% | 30/31% | 6/6% |
| S | Work to positively influence primary and secondary school history curricula so that historical research and archives are opened up to those presently disengaged and excluded through white hegemony. | 44/46% | 40/42% | 12/12% |
| T | Participate in these efforts instead of expecting others to do the work for us. | 71/74% | 17/18% | 8/8% |

Throughout the feedback it was evident that the lockdown brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic which started in March 2020 was a major constraint. Responses stated it had affected funding and employment and impacted ongoing working practices particularly with people meeting online rather than face-to-face, hampering the physical collaboration needed with other sectors such as education or community groups.
Action J, concerned with recruiting trainees, received a strong negative response, the main concern being lack of funding, but also maintaining compliance with the Equality Act (2010) to avoid positive discrimination in favour of marginalized ethnicities.

For actions O, Q, and S, there was a near even split between those saying ‘Yes’ and ‘No.’ Their feedback asked for further information explaining the issues being addressed and evidence of their existence. This need for better education of how white supremacy has impacted the profession, links with responses to questions about archival praxis, shown in Table 4. Whilst over 68% of participants showed agreement that white supremacy had impacted archival praxis, those who did not sign The Statement because they did not believe structural racism was an issue, either replied ‘No’ to all three questions, or only replied ‘Yes’ to white supremacy influencing the creation of records. Also, out of those who expressed they did not know the impact of white supremacy, 7% did not know whether it had impacted the creation of records with 16% and 15% saying the same of its impact on decision-making and description respectively.

**Table 4. Archival praxis questions.**

| Question                                                                 | Choice           | Count/Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Has ‘white supremacy’ influenced:                                        |                  |                  |
| The creation of records in the UK and elsewhere? (i.e. what information is recorded, and about whom). | Yes              | 85/89%           |
|                                                                          | No               | 4/4%             |
|                                                                          | Don’t Know       | 7/7%             |
| Decisions relating to information held in UK archives?                    |                  |                  |
| (i.e. which records are selected for preservation, which collections are prioritized in terms of description, digitization, outreach etc?). | Yes              | 69/72%           |
|                                                                          | No               | 12/12%           |
|                                                                          | Don’t Know       | 15/16%           |
| The way archive collections are described in UK archival institutions?    |                  |                  |
|                                                                          | Yes              | 73/76%           |
|                                                                          | No               | 9/9%             |
|                                                                          | Don’t Know       | 14/15%           |

When asked for a definition of ‘white supremacy’ over 75% of respondents gave a definition akin to Layla Saad’s, some showing familiarity with the terms ‘white privilege’ and ‘white fragility,’ and a few referring to the false ‘race science’ theories that can be found in Charles Mills’ spheres. However there were some who did not respond, or stated they were unsure what it was.

Five people, who did not sign The Statement, because they either did not believe structural racism to be a problem or were put off by discussions on the Archives-NRA listserv, indicated they disagreed with use of the term. Two described it as ‘loaded,’ its ‘use a form of racial bias.’ One claimed that issues in the sector are not based on white supremacy but on ‘historical under-representation’ of Black people, and the others said the term should not be used when discussing the absence of marginalized ethnicities from our pool of users, remarking it to be offensive, and intentionally divisive.
Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has examined definitions of ‘white supremacy,’ UK archival literature, and information from the survey for the dissertation “How Do UK Archivists Perceive ‘White Supremacy’ In The UK Archives Sector?” to determine archivists’ understanding of white supremacy, their enthusiasm for engaging in anti-racist actions presented by The Statement, and how white supremacy has impacted archival holdings and the archivists’ praxis.

The literature review shows evidence of Charles Mills’ six spheres of white supremacy having impacted UK archives, and scarcity of literature on the subject highlights a need for there to be more written about this area of research.

The findings from the survey showed overall enthusiasm for engagement in the anti-racist actions that were set out in The Statement, despite concerns made about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on working practices and funding, drawing the focus away from making progress against the impact of white supremacy.

