



Race to the top:

A PPN report on race and ethnicity in prisons

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About the Prison Reform Trust

The Prison Reform Trust is an independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective prison system. For further information about the Prison Reform Trust, see www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/

About the Prisoner Policy Network

The Prisoner Policy Network is a network of prisoners, ex-prisoners and supporting organisations. It is hosted by the Prison Reform Trust and seeks to ensure that the lived experience of prisoners is central to the development of prison policy nationally. Contact ppn@prisonreformtrust.org.uk for more information or call 020 7251 5070.

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Introduction

While race and ethnicity have long been a feature within criminal justice debate, the Black Lives Matter protests and the reaction that followed, sharpened the focus on dignity, fairness, respect and decency for those from ethnic minorities living (and working) in the criminal justice system.

Prisoner Policy Network members have often raised the issue of race and ethnicity in discussion groups and correspondences. Their interest in the subject – and concerns they have expressed in responses to previous consultations – led us to engage the Prisoner Policy Network (PPN) more fully and methodically in the conversation.

In this national consultation, we sought to capture the perspectives of current serving prisoners and former prisoners and their families on race and ethnicity, to understand how their own ethnicity had impacted on their time in prison, and to explore any further views on racial equality or discrimination in the system. We also discussed the topic with a small number of prison staff.

Our intention with this report was to seek to influence Ministry of Justice and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service policy teams working on Diversity and Inclusion planning, with a specific focus on race and ethnicity and to stimulate positive action in responding to this consultation report.

We asked:

How does my race/ethnicity impact on my experience of prison?

We deliberately left the consultation question broad and opened the opportunity to encourage views of white prisoners too, and to also include the views of foreign nationals and those from other ethnicities who do not identify as coming from black or brown communities.

Background

In the past two years there have been a number of reports published looking at the experiences of people from black, brown and minority ethnic backgrounds across a range of areas including prisons, probation, the police service, and other emergency services. Many of the findings have been alarming, showing that the experiences of people from minority backgrounds are often more negative than their white British counterparts.

A brief summary of some of the major reports published over the last three years that look at the experiences of people from minority ethnic backgrounds is included in our appendix.

1. What we did

The consultation period stretched from April 2022 to March 2023 with care taken to try to involve prisons from a range of geographic areas and prisoners from a variety of demographic backgrounds. We approached the national consultation with a call out to our membership using our own publication Network News and the prison newspaper Inside Times and augmented this approach with a “deep dive” into 13 selected prison sites in England and Wales, with an additional 23 prisons represented in letters, emails and calls, making 36 prisons in total.

In prison we held in depth discussion groups with a wide diversity of prisoners, including Diversity and Equality representatives and in some prisons with staff as well. We agreed to anonymise the prisons engaged in the consultation in this report to ensure frank and honest discussion and thus will identify participating sites through categorisation and specialism.

We visited:

A Category Male Long Term High Secure	12 attendees
A Category Male Long Term High Secure	80 attendees
B Category Male Long Term High Secure	12 attendees
B Category Male Sexual Offences	2 attendees
B Category Male	40 attendees
B Category Local	82 attendees
B/C Local	20 attendees
C Category Male	81 attendees
C Category Male	11 attendees
C Category	40 attendees
YOI Male	80 attendees
D Category Male	36 attendees
Women Closed	20 attendees
Women Open	26 attendees

We received 63 written responses (49 letters, 14 emails).

One to one telephone calls with 18 people.

We also interviewed 28 people in the community from:

Standout, Red Rose Recovery, and a separate focus group of PPN Community members including prisoners' families.

This means that 661 members contributed to the learning in this report.

On our prison visits, we encountered interest in the topic and genuine enthusiasm about discussing the impact of race along with some genuine apprehension about engaging with the topic. Despite this, we note that we received fewer written responses than in previous consultations. Though it is difficult to know for certain, there were a number of people who contacted us who were not comfortable sharing their full experience of prison in any way other than in a face-to-face interview, in privacy and were nervous.

The final report was written collectively between the PRT prisoner engagement team, supported by Dr Lucy Wainwright, with the prison visits conducted entirely by PRT staff.

Where requested, we provided the management teams of the prisons we visited with anonymised, generalised findings ahead of writing the final report so that they had some feedback on potential issues (and positive findings where appropriate) in their establishments. This was not done for every prison and never were any direct quotes shared with prison management which could be identifiable.

In addition to that there were a number of cases where participants in discussion groups or interviews asked us to raise particular issues related to race and ethnicity with prison management and waived their anonymity. Where appropriate we escalated such requests and monitored the outcomes through our correspondences and contact with the people we spoke with.

2. Prison visits

Visits were usually conducted over two full days in each prison, with a team of four people working in groups to run discussion groups simultaneously, sometimes four or five in a day. There was also time made to interview at least one member of staff, usually the equalities lead (if they were in post), and officers who worked directly on the wings.

Each discussion group would last for a minimum of 1 hour and 15 minutes, with many going over the allocated time. One team member would facilitate the discussion while the other took contemporaneous notes. The notes were then collated and discussed as a team before the next prison visit to identify topics of importance to discuss more fully in subsequent visits.

In most of the prisons we visited, we found that staff were especially concerned about equalities work in general not having the priority that it once had pre Covid-19.

Many staff noted that while in the past there were always issues and concerns around racism, discrimination and a lack of diversity among staff (particularly management) in prisons, the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent staffing crisis meant that “equalities has fallen way down the agenda, it’s barely going”.

We saw for ourselves first-hand the pressures many prisons face to maintain safety and basic functions with low staff levels. One prison in particular was at around 50% of its minimum service requirement and had been for around a year. One of the two women’s prisons we visited had only 15 operational staff on the day of our visit, looking after roughly 300 women.

