



Home Truths

Undoing racism and delivering
real diversity in the charity sector

Dr Sanjiv Lingayah, Kristiana Wrixon and Maisie Hulbert

Funded by



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The partner organisations

Voice4Change England

Voice4Change England was set up in 2007 to support the Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic (BAME) voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. Its aim is to build a strong and inclusive civil society that lifts the life outcomes for BAME and other populations subject to racism and other structural disadvantage. The organisation works in a number of ways, including developing BAME-led self-organised action and contributing to a constructive discourse about 'race' and racism.

ACEVO, the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations

ACEVO is a membership body of over 1,400 CEOs and senior leaders of civil society organisations working in England and Wales.

Together with its network ACEVO inspires and supports civil society leaders by providing connections, advocacy and skills. ACEVO believes that effective leaders are driven by imagining a better, brighter, more equal world. Through their vision these leaders inspire others – improving lives, our society and their own performance.

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Foreword

This report was researched and largely written before Covid-19 took hold. The pandemic has affected every part of life as we know it. But the virus has placed a particularly heavy load on sections of society where BAME people are over-represented – among those living in poverty, in low-paid and precarious work, and in key worker roles. This over-representation is not coincidental but a result of the ways in which racism is embedded in our socio-economic arrangements (Khan, 2020; Pidd, Barr and Mohdin, 2020).

The crisis has also taken its toll on the charity sector. Some charities have been inundated with demands as they try to service populations and organisations heavily impacted by the virus and also the fallout from efforts to combat Covid-19. This is perhaps particularly the case with small charities close to often-excluded populations that mainstream charities and the state can find 'hard to reach'.

This situation means that BAME populations may be over-reliant on self-help and on often under-resourced BAME-led specialist organisations. Even where there is, potentially, money available to help BAME populations and BAME organisations, there is little in the way of pipelines to get resources to where they are urgently needed.

Before Covid-19 hit home, this report was calling for the charity sector to prioritise racial and ethnic diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Additionally, as is made self-evident by the fallout from Covid-19, there is a need to reinvest in BAME-led charities and civil society. In part this is to hold mainstream charities to account for what they do and don't do to support and service BAME populations. But, crucially, this investment is also needed to enable BAME-led charities and civil society to play a full and equal part in the post-crisis reconstruction of the charity sector and wider society.

The aim is to create a healthy 'ecosystem' for change. That is, one that features a complementary relationship between mainstream and BAME-led charitable endeavours to ensure equitable progress in society so that all people are properly supported and protected from harm, both in everyday life and in crises.

But while the need to combat structural racism and advance DEI is perhaps clearer than ever, in the midst of the pandemic the conditions for change may have also deteriorated.

Many charities will have lost income as they are unable to deliver projects and contracts or generate revenues from events and fundraising. Furthermore, charitable funders – rightly – have increased short-term spending to support some organisations through the crisis, and this may affect the availability of future funding, including money for investment in sector initiatives on DEI.

In these circumstances, charity efforts for greater diversity inside the sector and for race equity in wider society could be deferred indefinitely in favour of 'steadying the ship'. But, as the research in this report shows and anti-racists note (Charity So White, 2020), the status quo does not deliver DEI or undo racism.

We cannot wait for the 'good times' to return to the charity sector before we prioritise DEI approaches and positive life outcomes for BAME people. Instead we must, more urgently than ever, rethink and reconstruct who we are as a sector, how we work and what we do. By prioritising the best in charity values, we can use the crisis to come together to undo structural disadvantage and racism in society and to replace it with equity and justice by design. ■

Executive summary

Introduction

The charity sector has a problem with racial and ethnic diversity. Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic (BAME) people are under-represented in the sector and those who are in charities can be subject to racism and antagonism not faced by white colleagues.

The sector is not alone in the relatively negative position of BAME people within it. This situation is a feature of wider society. However, the issue seems especially problematic in the charity sector because it is expressly built on commitments to justice and equality.

Living up to its positive values means that there are times when the charity sector needs to hear some home truths about where it has fallen short. This report reveals some of the failings of the 'mainstream' charity sector on diversity, equity and inclusion and suggests that these issues can only be meaningfully addressed by engaging in questions of racism. However, our research indicates that some charity leaders who are white have much further to go to understand racism and to help to overturn it.

More positively, there appears to be an appetite for progress. And this report is intended to provide a supportive framework for those who want real change. The report lays out steps both to further open up the charity sector to BAME people and to reorientate charity work towards building a racially just society.

This report is not about finger-pointing and blame: it is about accepting responsibility for what needs to be done. We hope it is a timely intervention to help the charity sector to move beyond warm words on diversity and on to meaningful action.

The project

To avoid being 'just another' diversity report, there are some points of difference from previous work in this area. We have sought to reframe the diversity debate so that rather than saying that the charity sector has a ('racial') diversity problem, we say that racism is a significant and unresolved issue in the charitable sector just as it is in the rest of society.

We define racism as ordinary and pervasive, a thread that runs through everyday life. Specifically, we say that racism exists where *harm* is caused to BAME people by *actions* in which *race-based thinking* is a significant factor. In the charity sector this can manifest in 'difficulties' relating to, engaging with and supporting BAME people, including BAME people in the charity workforce.

We also take the approach that the discussion on diversity in charities must centre the experience, knowhow and insights of BAME people in and around the charity sector. We prioritise this way of doing things because, somewhat paradoxically, discussions about insufficient racial and ethnic diversity often exclude or limit input from BAME people.

Key findings

This project draws on a number of important data sources, including a background literature review; an online survey with almost 500 responses from BAME people in the charity sector; 24 in-depth interviews, 13 with charity leaders (including two BAME) and 11 with BAME charity staff. Two roundtable discussions also took place. One was with 'system-shapers', including representatives of funders and infrastructure/membership bodies with influence on diversity priorities within the sector. The second was with racial justice advocates and activists, to explore connections between diversity, anti-racism and race equity.

The participants sharing their experiences in this project were largely self-selecting rather than drawn up as a 'representative sample'. We therefore cannot say that their experiences, perspectives and insights reflect those of wider BAME populations in charities. That said, the ►

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◀ accounts of life in the charity sector provided by BAME project participants are rich, textured and troubling.

In particular, our online survey of BAME people showed that racism was a significant feature of their charity life:

68% of respondents

(335 out of 489 people) said that they had experienced, witnessed or heard stories about racism in their time in the charity sector

50% of respondents

(246 people out of 490) felt that they needed to 'tone down' behaviour or to be on their 'best behaviour' in order to fit in in the charity sector

In terms of direct experiences of racism:

222 people

had been subject to ignorant or insensitive questioning about their culture or religion

147 people

had been treated as an intellectual inferior

114 respondents

had been subject to excessive surveillance and scrutiny by colleagues, managers or supervisors

These experiences cause harm. One-hundred and sixteen people stated that direct experiences of racism had had a negative or very negative impact on their health and emotional wellbeing. And a further 94 respondents who had experienced racism said that it had had a negative or very negative impact on their 'desired career path'.

Our findings demonstrate that the problem in the charity sector is not simply an absence of BAME people. Once inside the sector, significant numbers of BAME people experience discrimination and harm. Our research suggests that this situation is linked to the prevailing culture of the sector. By this we mean that long-standing habits, practices and norms will have to change in order to improve how the charity sector works with and serves BAME people.

However, our research also shows that while charity leaders who are white see the problem of a lack of ethnic diversity in the sector, they are concerned about saying or doing the wrong thing on 'race'. This fear seems to be underpinned by a lack of understanding about and engagement with the realities of racism. For example, in our project, racism was discussed in the main by charity leaders and system-shapers in abstract terms, rather than as a set of arrangements that they can challenge and undo. There was little or no focus on institutional racism, or on how paternalism or colonial thinking can disadvantage BAME people in the charity sector.

Diversity, equity and inclusion

While there may be a focus in the charity sector on attaining more racial and ethnic diversity, our evidence suggests that a lack of diversity cannot be overcome without a commitment to engaging with racism. It also requires practical action to create conditions inside the charity sector for BAME people to enter, to stay and to thrive. This is why inclusion and equity are important.

Inclusion refers to actions that invite and support 'difference' in a setting. An inclusive organisation enables all of its people to fully participate in and shape the collective, e.g. by supporting people to be themselves and to speak out about concerns and to be heard.

Equity-based approaches emphasise that different populations are differently situated in society. For example, the lives of BAME people may be shaped by various factors – including racism. As a result, to even out racial disparities – for example in a recruitment process – it may be necessary to treat people differently based on how they are positioned in society, rather than treating and judging everyone as the same. This may mean supporting BAME charity people and prospective charity people differently from white counterparts so that a workplace can be made more diverse and inclusive. ▶

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< Recommendations

Progress in the charity sector requires strategies for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). The recommendations below attempt, in different ways, to instigate cultural change in how charities engage with BAME people – from addressing racism to changing everyday practice. The emphasis is not only on diversifying the workforce, i.e. on who does the work. Transformation in this area will be reflected in everything charities do: from how they work to what they do in wider society to target and enhance outcomes for BAME people.

Recommendations for the sector collectively (including charities, infrastructure bodies, funders and regulators)

1. Redefine racism as ordinary, systemic and institutional
2. Conduct an annual sector-wide 'BAME Barometer' survey to capture BAME experience in charities
3. Develop independent or third-party mechanisms for reporting and addressing racism in charities
4. Develop a plan on the use of regulation to accelerate DEI progress

Recommendations for organisational policy

1. Integrate explicit race equity goals into charitable work
2. Report publicly on internal DEI targets
3. Publish ethnicity pay gap data
4. Change recruitment criteria, e.g. value attributes differently, including lived experience and alignment with institutional vision
5. Invest in supporting and safeguarding BAME charity people, including proper complaints procedures
6. Work with and pay BAME DEI specialists to improve practice

Recommendations for CEOs and senior leaders

1. Learn more about racism and current anti-racist thinking
2. Take responsibility for learning how racism can manifest in your organisation
3. CEOs (with board chairs) should lead on and be held responsible and accountable for progress on DEI targets

Recommendations for funders

1. Invest in a DEI Transformation Fund geared to BAME-led initiatives
2. Become more interventionist in supporting charity sector DEI culture and practice, including making changes to application criteria to prioritise racial justice work

Conclusion

This report marks out a pathway to transform the charity sector. However, to date, DEI rhetoric is ahead of action to such an extent that it can lead to frustration and even despair about the prospects for progress. And yet, there appears to be an appetite for real change, among BAME charity people and among a growing, possibly critical, mass of influential white charity people and institutions. This is the time to act, for the charity sector to centre BAME people and for DEI to be reflected in who is in the sector and what the sector is trying to achieve.

ACEVO and Voice4Change are committed to doing more to deliver DEI through our work together and as individual organisations. We also want to work openly and constructively with others – particularly infrastructure bodies – who are seeking to advance DEI practice. ACEVO and Voice4Change also recognise that we do not have all the answers and that we too must be open to scrutiny in our DEI interventions.

We look forward to the work ahead. ■

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Section 1:

Introduction

The charity sector has a problem with racial and ethnic diversity. Black, Asian and Minoritised¹ Ethnic (BAME) people are under-represented in the sector and are also subject to discrimination and antagonism not faced by white colleagues.

The sector is not unique in terms of the relatively negative position of BAME people in it. In wider society BAME people, overall, experience in a variety of ways² lows that are lower and highs that are less high than the general white British population. This is a well-established and well-evidenced pattern that exists at the collective or aggregate level. However, this does not mean that every BAME life is at every turn thwarted by 'race' and racism; and, more importantly, BAME people individually and collectively are not helpless victims of racism but active agents in making their lives and remaking contexts.

At the same time, BAME people in the charity sector and wider society should not have to fight for the right to belong. People in and close to power need to play their part – especially in the charity sector, which is built on but does not always live up to higher ethical principles.

This report contains criticism of the 'mainstream' charity sector. It suggests that charity leaders have much to do to understand racism and deliver on diversity, equity and inclusion in the sector. But this report is not about blame: it is about facing some home truths about where the charity sector falls short and taking responsibility for what needs to be done. On diversity, we must now move from warm words to meaningful action in order to change the sector for good. To that end, this report is intended to be a spur and an aid to all those committed to making the charity sector a racially diverse and welcoming place for all – one where everyone's face 'fits'.

Diversity in the charity sector

Diversity is the presence, in a setting such as an organisation, of people who together have various elements of human difference,³ such as gender and gender identity, 'race'

and ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, disability classification, and class.

