



A Review of progress on anti-racism at Centre for Mental Health



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October 2023

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background & overview

Since publishing its anti-racism statement, the Centre for Mental Health has implemented a suite of initiatives to support its aim to become an anti-racist organisation. The present review set out to assess if and how well these approaches are working, the impact on the team and organisational culture, and next steps in terms of progressing the Centre's anti-racist principles.

The review collated the opinions of internal stakeholders (staff, trustees and an ambassador) regarding the success, areas for development of the current anti-racism strategy, and to evaluate and recommend potential next steps, with a view to updating the organisational anti-racism statement.

Aims

Rather than being a tick-box exercise, the leadership team commissioning the review were clear that the process should be geared towards pushing the organisation further - aiming to understand:

- What has made initiatives successful or not,
- What could be improved and how, and crucially,
- What to do next.

Approach

With these overarching aims and ambitions in mind, the strategic approach that underpinned the process was:

- **Forward-looking** - not a pat on the back, but a push in the right direction.
- **Strategic integration** - embedding anti-racism into wider organisational strategy and making sure the right performance indicators are being measured.
- **Building a culture of anti-racism** through the fabric of the organisation.

As with any work focused on understanding and dismantling systems of oppression, it was of vital importance to create as safe and compassionate an environment as possible. Conversations, reflections and realisations about the pervasive impact of white supremacy are often difficult - at the least uncomfortable, and at the worst painful and (re-)traumatising. To navigate this dynamic and to support participants in sharing honest and critical feedback, the principles employed were:

- **Inspiration** - sharing stories of positive change to help difficult work to feel hopeful and constructive
- **Care** - ensuring voluntary engagement, carefully holding space, checking in with participants, and checking out with plans for self-care and a digital 'care package'.

- **Authenticity** - naming the emotional nature of anti-racist work as the 'elephant in the room', supporting internal reflection and offering personal experiences/perspectives when appropriate

Method

The review was carried out using:

- **An engagement survey** based on, and building from a previous survey on racism and anti-racism at the Centre
- **Focus groups** - one with three staff from racialised communities, and one with three members of the anti-racism working group
- **Interviews** - nine 90-minute sessions with staff at various levels of seniority and the chair of Trustees.

The survey responses informed key discussion topics in the focus groups. Survey responses and focus group discussions then informed interviews. Focus group and interview participants were given a copy of the summarised survey responses to help shape their initial reflections.

Participants were selected for focus groups and interviews to ensure a diversity of experiences was represented across the consultation (racial experiences, levels of seniority, engagement with the antiracism group etc), as well as attempting to mitigate power dynamics (for example, avoiding having a manager and their direct report in the same group).

Language & glossary

Racialised communities (may be especially relevant when we are speaking about inequality and injustice). This is because ethnic, racial and cultural communities who are in the minority have been racialised – that is, white-majority systems have categorised groups according to the colour of their skin or other cultural or religious features, and in doing so have 'othered' and marginalised them.

People of colour (or 'people of colour and other marginalised groups', if we are also talking about minority white groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities or Jewish communities).

Racism is prejudice, discrimination or antagonism against a person or people based on their membership of a minority or marginalised racial group. Racism is not always conscious, explicit, or readily visible. The impact of certain behaviours, policies, cultural

norms etc can be racist (ie causing worse treatment/outcomes for certain racial groups), even without any racist intention.

Oppression refers to a *combination* of prejudice *and* institutional power that creates a system that regularly and severely discriminates against some groups and benefits other groups, ie individuals belonging to the dominant group have access to privilege and benefit at the expense of individuals in the subordinate group. Oppression can manifest as beliefs, values, social norms and culture (ideological) in interactions between people (interpersonal), within the policies and systems of an organisation (institutional) or within the beliefs of an individual, even about themselves (internalised).

White supremacy is the widespread ideology, an calculated myth created in order to justify slavery, which is still baked into the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of much of Western culture, teaching us both overtly and covertly that whiteness and proximity to whiteness are valuable.

Racial trauma, or race-based traumatic stress, is the cumulative effects of racism on an individual's mental and physical health. Trauma can be caused by direct personal experiences, through history and narratives of the collective, or through witnessing the experiences of peers (vicarious). It can be passed from generation to generation within family through genetics as well as behaviour (intergenerational), and across unrelated generations through culture (transgenerational).

Solidarity implies a sense of collectivism, a willingness to take risks and make sacrifices for the collective, and the sense that 'my liberation is bound up with yours' as opposed to allyship, which has come to mean more passive gestures and a sense of 'empathy at a distance' from those experiencing oppression.

2. Findings

It is important to note that with such small numbers in the sample size, it is hard to extrapolate experiences. Percentages are used to help conceptualise the data, but, for example, with seven members of staff from racialised communities, one person can shift the percentage by a significant amount.

2.1. Hopes & Fears

Since this review centred a subject of such a sensitive and emotionally charged nature, it was important to capture and respond to the hopes, ambitions, doubts and hesitations of the consultation participants, as those who will be tasked with driving this work forward. This question was asked explicitly as part of focus groups, and was more implicitly implied through other conversations.

Prevailing themes were:

Hopes:

- **Impact** - There is a strong motivation across the organisation to work towards positive change now and in years to come, both internally and across the wider anti-racist movement.
- **Reflection** - This review was seen as an opportunity to pause and reflect, to build a fuller understanding of how racism and white supremacy are manifesting for different people within the organisation, and what's working, or not, to change that.
- **Reinvigoration** - There was a universal sense that after an energetic start and three years working at the anti-racism strategy, there is a need for a renewed vision and improved structures to revitalise the team's motivation and engagement.

Fears:

- **The impact of reflection** - A running theme throughout this piece is the emotional impact of engaging with the topics of race, racism and white supremacy. For white colleagues, there can be uncertainty, discomfort, worry about causing upset, fear of being called out or repercussions of 'getting it wrong', and overwhelm. For people of colour, there is all of this, plus the risk of being triggered or (re)traumatised, and the associated discomfort and trepidation of engaging with white people on such sensitive issues that may not be taken seriously or understood in their full gravity. There is also the risk of being left with additional, emotional work without adequate support, and associated risk of exhaustion and burnout.
- **Engagement** - Linked to the emotional nature of the work, is a concern about superficial engagement, inequitable distribution of work/energy, and withdrawal -

from both white and racialised staff members who feel overwhelmed, disillusioned, unsupported or ill-equipped to engage.

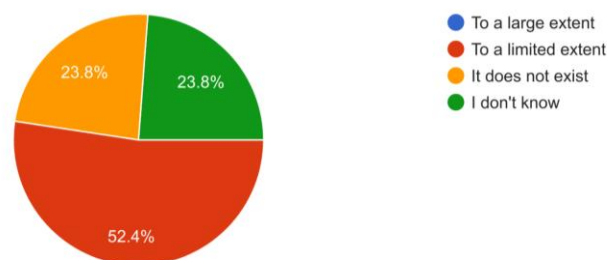
- **Application** - There is a perceived risk that uncertainty, particularly at senior leadership level, or limits to the sustained resourcing and reviewing of the work, might mean that the Centre is unable to adequately apply lessons or sustain meaningful progress.

2.2. How racism is manifesting

The survey posed a set of questions, based on the initial survey completed in 2021, to understand how racism may be manifesting at the Centre, and how this is perceived by people from racialised communities and white people, respectively.

In terms of whether racism exists at the Centre, 52.4% (n=11) of respondents said it was “to a limited extent”, whereas 23.8% (n=5) said “it does not exist”, and the same proportion responded “I don’t know”. Nobody responded that racism exists to a large extent at the Centre.

Figure 1: Survey responses to the question “To what extent does racism exist at the Centre for Mental Health”
21 responses



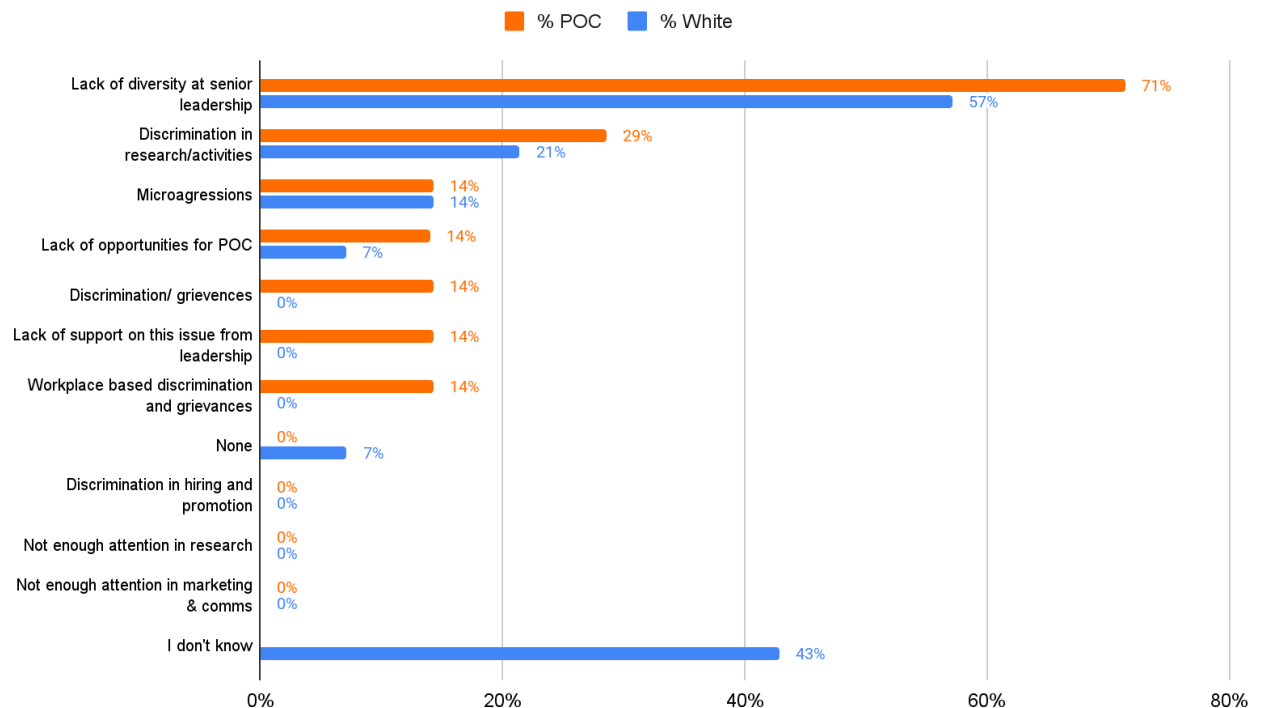
It is worth noting that while “I don’t know” responses were exclusively from white colleagues, responses of “it does not exist” came from both white (n=3) and racialised colleagues (n=2).

In terms of identifying how racism manifests at the Centre, “lack of diversity at senior leadership” appears to be the most evident issue (n=13), with people of colour identifying that more commonly than white colleagues (71%, n=5, compared to 57%, n=8).

The second most prevalent manifestation of racism was “discrimination in how we involve people from racialised communities in our research and activities” (n=5), again, more commonly identified by people of colour (29%, n=2).

Again, there was a significant proportion of personnel that selected “I don’t know” - notably all white (n=6), and one white respondent who said “none” of the issues listed were present.

Fig 2: Responses to the question, “How would you describe how racism manifests at the Centre, if at all?”



Those who responded “I don’t know” or “it doesn’t exist”, did however identify “lack of diversity at senior leadership” and “discrimination in how we involve people from racialised communities in our research and activities” as ways that racism manifests at the Centre.

