

# **Advancing psychological support for ethnic and culturally diverse groups affected by visible difference**

Identifying barriers and opportunities in collaboration with  
the Appearance Collective charities

**VTCT Foundation  
Small Grant**  
(EDI theme)

**Full Report**  
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## Research Summary

Ethnicity and culture can affect how individuals and families experience visible difference and interact with healthcare and support. Yet, ethnic and culturally diverse communities are perpetually underserved by existing services. The aim of this project was to identify opportunities and barriers to advancing psychological support in the charitable sector for ethnic and culturally diverse groups affected by visible difference in the UK.

Individual 1-1 interviews were conducted with representatives of the Appearance Collective charities to gain a comprehensive understanding of current UK charitable service provision for this population; and a broad, narrative review of current research and policy guidelines from the wider field examined known barriers, interventions and solutions for engaging ethnic and culturally diverse communities.

Conventional Content Analysis of interview data identified three core themes: **Theme 1: Knowledge and Engagement.** Participating charities' existing knowledge and confidence in relation to EDI was low overall. Almost all charities reported difficulties engaging effectively with diverse communities and believed their knowledge of these communities' support needs and preferences was low. Few charities had an active EDI policy, and few had participated in EDI training. **Theme 2: Accessibility.** Language was a commonly reported barrier to engagement, and charities stated that the accessibility of events for ethnic and culturally diverse communities could be improved. **Theme 3: Diversity.** The ethnic and cultural diversity of staff teams and volunteers was reported to be suboptimal. Several charities estimated the diversity of their membership did not reflect society as a whole, yet few charities collected demographic data. Most charities felt the diversity of their member stories and imagery could be improved.

As a result of the interviews and literature review, a set of seven recommendations were developed:

**Recommendation 1:** Increase cultural competency by engaging with relevant training.

**Recommendation 2:** Build community networks by connecting with community leaders, participating in cultural events and activities, connecting with other charities to share learning and enlisting the help of clinicians to raise awareness of charity services.

**Recommendation 3:** Understand the population's support needs and preferences by engaging in conversations and/or formal research.

**Recommendation 4:** Increase representation across the organisation through proactive efforts and open calls to diversify member stories and imagery, and by improving recruitment processes.

**Recommendation 5:** Improve accessibility by reflecting on EDI principles when organising events and considering language translation and interpretation opportunities.

**Recommendation 6:** Develop organisational strategies to incorporate actionable EDI goals throughout the organisation.

**Recommendation 7:** Measure progress and impact by collecting robust demographic data.

Funders are encouraged to support the Appearance Collective charities to address the above recommendations with the goal of advancing EDI practices across the UK charitable sector.



## Introduction

### **Grant Summary**

This VTCT Foundation Small Grant sits under the theme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). A total of £20,181.09 was awarded to Dr Nicola Stock (Centre for Appearance Research, UWE, Bristol) for a period of 6 months from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2025. Dr Beth Herring (Centre for Appearance Research, UWE, Bristol) also contributed to the conceptualisation of the project and was initially a Co-Investigator on the grant until her departure from CAR in September 2024.

### **Terminology**

The language used when speaking about diverse groups is continually evolving and there is a lack of consensus over which terminology is most appropriate. For understanding and consistency, variations of the term “ethnic and culturally diverse” are used throughout this report to describe those who identify as belonging to any ethnic group other than White. It is acknowledged this terminology is imperfect. Equally, that each diverse community has their own identity and would ideally not be arbitrarily grouped together.

### **Project Background**

According to the most recent national Census (Gov.UK, 2022), the total population of England and Wales in 2021 was 59.6 million, with 18.3% being from ethnic and culturally diverse groups. After White, people from Asian ethnic groups made up the second largest percentage of the population (9.3%), followed by Black (4.0%), mixed ethnic background (2.9%) and ‘Other’ ethnic groups (2.1%).

