
EMBEDDING AN ANTI-RACIST APPROACH IN RESEARCH AND DESIGN

Summary of activities, actions and organisational changes

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SERVICE
DESIGN LAB

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Click on any title or page number to go straight to the page

<u>Introduction</u>	What is racism? Intersectionality How is racism manifesting in social research?	3
<u>Part 1</u>	Project and partnership formation	5
<u>Part 2</u>	Design, engagement and implementation of research and Design activities	7
<u>Part 3</u>	Analysis, reporting and dissemination	10
<u>Part 4</u>	Creating a diverse and inclusive team	13
<u>Part 5</u>	Developing and sharing our learning on anti-racist approaches	16

INTRODUCTION

Racism pervades social research and design. As a social research organisation, we at Dartington Service Design Lab have been reflecting on how we perpetuate racism and inequality – but also how we can challenge it.

This paper is the result of this organisation-wide reflection and starts by outlining how racism manifests at various stages of a typical research or design initiative. In some cases, this is a result of our own actions, decisions or omissions. At other times it may reflect racism within related institutions and wider structures. This overview is informed both by our own experiences, and by the work of others on this topic.

We then describe what we are going to do about it: some concrete actions we are taking and can be held accountable to – organisationally and in our interactions with the wider sectors we inhabit. We also consider some organisational changes we will make to become anti-racist.

This paper will form the basis of an organisational anti-racist policy underpinning our research and design activities (to sit publicly on our website), alongside a published summary of our learning, commitments and actions that will underpin annual updates on our progress.

What is racism?

Much has been written on what constitutes racism. We think the definitions summarised in a recent report by the Health Foundation¹, building on work by James Nazroo and colleagues² are a useful orientation:

- **Structural racism:** the processes that lead to disadvantage in accessing economic, physical and social resources.
- **Institutional racism:** the cultures of practice and procedures that shape the experience of racialised groups in institutions.
- **Interpersonal racism:** behaviours ranging from slights and micro-aggressions to verbal and physical violence that threaten, harm and devalue those who are targeted and those with similarly racialised identities.

In a UK context, there are many groups which experience racism in different ways. We recognise that a differentiated approach is required to reflect these different experiences, and there will not be a 'one size fits all' language or approach to pursuing anti-racist research and design. As a result, we have not

¹ <https://health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/how-to-interpret-research-on-ethnicity-and-covid-19-risk-and-outcomes-five>

² <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9566.13001>

singled out specific groups or ‘racisms’ in this paper, and we have avoided the acronym BAME.

Intersectionality

This paper is intentionally and specifically focused on racism. Of course, there are many other forms of discrimination that pervade social research and design (such as those related to gender, class/poverty, sexuality, religion, physical appearance or disability). These intersect with racism: people may experience multiple forms of discrimination that may interact and compound disadvantage and trauma. Furthermore, there may be common and distinct underlying structural determinants of various forms of discrimination.

We will be applying a racial equity lens to our work, which does not mean we will be ignoring other forms of discrimination (and their structural underpinnings). These will be considered alongside racism as part of broader and ongoing equity-focused enquiry within the organisation.

How does racism manifest in social research and design?

It is important to recognise at the outset that the research and design lifecycles are racialised and perpetuate racism. Social research and design – and sources through which it is funded – have been shaped by, and often reinforced by colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy³. Much current social research and design is conceptualised, commissioned, delivered and consumed through a ‘white racial frame’⁴ – a dominant, unconscious and internalised narrative that privileges whiteness and discriminates against people of colour.

It is against this backdrop that we consider racism in relation to three broad phases of a research or design initiative: (i) project or partnership formation; (ii) research methods, engagement and implementation; and (iii) analysis, dissemination and reporting.

For each of these broad phases, we consider: (a) the ways in which racism manifests in the research and design fields, and its impact; (b) our organisational starting point for change; and (c) the actions and associated commitments we will take to become anti-racist in each regard (by when, and how we’ll know).

³ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1098214018778533>

⁴ Feagin, J. R. (2013). *The white racial frame: Centuries of racial framing and counter-framing* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

PART 1: PROJECT AND PARTNERSHIP FORMATION

There is an early stage in any project or initiative - whether a proactive development of ideas or a response to an invitation to tender - when ideas are developed and focus is clarified, partnerships are formed and early design decisions are made.