This, along with the written comments, suggests differences in experiences of and witnessing of racism, but moreover, discrepancies in the definition of racism (ie. as visible interpersonal interactions or discriminatory behaviours such as name-calling or microaggressions, rather than harder-to-point to cultural or systemic manifestations). For example, several responses were based solely on what individuals have personally witnessed at the individual and interpersonal level:

“I have not witnessed racism at the Centre.”

“I suppose I also am not really prepared to say it does not exist because I expect it is experienced differently by different people... I recognise that it's highly likely Black staff would say -"no, it does exist, ... Just because I don't recognise it, doesn't mean it isn't there.”

“...I wouldn't want to insinuate that there are not problems, but from what I have witnessed everyone is very open to the conversation and the conversations are always held in a positive light.”

Other responses, by contrast, focused on the pervasive, systemic nature of racism:

"Because whilst we actively try [to] work in an anti-racist way we are still living and working in a systemically racist society, and we work closely with bodies who could be viewed as having problematic and racist attitudes. Racism is intertwined into healthcare at every level."

Some of the commentary demonstrating positive progress towards embedding anti-racism included:

"The Centre are well informed and their staff recruitment process ensures the people that are employed are the right fit, which includes an anti racist culture."

"All Centre staff work hard to ensure we treat everyone with respect and honesty whoever and wherever they are from. We are all acutely aware of our ambition to be an anti-racist organisation not only in words but in action."

"I have noticed a strong effort to consider the effects of all areas of our work on racialised communities and the notion that we are actively anti-racist has been clearly communicated in my short time with the Centre, including in my interview."

There was also a sense from the comments that there is an emphasis on anti-racism right from recruitment, which has helped to embed the expectation and valuing of anti-racist approaches.

Commentary suggested three key themes in how racism is experienced or perceived at the Centre:

1. Specific experiences of discrimination

"[Racism] manifests in our work in all sorts of ways, i.e. the way some staff are treated and talked to or about by others."

"Haven't experienced it from fellow staff but have experienced microaggressions and felt uncomfortable at the King's Fund building."

2. The pervasive, systemic and cultural nature of racism/white supremacy

- Internal and systemic power dynamics, especially with a majority white team, leadership & board
- A concern about working closely with organisations or bodies that might be problematic and perpetuating racist systems and attitudes (as a pervasive feature of the healthcare system)
- Not challenging western-centric ideas of research, evidence and knowledge
- Potential to do better work with Black or POC-led organisations (eg sharing power and resources, rather than tokenistic engagement)
- A sense that, while the Centre is actively anti-racist, there is still work to be done.

3. Complacency in the team

- Rooted in a lack of a shared or deep understanding of racism and reliance on being 'not racist' rather than 'anti-racist'
- Belief that "we've done enough" (example of staff not committing time to the anti-racism group or any other anti-racism work)
- Tokenistic engagement, eg engaging in the anti-racism discussion without this translating to action

Commentary from those who were unsure if and how racism manifests suggests:

- A desire for more training
- A recognition of the potentially greater emotional weight of anti-racism work on people of colour but uncertainty about how to support those colleagues
- Having a dispersed team makes it harder to judge

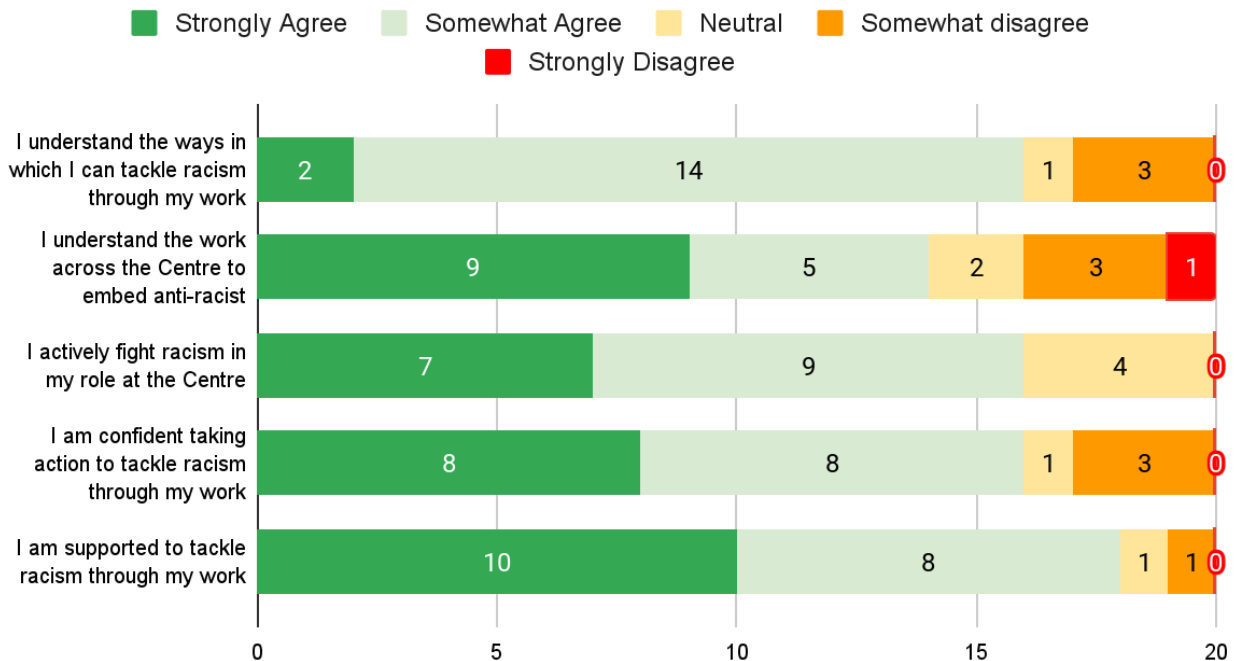
Lastly, when asked if racism is openly talked about at the Centre for Mental Health, 85.7% responded 'Yes' (n=18), one respondent said 'no' and two responded 'I don't know'. In terms of this translating into action, 47.8% (n=10) of respondents felt that talk about racism translates into action to a large extent, 38.1% (n=8) felt it translates to action to limited extent, 14.3% (n=3) did not know.

2.3. Anti-racism: Experiences and ambitions

i. Experiences of the Centre's anti-racism work

The survey asked respondents to indicate to what extent they agree with a set of statements relating to anti-racism at the Centre for Mental Health. Results are displayed below.

Fig 3: Responses to the question "Please select the extent to which you agree with the statements below"



None of the statements had 100% agreement. The areas with the most respondents disagreeing were around understanding of the work across the organisation and in their individual role, and, relatedly in confidence to take action.

Comments demonstrated:

- **Positive feelings about existing anti-racist approaches**, including anti-racism in comms, ensuring diversity on panels and in events, an improved culture of speaking out and the impact of new hiring processes and new recruits who've ignited the conversation
- **Keenness to learn more, better understand what's going on and how to contribute**

"I am keen to learn about what more I can do to fight and tackle racism."

"I would appreciate some more job specific training/discussion around accountability and some background on the Centres approaches to racism and why we have made certain choices and what is the shared goal"

"[We] could be more explicit about the work that we do here, the expectation(s) on staff and how we are actively working to be anti racist."

- **Desire to create a genuine culture, beyond rhetoric**

"It can sometimes feel like we talk a lot about being an anti-racist organisation, but I am not always sure how this translates into action. Sometimes it can feel a bit tokenistic."

"I still think anti-racism within the Centre stems from personal commitment and passion to anti-racism as opposed to an enforced culture of anti-racism...[My confidence etc is] due to a personal commitment to learning and fighting, as opposed to being down to culture."

ii. Perceived progress of anti-racism work

Survey

The survey also asked respondents to rate to what extent they perceived the objectives set out in the anti-racism statement to have been achieved, and to what extent they felt that specific interventions related to the statement had been impactful.

Fig 4: Responses to the question "Please can you indicate to what extent you feel that each of these objectives has been achieved?"

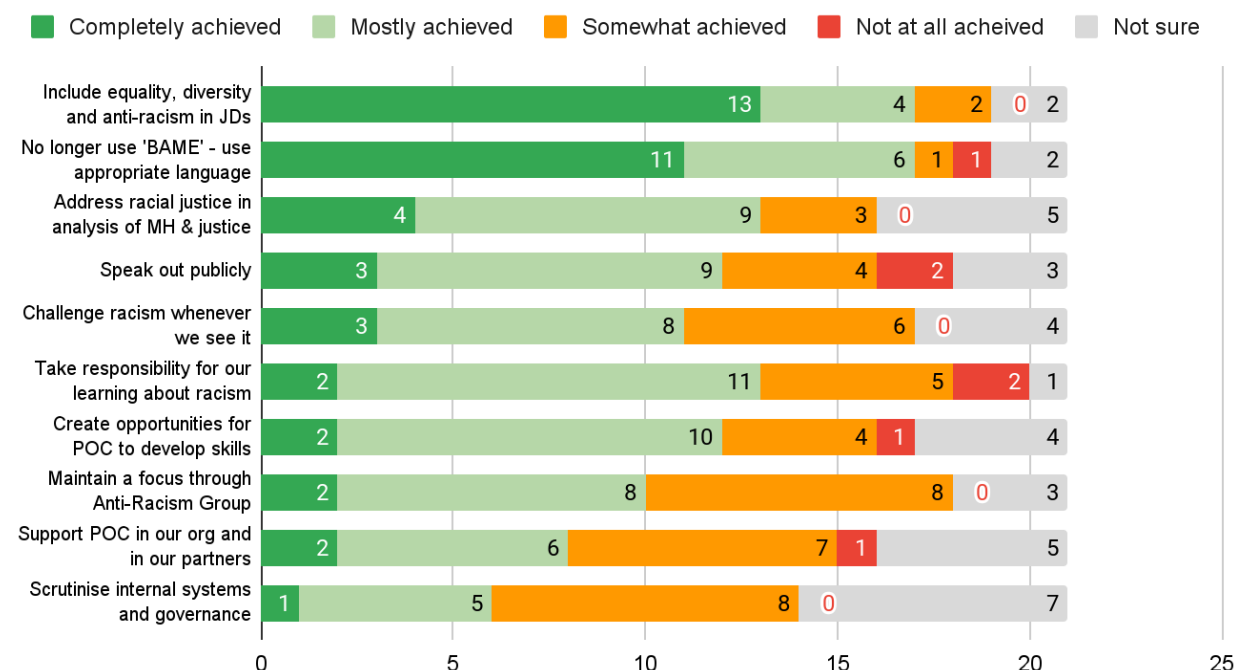
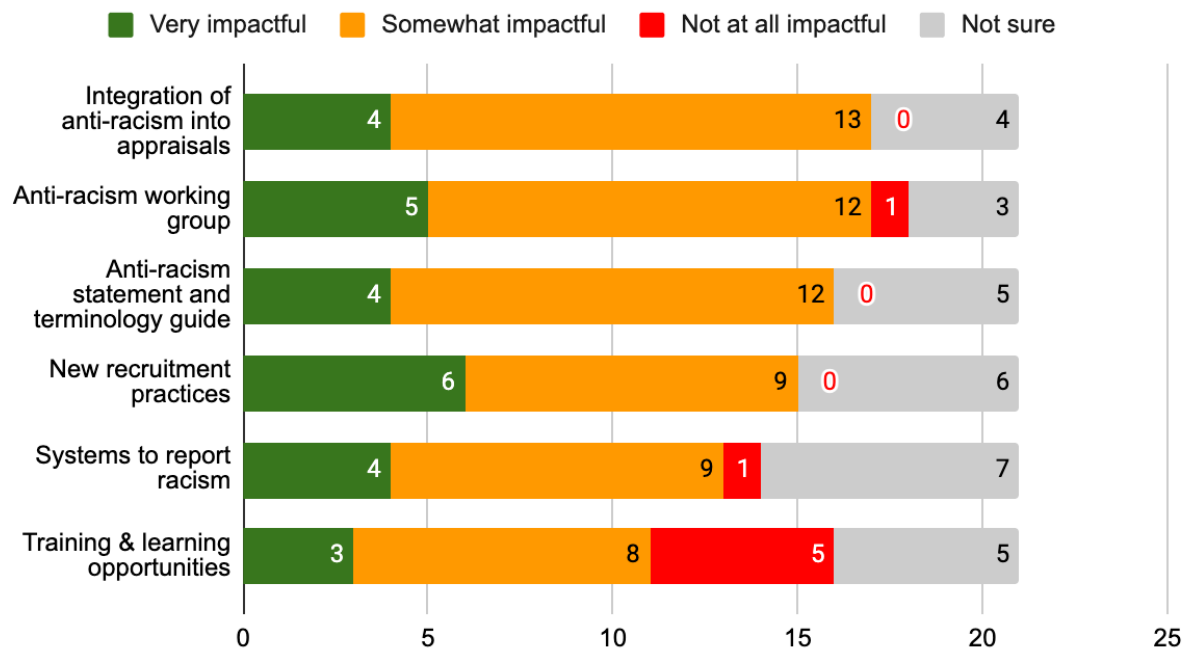


Fig 5: Responses to the question “In terms of what the Centre has done to embed an anti-racist approach, to what extent do you feel that each intervention has been impactful?”