Although it remains unclear how many people from diverse communities are affected by visible difference, it is known that some conditions disproportionately impact these groups. The incidence of some appearance-altering conditions and injuries is higher in ethnic and culturally diverse communities, due to a range of genetic and environmental factors (Henderson et al., 2012; Mastacouris et al., 2023). Some conditions are more visible on darker skin tones and can be more difficult to conceal (Alchorne et al., 2024). Cultural identity can also influence how people view and experience visible difference (Knifton, 2012). For example, prior research has demonstrated that people from diverse communities often hold cultural beliefs about the causes of visible difference (e.g. a “curse”, an “evil spirit” or a “punishment”) that may lead to stigma and discrimination (Hughes et al., 2009; Costa, 2022). Further, what is considered important for beauty varies with time, place, culture and faith (Naqvi & Saul, 2012).

Engagement with health information and psychosocial support may also vary according to ethnicity and culture. Research has indicated that data gaps on individuals from diverse groups results in diagnostic delays and reduced medical and psychosocial support (NHS, 2022). The well-being of diverse groups may also be negatively impacted by a lack of translation/interpreting services for those who do not read or speak English confidently, a lack of trust in UK organisations and an avoidance of help seeking due to fear of discriminatory treatment (NHS, 2022). Broader health disparities, including lower levels of health literacy (Berkman et al., 2011) and lower socioeconomic status (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022) also play a key role. Given this overarching lack of support to appropriately meet the needs of ethnic and culturally diverse groups in the UK, heightened emotional impacts and poorer quality of life in this population have been frequently identified (Alexis & Blackcloud, 2014; Grimes & Miller, 2018).

Individuals from diverse communities are perpetually underrepresented in various aspects of UK society. This includes a lack of representation in research, within healthcare and charity staff teams, within stock photography, and more. Yet, research implies diverse groups are willing and able to participate when activities are directly relevant and approached with cultural sensitivity (Gill & Redwood, 2013). Due to the potential psychological and social implications of visible difference within diverse communities, it is vital to ensure we are doing all we can to meet the needs of underserved groups.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this project was to identify opportunities and barriers to advancing psychological support in the charitable sector for ethnic and culturally diverse groups affected by visible difference in the UK. To achieve this:



1) Individual 1-1 interviews with representatives of the Appearance Collective charities were conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of current UK charitable service provision for this population.

2) A broad, narrative review of current research and policy guidelines from the wider field was carried out to examine known barriers, interventions and solutions for engaging ethnic and culturally diverse communities.