There was also generic feedback across the actions from those positive about change, expressing issues that would slow down progress regarding:

- Variations on how racism presents locally and nationally, making analysis more complex, and perpetuating its existence in society, both nationally and globally, echoing Toole’s definition of ‘white supremacy’ being a ‘resilient epistemological system’;
- Intersectionality needing to be revisited, to address concerns relating to class and poverty which present a bigger problem, and other categories of minority groups such as LGBTQI, disabled and neuro-divergent;
- Tokenistic gestures from management rather than the implementation of carefully considered change.

Constraints for actions were also expressed by those who did not believe there was a problem with structural racism in the sector. These show evidence of ways Saad explains how white supremacy can manifest in behaviours and attitudes:

- A projection of superiority in the belief those joining the sector must go through the same arduous processes as everyone else even though the qualifications are expensive to attain;
- Negative attitudes to change in the sector shown in non-constructive and negative feedback demonstrating combinations of white exceptionalism, white fragility and white privilege. This is perceived by those who want change, to be off-putting to onlookers and new people, hampering the progress and development of new ideas;
- White fragility and tone-policing where participants complained about the ‘rather strident’ tone of The Statement, and use of the term ‘white supremacy’ claiming it to be divisive or provocative, explaining archival donors may be offended by their material being associated with the concept;
- White exceptionalism, and white fragility shown in the disbelief structural racism is present in the sector, and in the requesting of evidence of issues with how history is taught in schools, how the courses are run in our universities and proof there are archives sat in the UK that no longer belong here.
For those who do not believe structural racism is a problem, or who are unsure of the issues, the information is available they just need to be willing and to be trained in how to look for it. Archives and archivists have always been up against the challenges of time, insufficient funding and their need for training. Archives are also still used to running short-term projects, and long-term investment is needed in overarching programmes of change, as stated by Johnston, Flinn, Berry and MacKeith, necessitating planning and advocating for extensive transformational programmes to take advantage of funding from sources such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England.

The survey showed online engagement to be a concern with the COVID-19 pandemic adding another dimension, challenging communications and physical collaboration, and if the profession is to improve, good communication is essential. The Archives and Records Association and The National Archives have resources they can use to assist in making improvements. Joint surveys to undertake regular temperature checks and gauge and monitor improvements, and the use of blogs and ezines to spread knowledge, can facilitate progress, collaboration and sharing of information. On a positive note, concerns with progress in the profession have helped drive the creation of two Discord servers: “ARATogether” and “ActivistarchivistsUK.” Both can be found when registered with Discord at https://discord.com. The former is used regularly by the Archives and Records Association for sharing of information and discussions, with the latter being a place where Activist Archivists can meet, converse in a more private arena, and plan.

Finally, this study shows that whilst archivists may be becoming better at identifying the issues posed by the impact of white supremacy, resolving the problems created is not straightforward. There is a need for sector leadership to be real with itself and engage in difficult conversations with colleagues who do not fully understand the issues and the impact they are having on others within the profession. Archives reflect our society, and the sector cannot be complacent in telling society that white supremacy’s impact on archival praxis and on interpersonal skills and behaviour is unacceptable.