One practical argument for diversity is that it helps to make organisations and initiatives more effective. This argument is well made by advocates of the value of lived experience and lived-experience leaders being at the heart of social change (Sandhu, 2017). The approach helps to recognise and affirm the assets of people who might be too easily dismissed as beneficiaries of charities or groups that need to be consulted by 'professionals' rather than recognised as well-qualified architects of social change. Furthermore, it is a reminder that excellence, knowhow and leadership come in many different forms.

However, the relationship between diversity and performance may be complex. For example, there is an argument that it is not identity or experiential diversity that boosts productivity but cognitive diversity, i.e. how people think (Reynolds and Lewis, 2017). And that can simply boost the intake of more white people who are deemed to be 'outside-the-box' thinkers, at the expense of BAME or other people who might bring lived expertise to a cause.

Therefore, while diversity may be performance-enhancing (Rock, Grant and Grey, 2016), ultimately, diversity in the charity sector should be underwritten by values such as a commitment to justice – values that inform the sector when it is at its best.

There is no one way to measure how much diversity is 'just right'. The answer depends on the nature of the work, location and mission of the charities involved. That said, the principle of 'proportionality' is one way to assess appropriate levels of diversity. In the context of an individual charity, this may ➤

¹ We use 'minoritised' rather than 'minority' ethnic in our version of BAME. In doing so we wish to indicate that the issue is not that one part of the population is in the majority and another in the minority. For example, blond-haired people are in the majority and another in the minority. Rather, the point is that people outside the category of 'white British' are subject to differential and disadvantageous treatment that can marginalise and constrain them.

² For example, see statistics from the Equality and Human Rights Commission to accompany EHRC (2016b).

³ This definition borrows from ACF (2019). See also D5 Coalition (2014).

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◀ lead to an expectation that its workforce 'reflects' certain populations, such as its 'user' group or the population of the local area in which the organisation is based. This logic implies that, for instance, an organisation supporting BAME young people with mental health issues in a diverse place like Leicester (BBC, 2012) should have a 'significant' proportion of BAME staff.

The reality is rather far away from proportionality of BAME presence in the charity sector as a whole.

Fewer than one in 10 voluntary sector employees (9 per cent) are from BAME backgrounds, a lower proportion than in both the public and private sectors (both at 11 per cent), and a lower proportion than in the UK population as a whole (14 per cent) (NCVO, 2019). There is even less racial diversity at executive and non-executive leadership level in charities (Wrixon, 2018). Inclusive Boards (2018) found that in the 500 largest charities by income, only 5.3 per cent of senior leadership teams were from an ethnic minority background. Green Park found that only 9.6 per cent of trustees in the top 100 charities by income were from a BAME background (Adams et al., 2019).

Progress in the area of racial and ethnic diversity in the charity sector is far too slow. But there appears to be growing interest in change. Initiatives include the pledge on racial diversity promoted by ACEVO and the Institute of Fundraising (ACEVO, 2018), and the Pillars of Stronger Foundation Practice developed by the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF, 2019). There has also been the rise of BAME voices outside of the charity sector, such as new media publication *gal-dem*, which foregrounds perspectives of women and non-binary people of colour.⁴ And within the charity sector, the critical and constructive campaigning of #CharitySoWhite is helping to make BAME absence an urgent issue.⁵

But there is still so much to do.

The project

Making Diversity Count – the project behind this report – began in a conversation between ACEVO and Voice4Change England in 2018. From the start there was a determination to avoid becoming 'just another diversity report'. The aim was to offer something new and helpful in a context where everyone says diversity is such a good thing, but there is surprisingly little of it around in the charity sector.

Our focus on experiences of BAME people should in no way be taken to mean that we do not understand the connection between BAME and other marginalised populations or understand the need for joint efforts for justice and freedom. We also recognise that 'race' intersects with other issues such as gender, class and disability in ways that can mean that some people experience compounded multiple levels of exclusion all at once. Our specific focus on BAME people is intended to ensure that uncomfortable issues of 'race' and racism are faced fully by the charity sector.

To add value, we have tried to bring a point of difference to the diversity debate. In part, this comes from being an unusual collaboration: two civil society membership organisations – one 'mainstream' and one BAME-led. More specifically, the project is founded on a set of principles which we hope adds something different to previous diversity research. Two principles are worth mentioning at this point.

The first is the need to reframe the issue. Rather than saying that the charity sector has a (racial and ethnic) diversity problem, i.e. a relative lack of BAME people leading and working and volunteering in charities, the project starts from the premise that racism is a problem in the charitable sector, as it is in society at large. Added to this, it is a problem that is deep-lying, significant and unresolved. It manifests in 'difficulty' in relating to BAME people, and a lack of diversity is one example of this.

We recognise that this notion will be uncomfortable for some readers to face. But naming and owning the problem is critical to fundamentally changing the charity sector. We further develop this idea, and in particular a discussion of racism in Section 3.

A second principle that has informed our work is that it is right and proper that the debate on diversity in charities has at its core the experience, expertise and insights of BAME people who have seen the charity sector up close and personal. We take this approach as a matter of principle because debates about racial diversity can, paradoxically, end up excluding BAME people.

In particular we recognise the importance of believing BAME people about their experiences in the charity sector. The Me-Too movement reminds us of the damage done when women's accounts of sexual harassment and sexual assault are disbelieved. We need to accept ▶

⁴ See gal-dem.com

⁵ See Civil Society (2019) and the Twitter account twitter.com/charitysowhite

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◀ the weight of lived-experience testimony and avoid the temptation to deflect and deny.

This report, and the research that informs it, is intended to contribute to meaningful movement on racial diversity. It is not a manual or a 'how-to' guide. Nor does it provide a one-size-fits-all solution. However, it should be instructive, adaptable and practical. It requires that individual charities and leaders commit to action and, critically, that charity people and institutions, advocates and activists, come together collectively to make change happen, decisively and irreversibly.

We hope that everyone with the interests of the charity sector at heart will read and be stimulated by this report. That said, we have particularly aimed the work at people in leadership roles in the charity sector and those with access to levers of power – including recruiters, infrastructure organisations and funders. Typically, that group is disproportionately white, middle class and, especially in the largest charities, rather male. We hope that this work brings into their field of vision new perspectives and possibilities and ambitions for change. Second, we hope that BAME people and racial justice advocates and activists will be able to read this report and find evidence that they can use to advance their efforts – even though we recognise that they may already have many of the same (and more) insights as those articulated here.

We want charity funders to use this report to inform how they deploy their power, influence and money, and we have made some recommendations that affect them. However, we have not made detailed recommendations to funders about advancing their own (internal) diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices, as others, such as the Association of Charitable Funders (ACF, 2019) and Ten Years' Time (Ten Years' Time), are doing this important work and are making progress.

Research interests and methods

In conducting our work, as well as seeking to understand the experiences of BAME people in the charity sector, we have sought the perspectives of leaders of charities as well as those of 'system-shapers' within the sector

– including funders, infrastructure bodies and regulators. We also have been focused on understanding the charity context and the significant body of recent work on charity sector diversity to situate this work well and to avoid duplicating other efforts.

More specifically, this report draws upon the following sources of data:

Landscape literature review: This included 56 items, including books, sector, government and corporate reports, newspaper articles and blogs. The review explored three main areas: (1) definitions of diversity and its features; (2) beliefs and attitudes about racial diversity; and (3) how current diversity initiatives operate.

BAME online survey: This survey explored the experiences of BAME individuals working in the sector in paid and voluntary positions. A total of 493 people responded in detail to the survey, providing quantitative and qualitative data covering their experiences in and insights about the sector.

Interviews: We conducted 24 semi-structured anonymised interviews between September and November 2019, 13 with charity leaders (including two BAME) and 11 with BAME charity staff.

Roundtables: Session 1 was with 10 system-shapers, including funders, infrastructure/ membership bodies and other organisations with influence on shaping the debate and priorities within the sector. Session 2 was with 10 racial justice advocates and activists to explore and make connections between diversity, anti-racism and racial justice.

Though we have had inputs from people in different types of charities, from medical to international development to local charities, those who participated were those with an interest in doing so. Therefore, we cannot state that the findings of the research are 'representative' of the whole charity sector, or of the experiences of all BAME people in the sector. That said, we consider our evidence base to be rich and important in conveying some of the hitherto underexplored experiences of BAME people in the charity sector. We hope that our new findings will make an important contribution to the debate on charity diversity. ▶

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< A word on language

Finally, in this introduction, we say a bit about language and the difficult nature of many of the terms used in the report, including 'race', 'BAME' and 'diversity'.

First, the term 'race': this is a socially constructed term that has no basis in science⁶ and should not in any way be a basis for organising and constraining human life. It has been powerfully argued that the idea of 'race' did not lead to the invention of racism, and that instead racism led to the creation of the idea of 'race' (Denvir, 2018) as a means to categorise and dehumanise some populations. When we use the term 'race' we do so with inverted commas. If we use the term 'racial' – with respect to diversity – we do so to refer to the presence or absence of Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic (BAME) people in the charity sector.

The second term is 'BAME'. Groups classified as BAME include people identifying as Asian/Asian British, black/African/Caribbean/black British, white Irish, Arab, Latinx,⁷ Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, or Gypsy or Irish Traveller, as well as those of multiple ethnic backgrounds.

Such a broad term has many limitations. It centres whiteness as 'normal' and labels everyone else 'other'. At the same time, few people are likely to self-identify as BAME (Sandhu, 2018).

People may instead think of themselves in more specific ways, for example as British Chinese, black Caribbean or Bangladeshi. Others may feel affinity with broader identifiers such as African/African Diaspora, black/Black, brown or Muslim. Yet, these terms may be of limited use in talking about the experiences of wider populations categorised as 'other' who may also experience racism, e.g. people of East Asian, Arab, Turkish or Latinx background. 'People of colour' is used as a term that can potentially encompass multiple racialised and minoritised populations. However, this generates its own concerns – for example,

that it comes from the United States and is less helpful in the UK context or that the term decentres Blackness.

Debates of this sort will no doubt continue. In this report, despite its imperfections, we do use 'BAME' in a particular and limited way. That is, to describe the aggregate experiences of (often) racialised and minoritised people categorised as other than 'white British'. This allows us to then say things like 'x per cent of the charity workforce is BAME, while the percentage of BAME people in the population is 2x'.

A third term in this work is 'diversity'. As discussed above, we take this to mean the presence or absence in a population – such as a workforce – of various elements of human difference, such as 'race' and ethnicity, gender, or perhaps class background.

Diversity applies only to a collective, not to an individual (Bolger, 2017). For example, sometimes a BAME person will be called a 'diverse person' or, if they are applying for a job, a 'diverse candidate'. This is incorrect. By way of illustration, a black woman is not 'diverse' in and of herself. She is just a person like any other; but recruiting a black woman to a charity could make the organisation's workforce more diverse as a whole.

Talk of diversity can provoke strong negative responses. Indeed, one member of our racial justice roundtable said that they never wanted to use the term (racial) 'diversity' again! For some advocates and activists working for racial justice, the term can seem a distraction, meaning that we don't talk about racism. Furthermore, as stated above, the diversity agenda can legitimately be criticised as more orientated to talk than action.

While we do understand these concerns, we do use the language to represent a visible sign of progress, or the lack of it. However, as developed further in Section 3, diversity only becomes truly meaningful and actionable when paired with ideas of inclusion and race equity. ■

⁶ For example, on announcing the completion of the first survey of the entire human genome, President Bill Clinton remarked that: 'in genetic terms, all human beings, regardless of race, are more than 99.9 percent the same' (CNN, 2000).

⁷ 'Latinx' is a gender-neutral term used predominantly in the United States to refer to people identifying culturally or ethnically as 'Latin American' or some variant of this.

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Experiences of BAME people

This section is this report's beating heart. We already know that BAME people are relatively absent from the charity sector. But the best way to know if the charity sector is ready for greater racial and ethnic diversity is to understand the experience of BAME people already inside the sector. And that is the focus of this section.

The participants sharing experiences in this project were largely self-selecting rather than belonging to a group drawn up on the basis of a 'representative sample'. We therefore cannot pass comment on the extent to which their experiences, perspectives and insights reflect those of wider BAME populations in charities. That said, the accounts of life in the charity sector provided by BAME project participants are rich, textured and troubling.

As mentioned in the introduction, inputs from BAME people into the project took three forms (see data sources at the end of this report for more details).