Working environments where staff are under increased pressure, and basic functions are not being met suggests that many of the issues that respondents to the consultation raised, were simply not being heard nor adequately responded to. Indeed, as one staff member told us, because of staff shortages they had rarely spent a day over the previous six months working on their main brief as Equalities and Diversity (E&D) lead. One reason, as explained by a staff member, was that E&D leads were covering for other staff and could not dedicate any significant time to their equalities work. It appeared that in some prisons but not all, focus on equalities had slipped further down the list of priorities. This lack of staffing capacity had an impact on prisoners’ ability to seek support, or to alert staff members to brewing concerns and consequently prisoners generally lacked confidence that tackling incidents of racism was a priority, and questioned whether the prison service has laid solid foundations for a culture of full inclusion.

This report

This report summarises what we learned from prisoners. We have separated the report into broad themes, including general perceptions around race and ethnicity, a lack of cultural understanding, the impact of discrimination, accountability and finally division. Verbatim quotes from letters and discussion groups, are used liberally throughout to illustrate these themes.

This report presents the voices of the prisoners (and some staff) who contributed to the conversation. The prisoner engagement team have not sought independent confirmation of the stories provided to this consultation.

Experiences, feelings, and perceptions are powerful, pervasive and permeate between cells and across the system and are sources of knowledge. This report presents these in abundance, and we argue that it is important to present all these so that those who work in equalities can address the multitude of issues as they are seen by those in custody and to honour the lived experiences of those that have shared them with us.

This report presents clear conflicting experiences, feelings and perceptions of racial discrimination; this report highlights how this topic can be significantly divisive. Indeed, division has an entire theme dedicated to it. Yet, we stress that irrespective of context and facts, the contributions we present are how prisoners and some staff experience, see and feel about racial tensions. And how these will not only impact prisoner wellbeing and safety, but also how they view the justice system and those living and working within it.

3. What we learned

It was clear that prisoners wanted to speak about this subject; yet there was not a uniform response, and some prisoners were nervous to surface the complexities of the question. As one prisoner said:

This is a very topical question, it's like a massive tree with loads of branches, clouded by plenty of leaves.

Such a minefield; feelings, anger, sadness and frustration, and where is the answer anyway; not in the prison maybe?

Predominantly, our responses centred around the discrimination experienced and felt by black, brown and mixed heritage prisoners by prison staff and within the prison environment. We heard about this through prisoners directly as well as from peers.

However, we also heard about racial tension between prisoners of different races, racial discrimination directed towards minority ethnic staff by prisoners and staff colleagues, and we heard from white prisoners who identified as another white background other than white British about their experiences. Significantly we also heard about the experience of being a prisoner from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities and those considered foreign nationals.

We also heard from white British prisoners who felt they had been unfairly treated due to their ethnicity, and those who felt there was no need for such a consultation. We refer to all these contributions at relevant points throughout the report.

3.1 General perceptions around race and ethnicity

The predominant message emerging from the contributions was that racism cannot be denied. A recurring observation was that prisons draw on and reflect the attitudes in wider society. Some people referred to more specific events as affecting their experience, with Black Lives Matter (BLM), Covid-19 and Brexit all being pivotal events in recent years.

There is a rich history of racism in this country.

Well, there is racism outside of prison, in the criminal justice system as a whole, so what would I expect?

Look at Marcus Rashford in the Euros, we were all together until he missed.

The BLM coverage and aftermath caused a lot of discussion a lot of which has been negative. Obviously, these are not prison specific issues but it's a reminder that prison is an extension of the outside community and you cannot solve problems in an institution unless that's reflected outside.

Just prior to COVID there was a concerted effort towards equality and diversity. With a larger safer custody team and reorganisation of the prisoner representative roles. COVID interrupted that process along with the re roll of the prison and vast changeover of the prison population. As yet due to regime and staffing issues I haven't seen any return to the Y&D commitment and the recent planned BAME forum was postponed.

One prisoner of Chinese nationality wrote extensively about his experience of blatant racism becoming intolerable during the Covid-19 pandemic. He said:

Being constantly named "CHINA MAN" by officers definitely didn't help. People decided to pick on me. I was referred to in public and private as Chinese virus. When I collected food, people asked if I could stop breathing and stop spreading coronavirus.

Another referred to how Brexit had paved the way for more racism, particularly against other Europeans.

Most prisoners from minority ethnic groups reported having experienced racial bias while in prison:

When I first came to prison, I never thought my race or ethnic group would play a role in how I'm perceived as that was not my experience as a healthcare professional working in the NHS. I can now say with conviction that, as a BAME prisoner, the bar is set higher for me /us compared to the white Caucasian inmate in every respect – access to roles, jobs, healthcare appointments, IEP status, access to programmes. The issue is underlying, imbedded and institutionalised, and it's looming. You can feel it, see it but you can't put a finger on it or even question it.

It is not a figment of my imagination, nor am I deluded. After ruling out many factors and reasons as to what it could be, the one that always stands up to scrutiny is my race.

I don't feel human. I feel like a slave but instead of getting whipped we get basic.

As a black boy who knows where I went wrong in the past, I try to be open and honest so I could get the help I need to stay crime free. But prison is designed to make black people fail and I only say that because I am going through it myself and it's painful and stressful.

It absolutely hurts to see how I'm still in the times we live in today treated differently based solely on the colour of my skin.

Prisoners in the whole contested that the prison system was fair and free from bias and discrimination. Some had adopted a laissez faire attitude towards it, seeing it as a depressing normality in the criminal justice system; asserting that the tools at their disposal to push back, complain and seek redress were not fit for purpose. People had little faith in the robustness and independence of the internal complaints system nor the specific process for raising issues in the DIRF (Discrimination Incident Reporting Form (DIRF) system. Prisoners believed such processes to be blurred and unable / unwilling to address issues, especially when the complaints were not prisoner on prisoner, but relating to staff members.

I don't bother with their processes, they mark their own homework don't they, so they always get straight As.

Building confidence and trust in an institutional commitment to tackle racism effectively and visibly was seen as vital.

An interesting topic emerged around 'banter'. Prisoners from all ethnicities wrestled with this issue and questioning what was ok and what was not. This added to the individual nature of the responses, with some clearly being open to this, and others not.

When I face issues, I'm not always gonna come out and call out discrimination or racism.