## **Methodology**

### **Objective 1: Interviews with Appearance Collective Representatives**

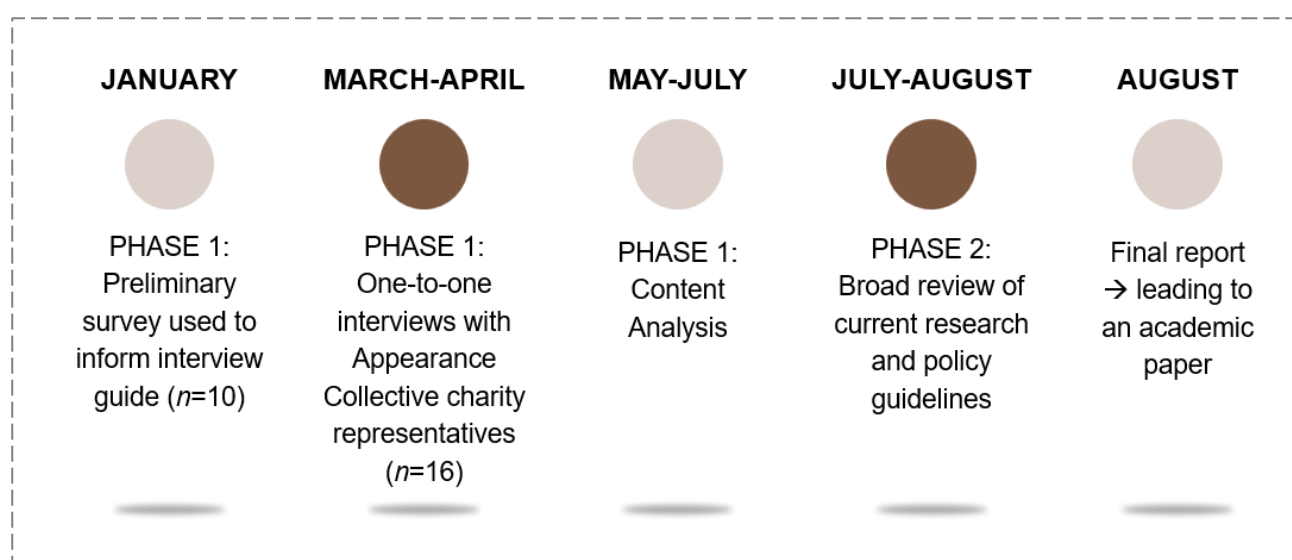
Ethical approval to carry out the research was obtained from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at UWE, Bristol (application ID: 13604998). An invitation to participate in the project was emailed to all Appearance Collective charities on three occasions between the end of 2024 and early 2025. Sixteen charities expressed an interest in the project and ultimately took part in an interview. Individual 1-1 online interviews were conducted with nominated representatives of the Appearance Collective charities during March and April 2025. Interview topics included broad EDI policies and procedures, representation of ethnic and culturally diverse groups among staff/volunteers/members, the use of diverse member stories and images, resource/event development, barriers to engaging diverse groups, strategies tried, and resources needed. Interviews lasted one hour on average. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Of the 16 participating charities, 10 also completed a brief survey in early 2025, covering similar topics of interest. The findings of the survey were used to inform the development of the interview guide and the wider Legacy discussions.

Interview transcripts were analysed using conventional Content Analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The preliminary findings were reported at the VTCT Foundation Showcase in London in July 2025. The draft report was shared with all participating charities for comment in August 2025. Each participating charity was offered a £50 donation as a thank you for their contribution to the project.

## **Objective 2: Review of Current Research and Policy Guidelines**

Original, peer-reviewed research articles pertaining to the engagement of ethnic and culturally diverse groups in community-based services, healthcare and research published in the last five years (2020-2025) were included in the review. Academic databases included Bright Mine (human resources), Business Source Ultimate (business, management and economics), CINAHL Plus (allied health and social care), MEDLINE (biomedicine and health), PsycInfo (psychology and social science) and Overton (policy and legislation). Relevant search terms were identified within the article title, abstract or keywords. Unpublished dissertations and articles published online while 'in press' were included where available. Literature reviews, systematic reviews, book chapters and meta-analyses were included. Articles published in all languages were included where English translations could be reliably obtained. Case studies and protocol papers were excluded. In addition, documents obtained from reputable charity, healthcare, business and Government sources were reviewed and included where relevant. Example sources include Gov.UK, the Association of Chief Executives and Voluntary Organisations, NHS England and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. Relevant data were extracted and narratively synthesised to inform the recommendations.



**Figure 1:** Project Timeframe

## **Results**

### **Participants**

Representatives of both large and small UK charities participated in this project. Thirteen participants were female and most identified as White. Participants included CEOs, Trustees, staff members and volunteers, and most had been in post for <5 years. The identity of individual participants has been retained to preserve anonymity.

### **Interview Data**

Conventional Content Analysis identified 3 overarching themes: 1) Knowledge and Engagement; 2) Accessibility; and 3) Representation. Each of these themes is presented below with exemplar quotations.

## Theme 1: Knowledge and Engagement

The first theme encompasses two main codes and explores the charities' existing level of knowledge of EDI, the degree to which diverse communities currently engage with the charities, and the charities' existing understanding of diverse communities' support needs.