The first of these was an online survey aimed at people self-identifying as one of the ethnicities under the umbrella category BAME. The survey was targeted at BAME people with experience in the charity sector as volunteers (including trustee and other roles), interns, employees and/or associates/freelancers.

There were 493 detailed survey responses that included information about the respondents' role and their personal experiences of being in the charity sector – although these respondents did not necessarily answer every question. One-hundred and eighteen additional survey submissions contained fewer completed data fields; we cannot be sure why this was the case. Of the total of 611 respondents (giving detailed responses and not), 543 were engaged in the charity sector at the time of the survey and a further 29 had worked in the sector within the last five years. This latter group's experiences were eligible for our survey, allowing us some access to people who perhaps felt that they had little choice but to leave the sector. A small number of people attempted to fill in the survey who

had previously worked in the sector but more than five years ago; these respondents were screened out from completing the rest of the survey, to ensure that all responses were based on relatively recent experiences.

The second element of input from BAME charity people came from 14 interviews with BAME charity employees – two of which were with people in formal senior management/ leadership positions in their organisations.

The third source of perspectives of BAME people was a roundtable discussion involving racial justice advocates and activists. This group of 10 people work in different ways to transform society to make 'race' irrelevant to the kinds of lives people can lead. Some of these roundtable participants work in the charity sector but in specialist (sometimes BAME-led) equalities organisations rather than what might be described as 'mainstream' charities.

Below, we examine the experiences of BAME people in the charity sector and draw on these experiences and associated insights to generate ideas on how to transform the sector. Before continuing, we need to say that we are grateful to all those who came forward to give such thoughtful, honest testimony – particularly because it can be difficult to discuss negative experiences, especially those of racism.

We believe that we obtained such a quantity and quality of contribution in part because, until now, the BAME people most impacted by the lack of diversity in the charity sector have not been sufficiently included in discussions of the problem and its solutions. We hope that this report marks the beginning of intentional ►

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◀ new practice in the charity sector: not simply to consult, but to ensure that the knowledge and specialisms of BAME people and organisations take centre stage in designing 'deep-down' diversity.

For the purposes of this report, we have taken an evidence base of several hundred thousand words and distilled it into a few thousand. In doing so we recognise that some detail will be lost, but we aim to highlight the key themes in the data. These are:

differing experiences and dimensions of racism in the charity sector

the failure of charities to effectively deal with racism

the harmful impacts that racism has on BAME people

the need for far-reaching and deep change

Experiences and dimensions of racism

In considering what it is like to have racial and ethnic diversity in the charity sector, we asked whether racism was a feature of life in the sector for BAME people. And it was.

The weight of negative experiences among BAME charity people suggests that the diversity problem is not limited to there being insufficient numbers of BAME people in the sector. Problems surface even when BAME people are present in charities.

Our results show that, in large numbers, BAME project participants have encountered racism in the form of discriminatory and antagonistic behaviours and actions inside the charity sector. More generally, there was a feeling among our cohort of BAME people that they are on the outside of the charity sector, even when on the inside. This is perhaps most reflected in the fact that 61 per cent (304 out of 491 people) of online survey respondents said that they feel/have felt that they need to 'outperform' white British counterparts to make comparable progress in the charity sector.

We consider other research findings below, but before doing so, we need to talk about racism. We discuss and define racism

more fully in Section 3, but here it is worth emphasising that racism is built on beliefs that a person's race and ethnicity (somehow) affects who and how they are as a person, and that some groups have more desirable traits than others. This, in turn, informs the actions of organisations, decision-makers and individuals. For example, recruitment processes are designed to filter in people with positive characteristics and capabilities and to filter out people with negative ones. But because these characteristics are racialised, filtration processes tend to disproportionately exclude BAME people and include white British people.

For now, a final point on racism is that it is harmful to BAME people. This seems obvious, but it is important to emphasise that racism is not necessarily about an intention to cause harm or about BAME people being 'offended'; it is about actual harm caused.

To sum up, racism exists where *harm* is caused to BAME people by *actions* in which *race-based thinking* is a significant factor.

In a charity or other setting, racism can play out as direct discriminatory and antagonistic behaviour towards BAME colleagues. But this behaviour might not be displayed towards every BAME colleague equally, and some BAME colleagues may even be favoured. Racism is complex and uneven. However, the patterns in the data gathered in our project are clear.

In the online survey, a majority – 68 per cent (335 out of 489 people) – of those providing detailed responses said that they had experienced, witnessed or heard stories about racism in their time in the charity sector.

In terms of directly experienced racism, 28 people had been on the receiving end of physical threats, violence or intimidation. This was one of the least common forms of racism experienced by survey respondents, but is still a significant proportion and is particularly at odds with the compassionate image of the charity sector.

The most common form of racial antagonism that respondents had experienced directly was being subject to ignorant or insensitive questioning about their culture or religion. This affected 80 per cent of people answering the questions (222 out of 278 people) and took different forms. Though we don't have the sampling frame to claim statistical significance (Gallo, 2016), we note that 58 per cent of female respondents, compared with 46 per cent of male respondents, had ▶

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◀ been subject to ignorant or insensitive questioning. We also see that Muslim people were the faith group most likely (at 57 per cent) to be subject to questions of this sort. These differential outcomes are cited not to create a 'hierarchy of oppression' but to recognise that underneath the broad BAME umbrella are distinct experiences that may require particular attention and intervention. And these differences warrant further survey work (see recommendations).

Ignorance can manifest in negative stereotyping and making assumptions about what BAME people can and (especially) can't do.

“

A lot of these incidences are so commonplace that it would take a long time to go through each one. The 'banter' and microaggressions happen quite often, remarking on the shock that I can speak such good English (I did an English degree).

Online survey

Micro-aggressions and banter and other passive-aggressive behaviours can be dismissed as insignificant. But they do have an impact because, as mentioned in the quote above, they can take place frequently. They can also be undermining, calling into question the professional competence of BAME people and a person's position in a workplace.

Beyond these experiences was a raft of other problematic behaviours experienced by BAME online survey respondents. For example, 147 people (out of 199) had been treated as an intellectual inferior. Again, with caveats about the survey limitations, this treatment does appear to be gendered, as it applies to 36 per cent of female respondents compared with 23 per cent of male respondents. Depressingly, such ideas of inferiority stem from old, discredited theories of biological racism and racial hierarchy that somehow persist to this day (Kelley, Khan and Sharrock 2017).

The corollary of thinking that BAME people are somehow 'not up to the job' is that

BAME people are treated differently in the job. Our online survey data showed that:

114 people

had been unfairly denied development/acting-up opportunities

114 people

had been subject to excessive surveillance and scrutiny by colleagues, managers or supervisors

We can see from the experiences above that BAME charity people can both be seen as 'deficient' and less worthy than white British colleagues and be required to do more to prove themselves.

“

I always feel like I was held to a higher level of standard than anybody else. I could say one thing the wrong way and I'd be penalised.

Interview – BAME charity employee

This is reflected in the aforementioned 61 per cent of online survey respondents who said that they feel/have felt that they needed to 'outperform' white British counterparts in the charity sector. Again, with caveats about our sampling approach, we also note that 71 per cent of black respondents felt this way compared with 62 per cent of all participants who responded to the question. This raises the question of whether black people are particularly subject to excessive scrutiny.

Another question asked of online survey respondents was which 'types of people' played a significant role in (any type of) racism they experienced or witnessed. Survey participants could select multiple answers, including people in partner organisations and funders. The two (by far) most common responses from people who had experienced or witnessed racism (in 74 per cent or 216 out of 291 cases) were that senior staff at the charity the respondent worked at played a significant role; and/or (in 70 per cent or 205 out of 291 cases) other colleagues were involved. This is extremely concerning and points to the need for white charity leaders, trustees, and colleagues to ▶

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◀ fully engage in making workplaces inclusive and free of racism, including being accountable for their own racist behaviour.

Charities' handling of complaints of racism

Experiences of racism are one thing, but for many online survey respondents these situations were compounded by the ways in which they were poorly handled. The three quotes below are indicative:

“

My line manager told me I needed to be more resilient. It's taken me four years and a great deal of therapy to come back to the understanding that I was correct and should not accept treatment like that.

Online survey

“

My grievance was not taken seriously and at the time my line manager was a director who simply rejected my claim. She presented me as the problem.

Online survey

“

My complaint was not recognised as racism and deflected to conflicting working and communication styles of my manager and me.

Online survey

A number of important themes come through here. All three quotes show that respondents feel unheard when making complaints. There is a sense of grievance processes being stacked up against the complainant.

More specifically in the first two quotes, to differing degrees, blame is passed on to the BAME person with the complaint, e.g. for being insufficiently resilient.

The third quote points to something related – a desire of those running the complaints procedure to put the issue down to something other than racism. This ties in with an idea discussed by other BAME project participants about some charities wanting to avoid racism. One interviewee put this down to a desire to maintain positive self-image in the sector.

“

I think that [desire to downplay racism] comes more from the white society in self-denial ... especially charities, because they feel themselves as a good guy. It's almost to say it's a reflection of them. They don't want to look in the mirror and say, you know, I'm actually part of the problem.

Interview – BAME charity employee

This quote suggests one reason why charity complaints processes might be geared against finding racism. There is a further discussion in Section 3 about the reticence to discuss racism.

Out of 310 responses, 159 (61 per cent) had raised concerns with senior leaders (e.g. senior management, chief executives or the chair of trustees) about incidents of racism that they had experienced or witnessed in a charity. In most cases, the complaint (111 out of 159) was raised informally. Also, a majority (88 out of 151 people) of those who responded to the question had made multiple complaints.

Respondents were mostly dissatisfied by how their complaints were addressed. We recognise that this negative feeling can be present even when grievances are handled 'fairly and reasonably', but in a racialised context this dissatisfaction is important. Out of 154 responses only 31 (20 per cent) felt that all or most of the concerns raised were dealt with satisfactorily, compared with 123 (80 per cent) who felt that none or a minority of concerns raised were satisfactorily handled. ▶

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◀ More specifically, we asked respondents to focus on the handling of one particular concern that they had brought forward, to allow us to understand in more detail how complaints are treated. One hundred and forty-two people responded to this question and were allowed to give multiple answers as to the outcome of the issue. Key results were that:

34 people
said that their complaint/grievance was taken seriously

40 people
said that their complaint/grievance was ignored

32 people
said that they were identified as a troublemaker

17 people
said that they were forced out of their job

Therefore, in our sample, BAME respondents generally feel that complaints about racism are not well handled and can even backfire on them.

In the most extreme example uncovered in our research, one BAME interviewee reported the inappropriate conduct of a colleague (towards another person in the charity). As a consequence, our interviewee was isolated and pressured by senior colleagues and ended up feeling suicidal and signed off work by their GP. This example highlights how a BAME person reporting a problem can themselves be seen as a problem and be targeted and penalised.

If the findings in our work are replicated (even somewhat) among BAME people in the wider charity sector, then it seems that BAME people can find themselves in a double bind: say nothing and put up with racism, or say something and risk punishment and getting a reputation for being 'outspoken' and not a 'team player'.

Harmful impacts of racism and charity responses

It is clear from the survey that people experiencing racism are, in the main, left to deal with the harmful consequences themselves.

It appears that, at least in our sample, there are relatively few formal and safely accessible channels of support available to people who have experienced racism. Of the 151 people responding to a question about whether they received support having experienced racism, only 40 reported that they had. This group were asked to list all sources of support: 31 people received support from work colleagues, 25 from family or friends, and only 9 people from Human Resources at their organisation. Just one person received support from their trade union – perhaps because of low rates of unionisation in the sector.

Unsurprisingly, in the online survey a high proportion of those experiencing racism – 77 per cent (116 out of 151 respondents) – stated that this had a negative or very negative impact on their health and emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, racism also affects professional progression. In our online survey, 63 per cent (94 out of 148) of respondents who had experienced racism said that it had a negative or very negative impact on their 'desired career path'.

One participant in the online survey said that their involvement in the charity sector left them with: 'increased insecurity and anxiety, depression [and] self-doubt'. Elsewhere, an interviewee also said that working in unwelcoming environments affected their performance:



There has [sic] been so many times I've been so frustrated in meetings where we're having a conversation and I'm thinking something and somebody else says it. And my idea was there.

Interview – BAME charity employee



As detailed in the quote above, speaking up and being creative can feel dangerous for BAME people in a way that it is not for white British colleagues. In such environments, BAME people are less likely to shine and to be seen for their true abilities – and may end up (wrongly) blaming themselves for ▶

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◀ the situation. However, a workplace may provide little encouragement to a BAME person to be who they are and to express themselves without fear of sanction. A number of BAME participants spoke of organisational cultures where a BAME person can get a reputation for speaking out. Blending in can seem the safest course of action.