Officers make jokes about my hair. I always took that as just humour, not racism.

Black pearl.

In one discussion group, prisoners referred to how the dominant narrative in their prison is that 'everyone gets on', due to it being a 'melting pot' of ethnicities. They felt that to dispute this narrative felt challenging and held the belief that the prison covered up casual racism with such banter. Some ethnic minority staff also struggled to deal with the way racial discrimination was veiled by laughter or badged as camaraderie. Staff who spoke to us were also unclear as to how raising this would affect their relationships on the wing, or their career progression.

Relatedly, some referred to the prison being a community like everywhere else. One Asian prisoner said that just like anywhere else, you have friends and enemies.

Some white people don't wanna talk to you, some black people don't wanna talk to you.

One prisoner reflected that prison was a place of power dynamics and that people will always try to get 'one up' on one another, in whatever means they can. To him, racism was one means to challenge someone.

People want to hurt others and they will make a calculation how best to do that, it isn't necessarily a deeply held view beyond someone thinking to themselves, 'How can I make this person feel as bad as I can using words?'

I'm Welsh and feel like I am more aware of that in an English jail. There is racism here, and you hear English people getting it in Welsh prisons as well.

I have been called a 'Bl- - - C - - t; that sort of thing. You know it is going to happen. It comes up if I'm arguing my case and I'm right and they run out of things to say. Then they go to that language.

Several others said that the prisoner – staff power dynamic is the most significant of all tensions in prison.

No matter what colour you are if you are an officer or an inmate there is always that judgement there.

We were told by several people from establishments that hold people convicted of sexual offences that universal judgement over their offences did mean prisoners shared a commonality of stigma to the point where race and ethnicity were not always such a divisive force.

I have found that as we have all been marked for life by the banner of sex offender, the normal societal issues of racism seem not to be so prevalent.

A small number of contributors wanted to share their positive views.

I wish to confirm I've not had any negatives to report of here. I've in fact, found that diversity and any race discrimination are things of the past.

Some referred to experiencing very balanced and progressive staff, working alongside those with more antiquated views around race and ethnicity. A handful of others compared progressive prisons with those which 'tolerated' racist views.

Finally, it is important to raise the concerns raised by many prisoners for foreign national prisoners who were often said to be managing racial discrimination alongside language barriers.

Although I am not proud or enjoy being in prison, I thank my lucky stars I am not a foreign national.

I consider myself to be lucky as I dread to think what life must be like for those prisoners whom do not speak English fluently like I do.

Not many people know about 'The Big Word' [translation line] and those that did would rarely use it because they saw it as too much trouble. It was, in their eyes, easier to use a fellow prisoner, even for confidential issues, rather than use the line.

3.2 Staff diversity

It is well known that the prison service has had a staffing crisis in recent years, with there being a struggle to recruit prison officers at all, let alone black and minority ethnic prison officers. The proportion of black and minority officers is far lower than the proportion of black and minority prisoners. This was highlighted as an issue by several PPN members.

We know that overall BME groups are disproportionately overrepresented in prison. However that certainly doesn't seem to be reflected in staff. In my time here (seven years), I have encountered a few non-white staff but they are rare this cannot be good for the staff prisoner dynamic.

It was noted to be a particular problem in rural parts of the whole country, as well as in the North of England. Diversity was highlighted as lacking in senior management teams.

Anywhere up north. You feel the vibe. That's got to be racist. The staff have grown into that for generations.

Diversity in the staff group is different. If you're in an inner-city jail, there are different people in the staff group. But like at xxxxx it's totally different. No staff are Black or Asian and all the prisoners are white. It ends up feeling racist.

In xxxxxx they were playing a game called 'whack-a-Muslim'. There's a lot of staff who'll say, 'if you're black keep your head down'.

The use of increasing numbers of staff on detached duty from outside of area also compounded potential of staff not being comfortable with the diversity of the prisoner population and the potential for poor communication to occur.

This place is full of people from the North; there is quite a big difference just between North and South, let alone black and white.

We were advised by one group of prisoners how prisoner feedback around this issue had encouraged their senior management to change the way they recruited, ensuring job search went out to a city slightly further away, but more culturally diverse, which is an excellent example of proactivity.

For those who had experienced prisons where many ethnic minority staff were based, this was particularly noticeable. London prisons were said to have a diverse staff, and this was valued. In fact, in one London prison, despite the many problems and challenges they spoke about in relation to the establishment, few raised their ethnic/racial identity as a major factor.

What made me feel more comfortable in xxxx was the diversity in staff, even among the govs. Whereas here I don't think I've even seen a black or Asian officer.

While almost entirely seen as a positive thing, a small number commented that ethnic minority officers could also show racial discrimination, for a variety of reasons, which should not be forgotten.

I don't believe jails are racist. But there are some black officers who feel they have to live up to expectations. They think they'll get stripes for being hard with us.

It's more likely not the English officers who will try and bad you up, its more the foreign officers, the Polish or African officers.

One ethnic group which stated it will never have representation is Gypsy, Roma and Travellers, who said it would be culturally unacceptable to be a part of a law enforcement organisation.

You would never find a traveller becoming a police officer.

Recommendations

- Create a knowledge exchange mechanism for sending officers from prisons in rural, less diverse areas to places where there is a greater collective and organisational understanding of how to work with people from various ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. Detached duty staff should have induction training on local demographics and local equalities and diversity policy and activities.
- Minimise use of staff on detached duty to give prisoners and staff the best chance of establishing respectful relations based on mutual understanding and trust, which takes time.
- Create more opportunities for prisoners and staff from various cultural backgrounds to share knowledge and experiences (and food) in a setting that is open and safe for all to participate.
- Individual prisons to publish data on race related complaints and the generalised learning from them to prisoners on induction to build trust in the system.
- Staff leading on equalities work to attend induction and be visible on wings .

3.3 A lack of cultural awareness

Some people identified that cultural insensitivity was commonplace in prisons where there were few or no ethnic minority staff, in part due to ignorance, stemming from a lack of exposure to other cultures.

