

How does the charity sector think about diversity?

Although civil society understands it has a problem with race equity, the discussion of the issue is “too often muted or insufficient” (Let’s talk about race, 2018)

There is no unified definition of diversity across the sector

- There is “a lack of precision in the use of terminology around diversity [...] and a lack of clarity about the benefits diversity can bring to people and organisations” (*Walking the talk on diversity*, 2018, p. 4). Organisations often discuss the need to improve the diversity within their organisation, but do not specify targeted protected characteristics, cognitive diversity or socio-economic background to improve.
- While in the 1980s BAME-led organisations largely existed to ‘speak truth to power’ about racial injustices their communities faced, this has changed. These organisations are increasingly professionalised to deliver culturally appropriate services to such communities, meaning that “the space to talk about race equality within civil society is diminished and under significant pressure” (*Let’s talk about race*, 2018, p. 9).

There is discomfort across the sector discussing these issues

- Discussion around race in particular is stilted and uncomfortable. White staff struggle to speak about race and worry that their language is incorrect or insensitive. This lack of awareness about wider patterns of discrimination across society is entrenched by insufficient and irregular training about the nuances and complexities of racism.
- There is a particular lack of understanding about ‘whiteness’ and privilege. *Let’s talk about race* highlights reports of senior managers deliberately emphasising their inability to discuss race, identifying this behaviour as symptomatic of ‘white fragility’ (DiAngelo, 2011) where privileges are felt to be under threat (*Let’s talk about race*, 2018, p. 11).
- Because of the sector’s philanthropic roots, there is a predisposition amongst charity staff to assume discriminatory practice and racial inequality is not present in the sector. Individuals and organisations can therefore shelter from accusations of racism behind liberal values (*Walking the talk on diversity*, p. 6). This is a powerful rhetoric, and cultures of racism, exclusion and discrimination can therefore remain unchecked for many years.

Employers do not always view influencing diversity as ‘their problem’

- There are mixed understandings of the extent to which employers are responsible to address this. When exploring black male employment rates, Trust for London found that few employers were surprised by the figures, but that “some felt the education system was at fault, whilst a few questioned young black people’s behaviour, confidence and a ‘lack of an ability to sell themselves’” (*Improving employment rates*, p. 7). The latter

response in particular indicates a poor understanding of systemic disadvantage, and the role of the employer to unravel racist stereotyping to support the future of the charity sector in being an inclusive place for BAME applicants.

- Employers also fear accusations of tokenism in employment practice, and therefore fear introducing measures for change. Sandhu found that over time, efforts to involve those with lived expertise more meaningfully have become routinely associated with tokenism. This assumption means that practices of involvement have not evolved or improved (*The value of lived experience*, 2017, p. 32).

The rate of change in the voluntary sector is too slow

Despite a strong business case for diverse teams delivering greater efficiency and financial return, progress within civil society has been slow.

Leadership on the issue has been muted

- A lack of diverse representation at leadership level has stalled progress. Green Park found that charity leaders in particular must represent the communities they serve, and that their “claims to be outward looking and open to helping people from all walks of life are hardly enhanced by the continued domination of its leadership by white men” (*Third sector leadership 2000*, 2018, p. 26). The lack of role models is also seen on trustee boards, where 92% of trustees are white, $\frac{2}{3}$ are male, and on average they are aged between 55 and 64 (*Taken on Trust*, 2017). A conscious effort is needed to make charity leadership specifically more diverse in order to drive change.
- Red Cross’ report examining their own diversity and areas for improvement found that many employees did not know a specific diversity team existed (*Recruiting, supporting and developing BAME staff*, 2017). Leaders need to raise the profile of the diversity debate within their organisations, and actively support it themselves to lead the way. The Institute of Fundraising highlights that “CEOs and trustees are key in driving the culture of an organisation, and key in setting EDI as a key priority corporately” (*Manifesto for change*, 2018). Charity leaders should prioritise diversity in their goal-setting and strategies in order to secure long-lasting change.

Lived experience is embedded as advisory, not strategic

- There is a clear lack of lived expertise in leadership teams. CEOs are rarely connected to their cause, and usually come from privileged backgrounds (*The value of lived experience*, 2017).
- This embeds a culture in which lived expertise is not understood as central and strategic but as ‘advisory’. Sandhu found that “the sector now broadly understands that lived experience is important, but even when action is taken, people with lived experience are

often viewed more as ‘informants’ than change makers and leaders of change” (*The value of lived experience*, 2017, p. 7).