Only two objectives from the anti-racism statement were considered ‘completely achieved’ by the majority of respondents - both of which are very tangible:

- “Include a commitment to equality, diversity and anti-racism within all Centre for Mental Health recruitment practices” (Completely = 13, mostly = 4)
- “No longer use BAME, use appropriate and respectful language and terminology when describing racialised people” (Completely = 11, Mostly = 6)

Several objectives had one or two respondents that felt they have “not at all” been achieved, and several had a significant number of “not sure” responses.

Commentary across these three questions covered:

- **Perception that the Centre is trying and improving** - especially with new recruitment practices which “*seem to have resulted in more non-white staff being recruited*” and subsequently, welcoming new recruits who have “*reinvigorated the conversation and brought new ideas to our work and practices*”.
- **Uncertainty in:**
 - how to assess impact (internal vs systemic)
 - What has been implemented (eg systems to report racist incidents) and the difference they have made
- **Concern about tokenism**, whether talk translates into action and reliance on personal commitment rather than organisational culture

- **Desire for more training on anti-racism and information about the anti-racism work across different functions**
- **A need to re-invigorate existing commitments** - Particularly that *“momentum has stalled with the anti-racism group. Agendas are usually loose and it relies on a couple of people taking the onus in between each meeting to make some form of progress with the current task. A re-think of how to re-invigorate the group's purpose would be really impactful.”*

“The book club hasn't really got off the ground, mainly because people seem too busy to commit to it.”

Focus groups and interviews

Conversations in focus groups and interviews about experiences of engaging with the Centre's anti-racism work broadly aligned with the themes above.

Staff and volunteers brought a diversity of identities and experiences, as well as motivations to engage in anti-racism, from their personal backgrounds as a person of colour, withing racial justice activism or faith communities, multi-racisl families and other experiences of marginalisation (eg as members of the LGBTQ+ community).

The team are values-led and thus well-intentioned and generally motivated toward the anti-racism work, with some expressing strong feelings of gratitude and honour to be part of the wider and historical movement for change.

Related to this, many staff reflected feelings of frustration at lack of structure and perceived slow pace of change of some of the anti-racism work, as well as overwhelm and disillusionment in the face of the scale of systemic racism and the current global political context. The anti-racism group was mentioned consistently as a potentially powerful vehicle that has stalled and is in need of a jump start.

It was also mentioned how remote working creates “more places [for racism] to hide and the sense that “I can only see what I can see”. Several participants were surprised that some survey respondents said racism “does not exist” at the Centre, whereas others express shock and concern that it was still perceived as manifesting to such an extent. Discussion covered the need for a shared definition of racism and greater awareness of the often invisible structural, systemic and cultural ways that it can manifest.

Some staff expressed greater uncertainty and vulnerability in approaching the work - sometimes relating to the function or level of seniority of their role, and at other times relating to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, feelings of guilt, fear of ‘getting it wrong’

or causing upset. In these cases, there was also relief to see shared experiences. Some white colleagues expressed the need for grace, and the impact of witnessing others be 'called out'. Others mentioned how some fear of getting it wrong and being sensitive about what you are saying is "probably healthy".

The disproportionate emotional weight of engaging in the anti-racism strategy for people of colour was highlighted in all conversations and again, there was a shared sense of relief in the common experience and being able to talk about this openly. Staff of colour felt strongly that there could be better recognition of the spiritual toll implicit to this work and that better support should be in place (suggestions are detailed under vi. Suggested priorities and 3. Analysis & recommendations).

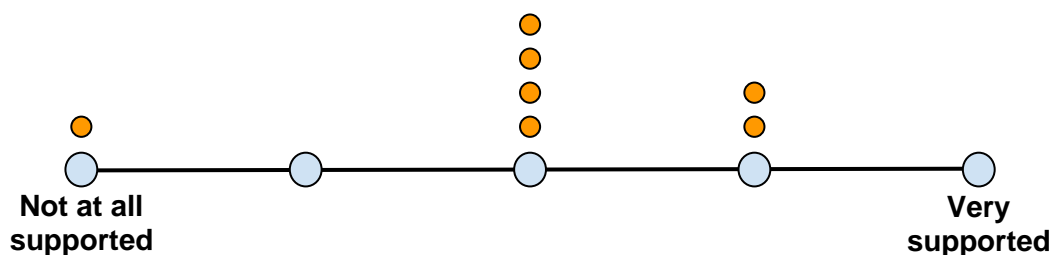
There were also reflections from managers about the importance of thoughtful, equitable and inclusive approaches to management, ensuring that staff from racialised communities are given opportunities to lead on elements of the anti-racism work and projects related to race, but are well supported, practically, professionally and emotionally in doing so, as well as being able to say 'no'.

iii. Perceived support for staff from racialised communities

The final survey section asked respondents from racialised communities about the support they received from Centre for Mental Health to deal with the emotional impact of engaging with the anti-racism work.

Most respondents (n=4) felt neutral about the support they received. Two felt somewhat supported and one felt not at all supported.

Fig 6: Responses to the question "To what extent do you feel supported by the Centre to deal with the emotional impact of engaging in anti-racism work?"



Comments included a positive reflection:

"I feel I have an open space to be able to speak freely with my lead about any concerns I have."

Other comments , however, were generally reflective that the emotional impact of conversations about race and racism is not adequately recognised.

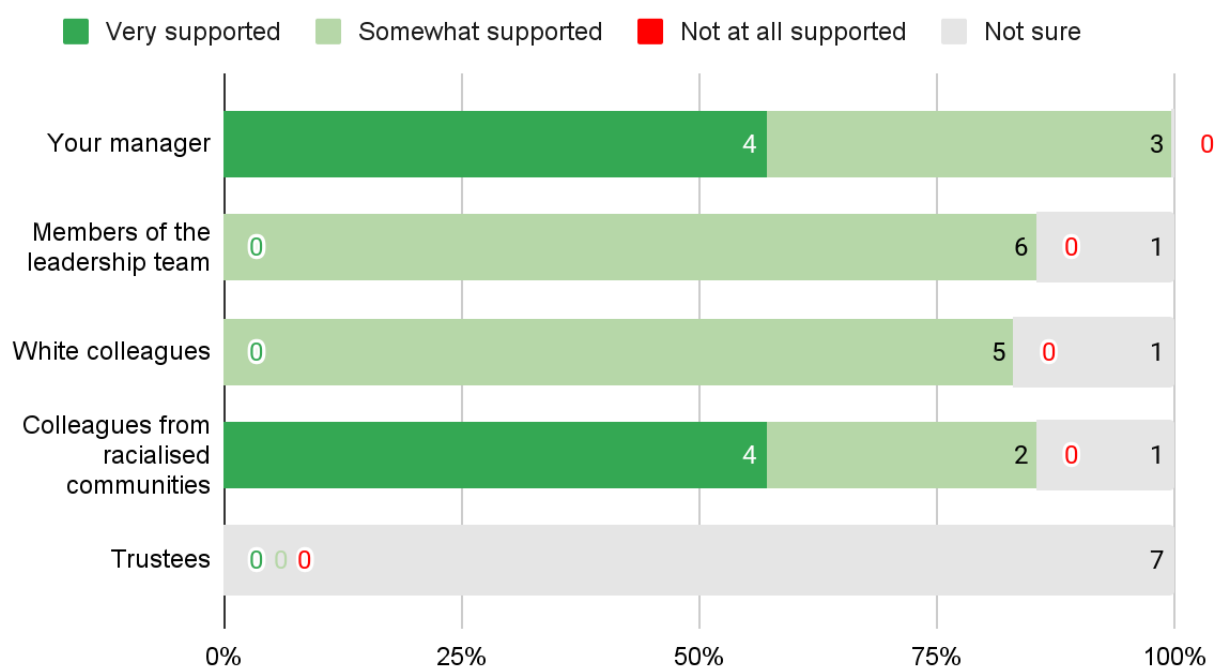
"I don't feel like people understand or appreciate the toll conversations about racism and whether it's real or worth focusing on can have on those of us from racialised backgrounds. It's discussed as though it's theory when this is our daily realities and lived experience. I've wanted to withdraw from these discussions many times."

"I feel supported, but this work is heavy, and can weigh on your emotions. Time to process after talking at depth about racism/ anti-racism would be helpful."

"There has been little acknowledgment of the emotional impact of engaging in anti-racism work for people from racialised communities."

When asked about how supported they felt by various members of the team, respondents generally felt supported by their manager and other colleagues from racialised communities. The leadership team and white colleagues were generally perceived as somewhat supportive, whereas 100% of respondents felt unsure whether they felt supported by trustees.

Fig 7: Responses to the question "How supported do you feel approaching discussions about race, racism and the emotional impact of anti-racist work with..."



Two comments mentioned:

- That they have no contact with Trustees
- That managers have been supportive and sensitive
- Not feeling comfortable to talk about race or the emotional nature of anti-racist work, at work and in general

When asked about what would help them to feel better supported and able to deal with the emotional impact of engaging in the anti-racism work, respondents said:

"Sometimes the discussions can be a little overbearing and you feel you need to be an expert in this area so that can put you off contributing."

"I just think people and the organisation taking it more seriously would help me feel better and safer."

"Formal weekly supervision guidelines with standardised questions for tracking over time."

Focus groups discussed the emotional impact and potential support in greater depth, which is discussed in section vi: Suggested priorities.

iv. Barriers and areas for development

Survey

In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate the barriers to engaging with the Centre's anti-racism work.

Every barrier received at least one vote. The perceived barriers can be clustered into four themes, in order of prevalence: 'emotional work', 'internal structures', 'rocking the boat' and 'what can we do, anyway', detailed in Figure 7 below.