For Black History Month the diversity lead asked us how to spend the budget to get a guest in. We suggested approaching Akala. The lead said she got some Rasta poet we never heard of. She then said, 'he has real dreadlocks though!'. That's the type of thing you'd see a lot, it's ignorance rather than malice, but it's still racist.

It's called Black History Month for a reason; to celebrate and educate about black history to the community, we don't just want random people regaling us with tales of triumphing over racism, there's enough black men in here to do that; it needs to be about the richness of our history and challenging ignorance.

Several people wrote in to comment on a lack of understanding around religious festivals and practices.

There's not really racism here, but it feels like there is a lack of respect for religious practices.

I have been told by the prisons that I was not allowed to have a SIDDAR (Daily prayer book) or the yamaka I had sent to me via the correct supplier and by my synagogue because they are not authorised religious items. If a daily prayer book and a skull cap covering are not religious items for Jews, it would be nice to know what are?

As a Muslim, if I know that the food I'm served is contaminated with pork I cannot eat it. I can't pretend I don't know because it's right there in your face. I know this causes a lot of problems for people.

In xxxx I didn't expect much given it was a local jail but I did expect some basic respect when it came to my religion. Now I can't eat beef because of my religion but I was told on multiple occasions to put up with it and eat it anyway.

This extended to other prisoners having a lack of understanding about religious practices, although it was spoken about to a lesser extent.

Someone behind the servery said that food turns Halal if you pray to a Muslim prisoner.

Both staff and prisoners stated that training was important if cultural understanding was to be improved, although for some this needed to go beyond typical training programmes and needed to be rethought entirely.

We are in a predominantly white and middle-class area, we have mainly white staff and prisoners. There has to be more support for staff to help them bridge the gap of understanding.
(Staff comment)

Officers need to know more about different cultures.

Most training is delivered through e-learning, and it doesn't work. It's click and forget; we need face-to-face learning for staff.
(Staff comment)

Swap the entire staff group with the staff at xxx for a bit, see how they get on.

We need a cultural exchange programme for prison staff.

A lack of awareness was considered by some as the cause of 'lazy stereotypes', fuelled by mainstream media. This is the topic of our next section.

It's unconscious bias, preconceptions from what they've seen on TV or what they've heard.

I'm Muslim, so staff think I'm a terrorist. That suspicion puts you on edge all the time. They look at you as if you're up to something. They are over-thinking everything. I asked for eggs. They go, 'But you can make a bomb with eggs.'

Recommendations

- HMPPS should create a good practice guide based on the work of other organisations that are conducting meaningful work on racial literacy/structural racism to provide governors with a constructive toolkit.
- Celebration and education of diversity should follow a 12-month long calendar of activities and prisoners should be invited to take part in planning and supporting such events.
- Prisons should focus on building relationships with external stakeholders from minority ethnic groups to build capacity to invite leaders of such communities to visit the prison and assist in building a more inclusive culture.

3.4 Stereotypes

With only predominantly white staff, prisoners felt there is a lack of understanding around ethnic minority prisoners' behaviours, mannerisms and needs. A host of examples were given, with one prominent one being about black prisoners being seen as aggressive by white staff.

When black people talk we use our hands, and some police officers see that as aggressive.

When I'm thinking or listening I can screw up my face, my pad mate will always tell me to fix my face in the morning. This is just how I look but I know what she means, cause to a white staff member I may come across as aggressive.

A discussion in a women's prison commented on officers' perceptions of them cooking together while listening to music. This behaviour, normal for them, was perceived by officers as 'rowdy' and 'anti-social'. The women said they had to change this activity, and indeed their identity, so that they were not seen as difficult.

Men in prison also gave examples of stereotyping, with some expressing their concern that black culture was seen as 'gang culture'. This again led to people making a choice as to whether they needed to adapt their behaviour, so they conformed with what white officers expected.

I keep getting labelled as a gang member. I'm not a gang member. I don't think they expect me to make good decisions.

It's all the time, whether talking to probation staff or staff here, you have to adapt the way you speak constantly.

My experience as a BAME prisoner is that you've got to be on your best behaviour; submissive, non-argumentative as well as refraining from asking any direct questions, which would be perceived as rude and awkward.

It was mentioned that it can be difficult for prisoners of different ethnicities to share a cell, potentially due to the fact they are sharing such a small space where tensions are heightened, and actions are magnified. One prisoner wrote in to say he struggled to share a cell with someone who washed his feet in the shared sink and used a jug of water rather than toilet roll. This is an important example of a clash of cultures, without appropriate consideration and discussion.

Sharing with someone from a different ethnic background often does not work. They may also have a very different religious background which can cause issues.

Cell sharing risk assessments are not simple however, and another prisoner told us how he was required to share a cell with a Muslim convicted of terrorism offences. He felt this was because he was also Muslim. Yet despite sharing a religion, these men were very different in their attitudes and lifestyles, which highlights the importance of individualising prisoners rather than viewing all from one race, ethnicity, or religion as thinking or feeling the same. This Muslim prisoner said he felt uncomfortable with this pairing as his wife is Jewish and this cell mate harboured antisemitic views and was intimidating to be around.

As well as potential issues around cell sharing, and the missteps that occur, we heard some examples of work situations that were potentially problematic and needed rethinking. At one prison, we were told by a Muslim prisoner that he was made to work alongside a former neo-Nazi on the servery and would serve halal food with a person who kept making disparaging comments about Muslims while maintaining they did not harbour racist thoughts.

It doesn't make sense to me to have a Nazi serving Halal food.

It was clear that chaplaincy teams, in particular the Imams, were an important conduit between staff and prisoners who follow certain religious practices (and not solely Muslim prisoners).

I had my Khara taken off me because they said it could be used as a weapon. It's the little dagger we are meant to carry with us during prayer. The Imam managed to get me a plastic one and that was allowed in.

Last year I asked for Ratri for Raksha Bandan, a Sikh festival, to be sent in by my sisters but they said no because it could have spice on it. Thankfully the Imam there was great, he went out of his way for everyone in the prison regardless of whether you were Muslim or not. He bought some, brought them to visits and gave them to my sisters when they entered so they could give them to me, as this is part of the ritual. It's not ideal but I was so grateful for the Imam making it work.

