

# Roots & Branches

Museums taking  
action against  
climate change

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# Project Overview

**Roots & Branches**, a collaborative project between **The Carbon Literacy Project**, **Museum Development England** and **Manchester Museum**, empowered and inspired the Museum sector to undertake environmental action through a programme of Carbon Literacy training, targeted support, and the development of an innovative Top Floor climate hub and public programme at Manchester Museum.

Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, **the project aimed to train and certify 1,500 people from 300 Museums as Carbon Literate** and provide opportunities for Museums to converse, experiment, and test new ideas for a more sustainable future.

This evaluation report documents the project and its impacts from June 2021 to March 2024.



Click here to view The Carbon Literacy Project website: <https://carbonliteracy.com>

Click here to view Manchester Museum's website: <https://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk>

Click here to view Museum Development England's website: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/supporting-museums/museum-development-programme>

# Project Aims: Roots

Create a hub of environmental action at Manchester Museum, where people with a shared commitment to social and environmental justice can come together to learn, share ideas, and build community.

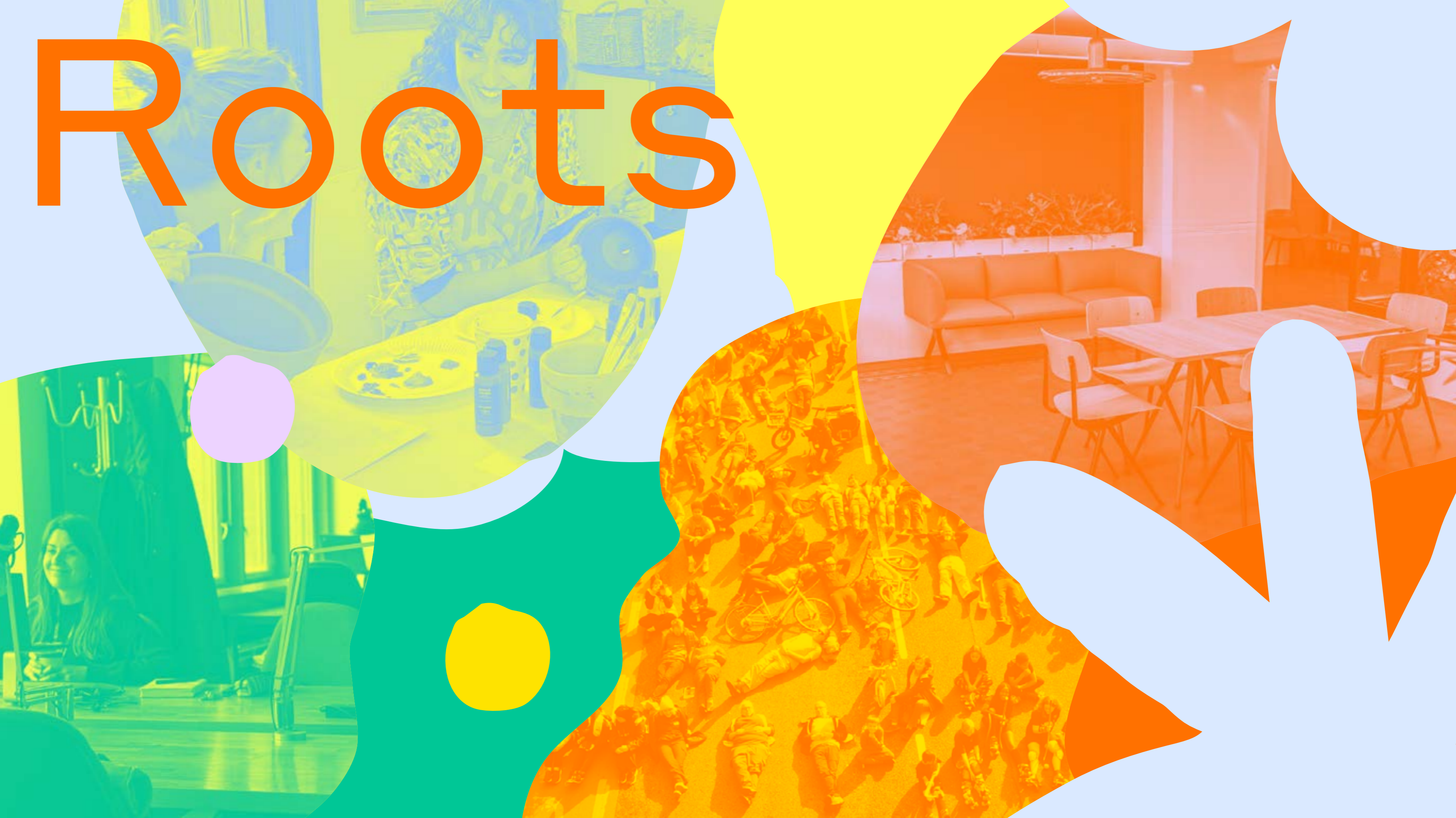
- Develop Manchester Museum's **Top Floor** space into a community-centred hub for co-working and collaboration
- Create a new **Environmental Action Manager** post at Manchester Museum, supported by a Museum-wide Environmental Action Group
- **Connect** visitors, local communities and environmentalists to mobilise positive action in response to the environmental crisis
- **Engage public audiences** in innovative and intersectional climate action events
- **Support staff and volunteers** to embed environmental action across all areas of work