One respondent selected "I don't think there are any barriers to actively fighting racism", commenting, *"I have personally not experienced or known of any barrier to actively fighting racism."* Another who responded "Other" said *"It's likely that elements of most of these reasons will manifest in the organisation but I don't consider that any of them apply to me,"* and one who responded "I don't know" said *"As a new start I have felt that the Centre is an open space and that challenges faced around racism are taken seriously."*

Figure 7: Prevalence of perceived barriers, clustered by theme

Emotional work (total = 25)

- The emotional impact of taking on this work as a racialised person - Most prevalent barrier for people of colour (n=4, 57%) and with 1 white colleague (14%).
- Concern about getting it wrong - most prevalent barrier for white colleagues (n=7), along with three staff of colour.
- Concern about offending people of colour - 3 white colleagues (21%) and 2 POC (29%)
- Worry about concerns not being taken seriously - 2 POC (29%)
- Worry that my lived experiences won't be respected taken seriously - 2 POC (29%)
- Worry that I'll have to take on all the work - 1 POC (14%)

Internal structures (total = 15)

- Not enough time/resource - more common among POC (n=3, 43%) as opposed to white colleagues (n=3, 21%)
- I don't know who is responsible or who I could speak to for support - 2 POC (29%)
- Lack of diversity at different levels of the organisation - 1 POC (14%) 3 white colleagues (21%)
- Feeling I don't have enough influence/decision-making power in my role - 1 POC (14%) 1 white colleague (7%)
- Feeling it is not a priority for our organisation - 1 POC (14%)

Rocking the boat (total = 8 including additional comment)

- Concern about being seen as someone causing trouble - 2 POC (29%), 2 white colleagues (14%)
- Concern that it will negatively affect my career progression - 2 POC (29%)
- Concern about offending white colleagues - 1 POC (14%)
- Concern that I could lose my job - 1 POC (14%)
- Additional comment: *"small organisation culture - everyone is identifiable, incidents would not remain anonymous for long, sometimes a culture of 'niceness' as opposed to kindness"*

'What can I do, anyway?' (total = 7)

- Feeling nothing will change anyway - 2 POC (29%), 1 white colleague (7%)
- Feeling it's not my place to say or do things to fight racism - 2 POC (29%)
- I don't know what I can do about it - 1 POC (14%), 1 white colleague (7%)
- I don't understand what it means - 1 POC (14%)

The above clusters informed the focus of conversations in focus groups and interviews.

Focus groups & interviews

Focus groups were given space to discuss the clusters of barriers and propose potential solutions.

Interview participants were asked what they saw as the priorities for the next phase of the Centre's anti-racism strategy, based on key needs, challenges, barriers to progress and areas for improvement.

The key themes from conversations were:

- **Emotion as a key barrier to progress** - Building on survey responses, participants articulated feelings of uncertainty, vulnerability, nervousness (of getting it wrong and upsetting people), guilt, overwhelm (at the scale and pervasiveness of racism, but also in the face of specific projects exploring painful realities for people of colour), and associated exhaustion and disillusion. One interview participant articulated the challenge as *"How to hold onto complexity without succumbing to overwhelm."*
- **Time & resource** was expressed as a barrier across the board. Work at the Centre within the model of restricted funding and many small commissions was described more than once as 'relentless', with little time available for rest or self-care (eg staff working overtime and seldom taking the allotted hour of wellbeing time), and managers struggling to find time for the 'compassion' required for a healthy and productive team. It was also mentioned that the time allocated for each individual staff member to engage in anti-racism work is not consistently used, due to competing demands.
- **A need for structure and accountability** was a theme across discussions. There were concerns about inconsistencies in people committing the time that is allotted for them to engage in anti-racism, and questions about what is realistically expected within an individual's role and working day, versus in their own time. Additional interventions such as the book group have struggled to get off the ground as people struggle to prioritise anti-racism or build it into other competing demands on their time.

The anti-racism statement is seen as a useful foundational resource, but has not bridged the gap from vision to strategy to individual work plans, so individuals and teams are struggling to find meaningful ways to contribute. There were suggestions for more consistent approaches to monitoring and reporting, from the individual level (eg in supervisions) to the leadership level (eg to Trustees).

- **Loss of momentum in the anti-racism working group** - Participants mentioned the group's great potential and a promising start, but that energy and output has petered out due to:
 - Staff turnover and losing key team members driving the work
 - New-starters struggling to find their place,
 - Mixed expectation of the group - with some attending to learn and observe and others taking on actions - resulting in inequitable division of labour
 - Lack of direction and focus to meetings
 - The voluntary and transient nature of the group meaning members
 - The anti-racism including a mix of small, quicker-turnaround tasks and bigger, more abstract objectives, which are hard to keep track of and drive forward through these meetings.

- **Lack of diversity and opportunities for people of colour** - The lack of diversity at leadership level was mentioned several times, and there is an awareness, and concern, that changing this will take time as people leave roles and are replaced. The wider context of the policy arena was mentioned, as sector that is broadly inaccessible to people from working class communities (where people of colour are overrepresented). Certain recruitment vacancies may fail to gain even one applicant from a racialised community, making building a pipeline of diverse talent even more difficult. The potential for internships to help address inequities was discussed, and it was acknowledged that these are a lot of work for the team to establish and for managers to oversee, as well as being difficult to fund.
- **Lack of understanding**, rooted in inconsistent internal comms about specific initiatives, policies etc. For example, several participants were unsure of the system to report racist incidents and what the protocol would be for following that through. Several participants mentioned that inductions are not standardised and so any detail on the history, policies and systems for anti-racism at the Centre would be down to individual managers. Similarly with supervisions, some (managers and direct reports) mentioned that they found it difficult to raise issues related to racism and anti-racism.

v. Successes, strengths and opportunities

In the interviews, participants were asked what they saw as the successes of the Centre's anti-racism work so far, and what they saw as priorities for the organisation in terms of capitalising on strengths and opportunities.

The themes in responses were:

- **A values-aligned team - past, present and future** - The Centre benefited from a strong legacy initiated by the former CEO and leadership team. Presently, it benefits from a skilled, knowledgeable and passionate staff team, aligned on values and motivated to tackle racism. This has been, and continues to be enhanced by the public-facing anti-racism statement which has attracted like-minded people to the organisation.
- **A strong reputation** - The Centre, its work and personnel are well-reputed in the sector. The organisation is seen as reliable and a thought leader.
- **Increased diversity among staff and Trustees** - Targeted recruitment drives for Trustees and changes to recruitment practices have resulted in greater racial diversity, fresh perspectives and a welcome boost to conversations around race.¹

¹ It must be noted, and this is discussed later in the report, that this perceived increase in diversity is at junior levels of the organisation, where staff from racialised communities are over-represented.

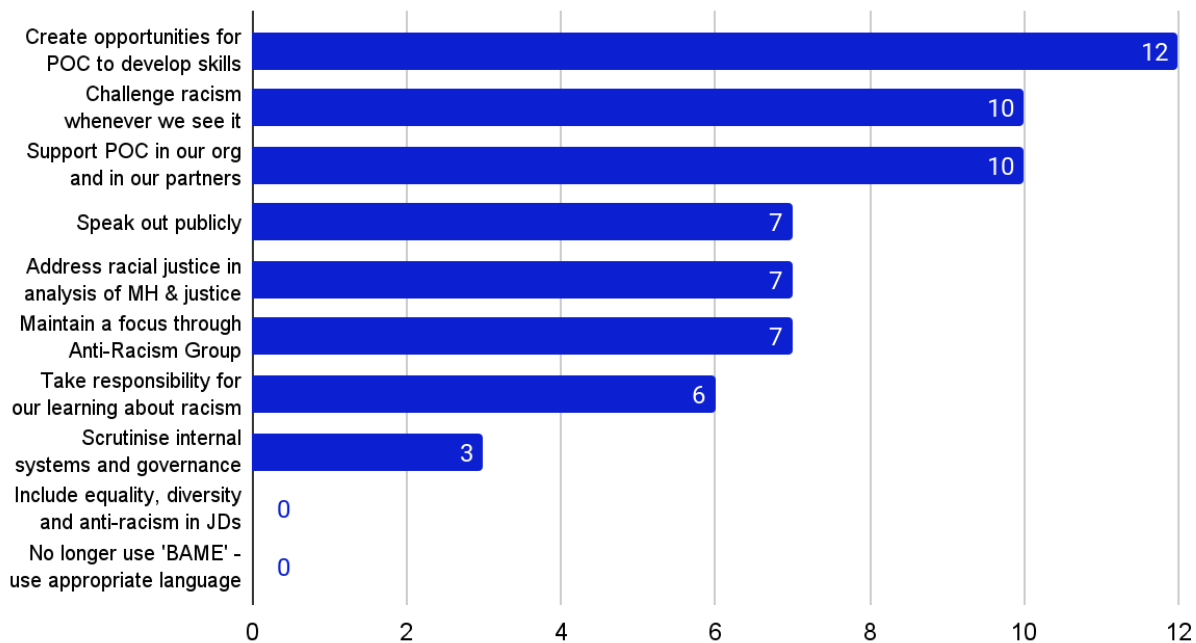
- **Changes to communications** - The concerted effort to roll-out more appropriate terminology, engage more diverse contributors and approach imagery thoughtfully has resulted in a very tangible shift.

vi. Suggested priorities

Survey

In the survey, respondents were asked to pick three objectives from the existing anti-racism statement that they believe should be prioritised in this next phase of the Centre for Mental Health's anti-racism strategy.

Fig 8: Responses to the question "Please can you indicate which of the items from the existing anti-racism statement you would like to see prioritised in the next phase?"



The favourite objective was to "Create opportunities for people of colour to develop skills," followed by "Challenge racism wherever we see it" and "Support people who have been impacted by racism in our organisation and in our partner organisations, providing a safe space for sharing their concerns and taking them seriously".

Adjusting terminology (ie not using the term BAME), and 'adding commitments to equality, diversity and anti-racism in recruitment practices' received no votes, presumably due to the perception that these have already been achieved (detailed in section 3.1 ii: Perceived progress on anti-racism)

Specific responses to the question "What would you like to see, that is not already being done, to help embed an anti-racist approach?" covered the following themes:

- **Role-specific responsibilities**

"Discussion with supervisor & antiracism group member to discuss each role - how the role can be used to achieve the Centres goals, and maybe a quarterly catch up to see how effective the role is being, what has been the most challenging and how to improve."

- **Improved partnership work**

"Building links with a wider range of racialised communities so that the Centre has a broad, deep and robust understanding of the many different ways racism manifests in people's lives."

"There's more to do in terms of challenging the way we work with smaller Black-led organisations as partners to ensure we're not perpetuating racism in our ways of working."

- **Training & learning opportunities**

"It would be good to have more training and learning opportunities so that we are continuously growing and learning."

"I think there is not enough emphasis on the 'personal and collective learning' aspect of being anti-racist. Formal learning opportunities are few and far between. There is more an assumption than enforcement that we are all making the time to do the work and better our anti-racist practice. This all stunts our collective growth and progress... more frequent learning opportunities (such as focused lunch and learns/staff meetings) would be beneficial for the collective and help centre our work regularly."

Focus groups & Interviews

In the two focus groups, we discussed potential solutions to overcome the main barriers of emotional impact and time and resourcing. Participants were first prompted with questions about working with emotion:

- What does a compassionate approach to POC-led anti-racism look like?
- What specific support should be in place?
- How might we mitigate/reduce the discomfort?
- How can we better work *with* emotion? What are the parameters, limits, boundaries, expectations?

Focus groups were then given time to brainstorm potential solutions to issues with internal structures, under the categories of 'budget', 'time', 'accountability' and 'learning opportunities'.