Staff are not being mindful of Muslim prayers, they'll walk on mats in their shoes, making noise when you're praying, slamming doors and that.

3.5 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in prison: “viewed with suspicion”

At one prison, the participants (who were all people of colour from minority backgrounds) said there was a “hierarchy of racism” in play with white people at the top, followed by black people, then Asians, with people from GRT backgrounds at the bottom.

While it is not our intention to recreate a “hierarchy of racism”, it is important to note the particular concerns of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in the prison system who we spoke to first hand.

While we do not want to make generalisations about the prevalence of discrimination towards GRT communities in prison, it is the case that on every visit we had multiple people raise the issue of prison service attitudes towards these communities as being wholly unfair and unjustified, if not blatantly discriminatory.

It was striking the number of times that groups of prisoners, many of whom had experienced racism and discrimination themselves, felt compelled to talk about the experiences of those from the Traveller community on their wings.

Many felt there was an unfair stigma associating people from Traveller backgrounds with organised crime, and in many prisons we went to there seemed to be a policy of splitting up groups of Travellers on their wing. This hostility towards group association of Travellers was raised by people from non-Traveller backgrounds as being discriminatory and deeply unfair.

It's not a problem if you share a culture with someone, you want to be around them, but the way they treat Travellers is so blatant.

One prisoner who was born and raised in the UK but with Chinese heritage said he felt shocked by the constant pressure from prison security on the sole Irish Traveller on his wing.

All I had to do was start speaking to him on the landing and suddenly I was being warned to stay away by staff.

One group alleged that Gypsy travellers were separated from other Gypsy travellers automatically, without any consultation, on the assumption they would fight. They felt ostracised from those who share their culture, based on a stereotype.

We asked some of those who identified as being from Traveller backgrounds why they felt Travellers were targeted in some prisons as being a particular threat to safety and security.

It's the stereotype, they think if you put a few travellers together that is a gang, they can't see it as just people wanting to be around others that share your culture.

You can get away with it more, the way they talk about Travellers in the news you would think we're all born evil.

On one visit, when we requested a meeting with people from GRT backgrounds, they told us that was the first time they had been allowed to meet up together socially and outside of work.

There were many other aspects to the Traveller experience of prison conveyed to us in group discussion that stood out. Many said they knew of people in their prison who had chosen not to disclose to the prison service that they are Travellers, for fear that they would have a harder time in prison if others were aware.

I know lads here who haven't told the prison they're Travellers because they're scared they won't get their D cat.

I bet there are another five or six people I know of here who are Travellers.

There was also concern that prisons weren't doing nearly enough to address the lack of cultural representation of Travellers in prison, especially in prison catering.

We don't have any celebrations or holidays here, the food is never catered for us. Traveller cooking is nothing out of the ordinary, how hard could it be to make some stew?

The lack of serious provisions in prison to meet the cultural needs of particularly Irish Travellers in prison was often juxtaposed by those we spoke to with the provisions in place for Muslim prisoners during Ramadan (and general provision of Halal food, Friday prayers) and Black prisoners during Black History Month. This pitting together of different ethnic groups in prison and the tensions that stem from that is described in more detail in the section titled 'Division'.

Recommendations

- Proactive work to help people in prison maintain a connection to their cultural background, such as connecting them with local places of worship, procuring reading materials, allowing people to decorate their cells in ways that remind them of home, etc. This should fall under the work of equalities leads in collaboration with head of residence.
- Celebration events built into the calendar to give a broader variety of cultural and community events in prison, and these should be developed in consultation with prisoners.
- Create opportunities to share experiences that go beyond prisoner-staff forums and instead utilise more creative means through art and music i.e. creative elicitation methodology.

3.6 Experiences of Muslims in prison

Another group who reported a disproportionate number of negative experiences were Muslims in prison. While Islam is a religion and not a race or ethnic group, there was a general sense that race, ethnicity and religious affiliation blurred into one when in the prison environment.

Many of the complaints and contributions from Muslim prisoners focused on cultural understanding – particularly of officers in relation to prisoners – food, religious observance (and barriers to), and general concerns around class.

In many cases our participants represented a multitude of different identity groups; there were also a significant number of white British Muslim converts “reverts”. While many Muslims from white British backgrounds would say that the discrimination they faced was not the same as their counterparts from minority ethnic backgrounds, they also acknowledged that there was a noticeable difference in the way they were viewed and treated before and after finding their faith.

I've been called a race traitor by an officer before. I get comments like that all the time.

It's actually shocking how badly people reacted to me announcing my faith.

Muslims of all backgrounds highlighted the hostility towards them from staff at a number of sites regarding people praying together in their cells, sharing Islamic literature (which can be legally sent to the prison) and the informal teaching of Arabic and reading the Quran.

Officer on my wing gave me a nicking for being in another man's cell but we were just praying together.

I'm Muslim, so staff think I'm a terrorist. That suspicion puts you on edge all the time. They at you as if you're up to something.

Here they view you as a terrorist by association, it's not my fault they put us all together on the wings... one of my mates on the wing is here for a terrorist conviction but he's the nicest guy on the wing, he was teaching me Arabic, and now officers are constantly on my case saying I can't associate with him.

There were further examples of prisoners feeling they were all “tarnished with the same brush” by association with others on their wings who may be viewed with suspicion by the staff. The informal teaching of Arabic was highlighted as something many believed staff felt uncomfortable about, and some claimed that their desire to develop new skills and grow closer to the Islam culturally was seen as a potential threat to public safety.

It's like they think just by learning Arabic so you can read the Quran you are being radicalised... religion is what has helped me change my thinking from my old mindset, being part of a community... that's what I didn't have growing up.

Alongside examples of discrimination and suspicion towards their religion, many talked about the positive aspects of their Muslim faith, with some highlighting the general benefits of being part of an organised religion in a space where division and mistrust is the norm.

