

# Diversity

## In 2016 the social sector knew that greater diversity was something to strive for, but was less sure of the benefits it could bring

Our original State of the Sector [research](#) found that 93% of charity leaders felt that diversity at board level was important, but when pushed as to why, they struggled to answer:

- 23% thought board diversity helped them make better decisions
- 19% thought that a push for greater board diversity would expand the talent at board level
- 17% thought it would better equip their charities serve their beneficiary or client groups

Since then we have seen more evidence that diverse and inclusive boards are better equipped to understand their client base—and [more able to adapt to organisational and relational challenges](#) as they emerge and evolve.

Within the social sector, the moral case for diversity throughout an organisation is also [gaining traction](#). Many charities see that diversity and inclusion are inextricably linked to their commitment to equality and social justice. This is backed by a growing body of research that demonstrates how diverse teams are more [innovative, creative, smarter, and less biased](#) than their more monocultural equivalents.

For this research we interviewed 20 sector leaders to see how attitudes to diversity in the social sector had changed since our original State of the Sector.

## There is agreement that urgent progress is needed but little clarity about what to do

We heard a great urgency from charity leaders about the need to put diversity into practice, particularly on the boards of charities and independent funders:

*‘The sector needs to take this seriously, there is a lack of understanding about what needs to be done, there is a lack of commitment, a lack of leadership. The issues are so deep rooted... [and] we have the idea there can only be one of ‘these people’ in an organisation.’*

Some of our interviewees highlighted that the sector still has a significant job to do to address diversity of experience and thought:

*‘My concern is where you don’t get diversity of thought. Lots of charities are still not advertising and they are recruiting through friends...’*

Others pointed out that the sector should be thinking about diversity in far more creative ways than just the 'usual' measures, such as race and gender, into thinking about diversity of impact too:

*'In grantmaking [it can be about] trying to understand the complexity of local ecologies...diversity can be about lots of things, not just protected characteristics... diversity is not just 'who' and 'what' but also intended impact and 'why?' things are done'*

One funder interviewed felt that their decisions should be made by a more diverse cohort, particularly when considering smaller organisations, and the importance of lived experience:

*'The importance [of diversity] is how do we recognise and fund specialist services responding to groups with specific needs within society? Small and medium sized organisations often have closer relationships with the people they serve; the 'by and for' aspect gives credibility and reach within a community better than a more 'generic' organisation or larger charity. [Focusing on diversity in this way] speaks to how we value people's knowledge and lived experience.'*

## Learning from others

One interviewee pointed out that non-profits would do well to learn from those private sector organisations that have invested significantly into their thinking about diversity:

*'[The sector] still feels very white and middle class, that's why you need to work with smaller organisations that have more diversity. We need to talk more about the successes of organisations from the private sector.'*

Others believe there are lessons we can learn from some of the debate across the Atlantic:

*'There has been good stuff coming out of the US but I don't see a huge appetite for conversations in the UK. It might take on more urgency post Oxfam and Save the Children [scandals], though maybe wrapping [diversity] up with safeguarding is not desirable.'*

## NPC's plans for 2019

Our 2018 research [Walking the Talk on Diversity](#), found that charities tend to 'shelter behind liberal values', presuming neither bias nor discrimination could exist in their organisations. We are [continuing this work](#) with a series of examples aimed at providing guidance for the sector on how to navigate some of the practicalities of increasing their diversity.

Please visit our [website](#) or contact [policy@thinknpc.org](mailto:policy@thinknpc.org) if you are interested in supporting this work.

