

Background on Our Approach to Equity at Renaishi

Racism, discrimination and inequality are longstanding issues and continue to impact all aspects of life and work. Sadly, we still live in a world where people experience injustice because of race, gender, sexual orientation and other characteristics.

As an organisation working closely with communities that have been marginalised along those lines, **Renaishi is committed to continuously and proactively reviewing our processes to make them as equitable as possible.** Over the last few years, we have been re-challenging ourselves around how to address a range of issues around inequality, discrimination, and bias both within Renaishi, and through our work

These have led to broader conversations about how to become the kind of organisation we collectively want to be, and how we can embed equity, diversity and inclusion within wider organisational practice. Since then, we have initiated staff-led groups on Equal Opportunities, Sustainability and Wellbeing, and made changes to our recruitment practices to make them more fair and inclusive. Some of the themes/challenges we would like to focus on in the coming year include diversity across the organisation and at senior levels, staff voice and organisational culture through an equitable lens.

Renaishi is aware that there is still a long way to go to get to where we collectively want to be, and is committed going forward to embedding equity as part of its new strategy to be released in September 2022.

Equitable Evaluation in the Consultancy Team

How is equity relevant to Renaishi's consultancy project work?

In our consultancy work, we conduct research and evaluations for a wide range of the public and third sector, including charities, philanthropic funders and local and central governments. This includes working with groups subject to marginalisation and exploring topics directly related to power dynamics - such as economic exclusion, youth violence and access to health and social care provision.

In carrying out this work, we have a responsibility to be conscious of our own biases, our potential to cause harm and our role in perpetuating an unequal system.

What is the issue and why is it important to address?

“Structural racism is encrypted in the very fabric of our society, our history, our institutions and our policies.” – Runnymede Trust

“Racial justice isn't niche or a fringe issue. It needs to be mainstreamed across all policy and work areas, preferably in reference to other relevant protected characteristics (intersectionality). If your work focuses on the

wellbeing of older people, the way race, gender, sexuality and disability shapes ageing should be explored.” – Kimberly McIntoshⁱⁱ

Summary:

- The charity and social research sector have been, and continue to be, white-dominated and led, as demonstrated by research from the [Young Foundation](#), [ACEVO](#) and the [Third Sector](#).
- The sector is also dominated by university educated, ‘middle class’ individuals with typically no physical disability or neurodivergence.
- The charity and social research sectors have historically been shaped by colonialist and classist imperatives. Funding structures in the sector reflect and embed the same power and privilege dynamics.

“[I]mpact measurement is middle class people demonstrating to rich people the worthiness of poor people to receive some small portion of the funds expropriated from them” – Do Big Goodⁱⁱⁱ

Without any proactive effort to address these biases, we are at risk of perpetuating a system that has been built over generations to benefit some over others – a white-dominant, non-disability-dominant, patriarchal hierarchy.

What is our approach to Equitable Evaluation in the consultancy team?

In the consultancy team, we have had internal conversations about how we can work towards making our approach to research, evaluations and learning partnerships more equitable, leaning on the expertise of others in the sector who have been exploring how to embed Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in practice:

“We need to change norms so that impact measurement counters — rather than reinforces — unequal power dynamics between foundations and grantees and between investors and social enterprises.”- Do Big Good^{iv}

To help us on our journey to changing our processes, **Renaisi has developed this position statement to layout our approach to being more equitable in our evaluation work**, including our understanding of the issues at Renaisi and in the sector more broadly. We have framed our approach around ‘equity.’ This is based on an understanding that i) equity encompasses the full range of oppressions that exist (racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia etc) and ii) that it acknowledges that the solution goes beyond giving everyone the ‘same’ access or resources.^v

“Equality essentially means providing everyone with the same amount of resources regardless of whether everyone needs them. In other words, each person receives an equal share of resources despite what they already have,

or don't have. Equity is when resources are shared based on what each person needs in order to adequately level the playing field.” - Khanyi Mlaba^{vi}

We recognise that language around this topic has historically been problematic and othering.^{vii} We frame our discussion using the term ‘groups subject to marginalisation.’ (rather than ‘minority groups’) with the understanding that this terminology recognises that individuals and communities have been marginalised through social processes of power and domination, rather than by statistical categorisation.^{viii} It also recognises that (in contrast with the term ‘marginalised groups’), the experience of oppression and marginalisation does not define those groups, instead acknowledging their humanity and the potential for positive change.^{ix}

The purpose of this document

There are two main purposes of this position statement on equitable evaluation

1. To provide a clear public statement about our understanding of how inequality plays out in the work we do and our commitment to proactively addressing it in the consultancy team.
2. To share some of the steps we are taking to embed equity in our project cycle.