A. Some ways in which racism manifests at this stage of a research or design initiative

How racism manifests	Impact
Predominantly white-led funders and commissioners set research and design priorities and the focus or scope of tenders.	<p>Those most affected by discrimination or disadvantage are rarely involved in setting priorities, questions and scope of research or design initiatives. This masks and compounds inequalities.</p> <p>Narrowly conceived or poorly articulated areas of focus may inadvertently reinforce negative stereotypes (often due to a surface-level rather deeper, more systemic and theoretical consideration of the contributors of the issues in question).</p>
A 'white racial frame' means that white-led or predominantly white organisations and partnerships tend to be better positioned to attract funding, in turn raising their own profiles.	<p>Partnerships are formed through predominantly homogenous networks.</p> <p>Organisations led by 'people of colour' are under-invested in, compounding their ability to compete and affect change.</p> <p>This reinforces poor diversity and representation in research and design professions.</p>
White-led, privileged organisations and partnerships with profile, lead work dedicated to serving marginalised or otherwise disadvantaged communities.	Planned research or design activities are extractive or tokenistic in their formulation, with partners parachuting into communities or delivery contexts (rather than being embedded or authentically undertaken in partnership).

B. Our starting point for change

Dartington is a white-led organisation, often working in predominantly white-led and homogenous networks or partnerships. Such closed networks mean we miss opportunities to work with diverse partners to achieve a greater, more equitable impact (either because we do not know diverse partners outside of our immediate sphere, or because we are not known by them).

Our profile, experience and track-record - coupled with such homogenous, un-diverse networks - means that better suited or experienced organisations, embedded in communities or led by people of colour, may be overlooked or disadvantaged in project formation or funding applications.

C. Our actions and commitments

Action 1a: Equality Impact Assessment (part a)

- **What:** We will develop and implement an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), which will include an explicit focus on early-stage partnership or initiative development, and responses to tenders (part a). This will ensure we carefully consider whether a potential initiative, project or partnership will perpetuate racism and other forms of discrimination, helping us challenge this and avoid such activities, or undertake steps to mitigate against this.
- **When:** Version 1.0 will be complete, published on our website and implemented no later than the end of Q2 of 2021 (September 2021).
- **Indicator of progress:** Once developed we will implement the EIA on all new initiatives or partnerships. After 12 months of use we will reflect and report on how this has changed the way we work, highlight key learning and report on any adaptations we make to the EIA or its use.

Commitments stemming from this action:

- We will carefully consider if we have sufficient expertise/understanding (or can create this in partnership) to undertake work. If we don't, we will not pursue it.
- When developing work to be delivered in partnership, we will intentionally seek diversity and complementary expertise in our partnerships to reduce the risk of exacerbating bias and inequality.
- Where we identify aspects of invitations to tender that we believe perpetuate racism, we shall constructively challenge and inform those funding the work of this (and if after unsuccessful challenge, we will not bid for work that perpetuates racism).

PART 2: DESIGN, ENGAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH AND DESIGN ACTIVITIES

Once initiatives and projects are funded, research or design methods are often refined, engagement plans developed and research/design activities undertaken.

A. Some ways in which racism manifests at this stage of a research or design initiative

How racism manifests	Impact
<p>Engagement with people from diverse communities or service settings is often extractive and transactional.</p> <p>Research and design teams too often appear for a brief time, and/or extract information in clumsy or racist ways.</p> <p>People, organisations or groups of interest are not adequately recompensed for their participation.</p>	<p>Resources (broadly defined) are taken out of communities or organisations, rather than being put in. This exacerbates power and resource imbalances and inequality.</p>
<p>Failing to consider ethnicity and culture in the set-up and delivery of research and design activities may ignore or hide important experiences and variations in need or experience.</p>	<p>This will lead to narrow or biased policy or practice responses – exacerbating inequalities and racism.</p>
<p>Unrepresentative or non-diverse sampling in research or engagement activities will produce biased views on the issues being considered.</p>	<p>This will result in skewed or biased findings and insights that disproportionately favour privileged groups over others.</p>
<p>Attempts to measure various aspects of child development, family functioning, attitudes or behaviours are typically narrowly developed from a white Euro-centric, perspective.</p>	<p>Measurement can be culturally insensitive or ineffective at capturing insight from diverse populations.</p> <p>Insensitive engagements and measurement approaches may also be trauma-inducing or retraumatising for specific groups, particularly if the historical or political contexts underpinning experiences are not considered or acknowledged.</p>

Researchers have an over-reliance on bodies of existing evidence undertaken with predominantly white or otherwise unrepresentative populations.

This results in increased confidence in particular policy and practice conclusions which favour or disadvantage some groups over others.

B. Our starting point for change

Whilst we often undertake co-design activities at discrete stages of a research or design initiative, rarely do we meaningfully involve people who are the focus of research or design activities in the up-front formulation and design of our activities and engagements. We are not experienced in peer research methodologies (although are increasingly partnering with those that are).