Notes

1. “End Structural Racism.”
2. Chilcott et al., “Against Whitewashing,” 47–49; see also DiAngelo, “White Fragility,” 57.
3. The National Archives, “1. Find An Archive.”
4. The Archives and Records Association and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, “Executive Summary,” 1.
5. JiscMail, “Archives-NRA.” https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=archives-nra.
6. Drum, “Let’s Be Careful”; McWhorter, “The Difference.”
7. DiAngelo, “No I Won’t Stop.”
8. Toole, “What Lies Beneath,” 76–84.
9. Ansley, “Stirring The Ashes,” 1024, note 129.
10. Mills, “White Supremacy.”
11. Saad, Me and White Supremacy, loc. 264 of 3206, Kindle.
12. Saad, Me and White Supremacy, loc. 2869–2905 of 3206, Kindle; DiAngelo, “White Fragility,” 57; and McIntosh, “Peggy McIntosh On White Privilege.”
13. See note 4 above.
14. The National Archives and Pye Tait Consulting, “Archives Sector Workforce.”
15. See note 10 above.
16. Ishmael, “Reclaiming History,” 269.
17. Ishmael, “Reclaiming History,” 270–1; Jenkinson, Manual.
18. Ishmael, “Reclaiming History,” 281–2; Mills, “White Supremacy.”
19. Ishmael, “Reclaiming History,” 275–6.
20. Ibid., 275–276 and 278–83.
21. Ishmael, “Reclaiming History,” 283.
22. Ishmael, “Reclaiming History,” 278–9; Schomburg, “The Negro,” 670.
23. Flinn, “Archival Activism,” 3.
24. Johnston, “Whose History,” 215–8.
25. Ibid.
26. Flinn, “Archival Activism,” 16–17.
27. Ibid., 6.
28. See note 10 above.
29. Johnston, “Whose History,” 221.
30. Flinn, “Archival Activism,” 5–6.
31. See note 10 above.
32. Johnston, “Whose History,” 226–7.
33. Ibid., 213.
34. Delgado, “The 34th Annual Meeting,” 45.
35. Berry and MacKeith, “Colliding Worlds,” 141–3 and 146–7.
36. Flinn, “Archival Activism,” 1 and 15–17; Johnston, “Whose History,” 221–226.
37. Thethi, “Wilfully Ignorant Histories.”
38. See note 10 above.
39. Thethi, “Archives and Inclusivity.”
40. Oxford African American Studies Center, “Hottentot;” Mills, “White Supremacy.”
41. Bressey, “Invisible Presence.”
42. Bressey, “Invisible Presence,” 60; Ishmael, “Reclaiming History,” 281–2; Mills, “White Supremacy.”
43. Bressey, “Invisible Presence,” 50–59.
44. Ibid., 61.
45. Chilcott, “Towards Protocols.”
46. The Archives and Records Association, “#ARAGlasgowManifesto.”
47. Brownson, “ARA Conference 2019”; and Thethi, “Empowered Collaboration.”
48. Chilcott et al, “Against Whitewashing.”
49. Ibid., 52.
50. Grey, “Bristol George Floyd Protest.”
51. JiscMail, Archives-NRA: “Thinking About Statues,” 10th June, 2020, 22:28:05, https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa-jisc.exe?A1=ind2006&q=L=ARCHIVES-NRA.
52. Saad, Me And White Supremacy, loc. 2869–2905 of 3206, Kindle; DiAngelo, “White Fragility,” 57; McIntosh, “Peggy McIntosh On White Privilege.”
53. See note 10 above.
54. Johnston, “Whose History,” 222–3; Flinn, “Archival Activism,” 14; Berry and MacKeith, “Colliding Worlds,” 148.
55. See note 10 above.
56. The Archives and Records Association, “#ARAGlasgowManifesto;” The Archives and Records Association North West Region, “North West Region Skills;” The Archives and Records Association and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, “Executive Summary,” and “Full Report;” Society of Archivists et al, “Our Past, Your Future;” Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, “Listening To The Past;” National Council on Archives, “British Archives,” “Changing The Future,” and “Taking Part.”
57. Chilcott et al, “Against Whitewashing,” 47–49.
58. Brilmyer, UCLA Poster Design, content produced in Michelle Caswell’s Archives, Records, and Memory class in Fall 2016 found at https://www.gracenbrilmyer.com/dismantling_whiteSupremacy_archives3.pdf.
59. See note 51 above.
60. See note 52 above.
61. See note 10 above.
62. See note 51 above.
63. See note 10 above.
64. Toole, “What Lies Beneath.”
65. Saad, Me and White Supremacy.
66. See note 52 above.
67. See note 54 above.
68. National Lottery Heritage Fund, “Funding”; and Arts Council England, “National Lottery Project Grants.”

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Sarah-Joy Maddeaux for invaluable advice, and facilitation of peer reviews; the informal and formal peer reviewers; the survey participants; Dr Victoria Stobo for her excellent insight and guidance as my supervisor for the original dissertation study; and Dr James Lowry for inspiration, editorial guidance and encouragement.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Karen S. M. Macfarlane is an Information Technology Business Analyst for a large retail organization, and has worked in Information Technology for over 30 years. Karen took time out of regular employment to study for and gain a Masters in Archives and Records Management at the University of Liverpool. She has always had a keen interest in the arts, heritage and local culture, and very much hopes to engage with more volunteering opportunities in archives in the future.