Following on from this, our survey shows that 50 per cent (246 people out of 490) of respondents felt that they needed to 'tone down' behaviour or to be on their 'best behaviour' in order to fit in in the charity sector. As one respondent put it:

“

I haven't always been able to be my whole self but this has allowed me access and to progress perhaps where others like me have not had the same opportunities.

Online survey

Another participant stated that:

“

I've had to overcompensate my personality to ensure I make management feel comfortable.

Online survey

But this strategy of trying to 'fit in' can also further damage health and wellbeing, because being 'undercover' takes emotional energy (Yoshino, 2006). Being BAME, being oneself and making career progress in the charity sector appear to be at odds. And so, there can be an impossible, unfair and costly trade-off for BAME people between career and wellbeing, to a degree unlikely to exist for white British charity people.

An additional form of harm to BAME people surfaced in our research. This is where BAME

people are in some ways expected to 'deal with the problem'. This 'BAME person's burden' can occur in a few ways. For example, BAME people may be expected to take the lead on internal diversity work. This is a complex area, and seeking input from BAME people is part of the answer. However, as was raised in interviews and our online survey, BAME people asked to play a role should be given commensurate authority to make change – otherwise they are bound to fail. Furthermore, it is unfair if these efforts (inside or outside of one's organisation) come on top of already full workloads or without recompense:

“

I do some, like, training and workshops on race and racism and the number of people that expect me to do it for free because, well, 'surely, it's in your best interest to get rid of racism'.

Interview – BAME charity employee

Efforts to build diversity and counter racism should centre those most impacted by current failings. However, it cannot be done 'on the cheap', nor can it be a substitute for the engagement and buy-in of the most senior people in an organisation.

A further way in which BAME people can be additionally burdened in a racialised context comes from hearing about the personal virtue of white colleagues:

“

You know, you get the responses. I'm not racist. Well, that's not good enough. Just saying you're not racist is not good enough. What are you doing to combat racism?

Interview – BAME charity employee ▶

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◀ Such situations can be fatiguing for BAME people because they can feel like an attempt by some white people to exonerate themselves from racism without really helping the situation. Even worse, sometimes BAME people are perversely expected by white colleagues who act in a racially problematic or racist way to make them feel better about the situation. This was described by one BAME interviewee as a case where BAME people are 'supposed to make you feel better for being offensive'.

Harms take other forms too – with more direct career impacts. For example, if a BAME person has damaging work experiences, is held back and does not advance in one charity then their career prospects, professional development and earnings suffer in their existing organisation and their ability to get other, better jobs outside of the organisation is constrained. And this can lead to a hard-to-break-out-of cycle, where BAME people are over-qualified and under-utilised in various different roles (McGregor-Smith, 2017).

There is perhaps another knock-on effect from experiences of racism in the charity sector. They can, unsurprisingly, lead to scepticism about whether charities are truly committed to diversity. One participant in the online survey expressed the opinion that diversity in their charity was primarily for show:

“

BAME staff were called upon for photo opportunities to appear more diverse to the public.

Online survey

This feeling is not simply world-weariness or cynicism; there is a genuine sense of having been let down by the charity sector.

“

I believe this [racism] is an issue across all sectors, as BAME candidates always have to work twice as hard. What I think is problematic in the third sector, is that they feel they are progressive by default; therefore, race is not an issue and therefore ignored.

Online survey

And so, in a highly racialised context, BAME people can become estranged from charities because of the mismatch between the sector's professed ethos and the realities of BAME people's experiences. In line with this, the online survey revealed that 64 per cent of respondents (285 people out of 448) agreed with the statement that the charity sector fails to live up to its stated values and principles in their treatment of BAME people.

This is a sentiment that will take some time and imagination to turn around – an issue to which we turn next.

The change to come

Those most impacted by racism and a lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the charity sector are uniquely and ideally placed to offer up ways to deliver diversity and anti-racism. This final subsection is focused on what needs to be done differently. It is sourced from the roundtable with racial justice advocates and activists, the in-depth interviews with BAME people, and the online survey. ▶

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◀ Rethinking and reimagining 'race' and racism

We describe above how some BAME participants in our research see some charities as being in denial about racism.

The online survey showed that only 20 per cent (87 respondents out of 450) agreed that charity sector leaders (e.g. chief executives and chairs of trustees) are willing to talk openly and honestly about race equality and racism. In contrast, 58 per cent (261 respondents out of 450) disagreed with the statement.

Ideas about the need to rethink racism were informed by concerns expressed in the roundtable, and in some of the interviews with BAME people, that the diversity agenda can too easily be used as a cosmetic exercise, rather than meaningfully opening up organisations to 'difference', as illustrated in the following quote:

“

In both of my roles, the charities wanted someone 'diverse' physically, but mentally identical to their white staff (talk the same, went to the same school, have the same hobbies, etcetera).

They were not ready for someone to challenge them on their equality and diversity policies and practices.

Online survey

Similarly, a participant in the racial justice roundtable noted that the diversity agenda is open to being co-opted by organisations. They cited the police as knowing the right things to say with regard to workforce diversity while doing disproportionate harm to black people. In light of this, they suggested it was hard for the concept of diversity to carry real weight.

In the roundtable discussion, especially, there was a desire to see the sector interrogate ideas of colonialism, whiteness and 'white fragility' (see Section 3 for more on these themes)

and recognise its own institutionalised racism. This would also enable charities to better discuss 'race' and racism and to recognise the normalcy of racism across society – including in the charity sector.

One mode of ensuring that this discussion takes place, identified in the roundtable on racial justice, is by exerting external pressure on the sector as well as ensuring the greater accountability (see below for more) of the charity sector on issues of diversity and racism.

Training was another means suggested to facilitate rethinking and new conversations (mentioned 236 times in the online survey). The main thrust was that there should be newly designed training specifically for the charity sector (rather than deploying generic 'unconscious bias' training). Furthermore, there were suggestions that training should be ongoing and mandatory – especially for senior staff and those who recruit for charities.

It was noted in the advocate and activist roundtable that the racial justice movement also has work to do. For example, there was a call for a more sophisticated and consistent approach to 'intersectionality' – in particular talking inclusively about the ways in which 'race' overlaps and interacts with disability, class and gender.

Building accountability

One of the big themes to emerge across our BAME interviews, racial justice roundtable and online survey was that of accountability.

In the roundtable for racial justice activists there was a wide-ranging discussion about making the charity sector more accountable on issues of racism and diversity. It was suggested that charities need to consider taking action against racism as seriously as most take filing their accounts on time. It was further argued that there can only be accountability if there are significant consequences for not doing enough on racism and diversity.

Accountability and related concepts such as responsibility were mentioned in one form or another many times in the solutions section of the online survey. The focus was especially on charities publishing data. The most prominent call (with 142 mentions in the online survey) ▶

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◀ was to publish ethnicity pay gap data (see ACAS and Government and Equalities Office, 2020) – sometimes with the added suggestion that this should be a Charity Commission requirement. In the same survey there were calls (82 mentions) for more accountability and responsibility for 'race', racism and diversity, including mandatory reporting and target-setting on numbers/proportions of BAME staff and trustees. Others recommended publishing organisational diversity data to show whether BAME people are present in or moving towards senior management positions in charities.

Also, in the online survey, in response to perceived shortcomings in the accountability and responsiveness of charities to cases of racism, there were calls for an independent ombudsman, complaints service or free, confidential, specialist advice line to manage these complaints.

Redistributing power – redesigning charity

Related to the principle of accountability is the question of where power lies in the charity sector. There were concerns that the relative strength and resources of the mainstream sector made it somewhat immune to efforts to hold it to account on diversity and racism.

One of the counterbalances suggested, especially in interviews with BAME people and the racial justice roundtable, was the need to invest in BAME-led civil society, including supporting groups to own buildings, so that this part of civil society is better able to support BAME populations, develop strategies for transformation in the charity sector, and hold the sector to account. There were parallel calls to enable BAME people in the charity sector to come together for mutual support, to provide 'safe spaces' in which to air concerns, and to build power to press for change from within charitable organisations.

The racial justice roundtable also considered how BAME-led civil society could use its existing power for change. Reflections included the need for some people to work within the sector for change and others to do so from the outside. There was also a discussion about the need – at times – for direct action, and an example was given of how university buildings have been occupied in order to secure change.

Finally, the dialogue about redistributing and realigning power in the charity sector led to thoughts about redesigning the sector. For example, it was felt in some quarters that

the diversity agenda itself accentuates the power of charities, which get to decide which BAME people to include and on what terms:



People that are privileged in some way are always, like, 'What can we do to give access to people to come to our table?' when to me, that's not the question. The question is that table was never made with people like me in mind. It's never going to be. You can put on a posh frock, but you won't fit. Because the rules that you're playing by are somebody else's. To me, it's about creating a new table.

Interview – BAME charity employee



The above is a call for a real rethink about the foundations on which charities operate. To this end, in the racial justice roundtable, there was also considerable interest in revisioning charity and the charity sector. This includes rearticulating and rethinking what the charity sector is trying to achieve, and creating different structures that might better serve this overarching purpose. There were also ideas for changing charity governance, e.g. the idea that one has to be a service user to be a trustee.

Fundamental charity redesign is beyond the scope of this project and report. However, such sentiments do echo the work of Civil Society Futures (2018b) which shows that the shape of charities and civil society is too often ill-suited to the work that needs to be done in changing, often tumultuous times. It is likely that without meaningful change in mainstream charities responses to how BAME people are situated in their organisations and in society at large, calls will grow for radical redesign of the sector.

Changes in everyday practice

The substantive changes identified above on rethinking racism, growing accountability and redesigning charity take time, as they involve ▶

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◀ important 'rewiring' in the charity system. That is not to say that we can't take immediate action on these issues. Some other practical changes can be implemented on a (much) shorter timescale.

Recruitment and progression were mentioned in one form or another 87 times in the solutions section of the online survey. Ideas included nine requests for 'blind' recruitment processes, where names and ethnicities are obscured at least until interview. There were also five mentions of a 'Rooney Rule', whereby at least one BAME candidate is interviewed for all positions (Kelner, 2018).

One BAME interviewee described some questions that can be introduced into interviews to understand and enhance how candidates think about themselves, diversity and racism:

“

One of the questions I introduced in all senior leadership recruitment ... [is] 'Have you experienced any societal barriers that have impacted on your career; on your career or development prospects?' ... We've had some of them talk about being a female, you know, and being denied and always assumed that they are the P.A. when they are actually the manager and all that, so it shows some awareness, you know, but most of them are absolutely shell shocked.

Interview – BAME charity employee

The responses to the question above, on the whole, were disappointing. But, at the same time the (lack of) answers can help an organisation to screen out and screen in candidates based on their understanding of structural discrimination and disadvantage.

Finally, there were also longer-term suggestions about how the charity sector works to recruit new staff or individuals into their first charity jobs, and the need for new pathways for first-time applicants via outreach in schools; targeted presence at all university careers events, not just Russell Group Universities; and bursary and paid internship schemes that provide living allowances to BAME people.

Concluding comments: BAME experiences and insights

Much of the testimony and evidence from BAME people in this section makes for grim reading. But while the overall patterns are bleak, it is worth noting a few shards of light. For example, what is happening in the case of the 51 BAME online survey respondents who said that their 'race' and ethnicity had counted in their favour in the charity sector? Are these people simply optimists, or is something more promising and replicable happening?

Although there may be pockets of good practice in the charity sector, the evidence from BAME participants in the project is alarming. Even though 60 per cent of respondents (298 out of 493 people) in our online survey said that overall, their experiences of working in the charity sector were positive or very positive, this may be despite rather than because of how charities engage with diversity and racism.

Combined with what data we have on racial and ethnic homogeneity in the charity sector, our new research with BAME respondents suggests not only that there are too few BAME people in the charity sector, but that for those who do make it through there are too many harmful experiences.