Whilst we always recompense individuals for their time when participating in research or design activities, we are inconsistent in our approach to recompensing organisations that we engage with. We do not always explore what people, communities or partnering organisations may want to learn or how they might want to benefit from participation.

C. Our actions and commitments

Action 1b: Equality Impact Assessment (part b)

- **What:** Our Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will have a specific focus on research and design methods and approaches to engagement (part b). This will ensure that we carefully consider how all engagement activities, methods and engagements may risk perpetuating racism and other forms of inequality, helping us either avoid such activities or mitigate against risks.
- A completed Equality Impact Assessment will be reviewed by the SMT, and if the work requires ethical review and approval, will also be included with materials for review by our ethics committee.
- **When:** Version 1.0 will be complete and implemented no later than the end of Q2 of 2021 (September 2021).
- **Indicator of progress:** Once developed we will implement 'part b' of the EIA on all new initiatives or projects, which is intended to help sharpen the focus on equity and anti-racism in our methods and approaches. After 12 months of use we will reflect and report on how this has changed the way we work, highlight key learning and report on any adaptations we make to the EIA or its use.

Action 2: Anti-racist social research and design training

- **What:** We will identify and invest in whole-team training on culturally appropriate and trauma-informed measurement and data collection specifically related to social research and design activities.

- **When:** Assuming we can source suitable training providers - this training will take place by the end of Q3 (Dec 2021), and be repeated every other year.
- **Indicator of progress:** We will publish details of training providers on our website that others may consider. In an annual learning reflection, we will consider and report on how our approaches to measurement and data collection have changed, highlighting key learning, challenges and further actions.

Commitments stemming from this action:

- We will consider all research and design (purpose and specific activities) through an equity and intersectionality lens. In doing so we will explore and set out theoretical justifications for design and analytical decisions related to race and ethnicity, taking into account underlying historical and political contexts. We will design methods that are informed by and sensitive to diverse needs and experiences.
- When undertaking engagements with practitioners, families, young people or communities we will work with partners to ensure that engagements are: (i) inclusive and as far as possible reflective of local communities in which research and design works takes place; (ii) that research and design methods and approaches to measurement are inclusive and culturally appropriate; and (iii) that they are conducted in a trauma-informed way.

Where funding allows:

- We will seek to engage and financially recompense organisations that are embedded or connected with populations we are working with. Where possible and appropriate, these will be organisations led by people of colour.
- We will also seek to engage and financially recompense diverse groups of people that support or participate in research or design engagement activities, with at least the minimum real living wage⁵.

If funding does not allow...

- We will: (a) work with funders and commissioners to explore ways that this may be achieved (either through additional or redirected resources); or (b) if further funding cannot be secured, we will be clear that we will not undertake activities that perpetuate racism and inequalities.
- Where possible we will enable and empower racialised and minoritised groups or populations that are the focus for analysis by including them in the interpretation of findings.
- When drawing upon bodies of research or evidence, we will consider and be transparent about how representative and transferable (or not) we believe it is for diverse populations.

⁵ <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>

PART 3: ANALYSIS, REPORTING AND DISSEMINATION

The way in which analysis is interpreted and findings are communicated with a diverse range of audiences are crucial stages in a research or design initiative.

A. Ways in which racism manifests at these stages of the research pipeline

How racism manifests	Impact
<p>Analysis may ignore race or ethnicity and thus hide important diversity of experience or structural inequalities.</p> <p>Interpretation of data and evidence is often from a white Euro-centric perspective which can reproduce and perpetuate racism.</p>	<p>Analysis or interpretation of data that ignores the intersecting historical and political contexts underpinning different ethnic identities may reach spurious or partial conclusions that perpetuate racial inequalities.</p>
<p>Findings, learning and insights are not fed back to communities or groups from which it was generated with.</p>	<p>This is extractive and creates bias in interpretation, further widening power imbalances and eroding trust.</p>
<p>The language and imagery used in reporting may be racist.</p>	<p>This will perpetuate negative stereotypes, cause offense and erode trust.</p>
<p>A majority of peer-reviewed literature is held behind a paywall, which makes findings inaccessible to racialised community members and community practitioners.</p>	<p>This privileges the wealthy and those directly involved in academia in accessing research and knowledge.</p>

B. Our starting point for change

Rarely do we involve diverse stakeholders participating in research or design activities in the analysis and interpretation of data or findings (analysis or interpretation is typically undertaken by our team, which is predominantly white).

Our approaches to dissemination and reporting are often traditional, in the form of reports, slide-decks, blogs and academic papers (the latter not always open-access). We are inconsistent in our approach to feeding back insights to those participating in research or design activities.

