



## News release

22 November 2021

### **Innovative Multaka-Oxford refugee project at Oxford University Museums supported by £1m funding from Alwaleed Philanthropies**

- **The £1million program will run across a 5-year period and is estimated to reach 7million visitors through guided tours and online exhibitions**
- **Multaka-Oxford will run at the History of Science Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum, upskilling refugees settling in Oxford and enhancing cross-cultural understanding**

The award-winning Multaka-Oxford project, that brings the rich and diverse knowledge of people settling in Oxford, many through forced migration, to two Oxford University museums, has received landmark funding. A generous £1million donation from Alwaleed Philanthropies will allow this innovative project at Oxford University's History of Science Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum to run for a further five years.

Multaka – which means *meeting point* in Arabic – uses the two University museums and the collections as a meeting point to bring communities together, strengthening cultural understanding through the mutual sharing of art, stories, culture and science. Multaka-Oxford aims to support 200 volunteers to develop new skills and volunteer as tour guides, all while deepening the understanding of Islamic art and culture across the wider community. The program works with local community organisations that support people settling in Oxford as refugees and asylum seekers and will be delivered by the History of Science Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum.

The new five-year programme was announced at a signing ceremony attended by HRH Princess Lamia bint Majed Saud Al Saud, Secretary General of Alwaleed Philanthropies, Professor Louise Richardson, Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford, Professor Anne Trefethen, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) at the University of Oxford, Dr Silke Ackermann, Director of the History of Science Museum and Dr Laura van Broekhoven, Director of the Pitt Rivers Museum.

The project began in 2017 with the museums working in partnership with local community organisations, including Asylum Welcome and Refugee Resource, to support volunteers from across Oxfordshire, many of whom recently arrived in the UK as forced migrants from countries including Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Zimbabwe, and Sudan. Planned with volunteers, the programme offers a supportive training programme

including English language learning, skills development and focuses on collaboration to run guided tours of the collections in Arabic and English. The programme also works with the volunteers to plan and deliver events, co-curate displays, enhance collections documentation and manage social media channels and the volunteers generously share their experience and knowledge. Since it began the project has helped to train almost 100 volunteers, many of whom have moved on to gain work, start a degree, or develop new aspirations for their own futures.

**Professor Louise Richardson, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, said:** “The support of Alwaleed Philanthropies is a strong and welcome endorsement of the Multaka-Oxford project, the work of the museum teams and the contribution of our many volunteers. The project offers mutual benefit both to the University and to the volunteers. We are very grateful to Alwaleed Philanthropies for their support.”

Commenting on the launch of the program Her Royal Highness Princess Lamia bint Majed Saud Al Saud, Secretary General of Alwaleed Philanthropies, said: “We are pleased to support the continuation of the Multaka-Oxford programme for another five years. This programme, which opens its arms to refugees and helps to integrate them into the local community through the power of art and culture, plays a powerful role in strengthening cross-cultural understanding in society. Islamic art tells a story of our heritage, which can be often misunderstood, the Multaka-Oxford programme bridges these gaps and brings museum collections to life. This partnership is a true testament to the power of art and role of creative industries in enhancing social development. This project mirrors the successful Multaka programme at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin which we have been proud to support. We look forward to a fruitful partnership.”

Alwaleed Philanthropies are an international philanthropic organisation collaborating with a range of philanthropic, governmental, and educational organisations across 189 countries to combat poverty, empower women and youth, develop communities, provide disaster relief, and create cultural understanding through education. For the last 40 years their work has sought to innovate and foster a new meaning of peace and inclusiveness through education, art, and conversational exchange between communities.

The funding from Alwaleed Philanthropies will enable the Museums to recruit, train and support a new team of 200 volunteers from across Oxfordshire to work with a range of collections - such as scientific instruments from the Islamic World at the History of Science Museum and textiles, objects, and material from the Photographic and Sound Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum. The volunteers will bring diverse perspectives to these collections, sharing within the museums and the wider community, with a particular focus on engaging young people. Together with museum staff, the volunteers will also co-produce online and in-person events at the museums, co-curate displays sharing artefacts from the Islamic world, and lead tours and deliver object handling sessions, among other activities.

The Multaka team has become an integral part of the network in Oxford that supports people who are asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. This collaboration has led to extensive partnerships with mutual skill-sharing and support with the services of our community partners.