This means that while talk about diversity is all very well, it appears that there is much more to be done for the charity sector to value and make room for BAME people to be just as they are and to contribute to the sector. But the scale and scope of change is fundamental rather than peripheral. For this reason, in the next section we ponder, more fully, what diversity really means, how it is intertwined with racism and what it means to change the culture of the charity sector into one that addresses the issues raised above, in order to deliver meaningful diversity and to undo racism. ■

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Diversity alone isn't enough

On one level, this report is about diversity, i.e. the absence or presence of BAME people in the charity sector. However, the testimony in the section above shows us that diversity alone does not represent progress if significant numbers of BAME people in the sector are experiencing harms. This situation means that there is work to do to examine and enhance conditions inside the charity sector for BAME (and all) people and to reaffirm why diversity should matter in the charity sector in the first place.

This is where inclusion and equity come into the picture.

These concepts and their connection to diversity are not necessarily widely understood. In this project, charity people (both BAME and white, and including leaders, racial justice activists and system-shapers) were aware – in some cases hyper-aware – of the presenting problem of a lack of BAME people in the charity sector. They could also envision how things could be different: specifically, that there would be more proportionate BAME presence on staff teams – including at senior levels – on boards, conference panels and so on.

However, while racial justice activists and BAME project participants had a relatively clear idea of what mechanisms of change were needed to deliver greater diversity this was less the case with white interviewees. And yet, in order to make progress on diversity, we need a widespread sense of how to build real change. Two critical building blocks are inclusion and equity.

Inclusion

Inclusion⁸ is at its core a set of actions and behaviours that invites and supports 'difference' in a setting. An inclusive organisation enables all of its people to fully participate in and influence the life of the collective.

Practices that may promote inclusiveness include highly democratic, participative and flat organisational arrangements, and commitments to institutional learning and dialogue on 'race' and racism. More open leadership styles with an emphasis on listening

may also help, as argued by Stone (2016). Critically, research suggests that effective inclusive practices help to promote, among other things, people's 'psychological safety' (Delizonna, 2017). This is the belief that one won't be punished for being oneself or for speaking out and being creative.

While inclusion sounds warm and fluffy, it does also raise some concerns. In particular, there is the question of who decides whom to include. Inclusion can end up as a case of white-led organisations opening their doors to BAME people. This makes inclusion a gift of the powerful, and that can feel disempowering and demeaning for BAME people. This is not a reason to avoid building inclusion into the charity sector, but it is a reason to emphasise that inclusion of BAME (and all) people is a right, not a privilege; to include with depth and beyond token gestures; and to avoid doing so in ways that reinforce hierarchy.

The indications are that the charity sector has much more to do on inclusion. By way of illustration, our BAME online survey showed that 50 per cent of respondents (246 people out of 490) felt that they have needed to be on their 'best behaviour' in order to fit into the charity sector. This means that BAME people affected cannot bring their whole selves⁹ to work, and experience the draining and harmful work of coming to work in disguise so that they 'fit in' – which Yoshino (2006) describes as 'covering'.

This in turn shows that diversity is not simply about upping BAME intake, if BAME people are then marginalised and feel that they need to exit once inside charity spaces. ►

⁸ The definition here draws on ACF (2019) and D5 Coalition (2014).

⁹ The ability to bring our whole selves to work is known to be good for mental health; for example, see MHFA (2020).

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< Equity

If inclusion is a set of actions and behaviours to enable diversity to function for under-represented populations, then equity is a justice-based approach to diversity and inclusion.

At its core, equity is about treating people in a just way – not necessarily all in the same way – in order to secure good outcomes for all people (Cipriani, 2020). More specifically, it has three elements.

First, equity is an analytical framework. It sees people and certain population groups as differently situated in society. For example, in a system where 'race' actively shapes the kinds of lives that BAME people can lead, it tends to result in disparities in terms of access to and outcomes in important aspects of life, e.g. health, education, employment, criminal justice etc. And an equity-informed analysis is attentive to the ways in which systems, institutions and individuals enable and deliver these detrimental outcomes.

Second, equity is a way to think about corrective action. It suggests that, as people and certain populations are differently located in society, we cannot secure justice by trying to treat people the same, e.g. using 'equal opportunities' in a recruitment process. Equal opportunities will tend to ignore the social context that may have shaped BAME lives in the moments up to recruitment – including the effects of past discrimination.

We pick up on equity-informed alternatives to equal opportunities below.

Third, race equity is for thinking about outcomes for BAME people. Specifically, the logic of equity-thinking is that there must be enhanced outcomes for BAME populations, to end racial disparities so that 'race' no longer affects how people are situated in collective life.

Therefore, the idea of equity is important and necessary. But, as with the earlier discussion

on terms such as 'BAME' and 'diversity', above all we want to be principled on outcomes and practical on language. Many advocates working with/for/from BAME populations prefer terms other than 'racial equity' to describe their work. These might include 'racial justice', 'anti-racism' or 'race equality'. In addition, 'equity' is language from the US and may not be quite right for the UK context. However, we use the term 'equity' for the rest of the report to highlight how BAME people are situated in society and that greater racial diversity in the charity sector cannot be delivered simply by adding equal opportunities into the mix – not when social circumstances so profoundly shape outcomes.

What equity means in practice

Equal opportunities means trying to provide a candidate or prospective candidate with a 'fair shot' at the position they want (EHRC, 2016c). In practice this might mean ensuring that as many people as possible know about the position; that the selection criteria are role-relevant; and that a selection panel is itself 'diverse'.

Under equal opportunities, individual candidates are compared at a moment in time, with the 'winner' being the person deemed the 'best fit' against the job description and person specification. This approach treats people in the same way at the point of decision-making. Equal opportunities work in a system untainted by racism, but not in a context where the evidence shows that employers, as a whole, discriminate in favour of white British job applicants and against BAME candidates.¹⁰ Even if employers were treating people in the same way, equal opportunity approaches ignore the ways in which 'race' may have shaped BAME lives in the moments up to recruitment – including the effects of past, even intergenerational discrimination. Equal opportunities recruitment processes will, relatively speaking, tend to favour well-positioned (male, heterosexual, middle- and upper-class) white candidates whose lives have been largely unimpeded by discrimination. >

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A 2019 report by Oxford academics saw them make fictitious applications to over 3,000 real jobs, randomly varying applicants' minority background, but holding skills, qualifications and work experience constant. On average, 24% of white British applicants received a positive response from employers, compared with 15% of BAME applicants applying with identical CVs and cover letters (CSI, 2019).

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◀ One interviewee explained the limits of equal opportunities in the following way:

“

I've never understood what it [equal opportunity] means. So, you're going to give these middle-class white folks who have had all the privilege, the same as you're going to give me who's coming from a background where I've been denied so much opportunity, so much resources. And you're going to give exactly the same. So, you're keeping them in that position. And I'll still stay down here. That's the difference.

Interview – BAME charity employee

An equity and justice-based approach towards diversity requires more than equality of opportunity. It means treating BAME people not in the same way as white counterparts but differently, to secure (much more) equal and enhanced outcomes to end group-based disparities.

The principle of treating some populations differently to adjust for disadvantageous context is established in higher education in the UK. Universities can offer places to students based on the circumstances that may affect their educational attainment prior to university. These 'contextual offers' take into account the level of 'deprivation' in the applicant's neighbourhood and whether they have been in the care system. Candidates are still expected to perform 'well', but can be offered a place on reduced entry requirements.¹¹

Extending the approach of offering roles to people from under-represented backgrounds to candidates who perform 'less-well' than over-represented groups is unlikely to be feasible in the charity sector, as it may be deemed to be positive discrimination. But while positive discrimination is unlawful,

employers can use positive action. Positive action includes a range of measures that can be taken to encourage and train people from under-represented populations so that they are more able to compete with other applicants. Positive action also means that if there are two equally matched candidates then it is lawful to appoint the person who is from an under-represented group.

It is also possible to redraw recruitment criteria for charity jobs in ways that genuinely value the skills, knowledge and specialisms that BAME people and other marginalised people may have. This means reimagining ideas of who is the 'best fit' and redefining what is understood as excellence, and redesigning jobs and requirements accordingly (see Section 5 for more on recommendations). It also means choosing candidates with the potential to add the most to the hiring organisations. But that will involve having an investment mindset to developing people who may not immediately be able to 'hit the ground running' but who will contribute in time. It also means charities choosing extra work, and potentially the discomfort of choosing people who are not on the same page and may also be on a different book.

This is not an easy choice; but easy leads to more of the same.

Recruitment is critical to the cultivation of what we might call diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) culture in the charity sector. However, if we are to think holistically and systemically then DEI in the charity sector is not just about having a more 'representative' workforce or trustee board. That is only part of the equation. Deep-down, DEI is reflected in everything an organisation does. Meaningful approaches to diversity and race equity in an organisation or in a sector change not only who does the work – the workforce – but the work itself. In other words, done well, real progress in DEI not only changes the players, it changes the game itself.

It means, for example, that cancer, employment and anti-poverty charities place at the centre of their thinking the racialised nature of health, the labour market and living on a low income. That then feeds through into their efforts to end racial disparities in access to good work, good health and good living standards. ▶

¹¹ This can mean that a person with contextual disadvantages is required to have the same grades as any other entrant, but in some universities this can lead to a guaranteed offer of places with still high but reduced entry requirements. For example, see University of Oxford (2020) and Durham University (2020).

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◀ There are different mechanisms to achieve this focus on race equity. One mechanism used especially in public services is that of (race) equality impact assessments¹² to help organisations to ensure that their policies, practices and decisions are 'fair', meet the needs of their users or potential users, and do not discriminate against any group on the basis of protected characteristics (EHRC, 2019), including 'race', age, sex or sexual orientation.

Even more helpful would be something that we could call race equity impact plans.¹³ These are processes that inform an organisation as it designs or redesigns the work it delivers in the world. As such, they both review and assess past impacts on equity and are forward-looking and intentional about trying to deliver positive future outcomes as part of their overall strategy. Critically, too, these are continuous processes, where the focus is on building deep and ongoing relationships and conversations with stakeholders in the orbit of the organisation – especially those who are more marginalised.

This work should take place at the same time as – or even ahead of – efforts to increase workforce diversity, because a charity may recruit staff and trustees infrequently. External efforts for race equity benefit BAME people in society at large and reinforce internal efforts to value, attract, retain and advance BAME people inside the organisation. This in turn can further strengthen the work and resolve of the charity to advance race equity and to end racism in the outside world, and in this way a virtual DEI circle is created. This also means that mainstream charities begin to show up productively and consistently in BAME people's lives, which can lead to BAME people seeing mainstream charities and the charity sector as a place for them.

This approach has some interesting implications. It can mean that although, of course, DEI within an organisation matters, it is not all that matters. For example, a mainstream mental health charity could have a BAME majority workforce and a BAME chief executive. But if it has no intentional strategy to recognise and address the racialised nature of mental health problems, its overall contribution to DEI may be limited (Khan, 2020). By contrast, a mental health charity with an all-white workforce could,

with a well thought-out, purposeful strategy, improve outcomes for BAME people and make a bigger impact on race equity.

This is not a reason to maintain racial homogeneity among charity staff, board members and other volunteers. But changing personnel is not the only way to make a positive impact on DEI, and charities should target DEI improvements internally and in their external efforts. The two go hand in hand.

Finally, mainstream organisations do not need to try to fix racism and racial disparities in their 'patch' all on their own. There are specialist BAME-led organisations or BAME people that – with appropriate resources – can help.

In doing DEI work on the inside and on the outside, the charity sector can reconnect with its ethical core, and pursue diversity and practice inclusion to deliver equity and justice. As a result, charities can do more than 'welcome diversity', they can proactively work against racism and towards racial justice.

Culture chores: creating DEI culture

As this project began, one of the focal points was what charities individually and the sector as a whole should and should not do in order to advance DEI. In Section 5, we address some of the actions that can be taken.

As our research has developed, the question of what to do has been joined, and perhaps even surpassed in importance, by another critical question – that is, 'If everyone thinks that diversity is such a good thing, why is there so little of it in the charity sector?'

This is a different order of question to what, practically, should be done for DEI. It focuses instead on deep-lying issues of why charities and the charity sector have not made more progress.

The chief executive of one charitable foundation says that transformation means that we need to 'change the systems, the norms and the culture of our sector – solutions that acknowledge and confront the reasons we choose not to change' (Fitzpatrick, 2020).

A keyword in the quote above is 'culture'. According to Sally Engle Merry: 'Cultures consist not only of beliefs and values but also practices, habits, and commonsensical ways ▶

¹² AdvanceHE (2019).