These suggestions informed conversations with interview participants, helping to shape more specific interventions. The proposed solutions from focus group and interview participants were:

Working with emotion:

- **Safeguarding** - Ultimately, the psychological wellbeing of people from racialised communities as they engage in potentially painful, triggering or traumatising work falls under the organisation's duty of care. This should be appropriately backed up in policy and practice regarding internal personnel as well as participants in research, events etc.
- **Solidarity & fair expectations for people of colour** - There was a sense across the board that being led by lived experience must not justify complacency from white colleagues. While it's vital that the work is directed by the needs and priorities of racialised communities, it cannot mean handing over all responsibility to a handful of POC inside the organisation (who are mostly in junior roles) without appropriate tools, training, resourcing etc and without acknowledging the emotional impact. Nor can it sit only with certain functions where work more obviously relates to race (eg research, comms, HR).

People of colour inside the organisation can often be expected to take on certain projects solely because they are from a racialised community, without necessarily choosing that work, or having the knowledge, skills or tools/support required. Some feel they are expected to 'be the experts' on matters of race, and are expected to take on additional labour (including the implicit emotional labour).

People of colour and white colleagues who manage those staff both discussed the importance of ensuring POC staff can *decide* to, and be equipped to, take on work related to race - both internal and external-facing - in a way that is equitable, non-tokenistic, and appropriate to their role, level of seniority and interests.

- **Line-management** - Linked to the above, line management was raised by people of colour and white staff as a key relationship and opportunity for quality pastoral support. It was seen as important that managers have appropriate training for anti-racist/inclusive line management, that they foster good relations and are supported by policies, protocol and resources (eg supervision, project planning, grievance procedures).
- **Supportive relationships** - Outside of line management, other relationships were seen as important to people of colour to offer space to debrief and decompress after emotionally challenging work. Formal structures such as a buddy scheme, scheduled

one-to-ones and external counselling were discussed, as well as the importance of informal relationships and check-ins, especially with other peers from racialised communities. Having options, the choice of who to go to and the time to allocate to this was crucial.

- **Joyful work** - Managers should consider the nature of work being planned and delegated, trying to ensure that challenging and painful work can be balanced with joyful, positive and fun projects. An example of collating stories of positive change for comms channels was suggested.
- **Practice & determination** - For white colleagues, exposure to conversations about race and white supremacy, as well as to the specific racialised issues in mental health (especially for those outside of the research team) can help to build levels of comfort and resilience to engaging with the subject matter.

'Sitting in your feelings' was described by white staff who feel more comfortable with conversations about race as taking the time to identify feelings (eg nervousness, guilt, feeling out of your depth etc), and using this to better identify the steps needed to address that (eg researching a particular issue, practising using new terminology).

- **Grace & humility** - Ensuring there is 'space' to get it wrong, to explore areas of uncertainty and to learn. This requires an attitude of humility and willing - being prepared to be wrong, to be a novice, to learn and do the work. This applies at the organisational level as much as the individual level.

Facilitating a culture of willing, determination and humility requires the response to 'getting it wrong' to be transparent, consistent and proportionate.

A point was raised about the organisation being willing to challenge mainstream focus on 'perfectionism' and the belief that 'progress' is a consistently upward trajectory as manifestations of white supremacy culture, and instead being willing to go backwards and move slower in order to unpick, re-think and challenge the status quo.

- **Listening & curiosity** - Linked to the above is the importance of genuine listening - recognising that each person's experiences are unique and trying to understand that. Questions such as "are you sure?" or attempts to assure a person of colour that a certain interaction or incident was not racist can feel condescending, invalidating, and contribute to disillusionment and withdrawal, or worse, fear of negative consequences of speaking out.

Participants expressed the importance of genuine listening, and asking "how can we help, what can we do, how can we support?".

- **Partnerships and working with racialised communities** - Participants recognised the importance of partnering with external organisations that are led by people of colour and specialise in working with racialised communities. All of the above principles are important to apply in those partnerships, as well as with individual research participants, guest speakers etc. Mechanisms discussed for developing equitable partnerships include appropriate payment/compensation (to organisations or individuals), clear expectations and lines of communication, and resources to support staff in approaching the work.

Budget:

- **Accounting for emotional impact** - This was a key issue coming from questions about how to practically 'make space for the emotional nature of engaging with anti-racist work'. In practical terms, time, support, relationship-building, training etc must all be budgeted and accounted for in project proposals and team resource planning.
- **Budget for opportunities** - Participants mentioned the need for specific budget that is allocated, well-communicated and accessed in order to:
 - Develop all staff's understanding of, and ability to deliver against anti-racism objectives
 - Progress people of colour within the organisation and to support those outside of the organisation to access roles
- **Increased budget on anti-racism** - Underpinning the above would be an increased budget for anti-racism work.
- **Pushing funders/commissioners** - Ensuring they understand the values and approaches of the Centre and that Business Development staff feel equipped and supported to develop and stand by equitable, anti-racist terms of engagement. It was mentioned that potentially Trustees could support with identifying and persuading funders.

Time & capacity:

- **Time for care and compassion** - Not just endorsing staff taking time to rest, recover and take care of themselves and one another, but also factoring this into project proposals, budget and planning, taking particular care to consider and pre-empt the

emotional impact of certain work, rather than responding to this after harm has been caused.

- **Dedicated time in supervisions** to discuss anti-racism and each individual's contribution, concerns, areas for development etc.
- **Built-in, not additional** - Engaging with anti-racism objectives can't be additional to existing workload. Anti-racism should be a thread woven throughout all workstreams, but where there are specific projects requiring a concerted effort, this must be factored into each individual's workplan.
- **Time for training** for individuals and as a group (detailed below).
- **Dedicating time in collective spaces** - Including anti-racism as a regular agenda item in whole-team meetings was discussed as a way to ensure everybody, even those who are not part of, or have not been able to attend the anti-racism working group understands what is going on, what is expected, and what support is available. Other additional spaces were mentioned, including away days, annual trainings etc²

Accountability:

- **Ensuring anti-racism is recognised as a priority** - *"Make sure that this is seen as important work that needs continuing in years to come."*
- **Embedding into systems and processes** - *"Anti-racist thinking needs to be from outset, not as an afterthought"* - this requires that it becomes a model of thinking, a mindset.
- **Monitoring, reviewing and reporting** - to ensure that anti-racism is prioritised and embedded at every level, in every function. Proposed mechanisms were:
 - An annual (or regular) review to measure against targets
 - Team-based reporting to SLT, eg using team meetings/updates
 - SLT/CEO reporting to Trustees
 - Role of trustees - *"we need the right people but also right structures"*, for example, longer meetings, a template for offering challenge, a skills audit, training, accessible and targeted recruitment
 - Potential role for wider networks outside of trustees who could help to hold the organisation to account, offer perspectives and also serve as a pipeline into trustee roles.

² There is already a 0.5 day per month allocation of staff time for contributing to the anti-racism objectives, but this is not necessarily seen as being enough, or being utilised consistently

- **Individual accountability:**
 - Maintain and improve the inclusion of anti-racism as part of appraisals
 - Use more structured supervisions and personal development plans to support the application and integration of learning and development targets identified in appraisal
- **Structure and mandate of the anti-racism working group** - participants generally liked that participation in the group is voluntary and thought that everybody should be involved in some way, but agreed that some sort of stability and accountability is necessary to drive change. It was consistently raised that the working group needs some support to prioritise objectives and break these down into meaningful plans, tasks and timelines.

As part of the conversations, participants were offered some potential models for a renewed anti-racism group, discussed in section 3. Analysis & Recommendations.

- **Policies to back up new interventions and anti-racism objectives.** For example, the 'zero tolerance policy' and system for reporting racist incidents need to come hand-in-hand with a standard protocol for investigating and responding to incidents, including disciplinary and performance management interventions where appropriate. This will help to ensure both those reporting, as well as those worried about 'getting it wrong', that incidents will be dealt with fairly and proportionately.

Training & learning opportunities:

- **A standardised induction** which includes information about the history of anti-racism at the Centre for Mental Health and its importance to the mental health system, plus training to bring everybody to a certain level of understanding
- **Annual training for the whole team**
- **Training for leads/managers**, as they establish projects and workstreams, and manage staff of colour who might be particularly impacted by the nature of the work
- **Specific topics of training:**
 - Racism and mental health
 - Anti-racist approaches to line management
 - Various areas that could be categorised as 'understanding and unlearning systems of white supremacy'

- **Informal learning opportunities**, eg lunch and learn, spotlight in meetings³
- **Learning about the Centre's anti-racism journey** - Making sure everyone is up to date on the history, context, current approaches etc.

³ Bearing in mind that this hasn't gone to plan with past initiatives eg Book Club

3. Analysis and recommendations

Centre for Mental Health has made a bold start with its ambition to become an anti-racist organisation over the past few years. The organisation benefits from a dedicated team, aligned on values and motivated to make positive change, both in the world and within the organisation.

As with any institution, there is work still to be done, and moreover, a boost is needed to reinvigorate motivation, reaffirm direction and determine the practical steps needed to move closer to certain goals.

3.1. Analysis within context

As an organisation working right at the sharp edge of racism and the impact of white supremacy - racial trauma, racialised inequalities and intersecting issues of race, poverty, exclusion, mental health and wellbeing - the importance of looking at this work in context, and its toll on staff, partners and participants, cannot be overstated. Any strategy for anti-oppression must consider the key systems and structures underpinning and intersecting with that oppression, in this case:

Trauma and emotion

No social issue can be examined in a vacuum. The people who should be leading this work, and who will be impacted most by its success or failure, are also likely to have experienced trauma - personal, collective, vicarious, intergenerational and transgenerational - all of which can influence behaviour and impact on mental health and physical health.⁴

It is also important to highlight that the trauma borne out of the impact of white supremacy is not just experienced by racialised people. White people also suffer the psychological and spiritual impact of realising the gravity of injustice that was previously invisible, and reckoning with their own role within these oppressive systems.⁵

⁴ <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-intergenerational-trauma-5211898>

⁵ See Resmaa Menakem's work on Somatic Abolitionism and his theory that "Trauma decontextualised in an individual looks like personality. Trauma decontextualized in a family over time can look like family traits. Trauma decontextualized in a people over time can look like culture."

And yet, those working to dismantle oppression are often expected to engage in painful, traumatising and triggering subject matter as if it is objective, abstract or merely practical. Not only does this fail to safeguard the very people that anti-racism efforts are supposed to defend, it stands in the way of real progress, as stakeholders withdraw, burnout, or engage only at the superficial level.

Not the shark, but the water

It is said that “racism is not the shark, it is the water”. Often we perceive ‘racists’, ‘racism and ‘white supremacy’ as extremist beliefs and visible, interpersonal interactions - the shark in the water of which we must all beware. In fact, the legacy of European colonialism and the enduring myth of white supremacy is the water we all swim in - difficult to see, taken for granted, but ultimately forming the bedrock of so many elements of Western culture that perpetuate discrimination, exclusion and inequities to this day.

Trauma is not a flaw or a weakness. It is a highly effective tool of safety and survival. Trauma is also not an event. Trauma is the body's protective response to an event - or a series of events - that it perceives as potentially dangerous. - Resmaa Menakem, My Grandmother's Hands

This goes beyond race - patriarchy, ci-heteronormativity, ableism and classism also serve to normalise oppression in our every day - but drawing on Tema Okun's work on ‘white supremacy culture’ is a good place to start to look through a critical lens.

Particular characteristics of ‘white supremacy culture’ as described by Okun, that often take root in the professional environment - and arguably even more so in the policy sector - are:⁶

- **The subscription to ‘urgency’** and the ‘need’ to deliver quickly, rather than carefully, collaboratively, thoughtfully, and with space to pause, reflect and rest.⁷
- **Perfectionism, objectivity, and the belief that there is ‘one right way’**, discouraging humility, and exclusion of those who do not comply.⁸
- **The definition of progress as ‘bigger’ and ‘more’** with little regard to quality or impact (on society, on morale, on credibility etc).
- **The ‘right to comfort’ and associated fear of conflict**, which leads to the valuing of ‘logic’ over emotion, and scapegoating those who cause discomfort (eg by calling out racism).