# Project Aims: Branches

Over the course of the project, sector colleagues participate in Carbon Literacy training.

- **Create a new online Carbon Literacy Toolkit** for all Museums to run internally with their workforce, accessed via The Carbon Literacy Project
- **1500 people** from the Museum workforce from across 300 sites trained in Carbon Literacy and supported to take climate action
- **Create a specialist Museum Carbon Literacy Officer post** to support Carbon Literacy training and roll out the Toolkit through delivering Trainer Support sessions
- **Research, develop and deliver follow-up webinars** to support other UK Museums in deepening their commitments and action plans for tackling climate change

# Roots



# Impacts

14 Top Floor co-working relationships established

More than 4000 participants engaged in a public events programme

National and international Museum and cultural sector engaged through visits, conferences, publications and workshops

Organisational development at Manchester Museum supported by Environmental Action Manager role

# Activities in Numbers

**627** people engaged in convening events shaping the role of Manchester Museum in local community climate action

Volunteers supported with **132 hours** of climate action learning

**70+** enquiries from groups and individuals about the Top Floor hub

**6** events delivered by and for young people at Manchester Museum

**9** environmental partners profile their work through collaborative events at Manchester Museum

**2,153** people engaged in family programming and outreach

Manchester Museum renews Gold standard Carbon Literate Organisation status and achieves over 80% Carbon Literate workforce





# A New Role: Environmental Action Manager



“The newly created position of Environmental Action Manager reinforces our commitment to building a more sustainable world.

Museums are uniquely placed to raise awareness of the incredible diversity of life on our planet and they should play a role in addressing the climate emergency.”

—

**Esme Ward**

Manchester Museum Director

“I believe the position of the Museum, both physically and civically, offers unique opportunities to connect people and interrogate the Museum’s role in local climate action.”

—

**Hannah Hartley**

Environmental Action Manager

\* Click here to read about the Environmental Action Manager role:

<https://museumsandheritage.com/advisor/posts/manchester-museum-creates-environmental-action-manager-role-tackle-climate-challenges>

# Organisational Impacts

“It’s not just about exhibitions with generic messages. It’s about connecting with people on a more direct level.”

—  
Museum Staff Feedback

**The Environmental Action Manager** has supported the Museum to consolidate work, develop a strategic approach and prioritise internal actions.

“Now we automatically think about impact and consider working practices.”

—  
Museum Staff Feedback

- Embedded Museum-wide Environmental Action Group
- Existing environmental and community partnerships strengthened, as well as new ones developed
- Co-created purpose statement and shared understanding of environmental action in the Museum



“It’s been very valuable. There’s been space to totally experiment and try something different.”

—  
Museum Staff Feedback



## Impacts on professional life reported by staff:

- Ability to build confidence in other people
- Greater agency to influence others
- Increased capacity
- Opportunities to develop skills as Carbon Literacy and Climate Café facilitators



# Community Impacts

“The Top Floor gives groups like us a base where we can work, discuss plans and invite people - we’re always really welcome.”

—  
Top Floor partner

“I love the dynamism that the Museum has started here [on the Top Floor]; creating the space for people who are visiting and those of us who are trying to shape services to come together and start conversations.”

—  
Top Floor partner

“Museums should serve the needs of the community. Climate change is humanity’s issue.”

—  
Museum Staff Feedback

Whereas “before local community groups were studied but not engaged” staff felt that the **Roots & Branches** project had enabled meaningful long term relationships with neighbours and authentic connections.