Bibliography

Ansley, Frances Lee. “Stirring The Ashes: Race Class And The Future of Civil Rights Scholarship.” Cornell Law Review 74, no. 6 (1988-1989): 993–1077. Accessed 22 September 2021. https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/clqv74&i=1019.

Archives and Records Association. 2018. “#ARAGlasgowManifesto.” ARA Conference. Accessed July 27, 2020. https://conference.archives.org.uk/araglasgowmanifesto/.

Archives and Records Association And Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. A Study Of The UK Information Workforce – Executive Summary. November, 2015. Accessed September 28, 2021. https://www.archives.org.uk/images/Workforce/20151124WorkforceSurveyExecutiveSummaryA4WEB.pdf.

Archives and Records Association And Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. A Study Of The UK Information Workforce – Full Report. Edinburgh: Napier University. November, 2015. Accessed September 28, 2021. https://www.archives.org.uk/images/Workforce/A_study_of_the_information_workforce_141115_7mb.pdf.

Archives and Records Association And North West Region. Archives and Records Association North West Region: Skills Audit 2018. March, 2018. Accessed 28 September, 2021. https://www.archives.org.uk/images/North_West/ARA_Skills_audit_report_Aug_2018_V2.pdf.

Arts Council England. “Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants.” 28 September, 2021. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/projectgrants.
Berry, Charlotte, and Lucy MacKeith. “Colliding Worlds In The Curatorial Environment: The Archivist And The Activist.” Journal of the Society of Archivists 28, no. 2 (2007): 139–149. doi:10.1080/00379810701607793.

Bressey, Caroline. “Invisible Presence: The Whitening Of The Black Community In The Historical Imagination Of British Archivists.” Archivaria 61 (2006): 47–61. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12534.

Brownson, Lucy. “ARA Conference 2019 – Lucy Brownson.” Off the Record, September 27, 2019. https://aranewprofessionals.wordpress.com/2019/09/27/ara-conference-2019-lucy-brownson/.

Chilcott, Alicia. “Towards Protocols For Describing Racially Offensive Language In UK Public Archives.” Archival Science: International Journal on Recorded Information 19, no. 4 (2019): 359–376. doi:10.1007/s10502-019-09314-y.

Chilcott, Alicia, Kirsty Fife, James Lowry, Jenny Moran, Arike Oke, Anna Sexton, and Jasspreet Thethi. “Against Whitewashing: The Recent History Of Anti-Racist Action In the British Archives Sector.” The International Journal of Information, Diversity, and Inclusion 5, no. 1 (2021): 33–59. doi:10.33137/ijidi.v5i1.34731.

Delgado, David J. “The 34th Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists.” The American Archivist 34, no. 1 (1971): 43–54. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40291295.

DiAngelo, Robin. “No, I Won’t Stop Saying White Supremacy.” Yes, June 30, 2017 https://www.yesmagazine.org/democracy/2017/06/30/no-i-wont-stop-saying-white-supremacy.

DiAngelo, Robin. “White Fragility.” International Journal of Critical Pedagogy 3, no. 3 (2011): 54–70. http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/view/249/116.

Drum, Kevin. “Let’s Be Careful With The ‘White Supremacy’ Label.” MotherJones, 26 November 2016. https://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2016/11/lets-please-kill-white-supremacy-fad/.

“End Structural Racism In Britain’s Archives Sector.” April, 2020. https://www.change.org/p/archivists-end-structural-racism-in-britain-s-archives-sector?recruiter=false&recruited_by_id=a06960b0-8b95-11ea-b07a-9360a75a3bd2.

Flinn, Andrew. “Archival Activism: Independent And Community-Led Archives, Radical Public History And The Heritage Professions.” InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies 7, no. 2 (2011): 1–20. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9pt249ox.

Grey, Jack. “Bristol George Floyd Protest: Colston Statue Toppled.” BBC News UK, June 7, 2020. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-52955868.