These, and other characteristics of white supremacy culture, ultimately serve - whether intentionally or inadvertently - to protect those benefiting from oppression, racialised or

⁶ <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics.html>

⁷ This is no to say there is never a case for urgency, just not constant urgency or prioritisation of ‘fast’ over other approaches.

⁸ NB ‘perfectionism’ is different to excellence

otherwise. Thus it is vital for any organisation working to challenge oppression both internally within its culture, and externally, through its work in the world, to develop an understanding of, and a confidence in addressing the 'water' as much as the 'shark'.

Anti-racism as the journey as well as the destination

With the above points in mind, it is vital that any organisation working to diversify its team, to involve communities experiencing oppression, to educate its people etc, must strive not to perpetuate harm in doing so. As Audre Lorde said: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Moreover, rather than seeing a 'fairer world' as the finished product, anti-racist organisations should prototype, practise and refine the approaches that will form the fabric of a more equitable future. The Centre for Mental Health is at a particularly delicate juncture in its journey. The transition out of a period of financial difficulty resulted in changes to the make-up of the team - with more junior roles created that may at one time have been 'lead' positions held by older and more experienced staff with more autonomy over their own time, budgets and project work. At the same time, it has committed to active anti-racism - successfully diversifying the team, and taking on more work centred on racial trauma and racial inequities in mental health. Thus, many of the new team members are at once: people of colour, junior, and working on highly sensitive subject matter related to their personal identity.

As such, the progress in diversifying the staff team and focusing work on racialised oppression of course offers fantastic potential for tackling racism over time, but it also poses a significant risk that, if not managed thoughtfully, people of colour within the team, partner organisations and research participants could be exposed to further harm. With this in mind, it is vital that the Centre strikes a balance between such factors as:

- Being genuinely led by the lived experience of racialised communities versus complacency of white colleagues and exploitation of people of colour through excessive, unpaid and emotional labour.⁹
- Supporting staff of colour and Black/POC-led organisations to lead work related to race, versus the tokenism of 'being seen' to be representative without appropriately equipping and supporting those stakeholders.¹⁰

*There is no
liberation without
practice.
- Lama Rod Owens*

⁹ For example, expecting POC staff to lead on co-production, decision-making, educating peers etc that falls outside of their role.

¹⁰ For example, expecting Black staff to lead projects related to Black communities, without ensuring they have the knowledge, competencies and support to deliver (and deliver in an anti-racist way).

- Setting an expectation of anti-racism for those coming into/within the organisation, versus absolving organisational responsibility to support personal development.¹¹

Striking these balances will help to ensure that the progress made so far and the valuable contributions of new staff and Trustees, partner organisations and other key stakeholders are not simply used up and burned-out - as is too often the case in 'social justice' spaces, but are treated as precious gifts and honoured throughout this work, as a model for the future.

These three contextual factors underpin the following recommendations.

3.2. Recommendations

Recommended objectives sit broadly under three overarching goals that echo throughout the organisation as shared ambitions.

1. **Culture** - Build a culture of solidarity, recognising that anti-racism is the journey as much as it is the destination.
2. **Team - Build a talented, diverse, anti-racist team** to lead our work fighting inequalities in the mental health system.
3. **Movement** - Contribute to the wider anti-racist movement, identifying the Centre's unique role within a larger ecosystem working for change.

The following recommendations need to be underpinned by a supportive infrastructure, detailed in 'Underpinning structures'.

1. Culture

Goal: Build a culture of solidarity, recognising that anti-racism is the journey as much as it is the destination.

This goal groups together a set of ambitions around building a common understanding of racism and its manifestations, a sense of cohesion around the Centre's role in dismantling racism, and the confidence of each individual as to their role in contributing to that effort.

Success will feel like a shift from 'must' to 'can', increased confidence and motivation, and equitable, meaningful engagement in the anti-racism strategy and associated workstreams.

¹¹ For example, expecting that by virtue of being from a racialised community, a new recruit will have the same political education and analysis on racialised oppression as others in the team.

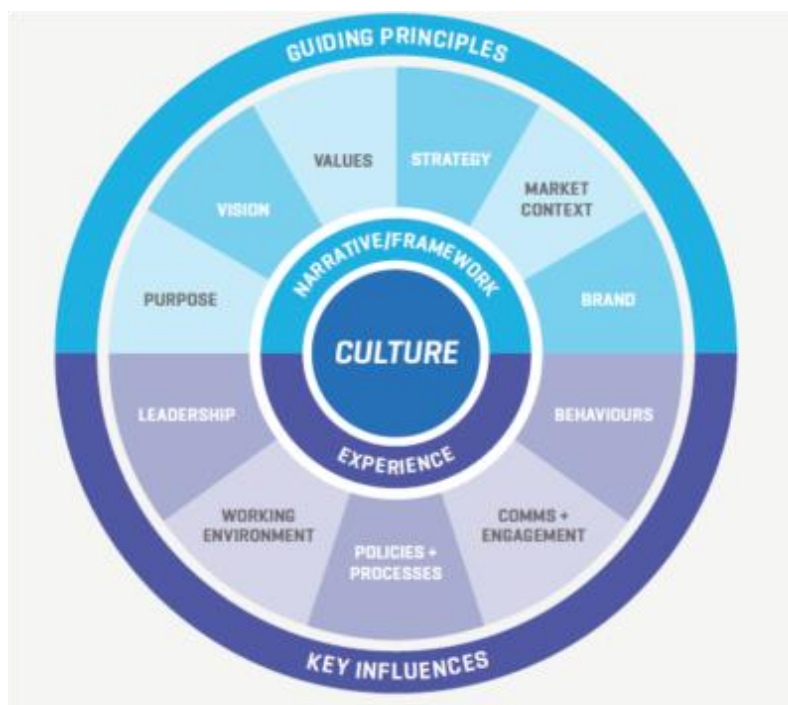
*How are you practising
what you preach -
whatever you preach -
and who is exactly
listening?*

- Audre Lorde, Sister, Outsider

Corporate Culture Group¹²

Culture results from a combination of beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviours and working practices and so can be created, not just by publishing a values statement or hiring people who already 'fit', but by developing policies, committing to everyday practices and communicating expectations which demonstrate, implicitly, 'who we are'.

Fig 10: The elements making up organisational culture. Credit:



The risk of any organisation or institution taking culture for granted, is that problematic and oppressive elements of dominant social norms take effect and perpetuate harm, as discussed in 'Analysis in Context'.

With this in mind, to embed the beliefs, values, everyday practice, policies and so on that make-up a genuinely anti-racist culture, Centre for Mental Health could:

i. Allocate time & budget as a function of solidarity

¹² <https://corporateculture.co.uk/the-elements-of-culture/>

Compassion, kindness and solidarity are ambitions shared across the Centre, and to take full effect, these need to be resourced.

Currently, there is half a day per month built into each staff member's budgeted time to deliver work for the anti-racism strategy. It seems not all staff are using this time, whereas some are spending considerably more, resulting in an inequitable distribution of labour.

Staff from racialised communities have been clear on the value of time that is ring-fenced for wellbeing, both generally, and in relation to emotionally-challenging work on race.

Practical steps to achieve more equitable allocation of time and budget could include:

- **Accounting for emotionally-charged work in full-cost recovery** - preparation, debrief, recovery, additional staff time (eg for a debrief, meaningful supervision, team-building and check-ins) and/or external support (eg coaching, supervision, therapy)
- **Honest conversations with funders** and commissioners about this, through proactive outreach as well as in responding to bids and tenders.
- **Supporting junior staff to have more agency over time and budgets** including being involved in the early stages of proposals and project plans to shape activities and schedules. This should also include the agency to say 'no' to a piece of work that isn't aligned with their skills or capacity.
- **Underpinning approaches with a strategic approach to funding/commissions** - consciously moving out of a period of financial difficulty into a period of sustaining and growth. It was mentioned that "instead of taking any project that pays the bills" it would be helpful to focus on attracting larger projects so staff have fewer conflicting priorities and demands on their attention, as well as building up unrestricted income and more progressive models of cost recovery.

ii. Resource personnel

Some of the most prevalent barriers to engaging with the anti-racism work were centred on internal structures - not having time or resources, not having the decision-making power, or not being sure of who is responsible.

As mentioned in the 'Analysis in context' section, like many organisations, the Centre is on a journey towards greater diversity and currently still has a majority white leadership team, and most staff from racialised communities are in junior roles, which may be a contributing factor to the greater proportion of reporting that "I don't have time or resource" or feeling "it's not my place".

It is vital to recognise that, while being led by lived experience is an essential element in any work to tackle oppression, just by nature of being from a racialised community, a person of colour is not inherently equipped with the specific subject knowledge, political education, skills or networks to carry out very specific work to tackle racism in the mental health system or within an organisation. Assuming such can be particularly overwhelming for new-starters and those in junior positions. Likewise, not having lived experience does not excuse any member of the team from working to build the best understanding, skills and networks to fulfil their role in the Centre's anti-racism strategy.

As such, effort should be made to ensure that people of colour (internally and externally) are directing the anti-racism strategy, and that every member of the team is resourced to take on an appropriate and equitable role in leading and delivering on objectives.

This may take the form of:

- **Employee Resource Groups**¹³ - Employee Resource Groups offer a dedicated space for staff with a common identity/experience to come together with peers to share perspectives, support one another with challenges and generate ideas and requests to leadership. Without many people of colour at senior leadership level, such a group would help to mitigate the barriers to feeling represented in decision-making. This group should be autonomous, but may want to have external support with convening, facilitation and feeding back to leadership. Stakeholders should decide the appropriate make-up of the group (eg Black staff, staff of colour, and/or staff from wider racialised communities).
- **Support for managers** - Managers play a key role in building culture, through their application of policy, everyday practices and interactions with staff. It's vital that they consider how their approach to managing people, projects and resources could be inadvertently discriminatory, and how to approach this more equitably. Specific systems for support could include:
 - Standard line manager training (eg inclusive line management)
 - Resources for supervision, appraisal and inclusive team meetings
 - A managers forum to share challenges, learning from trainings, good practice etc. This could be run as an Action Learning Set,¹⁴ Thinking council¹⁵, or similar model for generating ideas on good practice.

¹³ Explainer of an Employee Resource group -

<https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/what-are-employee-resource-groups-ergs>

¹⁴ <https://www.managementcentre.co.uk/blog/action-learning-sets-group-problem-solving/>

¹⁵ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/improvement-hub/wp-content/uploads/sites/44/2015/08/learning-handbook-thinking-council.pdf>

- **Equipping personnel** - As well as recruiting committed and motivated anti-racists people, the Centre must ensure the entire employee or volunteer lifecycle works to support all staff, Trustees and volunteers to feel confident in approaching objectives under the anti-racism strategy. This should cover:
 - A standard induction including a refreshed employee handbook
 - A self-assessment process to establish levels of confidence and areas for development, along with support to break that down into manageable steps and see progress.
 - A standard process for turning appraisals into a personal/professional development plan, with associated personal development budget and time allocation (also discussed under Team: Training & Learning opportunities)
 - Resources, guides and toolkits to inform thinking, decision-making and approaches to work
 - Team/function-specific workshops to establish meaningful mechanisms to tackle racial inequities.

iii. Strengthen relationships & emotional support

Centre for Mental Health benefits from an empathic team and a generally supportive environment, although the specific support needs for people of colour engaging in anti-racism work has been noted as an area for development, as has the tension between the genuine desire to create a culture of care, against the demands of an exceptionally high workload.