This paper takes inspiration from several related sources, including:

- Dartington Service Design Lab’s [Embedding An Anti-racist Approach in Research and Design](#) which looks at embedding an anti-racist approach across all stages of research and design initiatives.
- Peggy McIntosh’s notion of [‘White Racial Frame’](#), which acknowledges that dominant narratives in society are based on the white experience.
- Tools and frameworks that look at privilege and power across multiple forms and in an intersectional manner such as The Equality Act 2010’s nine protected characteristics and The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women’s [visual](#) conceptualisation of intersectionality.
- The four expressions of power as referenced in the [PowerCube model](#)
 - Power over: dominating ownership of resources and decision-making at the expense of others
 - Power with: building collaboration and finding common group to build a collective strength greater than the sum of its parts
 - Power to: the agency held within individuals to direct action and ambitions
 - Power within: a sense of self-worth, awareness of strengths and confidence in personal capacity to enact other forms of power

Embedding change at every stage of the project

We are committed to embedding processes to make consultancy projects as equitable as possible. Following a similar format used by Dartington Service Design Lab^x, the below sets out our understanding of how inequality manifests at each project stage, and how we intend to mitigate this. While some of the commitments are already in action in some parts of the team with expertise in this area and on certain projects which have required a more systemic approach, the commitments below reflect our intention to embed equitable practice and improve these continuously on an ongoing basis.

Proposal Stage
<p>How inequality manifests and its impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Predominantly white-led funders commission work</u>: this means that work is commissioned through a 'white racial lens' with inherent assumptions and unconscious biases, frameworks and definitions at play.• <u>Agendas/research questions are set by those with the resources/power</u>: this means that the dominating narrative or lens is generally not that of those with lived experience of structural inequity.• <u>Lack of racial and class diversity in social research sector</u>: this means that there is a lack of diversity of ideas, viewpoints and experiences in commissioning, designing and bidding of social research.
<p>Our starting point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We do not have a one-size-fits-all approach to proposal development which enables us to think about each project differently.• We are increasingly working in partnership with organisations that bring different experiences and expertise to our work.
<p>We commit to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making our commitment to the principles of equity (as set out here and in our research ethics policy) more explicit in our proposals, research design, and pitches. This includes being clear around the potential trade-offs in budgets and having conversations with clients around this, that we will challenge assumptions when needed and that we will be open to being challenged ourselves.• When writing proposals, reviewing our research design and proposed methodology to ensure that it is equitable, that we are aware of who is in the room, who is missing and how we might engage them, and budgeting appropriately to support wide engagement in research and evaluation work.• Continuing to invest time into developing partnerships with organisations or individuals that have expertise we do not and acknowledge when we are not the best fit for some work.

Project delivery
<p>How inequality manifests and its impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Over-reliance on existing networks and systems for recruitment into research</u> – this means that we often speak to people who already part of the conversation or the system.• <u>Time and budget constraints</u> – it can be time and resource intensive to ensure projects are truly inclusive and accessible. To review and embed changes from the norm requires buy in from us and the client or funder.• <u>Power dynamics</u> – dynamics between commissioner, researcher and researched can often impact who is involved in research and evaluations, what voices get listened to and how they get listened to.• <u>Reliance on traditional methodologies</u> – research and evaluations tend to rely on tried and tested methodologies, some of which might not be accessible to everyone.• <u>Poor demographic data</u> – Limited demographic data can make it difficult to understand diversity and inclusion – for both programmes and evaluations alike. This can mask trends about where need lies, and whose needs are not being met.
<p>Our starting point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We create spaces in our work where people involved feel comfortable to share their thoughts.• We are building our experience of what it takes to be genuinely inclusive and accessible. For example, an ethnography research project carried out for Impact on Urban Health.• We use several methodologies and mechanisms that help overcome various barriers to access - such as digital platforms or use of translation services.• Our organisation and team strive to be open, adaptable, sensitive and honest.
<p>We commit to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating space at the start of projects through standardised equity meetings, and having open conversations throughout both internally and with clients, about how to embed equity in projects, including being more realistic with ourselves and explicit with clients about the time it takes to ensure consent, accessibility and wellbeing.• Taking time as a team to consider how unconscious bias manifests in our work, and where we can use specific methodologies (e.g. participatory action research methodologies or use of community researchers) to mitigate these.• Considering how to better engage diverse groups through recruitment techniques (and sampling benchmarks where appropriate).• Making our our research and evaluation methodologies as genuinely inclusive and and accessible as possible. For example, building on our experience of ethnography research project carried out for Impact on Urban Health.• Ensuring the consultancy team has received guidance on appropriate, inclusive language to use when designing and conducting research.