### 1.1. Charity Knowledge of EDI

Some participating charities were more experienced in EDI practices than others, yet most believed they were at or near the beginning of their EDI journey. All charities acknowledged that EDI (with particular reference to ethnic and cultural diversity) is an area they need to improve upon.

*"We are conscious in our unknowing. That is, we are aware that we don't know enough... There is certainly a gap in our service provision".*

Some participants described a lack of confidence in discussing ethnic and cultural diversity and believed this led to inaction.

*"We constantly talk in circles. "Where do we start? This issue is really complicated". And there is very little action. Out of cautiousness, lack of experience, lack of knowledge, not knowing what language to use. It's paralysing".*

Most charities felt they could benefit from EDI training but highlighted the need for training to be relevant and practical.

*"We did try some training a while back, but a lot of it wasn't relevant to us... It felt like a tick-box exercise, rather than giving us something we could meaningfully action".*

Most charities did not have an EDI policy at the time of interview or had one that was partially developed. Those charities that did have a live policy reported ongoing difficulties with implementation.

*"Officially yes, we have an EDI policy. But has anyone in the organisation properly scrutinised it and thought about it? No. So, we need to think about how we actually make that policy live".*

For the smaller charities in particular, the resources required to carry out EDI effectively was a significant concern.

*"We lack the resources and time to prioritise EDI. Most of the time we are focused on fundraising and being financially stable. [EDI] feels like a big and overwhelming task".*

### 1.2. Community Engagement

Almost all charities reported difficulties in engaging effectively with diverse communities. Many participants cited cultural norms, in addition to societal stigma, as key barriers to engagement.

*"We've found that some communities just don't have the same concept of a "charity" as we do. It doesn't really translate. They wouldn't necessarily think to come to us or step outside of their own community for support".*

*"I would speculate that some communities have a greater level of stigma attached to their visible difference... If there's shame associated with the condition, then perhaps there's differences in how people manage their condition and the ways they do or don't seek support".*



Despite these barriers, some participants commented that the onus was still on the charities to offer inclusive services.

*"We just can't reach them. Which to me says we're not doing or saying the right things to make people feel safe to come to us".*

Few charities reported feeling confident in their knowledge of diverse communities' support needs and preferences and believed this was a critical step to offering relevant and appealing services.

*"We often say that we don't know what [diverse communities] want from us... But in fact, we haven't asked... I think it's naïve to think we can guess the ethnic and cultural and religious connotations and expectations that are loaded on top of people who are also dealing with a visible difference. We need to understand people's life experiences much more deeply".*

## **Theme 2: Accessibility**

The second theme includes two main codes, which examine language barriers and the accessibility of charity-led events.

### **2.1. Language**

Language was a barrier identified by several charities. Yet, the translation of existing materials was viewed as a significant cost that wouldn't necessarily achieve the desired effect or be sustainable.

*"We have so many languages spoken in the UK and there's no clear place to start. And then, we'd have to keep everything up to date, and it's just a huge expense we can't really commit to".*



*"Not all people who speak their native language can read in that language. So written resources aren't always helpful".*

### **2.2. Inclusive Events**

Participants expressed a desire to ensure events were inclusive and welcoming. Yet, charities offered several examples where this had not been well-considered.

*"The staff were looking at venues for [an event]. Everybody endorsed the local Christian Centre because it was reasonably priced, without thinking that the name could immediately preclude people who might decide "that's not for me"."*

*"We were embarrassed actually, because a Muslim family turned up to one of our events and we hadn't even considered that Halal might be a dietary requirement".*

## **Theme 3: Diversity**

The third theme encompasses three main codes. These include the diversity of staff teams, the diversity of charity membership and inclusion of ethnic and culturally diverse groups in charity resources and communications.

### **3.1. Staff Diversity**

Most participating charities identified the diversity of their current team to be suboptimal. This was the case across founders, Trustees, staff, volunteers and donors.