¹³ Equalities charity brap is particularly skilled in developing equity impact assessment and plans; see brap.org.uk

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◀ of doing things. They include institutional arrangements, political structures, and legal regulations' (2006, p. 15). These elements come together to form what Raymond Williams called a 'way of life' (cited in Rothman, 2014). Culture is powerful to the extent that the famous management consultant and writer Peter Drucker is supposed to have said that 'culture eats strategy for breakfast' (cited in Hymen, 2015). This means that strategic plans (NCVO, 2017) that fundamentally challenge prevailing culture of an organisation, a sector or a society tend to meet resistance and can fall by the wayside. For example, when publisher Penguin Random House pledged to better reflect society in its output, critics condemned the move as one that would drive down 'standards' (Flood, 2018) – reflecting a widely held belief that diversity and excellence are somehow at odds.

But the good news is that, though it takes time and investment, culture can and does change and institutions and leaders have their part to play, because, as Engle Merry says, 'as institutions ... change, so do beliefs, values and practices' (2006, p. 15).

Charity sector landscape and DEI culture

As we consider how to cultivate conditions for meaningful DEI culture, it is important to understand the existing terrain. For that reason, in this project we have engaged with both system-shapers, including funders and charity membership/infrastructure bodies, and senior charity senior leaders – 10 white and two BAME. As mentioned in the previous section, the views of the two BAME charity leaders have been used inform Section 2 on BAME experiences and perspectives rather than in this section. This is because these two individuals had rather different and richer insights compared with their white counterparts. Though we can't read too much into this as it is only two people, it hints at the importance of BAME people in leadership positions in mainstream charities.

'Getting' the problem – up to a point

All of the white charity leaders interviewed for the project recognised that the charity sector is not reflective of its 'user' groups, those it represents or the wider population. They understood a lack of diversity to mean the relative absence of BAME people in charity spaces and accepted it as a self-evident problem.

In the words of one charity leader:

“

Racial diversity is visibly obviously very, very poor in the sector, particularly at senior levels. It is an overwhelmingly white sector, which is really wrong, given that ... a large chunk of the sector is supposedly about working towards social justice and is often working with more marginalised communities.

Interview – white charity leader

And another leader spoke about the need to be more "reflective" of and open to broader society.

“

We have a responsibility to try and be at least broadly reflective of society and make sure that we're not putting barriers in a way which excludes certain people within society.

Interview – white charity leader ▶

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◀ There was some acknowledgement that the charity sector is not very inclusive or open, and that this is to the detriment of diversity.

“

I think we're really quite good at moving around between us, but maybe not at bringing other people in.

Interview – white charity leader

Furthermore, there were a few examples of leaders who were clear about what inclusion looks like. For example, one leader stated about inclusion that:

“

It's also something about creating an environment where people can be who they are so they don't have to hide aspects of their identity.

Interview – white charity leader

And another white charity leader displayed an understanding of inclusion as being not only about making BAME people feel welcome but also about BAME people having access to power. They noted that an organisation could be diverse if it had “99 per cent non-white staff; but if the only person making the decisions is the white person that's not really inclusive”.

However, these rather sophisticated understandings were not widespread in the interviews with white charity leaders. In particular, the interviewees found it difficult

to articulate the distinction between diversity and inclusion. Yet this difference is important, because high numbers of BAME people present in the charity sector were clear that they did not feel welcome and accepted. For example, 246 people out of 490 online survey respondents felt that they needed to be on their ‘best behaviour’ in order to fit into the charity sector (see Section 2 for other examples).

When it came to the question of why there was a racial diversity problem in the charity sector, there was a general view that this deficit is connected to racism.

“

We live in a racist society, we have racists ... institutions themselves can be institutionally racist ... we all have our own biases, which are, you know, largely forged by that society.

Interview – white charity leader

This observation does, on the one hand, show some awareness of and insight into the problem. This interviewee, and most of the other leaders interviewed, acknowledged that racism exists in society and therefore in the charity sector as well. But even this way of thinking was somewhat limited and problematic.

In the quote above, and in other interviews with leaders who are white, racism is named almost as if it exists as an abstract force – one that lives somewhere out in the world rather than being internalised and owned. This can reveal and entrench the idea that racism is inevitable and will always exist: the opposite of what we want in order to energise meaningful action. ▶

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◀ This kind of generalised talk about racism, including phrases such as “we all have our own biases”, can also be a way of putting distance between the speaker and racism. In keeping with this, there is not a sense from our interviews with white charity leaders that they are intimately engaged with racism or in self-reflection about it.

Neither did participating white charity leaders appear to have a detailed understanding or analysis of factors underlying racism. For example, there was little engagement with how charity paternalism or aspects of colonialism can help to generate or perpetuate the problem. And there was little discussion of the different – sometimes subtle – ways in which racism manifests institutionally, or how this might specifically reveal itself in charities. By way of contrast, it is fair to say that BAME participants in the project have had little choice but to become overly familiar with ‘race’ and racism – indeed to become ‘experts’ in it – because it shapes their experiences in the sector so profoundly.

Blockages and resistance to DEI

There was general agreement among the leaders about the DEI problems and deficits in the sector. Leaders also expressed interest in solving the problem, in part because they believed that greater racial and other diversity strengthens the work of the charity sector and its absence undermines that work. For example, one white charity leader said:

“

You may be missing out within the organisation on some extraordinarily brilliant people that could improve your work and development.

Interview – white charity leader

But when it came to discussions of practical change towards being ‘more reflective’ of the communities that they serve, the leaders as a whole were uncertain about what to do and were also somewhat resistant to action.

There was, for example, talk about wanting to “connect naturally” with “these [BAME] groups” and not be “threatened” into it by external pressure:

“

I think what’s counterproductive is some of the really loud outrage that goes on. And I also get where that comes from.

Interview – white charity leader

The quote above shows some sympathy with, but also resistance to, what the interviewee deems to be “loud” external voices demanding change. The statement reveals some concerning but familiar stereotyping – for example associating BAME people with ‘rage’ and being ‘shouty’, and classifying some BAME people as being threatening or potentially dangerous to white people.

This line of thinking is problematic not only because of its racialised undertones, but also because it reveals a desire of people in relative positions of power and privilege to prescribe how marginalised groups should ask for change. This ties in with the earlier discussion (see Section 2) and concerns expressed by some racial justice advocates that inclusion is in the ‘gift’ of powerful actors – a gift only given on the terms decided by charity sector leaders. ▶

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◀ Another blockage on DEI was mentioned by a few of the white charity leaders who felt that DEI and issues of 'race' were difficult and risky territory. There were some concerns that they might get the issue 'wrong' and trigger negative reactions.

“

I mean, there's something particularly difficult about racial equality. It's such a sensitive issue. Look, people find it difficult to even sort of say the word 'race' or they're really nervous about the language ... And I think there's a fear, there's a lot of fear about the subject.

Interview – white charity leader

Another interviewee suggested that these difficulties meant that DEI issues as they relate to 'race' would end up in the "too-difficult pile".

We take these concerns seriously. This is hard work, and in wider society we do struggle with issues/discussions of 'race' and racism. However, such anxieties somewhat assume that these white-majority institutions need to find the answers or do the work on their own. The reality is that there is scope to co-design such efforts, including with BAME race equity and DEI specialists as well as with BAME staff, trustees and other stakeholders engaged with charitable organisations.

System-shapers

Before looking at some of the ways in which charity leaders and charities can become more engaged and resolute in pursuit of DEI culture, we consider the role of system-shapers. These funders, regulators, membership and infrastructure bodies, and recruiters influence the conditions for DEI and the pursuit of race equity in the charity sector.

Our engagement with the system-shapers took place in the form of a single roundtable. The roundtable explored how they can utilise their power to influence culture as a lever for change.

As with the charity leaders, the group recognised the problem of a lack of DEI in the sector and expressed a desire to change. As with the charity leaders, they were not sure how to achieve it, and there was some fear about getting it wrong with "explosive" and negative impacts for them and their organisations, including damage to personal reputation and the risk of online abuse and high-profile press criticism.

The group accepted that many white leaders simply don't know how to discuss 'race', inequity or inclusion and that this lack of understanding generates fear, failure to speak out and inaction. Again, as was the case with charity leaders who expressed anxiety in dealing with 'race' and racism, we take these feelings on board. But, as with the leaders, such emotions need to be examined deeply, and there are strategies of co-design and co-working that can help to manage risk, diminish fear and avoid paralysis.

More positively, all roundtable attendees were able to articulate some elements of a vision of a 'DEI-forward' charity sector. Among the most interesting of these elements was a sector where: (a) individuals with 'protected characteristics' are asked to speak not about their so-called diversity, but about their role and expertise; (b) BAME-led specialist organisations are strong; (c) BAME people inside the charity sector overwhelmingly have positive experiences and a sense of belonging; and (d) racial justice is integral to the mission of the charity.

In view of their climate-making role, we asked system-shapers to consider the enabling conditions required for the charity sector to develop more of a DEI culture. Among the ideas to emerge were that people in the charity sector itself need to be more self-aware and recognise that the sector's persona of being 'good people' is not enough to deliver DEI. The sector needs to challenge itself to do better. The group spoke at length about difficulties enforcing such change but also the importance of charitable organisations and leaders being held accountable for progress – including consequences if they fall short on DEI.

There was some debate about regulation as a way of ensuring accountability. Suggestions ▶

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◀ included a requirement for reporting on DEI in the charity statement of recommended practice (SORP) or some form of DEI league table encouraging comparison and aspiration. There was no consensus on whether further regulation should be adopted, or about what kind of regulation if so – but there was agreement on the need to dismantle the charity sector culture of doing very little on DEI and being able to 'lie low' on the issue.

There was also some discussion in the group about how to dismantle power structures that favour white people. System-shapers were keen that the sector should engage in ongoing, direct conversations on the problem of 'race' and DEI at this deep level. Practical ideas for doing so included 'reverse mentoring', where junior BAME team members are paired with senior charity leaders to guide the latter on DEI (Jordan and Sorrell, 2019). Funders also wanted to more actively understand, support and improve DEI within the charities they fund. And they also expect those they fund to hold funders to account on their record on DEI.

It is worth noting that the vision and desired future described by system-shapers does not contain the equivalent of the 'radical' edge articulated by racial justice activists and advocates in the project's other roundtable (see Section 2). This is not surprising. In the latter more attention was paid to issues underpinning DEI deficits and racism, including how whiteness is positioned; moving away from ideas that race equity is about saving BAME people; and the transformation of the work that charities do in the outside world. System-shapers and advocates and activists for racial justice think about DEI differently, and they focus on racism and anti-racism differently too. That said, though there are fundamental differences, the conversations in the two roundtables did mark out overlapping interests. Most prominent in that overlap is that system-shapers stated clearly that the status quo will not do. They want the charity sector to highlight the inequalities around us and to offer solutions to them, rather than perpetuate these disparities through DEI inaction.

The way ahead

Overall, charity leaders and system-shapers in the charity sector understand the DEI deficit as a problem. Both groups expressed an appetite

for change, but the culture required for making that change is not yet present.

Ways forward include further engagement in issues of 'race' and racism and DEI – including working with BAME specialists. There is reflective work that white charity sector leaders – including system-shapers – need to do for themselves to understand what may lie beneath fear around this topic. They need to understand whether the fear is first and foremost about getting things wrong. It may be that there are some deeper anxieties – not about getting things wrong but about getting them 'right', because if meaningful moves are made on DEI this will represent fundamental change in the charity sector. And change may be disruptive to people currently well placed in the sector – including some of those who have engaged with this project.

It is important that fear, whatever its source, does not become a reason or excuse to keep things as they are. The status quo – as set out above in Section 2 – can cause serious harm to BAME people who do get inside charities, as well as excluding BAME people who might otherwise be in the charity sector. Ending these real-life harms must outweigh the risk of the honest mistakes that will inevitably be part of trying to make things meaningfully better. As one charity leader put it:



I mean, if we're about social justice, if we're about working with more marginalised communities, then not being racially diverse is ... just not acceptable.

Interview – white charity leader



Next, we turn to three aspects of the charity sector where improvements might address some of the impediments identified in (the foreground or background of) this discussion about the charity landscape and DEI culture. These aspects are engaging with racism, getting past paternalism and improving accountability. ▶

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< Three culture-shifters

From input via BAME project participants and our review of literature on DEI in the sector we can see three critical areas for development if DEI culture is to take hold in the charity sector: first, engaging with racism; second, changing the benefactor–'beneficiary' relationship; and third, building mechanisms for accountability on DEI.

Engaging on racism

If we are to take meaningful action on DEI, the charity sector, like our BAME project participants, needs to talk about racism.