“In just a relatively short period, the project has deeply affected the lives of everyone involved with it, from staff to volunteers to community partners. Mutual learning and benefit are at the heart of

everything we do. For the museums, it has transformed museum practice; it has deepened understanding of the role museums, and for the interpretation of artefacts from the Islamic World and beyond in the heritage sector and our communities, locally and globally,” said Project Manager, Nicola Bird.

Multaka-Oxford is already highly regarded in the museums, arts, and heritage sector, having won the prestigious 2019 Collections Trust Award and the 2019 Museums + Heritage Award for Volunteer Team of the Year. Over the next five years the project aims to share its learning and resources across the sector by establishing a UK Multaka network, offering informal mentoring support to UK heritage projects, sharing project information at conferences, and supporting the development of Multaka projects at other international museums.

#### **Multaka-Oxford volunteer Hussein Kara Ahmed**

Before coming to Oxford in 2018, Hussein Kara Ahmed worked in an embroidery factory in Turkey. Three years before that, he was living in Syria, preparing to study law at university, but was forced to leave the country. Shortly after arriving in Oxford, a contact at a local community organisation suggested he might like to get involved in Multaka-Oxford. After eight months of volunteering, Hussein felt confident enough to apply for a job. He is now employed part-time as a Visitor Services Assistant at the Ashmolean Museum.

Hussein saw how the project fostered a sense of intercultural understanding between those visiting the museums and those volunteering in them. He says: “People here respect my language, respect where I come from. They like to hear about different cultures, and that’s been very encouraging. It has really helped me to feel part of this community.”

#### **Multaka-Oxford volunteer Dhamyaa Abass**

Dhamyaa Abass arrived in Oxford, from Iraq, in 2017 and she joined Multaka-Oxford as a volunteer in 2018. At the time she didn’t speak English but the Multaka-Oxford programme and tour guide training gave her the opportunity to practice. “I enjoyed leading the tours in English and loved showing visitors the objects from Iraq, Sudan and Arabic culture,” says Dhamyaa. Dhamyaa eventually became more involved in Multaka-Oxford, running a series of popular fashion shows, featuring dress from around the world, to encourage inter-cultural understanding.

The Multaka-Oxford programme gave Dhamyaa the confidence to continue her English training at City of Oxford College and to explore further education. She has recently completed a Teaching Assistant course that has led to working as a Teaching Assistant in Oxford primary schools.

Dhamyaa continues to bring her knowledge and experience to Oxford University museums by volunteering at the Ashmolean Museum, where she is based at the Welcome Desk and provides a welcome to visitors to the museum.

Dhamyaa says Multaka-Oxford “changed my life... and it changed many, many things in my heart.” She says: “It supported my language training and encouraged me towards other education. Multaka-Oxford introduced me to so many people and cultures and made me feel part of a community. And if I ever missed my country, the project gave me the opportunity to speak about it and my family.”

**End**

## Notes to editors:

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Images, including photos of volunteers featured in case studies above, can be downloaded at:  
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/aqswfntndxu7ps3/AADX9Qo1ZAq4hBszsLwz6Gpya?dl=0>

### About Alwaleed Philanthropies

For four decades, Alwaleed Philanthropies has supported and spent more than 4 billion dollars on social welfare and initiated more than 1,000 projects in over 189 countries, managed by 10 Saudi female members, reaching more than 1 billion beneficiaries around the world, regardless of gender, race, or religion. Alwaleed Philanthropies collaborates with a range of philanthropic, governmental, and educational organisations to combat poverty, empower women and youth, develop communities, provide disaster relief, and create cultural understanding through education.

### About Oxford University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums

Oxford University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums house some of the world's most significant collections, covering the breadth and depth of the natural world, global art and artefacts. The four museums – the Ashmolean, History of Science, Natural History and Pitt Rivers – together with the Bodleian Libraries and Oxford Botanic Garden serve as the front door to the wealth of knowledge and research generated at Oxford. In 2019 the sites together welcomed more than 3.3 million visitors.

[www.glam.ox.ac.uk](http://www.glam.ox.ac.uk)

Ashmolean Museum:	<a href="http://www.ashmolean.org">www.ashmolean.org</a>
Bodleian Libraries:	<a href="http://visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk">visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk</a>
History of Science Museum:	<a href="http://www.hsm.ox.ac.uk">www.hsm.ox.ac.uk</a>
Museum of Natural History:	<a href="http://www.oumnh.ox.ac.uk">www.oumnh.ox.ac.uk</a>
Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum	<a href="http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk">www.obga.ox.ac.uk</a>
Pitt Rivers Museum:	<a href="http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk">www.prm.ox.ac.uk</a>