*"Sometimes the projection of the charity can look very White and wealthy, and I think that's something we struggle with".*

*"From a staffing perspective, we are definitely not diverse. Everybody in our staff team is White".*

Participants speculated that this lack of staff diversity could be due to a lack of appropriate recruitment practices and/or a lack of desire from ethnic and culturally diverse communities to engage in charity work.



*"Are we advertising in the wrong places? Are we not advertising the right roles? Are we interviewing the wrong people? Is there some sort of internal bias happening? Is it our processes or our style of communication that's at fault? Or is this because the charity sector only attracts a certain demographic?"*

All participating charities believed it was important to have diverse representation on their teams.

*"We're making all these big decisions as a charity, but those decisions can't possibly be representative of [our community] as a whole, because all the people in the room are White... It doesn't look good. I wouldn't trust us if I was a person of colour".*

*"Unless we have staff who intrinsically know what it's like culturally to live with this condition, we will never be fully addressing what's important to that group".*

### 3.2. Membership Diversity

Similarly, charities estimated that the majority of their members would identify as White British.

*"The representation of [ethnic and culturally diverse communities] at our events is uncomfortably and disproportionately low compared to what you'd see in the everyday world... Our membership doesn't reflect society as a whole".*

However, few participating charities were collecting demographic data from their members at the time of interview, which prevented the reporting of accurate figures.

*"We don't know, because we don't collect the data. If I gave you a figure it would be based on total guesswork".*

Participants highlighted some challenges with data collection, including how to request sensitive data and how to ensure the data are robust.

*"We're not always brave enough to ask the question. Some of us have worries about being perceived as invasive or indelicate... We haven't always known how to ask in the right way".*

*"When we have done a survey in the past, most people just skip the demographic questions".*

Some participants expressed uncertainty about whether collecting demographic data would be useful.

*"To be honest, if we collected it... To what ends? I don't know what we would do with that information. I'm a bit on the fence".*

### 3.3. Diversity of Resources

All charities collected member stories as part of standard practice. These were shared on charity websites, on social media and in newsletters, and were frequently used in fundraising campaigns. Some charities reported being more successful than others in gathering stories from diverse communities.



*"I think we've done quite well with our member stories. We've got a good few up there now that reflect diverse parts of our society".*

*"We've put calls out and asked people directly for diverse member stories before, and we've just had nothing back".*

Similarly, some charities reported having successfully collected a bank of diverse photographs of individuals and families, while others felt their imagery was limited.

*"We have a small number of diverse images, but we tend to use the same ones again and again. Which is almost worse, because it looks tokenistic".*

Participants suggested that the stigma associated with visible difference may prevent people from diverse communities from openly sharing their experiences.

*"It can be quite a leap for people to put their story out there regardless of their background... But for some communities there is an additional barrier there... It would take a certain kind of person to put their hand up and say, 'take my picture, I'm willing to disclose my condition in front of my community and speak up about it'".*

Charities felt a lack of representation in their existing resources was an important component that restricted their ability to engage with diverse communities.

*"The fact that some people don't want to come forward and be seen... It's a real conundrum that we need to understand. If people don't want to be seen, then we can't get our materials to look like them... If they don't see themselves represented, then we don't look like a trustworthy and welcoming place for them to come. So, who's going to take that step and help us?"*

## Recommendations

The aim of this project was to identify opportunities and barriers to advancing psychological support in the charitable sector for ethnic and culturally diverse groups affected by visible difference in the UK. The interviews provided insight into current UK charitable service provision for diverse communities and highlighted a series of barriers to engaging this population. The findings of the interviews were used to inform the literature searches with the aim of identifying potential solutions to the challenges raised. Subsequently, a set of seven recommendations were developed for the consideration of the Appearance Collective charities and the VTCT Foundation. Examples of innovative practice were also extracted from the interviews to stimulate further discussion.



### **Recommendation 1: Increase Cultural Competence**

Cultural competence is the ability to understand, respect and effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is a dynamic and ongoing developmental process that requires a long-term commitment (Denboba, 1998).