—  
Museum Staff Feedback

- **Climate Café facilitator training** delivered in partnership with Climate Psychology Alliance to 13 community participants
- **Facilitated capacity building and networking opportunities** for Top Floor partners result in new collaborations
- **Our Faith Our Planet**, an inter-faith network based in Manchester focused on climate change action brought together 83 civic and faith leaders for food, networking and workshops at Manchester Museum
- **‘Meet the Changemakers’ launched**, a new regular event opening up the Top Floor to public audiences to meet the communities, charities, activists and artists shaping a more sustainable and fair future for Manchester

# Programming Highlights



- New public **Climate Café programme** launched with the Climate Psychology Alliance
- **Interactive theatrical performance of The Wicked Problem** & post-show discussion on Climate Justice by Ergon Theatre – with 16 university students involved in workshops to co-create a pop-up exhibition
- **Artist Jason Singh** commissioned to create a unique audio composition using botany collections
- **A shared meal and interactive workshop** hosted with the Manchester China Institute as part of Ling Tan's 'Low Carbon Chinatown' project, exploring low carbon cooking with ESEA communities
- **Events co-developed and delivered with new partners** including: Women's Environmental Network, Manchester Climate Alliance, GMCA Green Spaces Fund, Manchester Climate Change Youth Partnership



# Branches

# Key Impacts (so far)

**299** attendees  
across Seeds for  
Action programme

**1,411** people from 375  
Museums completed a  
sector-specific Carbon  
Literacy course (863 of  
these were trained by  
Museum Development)

**431,140 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e**  
saving pledged through  
participant actions

**190** people trained  
to deliver Carbon  
Literacy training

**1,202** people certified  
as Carbon Literate

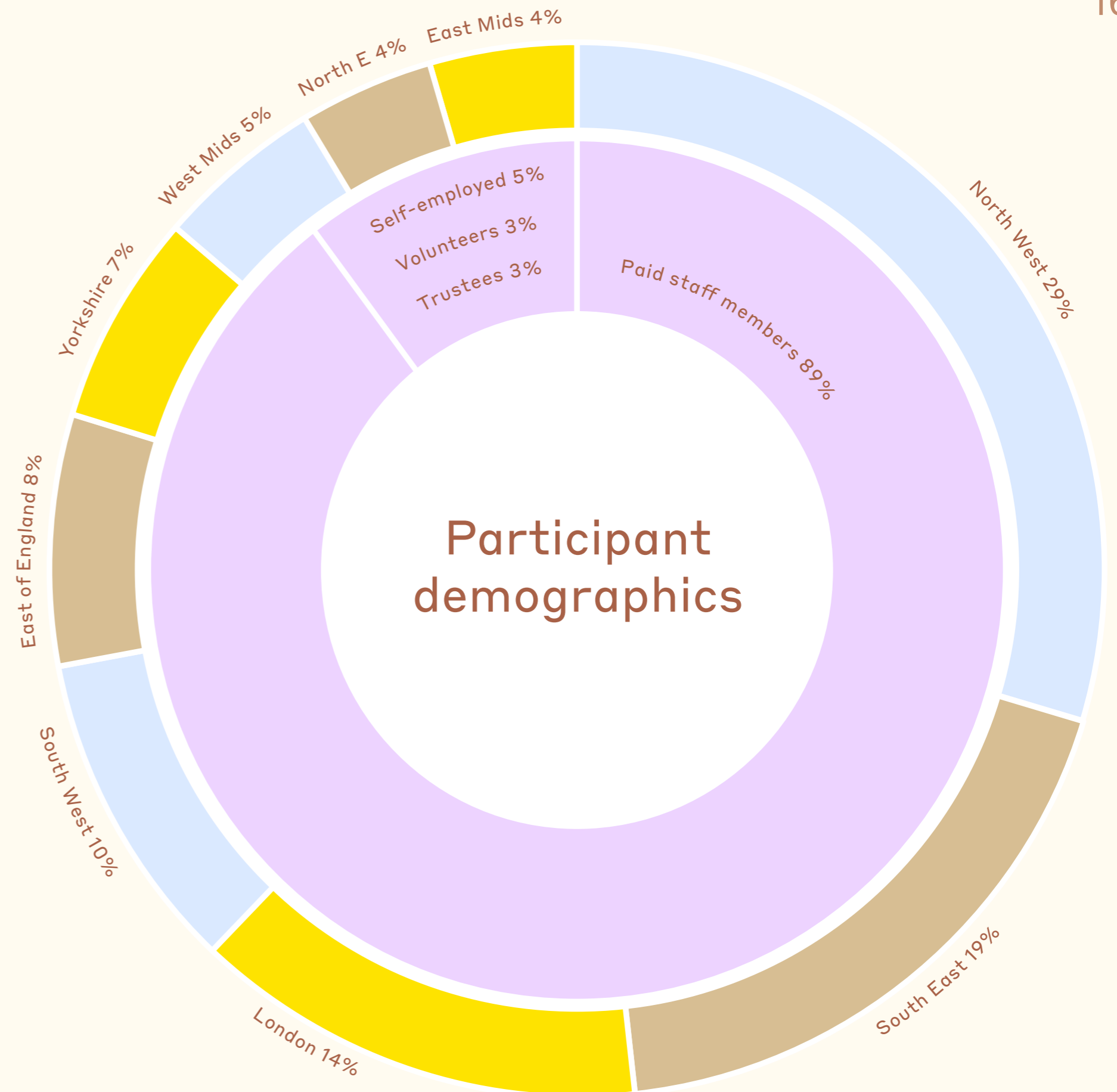
**2,404** actions  
created by  
Museum  
workforce