I know that when I enter a new jail, more often the not there will be a community of brothers I can connect with, pray with, study, and where I can feel like I'm not on my own.

There was considerable variation in the experience of Muslim prisoners in different sites. In prisons with diverse staff groups, who have the cultural competency to understand people of various faith and religious backgrounds, staff generally had better relationships with the prisoners in their care.

Here it's calm, people don't really fight and staff are pretty on top of security so you know nothing is going to happen. In other jails I've been to, where the staff maybe don't have much experience speaking to a black man or Muslim, they can antagonise and push it to the point where people get their back up.

We have one pool table here, there's people stood around waiting all the time, but no one kicks off... you need to know how to speak to people... then things stay calm.

Here the staff are diverse... they still can be bastards at times but generally they don't make the same comments or assumptions you get in a place that is... less so.

Some Muslim prisoners commented to us about how varying interpretations of Islamic teaching and religious adoption caused issues amongst prisoners. They felt that unless Imams intervened with clear guidance, these differences would cause conflict, without any safety net of arbitration. One woman told us of an incident where, as a practising Muslim she challenged the views of another Muslim woman. As a result, she was the subject of a complaint pinpointing her as a person who caused conflict, which affected her mental wellbeing.

3.7 Inequitable experiences: Differential treatment / possible discrimination

This section looks at the impact of stereotypes and lack of cultural awareness on prisoners' experience of custody. We present claims of direct discrimination (differential treatment), structural or indirect discrimination, and more subtle micro-aggressions.

3.7.1 Possible discrimination

Prisoners reported that due to stereotyping they receive differential treatment to white British prisoners.

I'm Italian/Serbian and I feel like the white prisoners get put first and the rest of us get put after.

Unequal access to jobs was raised consistently:

Being black is hard work. You don't have the same opportunities. Some white men have five jobs, and a black man can't even get one.

They'll look at the surname. I know three months ago, a white guy and a black guy both put in forms for jobs and only the white guy got a job, and the black guy hasn't heard anything.

Prison discipline was another hugely important consideration for ethnic minority prisoners. Many examples of differential treatment were given.

Some women told us that black women were automatically assumed to be the aggressors, which links with the earlier section on stereotyping and cultural misunderstanding. One woman described an incident between two women of different ethnicities. After the incident, the person of colour reported it to staff and asked for advice. She was then put on an ASBO while the white prisoner was told not to do it again. She and the group felt this was direct discrimination.

Uneven enforcement was often cited as an example of differential treatment. A white male prisoner said:

The other day I see three or four black guys in a cell. The gov comes along and says no in cell association. Then I went up to my cell on the threes and there's like seven men in my cell, white guys, and the gov said nothing. It's not the same treatment.

I see people vaping on the landing all the time and no one says anything, then if I do it the screw will come over straight away and yell 'gimme your vape now!'.

3.7.2 Inequitable structure

One part of the social structure was singled out as a concern: the canteen. Prisoners told us they found they had less opportunities to access certain items, particularly on canteen, or where items were available, they were proportionally more expensive.

I have nothing on canteen that's related to my culture.

All of that stuff is expensive, I can't use head and shoulders with my hair type. The beard oil is made for Caucasians, it doesn't agree with my skin.

(In a canteen sheet that we saw; African Pride shampoo was £1 dearer than Head and Shoulders)

I'm Muslim. We get Islamic order forms. Those items are expensive. We cannot get them out of our £18 a week.

One Eastern European prisoner stated he found his needs were even less well catered for than black or Asian minorities.

I never see kebab day or baklava! So, if you're seeing rice & peas or jollof rice on the menus you're living.

One person reported inequitable access to healthcare:

I think it's the whole system. Even like healthcare, if you're a black brother they'll just put you on meds. If you're white there'll be reviews, 'how are you doing' all that.

One black prisoner told us about his fear about presenting to healthcare with mental health issues lest he would immediately be sectioned or deemed unsuitable for open conditions.

This seems to be what happens to us; they are seen as vulnerable in mental illness, we are seen as dangerous.

I worry as a black man to report to healthcare or wing staff that I'm feeling down, I worry that is the first step to being sectioned.

Family ties was another area where inequitable treatment was reported. We mentioned earlier the challenges for foreign national prisoners who did not speak English. Several of those who did speak English told us about their experiences with the visits system that made connecting with family difficult, especially when the prisoner had no access to a private spends account.

I do not have any visits because it's a 2-hour flight for a 1-hour visit. They have to book a hotel. I've asked for extra video visits but I'm waiting to hear back. I don't even get credit for my phone. Every 10 mins is £2.80 to a mobile in Italy, £3.20 to call a landline. I spend £50-80 a week.

I can't afford to call my home country.

One guy called China for 10 minutes and it cost him £10.

You should get five-minute calls for foreign nationals, but I've been applying for two months and it keeps disappearing so I've given up.

One man stated he felt further discriminated by speaking his native language on the phone with his family, while another said he was denied access to speaking with his family abroad because he was not a foreign national.

My calls were cut off if I talk in my language.

British nationals are denied the foreign national pin even with family abroad.

Another made the suggestion that foreign national prisoners could swap one of their visiting orders for phone credit to ease the price of long-distance calls.

Traveller prisoners whose families do not have a permanent address said they were being denied video calls.

Some of my family live on a site, so because they don't have a proper address they can't get cleared for purple visits.

Recommendations

- Improve the food budget in prisons so that the variety of food offered can be increased, and better cater to minority groups who are currently underserved when it comes to being able to maintain a connection to their cultural background through food.
- Utilise food as a tool for bringing people together. This can be in the form of themed cuisine menu's, collective celebration of cultural and religious holidays on the wing, more opportunities to cook communally and for others.
- Build culturally appropriate public health messaging about depression that encourages early intervention self-reporting.
- Increased visibility of a Foreign National officer who can assist with expediting challenges faced by foreign national prisoners and monitoring of family access and contact of foreign nationals and to publish data on this.
- Equalities officer to equally monitor family contact and access of Traveller families and to publish data on this.
- Create ability to swap an unused visiting order for phone call credit.