Defining racism

A 'common sense' view is that racism is carried out by individuals deliberately seeking to harm BAME people (Lentin, 2015). The archetypal racist is the shaven-headed white thug on the football terrace making monkey chants at a black player.

However, this is only one manifestation of racism. It says nothing about where the impulse to act comes from or about how it affects BAME people.

A fuller definition of racism can be made up of three parts: beliefs, actions and impacts.

In other words, racism has a logic arm, a delivery arm and a results arm. Therefore, we can say that:

Racism is a **belief system** based on racial difference and hierarchy that informs **actions** of organisations, legislators, decision-makers and individuals in ways that **harm** BAME people.

In our definition, racism is ordinary and pervasive, stitched into the fabric of society and profoundly harmful. It is the stuff of everyday life. It does manifest in antagonistic acts from one person to another, e.g. in street racism. But also it is embedded in institutional practice, such as in the police force that disproportionately stops and searches black men (Dodd, 2019); and in sentencing practices that see BAME people given harsher sentences than their white peers (Lammy, 2017); and in the tendency of employers to favour white British job applicants over BAME candidates with identical CVs (CSI, 2019).

Racism becomes normalised. This means that BAME people can be subject to greater scrutiny and less often given the benefit of the doubt about their behaviour – as seen, for example, in the ways that Meghan Markle is portrayed in the media compared with Kate Middleton (Hall, 2020).

As a result, BAME people may 'do less well' and appear 'less 'desirable' on paper or in person in recruitment and promotion processes compared with white counterparts. In these circumstances, even in a non-racist charity, BAME people may seem to be the 'wrong fit'; and so BAME people can easily be penalised and denied, as roles and rewards end up elsewhere. Furthermore, this cycle reinforces the idea that it is whiteness that is the key marker of excellence.

The other side of racism: white privilege and discomfort

While it seems (from our BAME survey and interview work) that BAME people cannot avoid dealing with racism, it may be that some white people can and want to avoid doing so. This may manifest in white people disassociating themselves from racism and perhaps even denouncing it.

Yet defeating racism requires concerted effort – including from white people – to fully engage and to play an active part in working against it. And therefore, we need to understand why white people may withdraw in the face of racism.

Author Robin DiAngelo helpfully explains how the very idea of racism can cause discomfort and anxiety among white audiences. She labels this phenomenon 'white fragility' and argues that it shows up in white people in discussions about race as 'emotions such as anger, fear and guilt and behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and withdrawal' (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 2). The result is that advantages of being white are maintained because meaningful conversation on the alternatives are shut down (Eddo-Lodge, 2017).

The existence – even prevalence – of racism in a space can be a profound disruption to the positive self-image of an individual, ➤

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◀ organisation or sector. This leads to rejection of the idea – ‘We don’t have a racism problem’ – and/or relocating racism elsewhere – ‘Other people/organisations/sectors have a racism problem’. This defensive strategy also makes BAME people who raise the issue of racism, rather than racism itself, into the problem (feministkilljoys, 2016).

This fragility and the associated negative emotions and behaviours may be more present in a supposedly ‘woke’ space such as the charity sector, i.e. one supposedly alert to racial and social injustice (see Butterworth, 2020, for definition). As surfaced a number of times in BAME interviews and in our racial justice roundtable, the charity sector is led by those who consider themselves ‘good’ people. To hear otherwise is jarring.

Engagement with racism requires people to confront the possibility that if society is ‘rigged’ against BAME people then it is, by definition, set up in favour of (some) white people. It implies that some white people are undeserving of their (relatively) lofty position. This is a blow to self-image, given that we are taught that individual merit is what matters in life.¹⁴ It can also lead to concerns among well-placed white people about ‘zero sum’ results. For instance, correcting the problem of racism probably means more BAME successes and by implication fewer white successes. Aside from the factors above, it can be the case that for some white people the thought that they are (even relatively) privileged seems at odds with how life feels. Such people in the charity sector may have faced, and may continue to face, real difficulties getting into and getting on in the sector and may also, with reason, feel overworked and underpaid. People in this situation will feel that whiteness does not guarantee advantage and may not empathise with or may be sceptical of BAME people experiencing racism.

We should accept these lived realities and a sense that for some white people life is hard. For many (BAME and white people), life in the labour market is precarious, and it needs to be more stable, rewarding and secure for all. But we mustn’t let this squeeze talk of racism out of the conversation. To do so is to the detriment of efforts to open up the charity sector to BAME people.

Beyond paternalism

As well as meaningfully engaging with racism, another enabling condition for DEI culture to take hold is that the charity sector moves beyond its paternalistic history.

The concept of charity is hundreds of years old, and definitions of charity vary culturally. In Hebrew ‘Tzedakah’ is commonly translated as charity, and the root of the word (tzedek) means righteousness or justice. However, the etymological root of the English word for charity is the Latin term ‘caritas’, commonly translated as altruistic love. This philosophy, with its biblical underpinnings, can be seen in the Victorian concept of philanthropy.

However, while this idea of doing good deeds was in part born out of a sense of duty and shared humanity, there has been a more troubling side to charity.

One element of this shadow side is that purveyors of charitable work have used it to signal their virtue and self-righteousness with conspicuous displays of giving, at the same time as marking out philanthropists as being morally superior – a mode of thinking that lends itself to paternalism. In this mindset, just as there are moral superiors there are moral inferiors: people who are deficient and need to be saved – from themselves as much as anything else.

This in turn is used to justify powerful people doing things to or ‘for’ the less powerful, and the setting up of clear demarcations between the ‘great and the good’ benefactors and the downtrodden beneficiaries. In paternalistic mode, power remains with the superior – the ‘giver’ – who decides who should be in receipt of charity and what kind of charity they need. Similarly, this model is not (primarily) interested in creating equitable systems or structures, or in major and meaningful redistribution of wealth or power – as these are believed to be in the ‘right’ hands already. This interest in both giving away money and keeping the status quo has been described as ‘philanthrocapitalism’ (Ramdas, 2011). Furthermore, it can be argued that charitable giving is an effective device for maintaining order and deference among the ‘less fortunate’ (Prochaska, 1990) towards elites. ▶

14
For example, Priti Patel argues that people want to be recognised for their individual merits (Sandhu, 2018).

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◀ Today, it has become normal to talk about people in terms of their assets as well as their needs; but more traditional ideas of benefactors and beneficiaries persist – such as charitable efforts riding to the rescue to ‘save the day.’

This behaviour can also be racialised to produce a colonialist paternalism (Buffet, 2013). It can bring money without understanding and side-line the knowhow and wisdom of BAME people – at once infantilising black and brown populations while simultaneously trying to save ‘them’. It can manifest in centring the role in social progress of certain white-led institutions, benefactors or radicals and marginalise the work of BAME people in struggle and liberation. Historically, this can be seen in the official story of the abolition of the slave trade, but even today there is the erasure of BAME activists and experiences in efforts to solve the climate crisis.¹⁵

This last example shows that what perhaps seem outdated notions of racialised paternalism and colonialism can still shape the way that charity and the narrative of social change work today. These ideas are transmitted across time through culture. And dominant culture affects how we all ‘think and act and, more importantly, the kind of criteria by which [we] judge others’ (Kinsey Goman, 2011).

A culture of paternalism can lead to resistance in charities to sharing or letting go of power – especially to people more traditionally thought of as ‘beneficiaries’. Racialised paternalism can further mean that BAME people are not seen as a ‘natural fit’ in the charity sector. A DEI culture requires that charities move beyond paternalism and live by the lessons of decades of work on the importance of the insights and knowledge of people ‘on the ground’ (OpenLearn, no date), as well as more recent work on the importance of lived-experience leaders (National Lottery Community Fund, 2019).

The third critical condition for building DEI culture is about how the charity sector thinks about and is held accountable for performance.

Towards accountability

One of the themes to emerge from engaging with BAME charity people and system-shapers – and, to a lesser extent, white charity leaders – is that of charity sector accountability for DEI performance. There was interest, especially among racial justice advocates and activists, in mechanisms of accountability that would mean continued failure to deliver on DEI would have consequences for charities and charity leaders.

Performance and accountability on DEI must be seen in the context of overall charity sector performance and accountability. The complex and subjective nature of the work undertaken by many charities makes performance hard to measure. This in turn means that, for many charities, it may be difficult to report meaningfully on progress, and it may also not be easy for outside parties to hold charities to account for their performance.

Amid this complexity, when recruiting, existing staff may prefer to bring in people who are ‘similar’ to them: people with whom incumbents are likely to get on. One BAME interviewee described the charity they worked for as very “relational”, where success depends on one’s relationships and networks. ‘Clubbable’ people – those who are perceived to ‘fit in’ – are highly desirable, even though they may be less capable than less clubbable counterparts.

As shown in the subsection above on racism, in a context in which racism is normalised and whiteness is associated with excellence, the question of who is seen as clubbable and who gets to be ‘in the club’ can be highly racialised (as well as classed and gendered). Therefore, these relational preferences can keep some BAME people out of the sector in the first place and can marginalise those who do enter the charity world.

In practice, it is not easy to hold charities accountable for these exclusions. They come dressed as hard-to-refute ‘common sense’ ideas. It is usual to hear phrases that support homogeneity in hiring. The emphasis may be on hiring the ‘best person for the job’ or a candidate who can ‘hit the ground running’ or one who ‘understands the sector’. It can ▶

15 See for example the cropping out of a photo of Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate when appearing alongside Greta Thunberg (Evelyn, 2020).

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◀ also be a priority to have new colleagues who are 'on the same page' and to avoid people who could be seen to 'rock the boat'.

These powerful tendencies and the complexities of the charity sector raise important questions about how to hold charities to account for DEI and DEI deficits. Ideally, part of the answer is for charity trustees and senior leaders to hold themselves to a higher standard. However, board members are part time, almost exclusively volunteers, and often deliberately distanced from the day-to-day operations of organisations. They may have little or nothing to do with hiring decisions or defer to those who have to work alongside new recruits. Additionally, and significantly, there is also a serious absence of diversity on many trustee boards. As a framework for accountability in terms of DEI, it cannot be assumed that trustees will always fulfil their role.

Other stakeholders such as funders, infrastructure and membership bodies, and regulators have a role in building the culture of accountability for DEI performance. However, movement in this direction is currently in a formative stage, and such system-shapers need to build their depth of knowledge on race equity to perform this function. Similarly, there is not currently

a regulatory framework in place to provide incentives to charities to do better on DEI or for there to be consequences for serial 'failure'.

Yet there are signs of progress. As noted in Section 2, the #CharitySoWhite campaign has brought to the fore issues of whiteness and racism in the charity sector. It has called to account powerful actors in the sector, for example by asking questions aimed at individual charities, such as how powerful and influential BAME staff are and how institutional racism may be playing out in charitable organisations (Civil Society, 2019). These are necessary questions, and it vital to have this external BAME-led scrutiny.

From a different vantage point, work is under way in the world of charitable trusts and foundations to address DEI questions both in their internal practice and in how they engage with existing and would-be grantees and investees (ACF, 2019). Even though this funder-led work is in an early phase, together with efforts such as #CharitySoWhite it is part of building an ecosystem of accountability: one that creates the environment in which DEI culture can grow.

Such endeavours need to be encouraged, and we suggest additional ways to address some of these accountability challenges in our concluding recommendations. ■

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As stated in Section 3, the DEI deficiencies in the charity sector (and society at large) are cultural at root. This point should not be underestimated. It means that only intentional, sizeable and persistent DEI efforts will generate significant progress. It also means that the power of prevailing culture may generate resistance and backlash should transformation begin and the face of the sector change.¹⁶

Meaningful recommendations for DEI are already in circulation. There are numerous practical suggested actions that make sense. These include a variety of approaches to recruitment to reduce the possibilities for discriminatory practice (see Babbage, 2018, for one example) and opportunities for people inside charities (especially those with power and influence) to learn how to do better on DEI.

But cultural problems cannot be easily eradicated through retraining. We need to invest in the foundations of DEI culture, putting conditions in place so that diversity, equity and inclusion, in its many forms, can flourish and so that its opposite – racial homogeneity, inequity and exclusion – is deemed a fundamental breach of what charities stand for.

Our suggested solutions and recommendations for actions on DEI are multi-levelled, spanning from culture through to everyday practice. If we cast back to Section 2 and some of the harms experienced by BAME people who engaged with this project, and Section 3 and the discussion of the power of culture, we can see three distinct levels where DEI deficits are set and need to be reset. They are:

micro
practice in organisations

meso
the overall regime in the charity sector, including power dynamics and money flows

macro
the landscape, including wider social and cultural norms, in which a sector operates

The micro, meso and macro levels are all elements of transition theory. This is concerned with how systems – of which the charity sector is an example – work and how they change (Sinha and Millar, 2015).