**5** Museums became  
Carbon Literate  
Organisations

# Training Impacts

Of the participants that responded to the feedback survey:

- 97% rated Carbon Literacy Facilitators excellent or good (100% for participants from Trainer Support Sessions)
- 88% felt they had gained new skills (85% for participants from Trainer Support Sessions)
- 94% felt able to share these skills with others
- 97% felt inspired (100% for participants from Trainer Support Sessions)
- 96% felt they had gained knowledge of the topic
- 96% said they would do things differently as a result of their training





# Themes of Climate Actions Taken by Participant

- Staff environmental skills development
- Green partnerships
- Organisational strategy
- Agency and culture change
- Measuring, monitoring and reducing carbon
- Becoming a Carbon Literacy trainer themselves
- Collections care and management
- Procurement and consumption
- Transport and travel
- Energy
- Materials and waste management
- Retail
- Building and Estates
- Changes which also impact personal life

# Participant Feedback

“It’s a great entry route to understanding climate change and carbon impacts, it’s also relevant to anyone working in the Museum sector.”

“Necessary foundational training for everyone and anyone looking to take climate action.”

“As a result of the course I feel empowered that by taking small steps I can influence change.”

“It’s informative, insightful and supportive. It makes committing to carbon reduction realistic and the support throughout and after the course has really helped me to plan out how this can be made possible.”

“HOPE - I’m completely inspired and in admiration of all the Museums and organisations that have worked on reducing their carbon emissions. I feel as though a chain reaction has begun and I’m excited to be a part of it.”

# Barriers to Project Engagement



## Barriers identified in interviews with non-participants:

- Capacity
- Competing priorities
- Needing peer support
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Worried about asking the wrong questions
- Feeling bogged down with site limitations of listed buildings

# Seeds for Action

## Growing a Carbon Literate Museum community:

- Carbon Literacy participants were encouraged to attend Seeds for Action programme sessions to connect with other sector professionals, deepening their commitments and action plans for tackling climate change
- **299** attendees across the programme
- A high level of **repeat attendance**:
  - **79** people attending more than one session
  - **12** people attending 3–5 times
- Museum workforce from all English regions attended the programme, as well as participants from other UK Nations

“It gave me food for thought, an opportunity to focus on next steps, and was useful to hear stories and anecdotes from others in the sector.”

# A New Role: Museum Carbon Literacy Officer

A new **Museum Carbon Literacy Officer** role was established within the Museum Development North West team.

The role has evolved and expanded into **Museum Development Adviser: Environmental Responsibility**, demonstrating Museum Development's commitment to climate action, as well as growing sector and regional partnership working.



“It’s been fantastic to bring together participants from organisations spanning the length and breadth of the UK. We are a sector brimming with creativity and curiosity, skills and knowledge, where no two working days or job roles are the same. Everyone has brought their unique experience and insight to the training and created fantastic actions to reduce carbon impacts and to support each other.”

—


**Alison Criddle**

Museum Development Adviser:  
Environmental Responsibility, MD North

# Museum Development Staff Impacts

## Impacts on professional life:

- At the end of the project **staff felt that they had gained confidence and skills** as a result of the Carbon Literacy training
- Museum Development staff felt they had developed their convening powers and had also been involved in national conversations, e.g. NMDC workforce and skills group and Museum COP
- Several staff commented that the project has had a **big impact on their professional lives**

A photograph of a woman with curly hair, wearing a dark top and a lanyard, looking down at a document. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

“I have agency in my role to make a difference. It’s been a well-recognised project... we’ve been involved in more conversations because of the project.”