3.7.3 Subtle behaviour ('casual racism')

A substantial number of reported incidents revolved around nuanced behaviour ('micro-aggressions') which, nonetheless, exposed biased attitudes:

There are no searches when going to church, but they do search before Friday prayers. Church is every week but Friday prayers are every two weeks.

A fellow resident who is Kurdish asked for a document to be translated into his specific dialect – Surani. Despite me giving this instruction to comms and chaplaincy, they failed and provided Urdu / Pashto and Kurmanji dialect which he could not read.

Some participants observed that relationships between staff and prisoners were different depending on race and ethnicity.

A white person is on first name basis with an officer, if I do that I am shipped out.

I find that white Caucasian prisoners somehow find it easier to approach, joke and have a laugh with the white officers, hence they are mostly allocated wing jobs as well as strategic jobs.

Some people experienced specific instances of subtle differences as deliberate, veiled racism and this is one of the difficulties in identification and burden of proof.

They can't call you a monkey. But they can give a white man a toilet roll right away then walk away and make you wait. Suddenly he's too busy.

The difference between punishment is blatant, my friend had an altercation where he was assaulted. He was the one who got punished. The difference between him and the other guy was that he was black.

Recommendations

- Specific training in recognition of micro aggressions and coproduce strategy wing by wing with prisoners to build ability to build rapport, and educate.

3.8 Accountability

There was clear support for a prison system that deals with racial discrimination fairly and appropriately. Prisoners wanted accountability and faith in the system.

Racism comes in many different forms and it's not a black and white issue, it's very complex, you won't ever totally get rid of it completely but it's important that systems in place to deal with discrimination are protected.

Every time I look at the race equality policy it's a slap in the face. It makes me angry because it's violated multiple times a day.

Many contributions centred on how racial discrimination was managed in the prison system. There was a general sense that at the current time, there was little faith in the process, and an almost acceptance of the situation.

I want to see an end to prejudice of all sorts but I am also a realist and concluded a long time ago that is not going to happen.

I lost hope a long time ago with trying to gain equality for black people.

Prisoners told us about their experiences of reporting discrimination, or 'casual racism' and some said they felt nervous to do this. We also had people decline to attend discussion groups, stating they were "scared to contribute" in case of repercussions. One prisoner wrote that he challenged his offender supervisor's assessment of him, suggesting that she differed to all others in her opinion. He questioned whether his race was a defining factor in their relationship. This was written up in his parole dossier, stating that he has accused the prison of racism.

There was a concern that accounts of discrimination would be disbelieved, and for some, they thought this would lead to a more difficult time in prison.

If my own lived experience at HMP XXXX [redacted] means I have personally been racially abused, have experienced racism indirectly and are aware of it happening to others, who has the right to dismiss lived experience as if it's being made up?

I put a complaint in. The governor said, 'I don't believe you. I believe my staff.' - So, what is the point of a complaints system? - In this system, our opinion doesn't count.

One prisoner gave an example of a time he had been reprimanded for challenging racism. He left his jumper in the washroom, when he went back and got it he found it had "Paki" written on it. He said:

When I went back on the wing and started shouting "who wrote Paki on my jumper? Say it to my face!" I was nicked by staff for "using racist language".

The primary method of reporting, the Discrimination Incident Reporting Form (DIRF), was not spoken about favourably;

There is no confidence in the DIRF process as there is rarely a positive outcome and even when it was blatantly obvious that an incident had occurred, it was classed as partially upheld.

I was being victimised, so I put in a DIRF about the woman who called me a black bastard, and it wasn't upheld. They said it was my word against hers and staff that witnessed it said they never heard her. I felt like I wanted to cry.

If you've got a genuine complaint and you put a DIRF form in, you're probably gonna get shipped out.

I've seen govs where if you tell them you're gonna put in a DIRF form they laugh in your face and tell you to put in 10, it ain't gonna go nowhere.

In one prison however the prisoners felt that the prison took DIRFs seriously.

They have a system of quality assurance for DIRFs which involves a panel including one officer, the deputy director and two randomly selected residents who scrutinise each DIRF that has been submitted over a certain period of time.

It appeared that some people were put off from using the DIRF process and many did not speak out. In one prison, we learned there was an semi-independent body comprised of non-operational staff from the prison that assess DIRF forms, thereby creating a higher degree of objectivity, and prisoners were optimistic this was a positive move. We also heard of good practice with organisations such as Muslim Women in Prison and the Zahid Mubarek Trust being involved in DIRF scrutiny panels.

For those who had their claim of discrimination upheld, the outcome was sometimes felt to be tokenistic.

I have been called a Paki by a prisoner and told to speak English by an officer, I complained about the officer and the response was "I was clumsy to say that".

There were a few responses that highlighted concerns that people were nervous to challenge black and minority ethnic prisoners, or officers, for fear that these challenges will be construed as racism or be met with aggression.

I have served almost 15 years. And I have served this time incarcerated across approximately 23 prisons and I've served time in various close categories from A to C. During my time in custody, I have witnessed and also been a victim of discrimination. I have witnessed staff from white backgrounds and I have witnessed staff from black and Asian backgrounds, be racist towards and discriminate against prisoners. However, I have seen staff from white backgrounds investigated for these acts, but I have never seen staff from black and Asian backgrounds challenged. There seems to be a culture that thinks only white people are racist and people from other ethnicities cannot be this is very alarming and gives people from different races and ethnicities free rein to discriminate and be racist but not be challenged.

HMP XXXX had become a radicalisation factory with calls to prayer now echoing daily from cell windows. Non-Muslims avoided contact with radicals for who knew what would offend them, thus avoiding claims of dissing a brother and the violent response.

The quote above gives a sense of some of the responses we received; in this case there appears to be some conflation between Islam and extremism, as the contributor shares their anxieties around what they see as growing radicalisation of people in prison.

This leads us well to our last theme, which centres around the divisions that emerged through this consultation. We understand there are many perspectives to consider, and some of those which stand in opposition to or vary greatly from the more common responses have been included. Though there was general consensus around a number of key issues that emerged through this consultation, it is important to include those that present a challenge to this consensus; so as to highlight the potential difficulties in developing a shared understanding of issues of race and equality in prison.