For individuals at all levels of the organisation, the first step towards increasing cultural competence is **engaging with relevant training**. Cultural competence training involves the personal examination of assumptions and biases, alongside the acquisition of knowledge of diverse cultures and effective communication skills. Building these skills allows individuals

to increase their confidence (Hoens et al., 2022) and to develop meaningful relationships, avoid misunderstandings and build trust with diverse communities (Wang et al., 2024). Training packages should always be tailored to the needs of the organisation and delivered with examples relevant to the individual's role(s). Training should be delivered by qualified instructors in a comfortable environment that allows for candid discussion (NPC, 2018). It should include both active participation and opportunities for reflection, with a focus on actionable strategies (Research in Practice, 2024).

### **Recommendation 2: Build Community Networks**

Building local and national networks can be a key facilitator for community engagement and collaboration. Identifying and **connecting with community leaders** can help to initiate relationships and provide greater knowledge of the group(s) the organisation wishes to reach. **Participating in events and activities** that are relevant to these communities offers another important opportunity to engage. In addition, understanding area demographics can build an appreciation of the characteristics of a given community, which can be helpful for resource allocation and developing tailored interventions (Office for National Statistics, 2016).

**Charitable organisations** may represent another important network. Other charities may be able to offer guidance based on their own learnings, as well as share success stories and examples of innovative practice. Finally, **clinicians and other professionals** are in a strong position to support charity engagement with diverse communities, by raising awareness among patients and families about what the charities can offer.

#### **APPEARANCE COLLECTIVE CASE EXAMPLE**

*"We know clinicians can be a real ally, so we've been working hard to make sure they're aware of us and what we do... We've travelled to different hospitals, taken leaflets and other materials... We do get far more people from ethnic and culturally diverse backgrounds being referred through the NHS rather than coming to us organically... Hopefully that's a reflection of the work we've been doing".*

### **Recommendation 3: Understand Support Needs and Preferences**

Placing communities at the centre of service delivery is essential for reducing health inequalities, effectively engaging at-risk populations and empowering people to have a greater say in how services are run. To be community-centred, an organisation must hold a strong understanding of the support needs and preferences of that community (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022). Open **1-1 or group conversations** with members of ethnic and culturally

diverse communities provides a platform for people to share their experiences, perspectives and ideas. This approach allows organisations to gain deeper insight unmet needs and potential solutions (Shea et al., 2022). **Formal research** conducted by personnel trained in qualitative methods is particularly advantageous as it ensures the study is well-designed and the data collected are robust and directly applicable to practice. Further, poor recruitment of diverse populations in research is due to complex reasons and needs to be addressed using current best practice (Farooqi et al., 2022). Where possible, research should be led by or conducted in collaboration with members of the community being explored (Shea et al., 2022).

When conducted effectively, these open discussions can foster a sense of ownership and participation for families and individuals, allowing for relationships to be strengthened and encouraging community champions and volunteers to step forward again in future. Once support needs and preferences have been established and community partnerships have been built, resources and interventions can be successfully co-produced (NIHR, 2024).

#### APPEARANCE COLLECTIVE CASE EXAMPLE

*"We started with the members we already had a relationship with... We were honest about our limitations and said that we wanted to do better. And we had 1-1 conversations, and took the time to really listen and understand... We learned so much about things we'd never considered before. Some of it was tough to hear, because we aren't getting everything right, but I think we had to open ourselves up and be vulnerable and take that direction... Then because we'd had those initial conversations in a safe space, we could work more confidently... That's when we set up an EDI focus group...and the learnings from that have informed some of our strategy decisions going forward... It's been amazing because we feel we're ahead of it now. We still need to do more formal research, because we've really only scratched the surface. But those small steps have helped to get us off the ground".*

#### **Recommendation 4: Increase Representation**

Representation of people with varied life experiences is important across charity resources and communications and within the workforce itself. Diverse stories and images can influence engagement and enhance the credibility of the organisation (Charity Comms, 2022), while diverse teams foster creativity and innovation, enhance decision-making and improve productivity (Shaw Trust, 2025).