Analysis, reporting and outcomes

How inequality manifests and its impact

- Researcher bias and positionality - Researchers and evaluators bring their own experiences and biases when analysing findings.
- Layer of interpretation – Findings and recommendations from research and evaluations go through various processes before implementation that often do not involve those the intervention is trying to benefit.
- Preconceived notions of what language is appropriate – There is a generally agreed and accepted manner in which outcomes are shared and what is appropriate - which tends to be from a white, non-neurological diversity frame.
- Where the learning is shared – Outcomes of research and evaluations are often developed and shared with clients (often white-led organisations) as the key audience, rather than with those from the communities in which they are seeking to effect change.

Our starting point

- We produce accessible outputs in different formats, such as shorter reads, film or diagrams, although we recognise more can be done.
- Recent projects have challenged us to re-evaluate how we collect feedback and involve participants in reviewing outputs, highlighting the importance and benefit of doing so (read more about this [here](#)).

We commit to:

- Consistently highlighting how impact plays out differently for different groups of people, being as specific as possible, avoiding generalisation.
- Driving positive change through our reporting, including making recommendations to clients around equity, diversity and inclusion and raising challenging findings with clients where needed.
- Being transparent about limitations in our research sampling and methodologies and our own position as researchers.
- Accessible reporting: using language in report writing that is inclusive and accessible, and ensuring quantitative findings and charts are explained and presented in an accessible way.
- Exploring opportunities to upskill the team in participatory action and analysis where relevant
- Where possible, ensuring there is a feedback loop with participants throughout the reporting process. For example, through an ongoing consent process giving research participants the opportunity to review outputs as they are developed, to ensure their story feels adequately represented (read more about this [here](#)).
- With clients, carefully considering and reviewing how and where our findings are shared, in particular how to share outputs with communities and audiences who are the subjects of the research.
- Ensuring reporting and research outputs are shared with research participants and key stakeholders, where appropriate.

References

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Do Big Good (2020), *Impact Measurement: A Cautionary Tale*, <https://dobiggood.medium.com/impact-measurement-a-cautionary-tale-d40991561489>
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- ^v Longley (2022), *Equity vs Equality: What is the difference?*, <https://www.thoughtco.com/equity-vs-equality-4767021>
- ^{vi} Mlaba (2019), *Equity vs Equality: What's the Difference?*, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/equity-equality-whats-the-difference-global-goals/>
- ^{vii} Cooper (2016), *A Call for a Language Shift: From Covert Oppression to Overt Empowerment*, <https://education.uconn.edu/2016/12/07/a-call-for-a-language-shift-from-covert-oppression-to-overt-empowerment/#>
- ^{viii} The Law Society (2022), *A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language*, <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/en/topics/ethnic-minority-lawyers/a-guide-to-race-and-ethnicity-terminology-and-language>
- ^{ix} Joseph Cooper, (2016), *A Call for a Language Shift: From Covert Oppression to Overt Empowerment*, <https://education.uconn.edu/2016/12/07/a-call-for-a-language-shift-from-covert-oppression-to-overt-empowerment/#>
- ^x Dartington Service Lab (2021), *Embedding an anti-racist approach in research and design*, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c86931b4d87114c07db1adb/t/60c88c02d15cef2df003c223/1623755779674/Our+Anti-Racist+research+approach%2C+a+position+paper.pdf>