In addition to the practical objectives around time and budget outlined above, the quality of relationships and the nature of emotional support available to all staff will be key to ensuring all staff get the support they need to fully engage in the Centre's anti-racism strategy.

Importantly, this isn't just about support people of colour to navigate their emotional responses in the face of oppression (which are rightful, justified responses to an unjustified state of affairs). It's as much about supporting white personnel to navigate feelings of discomfort, guilt, defensiveness and aversion that can stand in the way of solidarity.

Mechanisms to strengthen relationships and emotional support could include:

- **An intentional approach to hybrid working**, ensuring teams and individuals are still able to have the interactions that breed familiarity, affiliation and a sense of support. Some managers mentioned being conscious of checking in with team members individually on a regular basis, for example, and people of colour spoke about the importance of nurturing relationships with other people of colour in the organisation so that they could turn to them in times of need.

In addition to regular team meetings and one-to-ones, formats for relationship building might include Teams chat channels, buddy-ups, away days/retreats and team socials.

Taking the time to prioritise those formal and informal interactions can also help to mitigate the sense of obscurity from being a dispersed team, as there'll be greater visibility, but also greater understanding of who to speak to and trust that they'll take an issue seriously.

- **'Go-to' people within the team** - This could be an informal or ad hoc system, for example, scheduling time with a trusted peer to debrief after a research interview, or could be more formal, such as a buddy system, an 'anti-racism champion', a 'wellbeing lead' or Mental Health First Aider.
- **Trustee engagement** - All of the people of colour in the organisation responded "not sure" in response to how supported they felt by Trustees, which sends a message about culture and leadership, as well as meaning there is nowhere to escalate issues to beyond senior leadership. Concerted efforts to build relationships with trustees might include implemented similar 'go-to' roles as those listed above, as well as meet-and-greet events, mutual mentoring (detailed under 'Training & learning opportunities') and integration of Board introductions into induction plans.
- **External support** - It won't always be realistic or appropriate for staff's support needs to be contained within the organisation, so may be worth considering the role of external support. The Centre already has an employee wellbeing offer, which usually includes free counselling, though these schemes are not always high quality and are not tailored towards the nature of this work. It may be worth considering tailored support or contract/partnership.
- **People management tools** - The line management relationship offers a key opportunity to build understanding of individuals and their specific needs, challenges, strengths and preferences. For example, some participants in the focus groups and interviews were very confident in talking about race and resilient in their emotional response, whereas others were less confident, or especially sensitive to the feelings of others and the risk of upsetting somebody. Simple tools such as a 'user

manual¹⁶ and personality assessments¹⁷ can be used in induction, team meetings and supervisions to help understand and articulate these differences so that the individual, their manager and their team can better support themselves and one another.

iv. Prioritise joy & celebration

Joy and celebration are key elements of collective care, which is as important as self-care in a collective struggle. Working against oppression is inherently difficult, but it is also inspiring, hopeful and life-affirming. There should always be opportunities to engage with moments of joy - celebrations of small wins, sharing stories of positive change, and prioritising time to come together for fun!

Specific mechanisms to incorporate joy and celebration into the organisational calendar could include:

- **A joyful agenda item** in regular team meetings,
- **A regular 'celebration session'**¹⁸
- **Mindful, care-focused and fun team social events.**

*Collective Care:
a communal
responsibility for
people's
emotional health
and wellbeing
within groups or
organisations.
- Act Build Change*

There should also be an effort to focus some workstreams on stories of joy, celebration of communities and positive change - in comms, but also in research, fundraising and wherever possible!

¹⁶ A user manual is a template document with sentence prompts which individuals complete to help explain how best to work with them.

Explainer here - <https://friday.app/p/personal-user-manual-for-work>

Example here - <https://oecd-opsi.org/toolkits/a-user-manual-for-me/>

¹⁷ Sixteen personalities is a free and relatively quick personality assessment based on Myers-Briggs - <https://www.16personalities.com/>

An assessment of communication styles can also be useful -

<https://www.astridbaumgardner.com/blog-and-resources/communicating-under-pressure-how-to-leverage-and-flex-the-4-communication-styles>

¹⁸ Inspired by [Act Build Change](#)'s workshops on Collective Care, at a previous organisation, we ran quarterly 'celebration sessions', where each member of the team shared one thing they were proud of, one thing they were grateful for, and one person they wanted to give a shout-out to. All responses were gathered onto a 'Wall of Vain' so we could look back over the year. We often cried.

I am grounded in joy - I am not grounded in the trauma any more - Tarana Burke

v. Build understanding & communicate

progress

Culture is shaped by beliefs and implicit values. The belief that 'we can contribute to dismantling racist structures' needs to be nurtured. Understanding that taking a bold stance against racism is an expectation and an asset, not a risk, takes consistent demonstration.

There are opportunities right the way through the employee and volunteer lifecycle, as well as with external audiences, by sharing stories of positive change, reflecting on challenges and how they've been overcome and generally spotlighting efforts in solidarity, through:

- **External-facing channels** - including the history and progress of the anti-racist strategy on the website, in social media posts, blogs, funding applications & reports, impact report, recruitment packs etc.
- **Internal comms** - for example regular bulletins, a 'lessons learned' project site, updates in staff meetings, reminders of policies/resources, Board papers etc. Potentially internal comms could be a function of the anti-racism group.
- **Standard induction and employee handbook** - discussed above
- **Regular training** - discussed under 'Training and learning opportunities'.

2. Team

Goal: Build a talented, diverse, anti-racist team to lead our work fighting inequalities in the mental health system.

Centre for Mental Health already benefits from a skilled team of like-minded and values-led people, and is already seeing the benefits of engaging a more racially diverse workforce. It is important that it continues to recruit the best people to take forward its work tackling racialised inequalities in the mental health system, as well as equipping those already in the team to reach their full potential in contributing to this goal.

While targeted recruitment into senior leadership and governance roles plays an important role in achieving diversity and representation in decision-making, it does, however take time and does not mean that experiences of recruitment, retention and progression are equitable or inclusive at all levels of the organisation, nor does it necessarily help beyond one 'generation'. There needs to be diversity among staff in roles directly reporting to Directors

to ensure a sustainable pipeline of talent through each level of the organisation, and a commitment to inclusive recruitment practices and progression opportunities that help people from all walks of life to showcase their talents.

The centre might consider:

i. Further inclusive recruitment practices

These can include attempts to reach racialised communities, but also to improve access for people facing other barriers. This might include:

- **Additional changes to recruitment packs and advertising** to ensure accessibility and wider reach
- **Centring lived experience and anti-racism as assets** in recruitment, including the process and assessment for initial application, developing template interview questions, and considering alternative assessment techniques to showcase lived experience as a valuable asset.
- **Resources to support hiring managers** to consider barriers, equitable practice and considering lived experience and anti-racism as key assets to the team.¹⁹

Importantly, this must include measuring the impact of recruitment practices - including monitoring demographics and engaging feedback from applicants, interview candidates and those appointed.

ii. Professional development and progression routes

The pathways for staff to develop skills and to progress into more senior roles should be transparent, accessible and equitable. Mechanisms to support this could be:

- **Standard personal/professional development plans** as part of appraisal and integrated into supervision, to encourage individual staff to identify areas for development - linked to anti-racism, and more broadly for their own progression into more senior roles. This should be accompanied - as is currently the case - by individual personal development budgets, ensuring all team members are made aware and encouraged to use their allocation.
- **Reviewing progression pathways / hierarchies** - There is an assumption, at Centre for Mental Health and across many professional institutions - that opportunities for

¹⁹ In addition to resources and template interview questions, there's the option to require a 'hiring licence' whereby managers must complete a standard training and work through a checklist of considerations before being able to put out a role.

individuals to progress into more senior roles requires a vacancy to appear by somebody leaving. While the funding landscape in the charity sector does not make it easy to create new, senior roles, it could be worth considering a less hierarchical model of recognising the contribution and potential of staff.²⁰

- **A Trustee support network and future pipeline** was discussed as a way for skilled professionals who might not be ready for Trustee roles to feed in perspectives while building their understanding of charity governance in the hope they could join the Board in future.

ii. Training & learning opportunities

Training was mentioned several times in the survey, focus groups and interviews, including a general desire to have a standard training to ensure everybody is at least at the same starting place in terms of understanding the issue and the Centre's journey.

Training can also be a key way to support the professional development of people from racialised and other communities facing barriers, and there is strong support at the Centre for creating those sorts of opportunities.

It is difficult to identify specific topics for training on anti-racism, and some interview participants emphasised that no training (at the Centre or elsewhere) has ever been 'quite right' in terms of achieving deep-rooted learning, nor is any training session received in the same way by everybody. There is limited evidence for the effectiveness of 'diversity and inclusion' or 'implicit bias' training, and most fail to engage learners beyond a superficial level.²¹ There is an evident need for training to establish a common understanding of the different sites or levels of oppression, and how these manifest as racist structures, systems and culture.²²

What's important is ensuring there is a commitment to continual development - from the individual through to the organisational level, embedding training, learning and development opportunities throughout the employee and volunteer lifecycle and ensuring there are underpinning structures to hold everybody accountable to their own development.

This might take the form of:

²⁰ This doesn't come without risks of perpetuating exclusion, but is just another way of thinking about moving an individual into a role more appropriate to their level of experience and ability rather than waiting for an opening or losing them to another organisation.

²¹ https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/7926-diversity-and-inclusion-report-revised_tcm18-65334.pdf

²² Ensuring all members of the team understand oppression as manifesting at the ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internal level, as well as how that plays out for them.

- **A standard induction programme and annual team training** to ensure everybody has the same level of understanding of the history, context and progress of the Centre's anti-racism strategy, as well as some core training on racism and mental health, and how to approach anti-racism at work. Importantly, this support deeper reflection, for example through 'embodied' approaches to learning.²³
- **Additional courses** delivered to the whole team or individuals based on emerging needs. These might include specific subject areas (eg how racism manifests in the everyday), or developing skill sets (eg navigating difficult conversations about race) or role-specific (eg anti-racist/inclusive management).

It is also worth considering the role of safe spaces in training, to ensure learners without direct experience of a specific issue, in this case race, can learn, ask questions and reflect without the risk of inadvertently causing harm. Similarly, people of colour can freely share experiences without risk of triggering defensiveness in white colleagues, or being asked to play the role of 'teacher'.

- **Opportunities for staff of colour** and those from other oppressed communities. This might include training in specific skills to support role progression or to take on projects for professional development, but it is also vital to leverage the value of lived experience in challenging systems of oppression, rather than supporting individuals to adapt to those systems. As such, it is worth considering how to engage staff from racialised communities in leadership/decision-making and organisational development at the same time as building their skills and confidence, for example, taking a (resourced) role in the anti-racism working group, or mutual mentoring with a senior leader.
- **On-the-job training**, for example through internships aimed at people from racialised communities.

3. Movement solidarity

Goal: Contribute to the wider anti-racist movement, identifying the Centre's unique role within a larger ecosystem working for change

An evident sentiment across the team at Centre for Mental Health is the positive sense of being part of something bigger: a legacy, a wider community and a movement towards social justice.

²³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6779792/>

Within movements, there is a sensitive ecosystem, where each player has a role - from the visionary to the builder and the storyteller.²⁴ It is important that Centre for Mental Health, as a whole, recognises and communicates its role within the movement for racial justice, and that each member of the team understands their individual role. This relies on the helpful attitudes discussed earlier, of humility (not everybody will be, or wants to be, the 'face of the revolution') and curiosity (but what role could I play?).