C. Our actions and commitments

Action 1c: Equality Impact Assessment (part c)

- **What:** Our Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will have a specific focus on analysis and reporting. This will ensure that all analytical approaches, reporting and dissemination activities carefully consider risks related to perpetuating racism and other forms of inequality, helping us either avoid such activities or mitigate against risks.
- **When:** Version 1.0 will be complete and implemented no later than the end of Q2 of 2021 (September 2021).
- **Indicator of progress:** Once developed we will implement 'part c' of the EIA on all new initiatives or projects, which is intended to help sharpen the focus on equity and anti-racism in our analysis and reporting. After 12 months of use we will reflect and report on how this has changed the way we work, highlight key learning and report on any adaptations we make to the EIA or its use.

Commitments stemming from this action:

- We will cost dissemination activities with minoritised communities of focus as an integral part of research and design activities (and where resources do not permit, a dialogue will take place with funders or commissioners about the limitations and risks of this).
- Where possible, findings and insights will first be shared and validated with communities or groups of people from which it was generated. This initial engagement and review should generate feedback, insights and recommendations about the messages and language used in subsequent dissemination.
- Engagements and sharing of data/findings with communities will be designed in a way that promotes equitable access (i.e. in formats or forums that enable equitable participation and engagement).
- When reporting we will be transparent about the degree to which the communities of focus were (or were not) involved in the design, data collection, interpretation and dissemination strategies.

- We will use language that accurately and respectfully describes the populations we are working with or describing (avoiding where possible acronyms such as BAME). We will explain why we have chosen particular language and acknowledge its benefit and limitations.
- We will only publish peer-reviewed research in open-access journals (ensuring that the fees for this are covered by funders and costed into the work).
- In reports and outputs, we will ensure use of diverse, inclusive and sensitive imagery.

PART 4: CREATING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE TEAM

Social research and design professions and underlying training and professional development routes are inherently racist. Underlying systemic structures and privilege result in an over-representation of white researchers and designers (and under-representation of People of Colour).

A. Ways in which racism manifests in social research and design disciplines

How racism manifests	Impact
<p>Although data is limited and not specific to social research, the UK's increasing diversity is not reflected in research and academia. For example, whereas 10% of academic staff are Asian⁶ (compared to 8% in the working age population⁷), only 2% are Black (compared to 3.4% in the wider working age population).</p> <p>There are significant ethnicity pay gaps in higher education and research: these are most stark for Black people, less so but still significantly so for Asian people⁸.</p> <p>Ethnic diversity in the design professions is generally better, although the same issues in relation to progression and pay are present⁹.</p> <p>92% of charity trustees and 94% of charity CEOs are white¹⁰ (whereas white people make up 86% of the wider working age population).</p>	<p>Poor diversity disincentivise young people from pursuing careers in social research and design and seeking to progress within these fields.</p> <p>Social research and design fields are not inclusive, with formal and informal learning and progression opportunities limited and situated within white social frames.</p> <p>There are relatively few diverse role-models and mentors to encourage and support progression.</p> <p>This poor diversity perpetuates and compounds the racism inherent throughout research and design pipeline.</p>

⁶ Calculated from Higher Education Staff Statistics 2018/19: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/23-01-2020/sb256-higher-education-staff-statistics>

⁷ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/working-age-population/latest>

⁸ See: <https://www.ucea.ac.uk/library/publications/Caught-at-the-crossroads/>

⁹ <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/does-design-have-diversity-issue>

¹⁰ <https://www.acevo.org.uk/2020/01/what-are-the-barriers-to-increased-racial-diversity-within-the-third-sector/>

B. Our starting point for change

We are a predominantly white organisation. Our small team size (currently 17) makes reporting on representativeness susceptible to seemingly large fluctuations when people leave or join (at the time of writing, 82% of our staff are white compared to 86% in the general working age). The proportion of people identifying as 'white' applying for roles in our organisation is 70% (compared to 86% in the general working age population).

We acknowledge that ensuring ethnic representativeness of a small team is not straight-forward. There is broad, aggregated data on the ethnicity of the UK working age population. However, this is very broad-brush, out of date, and we don't have specific data related to the fields of social research or design. Arguably more important than representativeness of the wider population is representativeness related to those populations we are working with and for (i.e. children and families in the various communities and contexts we work in). However, these vary enormously on a project-by-project basis, making efforts at representativeness an impossibility for a small team like ours. Most crucial is ensuring we nurture an inclusive working environment and approach to recruitment and strive for as much diversity within our team as possible.

Our greatest area of concern relates to our leadership and governance. All of our trustees and senior management team are white. This is undeniably problematic and reflects structural racism.