Ishmael, Hannah J. M. “Reclaiming History: Arthur Schomburg.” Archives and Manuscripts 46, no. 3 (2018): 269–288. doi:10.1080/01576895.2018.1559741.

Jenkinson, Sir C.H. A Manual of Archive Administration Including the Problems of War Archives and Archive Making. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922.

Johnston, Ian. “Whose History Is It Anyway?” Journal of the Society of Archivists 22, no. 2 (2001): 213–229. doi:10.1080/00379810120081154.

McIntosh, Peggy. “Peggy McIntosh On White Privilege.” Reparations4Slavery. Accessed 25 July 2021. http://reparations4slavery.com/peggy-mcintosh-on-white-privilege/.

McWhorter, John. “The Difference Between Racial Bias And White Supremacy.” Time, 29 November 2016. https://time.com/4584161/white-supremacy/.

Mills, C. W. “White Supremacy As Sociopolitical System: A Philosophical Perspective.” In White Out: The Continuing Significance Of Racism, edited by Ashley W. Doane, and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, 35–48. New York: Routledge, January 11, 2013. doi:10.4324/9780203412107.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Listening To The Past, Speaking To The Future. 2004. Accessed 28 September, 2021. https://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/Publications/listening_to_the_past_report.pdf.

The National Archives. “1. Find An Archive In The UK And Beyond.” “Discovery: Find An Archive.” Accessed 22 July, 2021. https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/discovery-help/find-an-archive/#1-find-an-archive-in-the-uk-and-beyond.

The National Archives, and Pye Tait Consulting. Archives Sector Workforce Development Strategy. August, 2018. https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archive-sector-workforce-strategy.pdf.
National Council on Archives. *British Archives – The Way Forward* 2004. Accessed 28 September, 2021. https://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/britisharchivesthewayforward.pdf.

National Council on Archives. *Taking Part: An Audit Of Social Inclusion Work In Archives*. April 2001. Accessed September 28, 2021. https://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/takingpart.pdf.

National Council on Archives. *Changing The Future Of Our Past*. April, 2001. https://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/Publications/changingfutureofourpast.pdf. Accessed 28 September, 2021.

National Lottery Heritage Fund. “Funding.” Accessed 22 September, 2021. https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding.

Oxford African American Studies Center. *Hottentot*. Oxford University Press. 1 December, 2006. doi:10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.41721.

Saad, Layla F. *Me And White Supremacy. Combat Racism, Change The World, And Become A Good Ancestor*. London: Quercus Editions Ltd, 2020. Kindle.

Schomburg, A.A. “The Negro Digs up His Past.” In *The New Negro*, edited by A. Locke, 670. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1925. reprint 1997.

Society of Archivists, The National Council on Archives, The National Archives, Local Government Association. *Our Past, Your Future*. London: Liberata; March 2009. Accessed 28 September, 2021. https://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/Publications/ourpastyourfuture.pdf.

Thethi, Jasspreet. “Archives And Inclusivity: Respectful Descriptions Of Marginalised Groups.” *Intersectional GLAM*, 22 November, 2018. https://intersectionalglam.org/2018/11/22/archives-and-inclusivity-respectful-descriptions-of-marginalised-groups/.

Thethi, Jasspreet. “Empowered Collaboration: Privilege, Lived Experience And Emotional Labour – Jasspreet Thethi.” *Off the Record*, 26 October, 2018. https://aranewprofessionals.wordpress.com/2018/10/26/empowered-collaboration-privilege-lived-experience-and-emotional-labour-jasspreet-thethi/.

Thethi, Jasspreet. “Wilfully Ignorant Histories: Its Impact, And What We Can Do About It.” *ARA Learning Blog*, 26 June, 2018. https://aralearning.wordpress.com/2020/06/26/wilfully-ignorant-histories-its-impact-and-what-we-can-do-about-it/.

Toole, Briana. “What Lies Beneath: The Epistemic Roots of White Supremacy.” In *Political Epistemology*, edited by Elizabeth Edenberg and Michael Hannon, 76–94. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. doi:10.1093/oso/9780192893338.003.0006.