—  
Museum Development staff feedback

# Ripple Effect

## The project:

- Exemplifies what is possible for the arts and cultural sector with a replicable model
- Increased opportunities to learn and respond to demand
- Enabled other organisations to access and adapt the Museums Toolkit to create courses including: Heritage, Libraries, Conservation, Archives and Learning
- Included capacity to regularly update the Carbon Literacy for Museums Toolkit to keep it relevant



# Takeaways





# A Project of Firsts



- First collaborative, **national** Museum Development England environmental project
- First project to upskill **Museum Staff** to deliver **peer to peer** training
- First Museum Development England project **to generate income** on a large scale
- First **Museum Development Officer** role with purely environmental remit

## As a result...

- The **Museum sector** has led the way for other cultural organisations
- The new **Museum Development Officer for Environmental Responsibility** has accelerated the project reach by forming new partnerships and delivery models

# Project Recognition



- The roles of **Environmental Action Manager** and **Museum Development Officer** have attracted considerable interest from colleagues across the sector in the UK and beyond
- The **Environmental Action Manager** and **Museum Development Officer** participated in conferences and gave presentations at national and international forums
- The project won an Environmental Sustainability award at the Manchester Culture Awards 2022
- The project was awarded Commended, Outstanding contribution to environmental sustainability and a low carbon future, Making a Difference Awards for Social Responsibility from the University of Manchester
- Manchester Museum renewed its Gold standard Carbon Literate Organisation status

# Driving Organisational Change



- Manchester Museum has a more strategic and holistic approach to environmental responsibility and can communicate this more effectively
- **Staff are supported to embed environmental sustainability**
- **Staff capacity is increased**
- **Meaningful community engagement is enabled**
- **A unique Top Floor Hub has been created to foster environmental action and co-working**
- **A strong programme of environmental activity has been delivered to a range of audiences including volunteers, adults, young people, community partners, families and sector groups**

# Embedding Environmental Responsibility

Staff and volunteers from the Museum sector across all regions are empowered to make environmental changes

- Museum Development England are continuing to deliver Carbon Literacy courses and the Seeds for Action programme throughout 2024 to 2026
- Carbon Literacy training is **inspiring sector-wide change**
- High levels of training participants becoming Carbon Literate by submitting climate action commitments
- Museums understand the science of climate change
- **A growing and supportive community of practice** for environmental sustainability within the Museums sector

# What Role Can Museums Have?

Reimagine  
their  
institutions

Empower  
communities

Reduce  
own  
footprint

Influence  
and  
advocate

Be role  
models

Tell the stories of  
climate change

# Find Out More

Interested in getting involved with Museum Development England's environmental programme?

Find out more here:  
[museumdevelopmentnorth.org.uk/get-support/programme/roots-and-branches-clca](https://museumdevelopmentnorth.org.uk/get-support/programme/roots-and-branches-clca)

Want to know more about the Top Floor hub?

Find out more here:  
[museum.manchester.ac.uk/learn/the-top-floor](https://museum.manchester.ac.uk/learn/the-top-floor)

Or more info on the Roots & Branches project and Carbon Literacy?

Roots & Branches celebration event recording:  
[youtu.be/SZX6jV2J2ro](https://youtu.be/SZX6jV2J2ro)

Carbon Literacy for Culture:  
[carbonliteracy.com/culture](https://carbonliteracy.com/culture)

Brief introduction to the Carbon Literacy Museum Toolkit:  
[youtu.be/eYENzrsBVGI](https://youtu.be/eYENzrsBVGI)

# Partners and Funders

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The Carbon Literacy

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Roots & Branches freelance evaluator

**Catherine Mailhac**  
Seeds for Action Programme and  
Carbon Literacy freelancer

Manchester Museum:  
[museum.manchester.ac.uk](http://museum.manchester.ac.uk)

The Carbon Literacy Project:  
[carbonliteracy.com](http://carbonliteracy.com)

Museum Development North:  
[museumdevelopmentnorth.org.uk](http://museumdevelopmentnorth.org.uk)

Museum Development Midlands:  
[mdmidlands.org.uk](http://mdmidlands.org.uk)

Museum Development South East:  
[mdse.org.uk](http://mdse.org.uk)

Museum Development South West:  
[southwestmuseums.org.uk](http://southwestmuseums.org.uk)

Museum Development London:  
[museumoflondon.org.uk/supporting-london-museums/about-us](http://museumoflondon.org.uk/supporting-london-museums/about-us)



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