C. Our actions and commitments

Action 3: De-biasing job adverts and ensuring recruitment is inclusive

- **What:** All job adverts (staff and trustee) and recruitment processes will be de-biased and inclusive. This will include using blind recruitment platforms that anonymise the majority of the application process.
- **When:** Immediately (following successful piloting in 2020).
- **Indicator of progress:** Positive feedback on inclusivity of recruitment process from unsuccessful and successful applicants (reported on an annual basis).

Action 4: Increasing ethnic diversity on our Board of Trustees

- **What:** We will increase diversity of the Board of Trustees. Given the previously described challenges regarding representativeness and small numbers, we will not set quotas and instead focus on increasing inclusivity (see Action 5) and over time increasing the diversity of the Board.
- **When:** By 2024 (over the next three years we will undertake at least one, if not two rounds of Trustee recruitment).
- **Indicator of progress:** Increased diversity of the Board, and a synthesis of learning regarding inclusion and diversity of the Board, based on

recruitment activities and Board reflections (which will be reported on an annual basis).

Action 5: Nurture an inclusive working environment that encourages a more diverse workforce

- **What:** We will create an internal working group, supported by access to training on inclusive workplaces, to review and work with the Senior Management Team to update policies, practices and nurture workplace culture to ensure that they are inclusive and foster belonging.
- **When:** Initial review completed by March 2022
- **Indicators of change:** Updates and changes and policies will be reflected in staff handbook, and staff will report a high and steady workplace inclusivity through staff 'pulse' surveys.

PART 5: DEVELOPING AND SHARING OUR LEARNING ON ANTI-RACIST APPROACHES

The areas covered in this note are a start. We know there is much more to learn about how race, ethnicity and racism intersects with our work, and more to do in identifying how we can tackle this. The ways of working outlined in this document will also take time to embed through practice, reflection, and further development.

We have identified three further actions to embed these actions and commitments into our organisation, and to continue to reflect, challenge ourselves, learn and make continued progress in becoming an anti-racist organisation.

Our actions and commitments

Action 6: Formalising actions and commitments into an anti-racism policy

- **What:** We will translate the commitments and actions outlined in this document into a formalised organisational policy (reviewed by Trustees, integrated into our staff handbook and staff inductions, and shared publicly on our website).
- **When:** Version 1.0 will be complete and implemented no later than the end of Q2 of 2021 (September 2021). The policy will be reviewed at least every three years.
- **Indicators of change:** Integration into our organisational staff handbook, and publicly hosted on our website. Review/updates at least every three years.

Action 7: Reflecting and reporting on progress against actions and commitments

- **What:** We will create a checklist and learning log related to our actions and commitments. These will be embedded into project and organisational reflective reviews. We will summarise learning and progress against actions and commitments in a publicly shared annual reflective report.
- **When:** Annually, with the first report published in the summer of 2022.
- **Indicators of progress:** We will identify areas of learning and actionable improvement to continually develop our approaches to anti-racist social research and design within our organisation.

We also appreciate that we are just one organisation that is part of a much wider system and infrastructure that is grappling with change. To amplify and support our organisational effort we will explore the appetite for a learning alliance of

other social research and design organisations committed to anti-racism in all aspects of their work. If there is an appetite, we will meet on a regular basis to:

- (a) share updates on progress towards our respective actions and commitments;
- (b) share reflections and learning on challenges in relation to our practice; and
- (c) work together to overcome challenges in our path towards anti-racism.

Together we will pool and share resources and learning with the wider sector.


Action 8: Anti-racism learning alliance


- **What:** We will explore appetite to convene or join an alliance of social research/design organisations to share learning, resources, challenges and opportunities for advancing anti-racist research and design within and beyond our respective organisations.
- **When:** We will gauge interest, through our own networks and those of others over the summer/autumn of 2021, updating on appetite and progress in our annual reflective report.
- **Indicator of progress:** Appetite and interest from the wider social research and design sector to embark on a journey of vulnerability, learning and reflection that leads to enhancements of anti-racist culture and practice within organisations involved in the learning alliance.

These actions are the start of our journey on becoming an anti-racist social research and design organisation and working with the sector to tackle the deeply embedded racism that pervades our work and society. Our progress will be measured by how we learn from our mistakes and how we perform against the actions and commitments we have outlined.


Dartington Service Design Lab is a research and design charity focussed on using evidence and design in innovative ways to help those working with children and young people have a greater impact. Our team of researchers and specialists are skilled in service design and improvement methods, systems thinking approaches, and data visualisation and communications. As an organisation, we have more than 50 years of experience working across the public and voluntary sectors.

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