Fig 9: The roles within a movement. Credit: Deepa Iyer, Building Movement Project



Solidarity is a key feature of movements - the sense of standing arm-in-arm, a willingness to 'pile in' to defend one another, and to share power and resources for the benefit of the collective. For Centre for Mental Health, this should apply both internally, and in the wider ecosystems that it sits within, including the healthcare system, the movement for health equity and the movement for racial justice.

²⁴ For example, the social change ecosystem map - <https://buildingmovement.org/our-work/movement-building/social-change-ecosystem-map/>

And Bill Moyers' four roles of social activism - <https://commonslibrary.org/the-four-roles-of-social-activism>

*Nothing we
accomplish in life is
totally free of the
influence of spirit
and community.
We do nothing
alone.*

— Tricia Hersey, *Rest Is
Resistance: A Manifesto*

The commitments in the existing anti-racism statement to “Challenge racism and white supremacy culture whenever we see it, both internally and within our external partnerships and relationships [and to] not act as bystanders” and “speak out publicly about racism and inequality, speaking truth to power and creating opportunities to centre the voices of people from racialised communities.” should be retained as core characteristics of movement solidarity.

Other objectives will also play an important role in progressing the movement by leveraging the resources, networks and influence of the organisation to normalise anti-racist principles and over time, to

change the landscape in the sector. It has already done this in the roll-out of the guide to race and ethnic terminology, and should continue to publicly align organisational values and approaches with those at the forefront of the movement for racial justice. This might include:

i. Structures and support to challenge racism

Ensuring staff are equipped to question and challenge issues that could be contributing to racial inequalities, both internally and in the wider sector. This could take the form of policies and guidelines such as the terminology guide, for example, a terms of engagement for commissioned projects outlining the need to account for the emotional impact of project work, or it could be proactive convening of funders and sector organisations to highlight the need for a trauma-informed approach to project planning.

ii. Equitable external relationships

The Centre has partnered with other organisations to deliver projects designed to tackle racial injustices, recognising the need for those organisations' connection into racialised communities, and the need to work in solidarity, rather than in competition with Black and POC-led organisations.

Compared to those organisations, however, the Centre is well-funded and wields more power in the sector mainstream - a power imbalance which has on occasion, despite good intentions, resulted in inequities, and valuable partners withdrawing from joint work feeling mistreated and resentful.

Extra care must be taken when working with these small, user-led organisations²⁵ as well as with individuals from communities with lived experience of an issue. These have the potential to be exceptionally valuable partnerships but can so easily become a microcosm of white supremacy culture, where objectivity, perfectionism and urgency override collective care, thoughtfulness and solidarity.

Approaches to building equitable external relationships could include:

- **Developing frameworks and guidance on partnerships with small and user-led organisations** to support projects leads and their team to approach the relationship thoughtfully, work with the partner to express assumptions, expectations and lines of communication (including escalation). This should also include processes before the project work begins, such as ensuring equitable funding structures, contracting, terms of engagement etc, to ensure the partnership is mutually beneficial.
- **Building a database of experts from racialised communities**, both organisations and individuals, to proactively engage, platform, reference and commission. This will help to build a strong network of professionals from racialised communities that the Centre can recommend, if, for example, a staff member is asked to speak on an all-white panel.

iii. Support cross-sector initiatives

Much of the work for racial justice in the mental health system falls beyond the scope of Centre for Mental Health's work, and needs solidarity across organisations to take effect.

Initiatives where the Centre might consider cross-sector approaches include:

- **Supporting staff of colour to set-up or join external networks.** For example, a 'people of colour in mental health policy' group was set up in 2020 with great potential for supporting members' own development, as well as POC-led anti-racism efforts within the sector, but has gradually lost momentum due to lack of time for members to convene or take part in sessions.
- **Internship programmes** - Internships are difficult to run in-house, taking a lot of planning and management. A potential model might be to partner with other organisations to fund and co-host an internship.
- **Mentoring and mutual mentoring schemes** - whereby people from racialised communities can benefit from the knowledge, insights and advice of a senior leader,

²⁵ User-led refers to organisations that are led by the community they work to serve, this often refers to 75% of leadership being from that community.

and in the case of mutual mentoring, offer their own perspectives, experiences and understanding in return.

4. Underpinning structures

It is generally true that 'what gets measured gets done.' Right now at the Centre, there is limited accountability to the anti-racism work, since objectives sit within the anti-racism statement rather than a strategy per se, and thus, there are not consistent approaches to delegation, planning, monitoring and evaluating.

Importantly, measuring and reporting against key performance indicators helps to demonstrate progress as well as to identify changing needs and navigate new landscapes.

There was surprise among some staff at the Centre upon reading survey responses, that more progress hasn't been made on anti-racism, or that certain issues are still prevalent, and often a sense of frustration at the pace of change. For many elements of racism however - as a structural issue - progress is slow. Identifying tangible measures of that progress, agreeing timelines that are ambitious *and* realistic, and taking time to celebrate small gains along the way can contribute not just to improved accountability, but also to improved understanding of the journey and motivation to keep moving.

As such, the Centre could consider:

i. Delineation of values & vision from strategic objectives

Potentially having a broad anti-racism statement outlining a vision (based on the recommended goal of 'Movement solidarity'), supplemented by a more detailed strategic plan which the Board of Trustees is accountable to, and which outlines specific, measurable objectives delegated to teams/functions and integrated into individual workplans.

This process might require support for teams and team leads to identify the ways their function could contribute to dismantling racist structures, especially where that is less obvious, eg finance or business development. It should also be backed-up with supportive strategies and policies, eg a people/talent strategy, finance/income generation etc (detailed under vi. Review/refresh of supporting policies).

ii. Monitoring and reporting embedded at all levels

This should include:

- **Individuals reporting into managers via appraisal and supervision**
- **Teams reporting into SLT** (and the rest of the organisation),
- **The CEO reporting to Trustees.**

Monitoring and evaluation should be built into any anti-racism workstreams and the remit of any task-and-finish groups.

As with any strategy, strategic goals and objectives must be accompanied by key performance indicators to assess not just 'did we do X?' but 'did X contribute to the intended outcome?', and where possible, gather evidence of that impact beyond the anecdotal. Some suggested measures are included in the summary of recommendations.

These should form the basis of a regular, independent review, using consistent measures to assess progress and monitor how inequalities and experiences of oppression might be changing shape over time.

iii. The ultimate accountability of Trustees

Trustees are ultimately accountable for any strategic plan at the Centre. In addition to reporting, they may need to engage in training or recruitment to ensure the Board has the right skills and knowledge, and develop resources to structure appropriate lines of questioning and offer challenge.

As discussed under 'Relationships and emotional Support', there may be a role for a dedicated 'lead Trustee' or a small committee within the Board to take on specific responsibilities, be a point of contact for staff, and work closely with the anti-racism working group/committee.

iv. Structure and mandate of the anti-racism working group

As previously discussed, the group has lost momentum - which is to be expected over time, but must also be mitigated so as not to lose progress on important anti-racism objectives.

There was not consensus across the organisation for the best model to implement moving forward, though there was a universal agreement that there should be opportunities for every staff member to engage with the anti-racism strategy and regular learning, linked to the group.

What's clear is that the group needs to capitalise on the different skill sets of the team - ensuring a compelling vision and leadership, as well as the practical support to convene meetings, write papers etc.

Some suggestions for structuring the group include:

- **Replace the group with a committee** - either appointed or elected, with a specific mandate (which might also include budget responsibility) and time built into their role

- **Ensure representation from each team/function**, and different levels of seniority to ensure appropriate oversight but also development opportunities for more junior members of staff
- **Task-and-finish groups** brought together from within and outside of the group to deliver specific objectives
- **A separate, but connected, anti-racism forum** for updates, discussion, learning etc
- **Ensure the group (or committee) has clear purpose and agendas for meetings**, encouraging everybody to take a role. This might include external facilitation, creating of sub-groups/task-and-finish groups, or sharing out roles such as research, feeding back, chairing etc

v. Potential for dedicated roles for anti-racism

In addition to the suggestions for a staff committee and lead Trustee roles, it may be worth considering creating a dedicated in-house anti-racism or equalities role, or partnering with an external provider, consultant or facilitator to support committees, employee resource groups and staff development.

Many organisations across the charity and commercial sectors have created variations of 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' roles since 2020, and, though many have surely reaped benefits, many have also formed part of the 'DEI exodus', as DEI leads resigned in droves over 2023 in the face of lack of support, toxic culture and disproportionate pressure.²⁶ Staff at Centre for Mental Health emphasised the importance of ensuring that having any dedicated staff member must not mean that anti-racism work becomes a silo or falls on the shoulders of just that person.

vi. Review/refresh of supporting policies

New systems, processes and practices need to be backed up by appropriate company policies. The may include:

- **Code of conduct, disciplinary protocol and performance management policy** to ensure accountability and transparency and standard, proportionate response in the event of witnessing or reporting of racist incidents. It is worth considering transformative justice approaches in any disciplinary model.
- **Safeguarding policy** to include the psychological safety and wellbeing of staff working on projects relating to oppression, trauma and shared lived experiences.

²⁶<https://www.tnt.com/articles/the-great-dei-resignation-why-are-so-many-diversity-heads-calling-it-quits>

- **Mental health & wellbeing policy or strategy** considering the emotional impact of work on race and other highly sensitive issues and the role of self-care, collective care, internal and external supportive relationships, wellbeing resources and services.
- **People strategy** to develop a plan for developing the attraction, retention and development of a skilled, diverse and anti-racist team.

1.Summary of recommendations

1. Culture: Build a culture of solidarity, recognising that anti-racism is the journey as much as it is the destination

Objectives:

- Allocate time & budget as a function of solidarity
- Resource personnel
- Strengthen relationships and emotional support
- Prioritise joy & celebration
- Build understanding and communicate progress

Seeks to address:

- Lack of support for the emotional impact of anti-racism work
- Lack of POC voice at leadership level
- Risk of staff burnout
- Complacency, disillusionment & withdrawal

Progress looks like:

- Increase sense of support
- Improved experiences reported in staff engagement surveys
- Equitable distribution of labour
- Increased understanding, agency and confidence

2. Team: Build a talented, diverse, anti-racist team to lead our work fighting inequalities in the mental health system.

Objectives:

- Further inclusive recruitment practices
- Professional development & progression routes
- Training & learning opportunities

Seeks to address:

- Lack of diversity, and over time, lack of POC at senior levels
- Discrepancies in definition, understanding and comfort talking about race

Progress looks like:

- Improved understanding, agency and confidence
- A more diverse team & more diversity in senior levels over time
- Positive feedback from role applicants

3. Movement solidarity: Contribute to the wider anti-racist movement, identifying the Centre's unique role within a larger ecosystem working for change

Objectives:

- Structures to support and challenge racism
- Equitable external relationships
- Support cross-sector initiatives

Seeks to address:

- Sector-wide challenges
- Inequities in partnership working
- Lack of resources to deliver initiatives single-handedly

Progress looks like:

- Increased confidence
- Positive perceptions of, eg credibility, generosity, solidarity etc from external stakeholders

		(eg partners) - Changes to the sector landscape over time (eg standard demands of funders)
Underpinning structures		
Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delineation of values and vision from strategic objectives - Monitoring and reporting embedded at all levels - The ultimate accountability of Trustees - Structure and mandate of the anti-racism working group - Potential for dedicated roles for anti-racism - Review/refresh of supporting policies 	Seeks to address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confusion, frustration and disillusionment - Need for focus and direction - Need for accountability - Need to codify values through policy 	Progress looks like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sense of cohesion, progress and understanding of 'success' - Appropriate accountability at every level - Policies reflective of organisational values and anti-racist culture