Potential representatives of diverse communities may be identified through **proactive efforts** by the charity (e.g. asking people who engage with charity services to contribute their stories and/or images as part of routine practice, or by reaching out to specific members of the community directly),

and/or through a more passive **open call** (e.g. a standard section of the website or newsletter) that people can respond to themselves if they would like more information. It is important to consider that some people may need support to work through cultural barriers and concerns before sharing their experiences publicly. Equally, alternative options could be offered, such as using stock imagery or illustrations rather than



personal photographs and/or removing identifiable information or using pseudonyms (Shea et al., 2022). Once involved in the organisation and where appropriate, representatives can be supported to take on more significant roles (e.g. from providing a member story to becoming an ambassador, or from volunteering to becoming a Trustee). Authentic representation of ethnic and culturally diverse experiences in charity resources and communications can significantly increase community engagement by creating a positive 'ripple effect'. Peer support and mentoring may also be beneficial (Ashraf et al., 2007).

#### APPEARANCE COLLECTIVE CASE EXAMPLE

*"We've managed to gradually build up a really nice group of peer supporters and ambassadors and there's good diversity represented there... The impact has been huge. It's our most referenced reason that people give when they contact the charity - "I saw someone who looks like me on your website and I realised it's OK to tell my story and that I am allowed to ask for help"".*

If an organisation's staff team is not representative of the community they want to serve, it is an indication that the charity would benefit from more diversity (ACEVO, 2018). **Recruitment processes** could be reviewed to ensure the language and imagery used in advertisements are inclusive and that a link to the charity's EDI strategy is clearly visible (Thomas, 2024). Advertisements could also be developed and/or reviewed by a diverse group of people to ensure the charity's values are accurately reflected. Charities could consider removing arbitrary or potentially prohibitive recruitment criteria (e.g. a minimum number of years working in the sector), offering job role flexibility and removing the candidate's name from the application form (ACEVO, 2018). Statutory annual leave days could also be offered on a flexible basis (e.g. observing Ramadan rather than Christmas). Advertising the role in a range of locations can be helpful, as can directly encouraging applications from underrepresented groups. Charities can also ensure all interviewers have completed EDI training. Once on board, all staff should be supported to progress within the organisation (Shaw Trust, 2025).



With regard to other charity roles, such as Trustees, it is important that charities are intentional in identifying why diversifying their team is important and how they will equip their new Trustees to contribute effectively (Getting on Board, 2023). Diversity should never replace skills, knowledge, networks and experiences, but should augment it (Getting on Board, 2023). Charities could also consider diversifying Trustee roles, running an open recruitment process and removing some of the practical barriers (such as timing and location of meetings, a lack of financial compensation) that may prevent people with diverse skills from stepping forward (Joy & Murray, 2016).

#### **Recommendation 5: Improve Accessibility**

Being inclusive doesn't mean treating everyone in the same way. It's crucial for organisations to consider how to adapt their activities and materials to be relevant the different groups they're engaging with (Mind, 2025). Improved accessibility for ethnic and culturally diverse groups can be achieved via a series of **pragmatic considerations**. Using a recognised multi-faith calendar can support proactive celebration of cultural events, as well as avoiding any clashes (Sporting Equals,

2024). Carefully considering the location of events, including diverse speakers at events, and offering prayer spaces and foods to suit a range of dietary choices can all increase accessibility (Sporting Equals, 2024). Charities could also consider the integration of a language widget on their websites to translate written materials, the use of pictorial symbols, or professional translators and interpreters (Kaplan & Celik, 2023). As an alternative to written translations, audio translations could be explored.