The micro level is that of the organisation (or project), i.e. the front line where BAME charity people experience the sector. It is the level of everyday practice, policy and procedures that affect recruitment, retention and promotion, as well as those that determine whether and how BAME people can report experiences of racism and the process of investigation and sanctions against those deemed to be behaving inappropriately.

Our empirical work suggests that, among other issues at the micro level, BAME people feel held to a higher standard than white counterparts and there is a lack of faith that BAME experiences of racism are being addressed meaningfully.

The meso level is that of the entire infrastructure that perpetuates the 'way things are': i.e. the 'regime' (Sinha and Millar, 2015). The regime sets the 'rules of the game' and is formed by powerful institutions, legislation, power structures and vested interests, and existing knowhow (and limits to this). According to Scrase and Smith (cited in Sinha and Millar, 2015) the regime tends 'to self-stabilize around the status quo'. This may be because well-placed white people in the charity sector wish to preserve their jobs, power, status and income (Fitzpatrick, 2020).

At this level, some BAME participants providing input into the project were acutely aware of the scale of the issues. One person suggested ▶

¹⁶ An experiment on hypothetical political candidates suggests that voters dislike those coming through diversity initiatives. If voters are offered candidates described as having been 'included on a list from underrepresented backgrounds' and others are described as people who 'just got involved in their party' rather than benefiting from a diversity scheme, the voters prefer the latter type of candidate, regardless of that candidate's ethnicity; see Martin and Blinder (2020).

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◀ that DEI (or the lack of it) is governed by 'some very large systems' (interview – BAME respondent).

The third level is the macro level. If the meso determines the rules of the game, the macro is the playing field: in other words, it is the context in which the game takes place. The macro includes major contextual factors, such as social conditions and features of (and changes in) population and technology. Crucially, it also encompasses 'mental models' – social and cultural norms that inform how we think and act.

Our recommendations cover the micro, meso and macro levels in order to generate the culture change needed for charities to impact meaningfully on DEI in the sector and in society through their work. The work carried out for this project was based in England, but we would encourage all UK charities to take up these recommendations.

Recommendations for the sector collectively (including charities, infrastructure bodies, funders and regulators)

1. Redefine racism as ordinary, systemic and institutional

Charities should adopt a definition of racism that recognises it as an everyday ingrained system of oppression that operates through institutions and individuals. This will help to move away from racism being associated with 'bad' people and allow charities to increasingly take the lead against racism.

2. Conduct an annual sector-wide 'BAME Barometer' survey to capture BAME experience in charities

This survey would source experiences of a representative sample of BAME interns, volunteers, staff and trustees in the sector, and comparable data should be collected for white British charity counterparts. The questions should draw on elements of the BAME online survey carried out for this project, and would provide insight into the state of BAME sector experiences over time and identify improvements and areas where action is most needed.

3. Develop independent or third-party mechanisms for reporting and addressing racism in charities

BAME participants expressed considerable dissatisfaction with both in-house processes for reporting racism and

internal responses. This can lead to significant harms to BAME people and enable problems to go unchecked. BAME project participant solutions included making available some kind of external or independent whistleblowing and 'Ombudsman' function.

4. Develop a plan on the use of regulation to accelerate DEI progress

Infrastructure bodies, regulators, funders, and race equity organisations and advocates should come together to explore what better regulation for DEI might look like. This could cover issues such as board composition, tax breaks to reward good DEI practice, and strengthened DEI requirements on charity reporting. This work would be based on the idea that regulation is not punishment but a possible means by which to deliver better DEI outcomes.

Recommendations for organisational policy

1. Integrate explicit race equity goals into charitable work

Charities of all sizes should consider how their work does or does not advance race equity and take steps to ensure that it does. An important start is to conduct a race equity impact assessment of existing work. Even more helpful are race equity impact plans that not only assess the past but look forward to delivering positive outcomes as part of an ongoing process and commitment.

2. Report publicly on internal DEI targets

Charities of all sizes should commit to and publish permanent and minimum targets for DEI that stretch the organisation and reflect their own context, e.g. location. Targets should be backed by implementation plans including details of approaches to the recruitment, development and retention of BAME people. These targets should be reported on as part of the organisation's key performance indicators (KPIs) (McGregor-Smith, 2017).

3. Publicly report every year on ethnicity pay gap data

In order to introduce greater transparency, accountability and scrutiny about the position of BAME people in the charity workforce, we recommend that charities publish their unadjusted ethnicity pay ▶

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◀ gap data on an annual basis. The key measure, based on existing requirements on gender pay gap data, is the difference between the average earnings of BAME men and women, expressed relative to earnings of white British men and women. We also encourage experimentation with additional measures, such as the percentage of total salary spend on BAME employees (see Ryder, 2019).

While the above is agreed by ACEVO and Voice4Change England, the organisations hold differing views as to the implementation of this recommendation. Voice4Change England recommends that all charities with five or more full time equivalent staff publish their ethnicity pay gap data alongside a statement of context and future intent; and that this becomes a Charity Commission requirement. ACEVO recommends that ethnicity pay gap data should be published by all charities except where doing so will lead to individual salaries becoming identifiable; and that a charity choosing not to publish ethnicity pay gap data should provide a brief public explanation about their decision not to do so.

4. Change recruitment criteria, e.g. value attributes differently, including lived experience and alignment with institutional vision

Charities of all sizes should change parameters in recruitment by, for example, (a) being open to different ways to test candidates, e.g. other than by CVs and covering letters (see Thorne, 2020, for an example); (b) being attuned to typically less valued attributes, including lived experience and connection to the vision of the organisation; (c) seeing the need to invest in recruits rather than selecting candidates who will 'fit in' or be 'low maintenance' or those who can 'hit the ground running'; and (d) being flexible, e.g. using job shares to increase hiring of BAME candidates.

Charities using recruitment agencies should ask and expect them to innovate in their service provision in line with the recruitment approach above.

5. Invest in supporting and safeguarding BAME charity people – including proper complaints procedures

The evidence in this project shows that BAME people inside charities can feel over-scrutinised and unsupported. BAME

participants expressed disappointment with experiences of reporting problems, and internal responses need to be strengthened, including to reduce the toll on complainants. BAME support systems can also help (though these networks should not be made responsible for change – that responsibility lies with senior leaders).

Larger charities (those with an income of £1m or more) should support the development of BAME affinity networks to allow BAME staff to share experiences, opinions, concerns and ideas for enhancing DEI inside and outside the organisation. These charities should also consider buying out BAME staff – particularly BAME network co-ordinators – for a certain number of hours per month to allow them to fully participate in a BAME network. Smaller charities with few employees should offer BAME staff opportunities to connect into support networks with BAME employees in other small charities.

6. Work with and pay BAME DEI specialists to improve practice

Charities should engage with BAME organisations and individuals with DEI knowhow for help and advice. However, BAME specialists are often asked to help on a pro bono basis, and they should not be expected to do so. Such input should be paid for financially or through something like a skills swap.

Recommendations for CEOs and senior leaders

1. Learn more about racism and current anti-racist thinking

All charity CEOs and leadership teams should source coaching or participate in a programme of learning on leading-edge anti-racist thinking and practice. Senior staff, in particular, should be encouraged to do the same.¹⁷

2. Take responsibility for learning how racism can manifest in your organisation

In conjunction with the above, all charity CEOs and leadership teams should engage in an analysis of how racism can manifest in their institution. Key themes for analysis include the extent to which BAME people have power and influence in the organisation; how external patterns of inequality might be reflected inside ▶

17 See Seeing White on Scene on Radio, 2017: sceneonradio.org/seeing-white

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◀ the charity; and whether BAME people in the organisation feel supported in sharing experiences of racism (Charity So White, 2019).

3. CEOs (with board chairs) should lead on and be held responsible and accountable for progress on DEI targets

Charity CEOs – alongside the chair of trustees – should be held responsible and accountable for progress against their charity's DEI targets, processes and outcomes. This includes reporting on how the charity is working towards DEI in the organisation itself and in board operations – in line with the Charity Governance Code (Good Governance Steering Group, 2018) – as well as developing and implementing race equity impact plans for the external work of the organisation.

Initiatives are not expected to always succeed, but progress against targets should be transparent and measurable. DEI performance should form part of senior leaders' annual appraisal and, should the charity operate a performance pay policy, pay should be linked to improvements on DEI.

Recommendations for funders

1. Funders should invest in a DEI Transformation Fund geared to BAME-led initiatives

The fund would pool money from different funders and could have three elements to support areas of development of DEI culture:

- a. Learning strand: Producing new learning and stimulus materials on racism and race equity for the charity sector – open only to BAME-led race equity organisations and initiatives.
- b. Innovations strand: Open to all charities to develop and test 'radical' DEI efforts with potential to lead to widespread change.

c. Accountability/support strand: Open to BAME-led race equity organisations and initiatives only – to enable them to advocate, challenge and support with new ideas sector-wide transformation efforts.

2. Funders should become more interventionist in supporting charity sector DEI culture and practice including changing application criteria to prioritise racial justice work

Funders should use their money and influence to reward 'DEI-forward' applicants and grantees – doing the work of enhancing DEI inside the organisation as well as through impacts in the world. This could mean that funders adopt a process where they: (a) *guide* applicants and grantees on DEI expectations; (b) *invest* to support specific improvements among grantees – e.g. external race equity impact plans; (c) *assess* regularly that progress among grantees is being made; (d) *warn* where DEI progress is insufficient and support (perhaps with money or specialist input) remedial action; and (e) in the last resort, *divest* in instances where there is still insufficient improvement (Chow, 2018).

Together, these recommendations for the sector collectively, for organisations, for senior leaders and funders represent a multi-level plan to move decisively towards DEI culture in the charity sector. Enacted in concert they can shift the 'way of life' in the charity sector and bridge the gap between the professed desire in the charity sector for a focus on BAME people and racial and ethnic diversity and the deficits outlined in this report.

At the same time, especially in periods of turbulence, the real question is not what should be done but whether different elements in the charity sector are willing to rethink and reconstruct who we are as a sector, how we work and what we do. ■

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No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.

The quote above is attributed to Albert Einstein. Whether Einstein did or did not say it, the point holds that we must shift mindsets if we are to escape the DEI deficits so evident in the charity sector.

A charity sector that is truly committed to DEI must engage with and seek to overturn racism. It must insist that BAME people within and yet to come into the sector are in the right place (not 'out of place'). It must work with intention to support racialised and marginalised populations within its own walls and in the outside world – through practical action and by challenging pervasive logics of racism and recognising and resisting the privileges associated with whiteness.

The analysis and direction for action in this report marks out a pathway to transformation for the charity sector. The change for which we are advocating is aimed to transform the DEI agenda from the periphery of charity life to the centre, and to create an environment where to act on DEI is expected and normal.

This agenda is broader than a call to the sector to recruit more BAME staff and trustees. This is because, as we have shown in our data, the DEI deficit is a symptom of a deeper malaise. If it were just an intake issue our survey would have painted a more positive picture of BAME people's experience in the charity sector. A new more central rationale for race equity in the charity sector provides

greater ballast for DEI within organisations as well as requiring charities to focus purposefully on DEI in society. In practical terms the shift can encourage BAME people to come into charities and encourage charities to value and make room/way for the knowledge, perspectives and interests that BAME people have.

To date, DEI talk is ahead of action to such an extent that it can lead to frustration and perhaps despair. At the same time there appears an appetite, among BAME charity people, and a growing, possibly critical mass, of influential white charity people and institutions such that now is the time to get things done; for the charity sector to centre BAME people and for DEI to be reflected in who is in the sector and what the sector does.

ACEVO and Voice4Change are committed to doing more to deliver DEI in our work as individual organisations and together in partnership. We will also work in a spirit of genuine collaboration and constructive challenge with others – particularly infrastructure bodies – who have entered this space. And ACEVO and Voice4Change also recognise that we do not (by any means) have all the answers or even all the right questions. We too understand that we must be held accountable and open to challenge on our DEI interventions.

We welcome the work ahead. ■

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Interviews: 24 interviews conducted between September and November 2019, 13 with charity leaders and 11 with BAME charity staff.

Roundtables: one 2h 30min session with 10 system-shapers and one 2hr 45m session with 10 racial justice advocates and activists.

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