- NPC supports these findings: “There are few examples of this expertise being used consistently, collaboratively and effectively to increase diversity and impact social change initiatives” (*Walking the talk on diversity*, 2017, p. 5)
- Unfortunately, this means that accusations of tokenism are not unfounded. It takes time and care to truly understand each individual’s experience, and the sector has not taken sufficient steps to centre lived experience in the right ways. Many charities feel trapped on this issue: they fear accusations of tokenism, so neglect to tackle the problem by developing meaningful programmes of involvement through shared learning.
- Sandhu found that funding practice entrenches this problem, with only 1 in 10 funders stating that the inclusion of lived expertise was a key element of their decision-making processes. Funders are broadly happy to fund research into the diversity of the sector, but less willing to score applicants on their involvement of service users. Changing this practice could significantly catalyse progress.
- This was supported by Hodgson and Pond, who found that top-down monitoring of grants and requirements to meet fixed outputs and outcomes were usually not defined by service users, and that shifting power so that they could define the use of the funds themselves would strengthen services (*How community philanthropy shifts power*, 2018).

This work is hard, and we need to be braver

- There are numerous practical issues that might prevent BAME people from becoming involved with charities. NPC identifies the difficulties involved with remunerating trustees, discouraging those who rely on paid time (*Walking the talk on diversity*, 2018). Red Cross discuss the prevalence of unpaid internships, preventing diverse pools of applicants (*Recruiting, supporting and developing BAME staff*, 2017). The sector has not been brave enough in taking steps to remove these barriers alongside the more challenging cultural work that is needed.
- The Institute of Fundraising acknowledged the significant challenges of the process and that learning would be necessary, stating “We know that this journey will not always be a comfortable one, and that no matter how hard we try we will get things wrong along the way” (*Manifesto for Change*, 2018, p. 7). Many organisations are simply not ready for the difficulties of the journey, and so their efforts to improve are not designed well enough. They can have little impact, or worse, put organisations off further initiatives due to resource implications or funding difficulties.

It’s not just about employment - inclusivity must come with diversity initiatives

- There is a focus on employing more BAME people, but insufficient focus on longer-term strategic measures and culture changes. Riordan identifies that diversity is useless

without inclusivity, highlighting that “subtle biases persist and lead to exclusion [...] often a result of unconscious mindsets and stereotypes about people who are different from oneself” (*Diversity is useless without inclusivity*, 2014).

- Aysa Gray finds that much of this unconscious bias lies in standards of professionalism across workplace cultures, which tend to be rooted in white supremacist ideals of dress, speech, accent and working style. Her use of Okun and Jones’ definition of diversity shows that these ideals “institutionalize whiteness and Westernness as both normal and superior to other ethnic, racial, and regional identities and customs” (*The bias of ‘professionalism’ standards*, 2019). Such biases are not always viewed as violent or discriminatory but lead to systemic discrimination and exclusion, and can often occur in workplaces that are visibly diverse.
- Having identified their discomfort discussing the issues, it is too easy to make excuses and avoid tackling them. Gray warned against simple solutions in undoing workplace cultures rooted in white supremacist ideals, highlighting that self-critical interrogation is necessary to spark genuine change: “don’t expect a one-time implicit bias workshop or panel to undo years of inequity [...] Don’t expect this work to be cheap or quick” (*The bias of ‘professionalism’ standards*, 2019, p. 6).
- The distinction between ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusivity’ is important for the charity sector to move forward. Cross-sector scrutiny of our own biases is essential to form truly inclusive workplaces, not simply companies with diverse employees. A diverse team will not automatically be inclusive, and an inclusive culture will not always attract a diverse team automatically. These initiatives must happen concurrently and in support of one another.

A further instalment of the literature review outlining solutions that have been proposed is forthcoming, which will outline more specific solutions.

[Selected bibliography \(full list of sources will be included in final report\)](#)

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[Sandhu, B. \(2017\) The value of lived experience in social change: the need for leadership and organisational development in the social sector: Clore Social Leadership Programme](#)