### **Recommendation 6: Develop Organisational Strategies**

At an organisational level, embedding EDI as a core value requires the development of a **comprehensive and coordinated plan** to improve policies, administration, organisational structures and service delivery (Research in Practice, 2024). If employed effectively throughout the organisation, an EDI strategy can foster a more inclusive and equitable working environment, demonstrate a commitment to ethical principles and social responsibility and support the organisation to comply with anti-discrimination laws (NCVO, 2023).

Charities can start by looking at existing EDI templates shared by national organisations, such as NCVO and ACEVO. Reputable charities such as the British Heart Foundation also offer easily accessible examples. An EDI strategy should be driven by organisational values and based on existing evidence wherever possible (Third Sector Network, 2024). Short- and/or long-term objectives should be supported by clear and achievable goals and activities (Aspiring to Include, 2023). As a working document, this strategy can be regularly reviewed and revised as knowledge and experience within the team grows (Aspiring to Include, 2023). External advisors can also be brought in to audit existing policies and procedures and highlight areas of strength alongside priorities for improvement (Third Sector Network, 2024).

#### **APPEARANCE COLLECTIVE CASE EXAMPLE**

*"We did an audit with an external advisor to take a look at what we were doing well and not so well. And while there were some really good things in the way that our team approaches people and families...there were lots of simple things that were not good enough. We realised that we were listening and responding to a limited or quite specific group of people... Some of our language was quite exclusive which is absolutely not who we want to be, but these were things we could change once we were aware of them... Now I feel like we have much more of a plan in place to support people from diverse backgrounds".*

### **Recommendation 7: Measure Progress**

Robust **demographic data collection** can enrich an organisation's understanding of the communities they are (and are not) effectively reaching, in addition to monitoring the diversity of job applicants and workforce composition (NCVO, 2023). Further, data collection can demonstrate the progress an organisation has made to meeting its EDI goals, as well as the impact of its services (NCVO, 2023). Utilising existing templates or drawing on research expertise to design a brief demographic survey question(s) can help organisations feel confident they are asking relevant questions sensitively (O'Gafari et al., 2024). Including an explanation alongside the survey question(s) about why the information is important and how the data will be used can encourage respondents to complete the questions in full (NIHR, 2018).

### **Recommendations for the VTCT Foundation**

The VTCT Foundation offers an established network for UK-based charities working in visible difference (The Appearance Collective), alongside funding and development opportunities. This network is ideally situated to advance EDI practices across the UK charitable sector. To effectively

action the recommendations provided in this report, the VTCT Foundation could consider ways to fund group EDI training opportunities, policy and procedural audits, effective translation and interpretation opportunities, formal research to better understand the support needs and preferences of underrepresented communities and future resource and intervention development.

## Conclusions

EDI is a complex area to address but is a necessity for meeting the needs of the visible difference community as a whole. It is hoped this report offers evidence-based, actionable solutions that can be explored by all Appearance Collective charities, irrespective of size and degree of experience. Many success stories and examples of innovative practice were shared during the interviews. The Appearance Collective therefore provides an ideal network for shared learning.

## Acknowledgements

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## Additional Resources

- Getting started in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: National Council for Voluntary Organisations. Visit: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/running-a-charity/equity-diversity-inclusion/>.
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Resources: Association of Charitable Foundations. Visit: <https://acf.org.uk/ACF/Research---resources/Resources%20content/Diversity-equity-inclusion.aspx>.
- NVCO Training and Events. Visit: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/training-events>.
- Understanding the demographic characteristics of your community: Office for National Statistics. Visit: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>.
- EDI strategy example: British Heart Foundation. Visit: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/-/media/files/what-we-do/equality-diversity-inclusion/igniting-change-edi-strategy-september-2023.pdf>.
- Measuring protected characteristics: Office for National Statistics. Visit: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/measuringequality>.
- Standards for collecting ethnicity data: Gov.uk. Visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/standards-for-ethnicity-data/standards-for-ethnicity-data>.