Recommendations

- Reprioritise equalities and diversity work to make sure it is an important agenda item in governors' meetings, as well as policy teams across MoJ and HMPPS.
- Ensure that all policy leads – governing prison conditions, regimes, incentives, discipline, security, family contact and others – regularly gather evidence on how their policy area can better contribute to racially equitable outcomes.
- Develop an independent DIRF complaints process including involvement of a paid external assurance to visit the prison to give the complaints process greater legitimacy in the eyes of prisoners.
- The Number 1 governor should attend DIRF panels, with the minutes from these meetings forwarded on to the prison group director.

3.9 Division

Despite being invited to contribute to this PPN consultation, some white British prisoners told us they felt left out of these conversations which affect diversity and equalities. For some, this can create resentment towards equalities and diversity work. Additionally, some white prisoners felt this was not a necessary consultation, with a small number stating that ethnicity was focused on at the detriment of other protected characteristics.

In my opinion when you focus on a minority issue you can run the risk of alienating the majority so that good intent becomes counterproductive. It may sound flippant, but I've often heard comments about the efforts put into marking Black History Month when compared to anything else is it disproportionate effort?

It is important for us to recognise that some white British people felt they had experienced racial discrimination too. This was at the hands of both prisoners and prison officers, and the following quotes highlight some instances from the letters we received.

On a previous wing, another prisoner and I would speak German to each other. Both of us were British but I learned my German from summers as a child spent in Berlin and he learnt his from school. A female officer told us not to speak foreign language in front of her and around her as it's totally disrespectful she could not understand it and we both spoke English. So I said to her sorry, but those from an Asian background speak Urdu or Punjabi together in front of you and you say

nothing but they can speak perfect English too, so the question is by saying what the officer said to us is she being racist or guilty of non-ethnicity in prison? It's a very fine line.

Since being incarcerated at the age of 14 years old I have been a Buddhist a Rastafarian and a Muslim yet as a child growing up in custody I never was taught anything about my own cultural heritage I became confused and lost as indigenous white adults and children we are taught to hold our heads in shame.

Black officer has said to me what does it feel like to be locked up by the descendant of a slave how does it feel now the shoe is on the other foot?

Several white prisoners felt there was a culture of not wanting to challenge minority groups. One wrote to express his opinion that those from an ethnic minority are treated more favourably than those who are white British. He wrote that he considered staff to be too nervous to challenge the behaviour of those who were from an ethnic minority, including loud music.

There was also some frustration with the term white privilege, with some speaking about their own disadvantages and feeling the term was unhelpful if everyone was to be supported to live a fulfilling life out of custody.

I find it racist and discriminatory when people from different ethnic backgrounds use the term, 'white privilege' to collectively describe white people as a whole. Nothing about my 29 years of existence has been a privilege. The majority of people to receive an IPP sentence were white men. This is the biggest injustice of the British criminal justice system has committed in the 21st century.

They have this idea that I'm white, I'm gonna be alright in prison. I've had a shit time in prison. In three years I've never had a decent job in prison.

4. Where do we go from here?

The thing about race and ethnicity is that we all come into the prison with different experiences of life and of community and systems and for some of us our experiences will make us more angry, more bitter, more distrustful. Some of it is individual but some of this comes from what type of community you come from and we won't all mix that easily together. Prisoners and staff really do need some guidance in this hot spot and you look around for that guidance and it's just placards on the wall and the rumour mill about what is allowed to be said and what isn't and there isn't anybody there telling you how to express yourself how to react in this situation what the right language is and how we can just all get along together respectfully.

Throughout the consultation, we were at pains to make sure a broad range of views were heard and that people participating felt safe to share their honest account of what they view as the keyways that their race or ethnicity (or indeed, the way the prison service views them) impacts their experience of prison.

Though some questioned the premise of the question, “Why are we talking about this when there are a million other things to worry about?” most people felt that it was an appropriate question posed at the right time given the prison service had moved out of emergency Covid-19 regimes but was still struggling into full recovery.

There were serious concerns about the extent to which issues of racial justice had fallen down the agenda of the prison service. Many staff tasked with leading on equalities issues felt unsupported, and that the current staffing crisis in prisons was only making it harder to carry out the basic tasks that a prison ought to do with regards to equalities.

We need equalities to be a major focus, not just left to two people who split their time across other roles. (related to our strained system)

The consultation highlights the urgent need for the prison service to get back on track with its commitments to reducing racial and ethnic disparities. In the government’s “Inclusive Britain” report – building on the Lammy Review of 2017 – the government acknowledges that racial disparities in the prison service exist, and that it is its responsibility to address them.

The PRT publication, *Lammy Five Years On*, reviewed the progress made against recommendations made in the Lammy Review, 14 of which were relevant to prisons. The report makes grim reading for those concerned with the government’s approach to tackling disparities in the CJS. It shows that although the government accepted these recommendations, only five showed significant progress since the Lammy Review in 2017, while evidence was lacking that the other nine had seen progress.

This consultation exposed the depth and extent of prisoner experiences of discrimination, inequitable treatment, and divisions whilst in prison. Overarchingly we heard of division, and a space where an institutional focus on improving the situation felt absent.

Prisoners themselves identified a void of education and training focused on dealing with many of the issues we have identified in this report and the frustration with this inactivity.

I refuse to let it impact me because of the education I received. People fall into the formula of division. The solution has to be education for prisoners about race.

There is not enough thought put into how race affects people in prison, any response to issues raised is often knee jerk.

It is also important to highlight, despite the tensions explored in the report, it is also clear that a shared sense of conviviality across the diversity of prisoners and a shared understanding of the impact of imprisonment created moments and spaces on the wings when race was not a predominant issue.

Some prisoners spoke to us of the closed space and enforced living together conditions as being a mechanism of shared learning about differing cultures and ways of being.

...in never really had been around so many different people before I despite the stress of being here I have met some good people and learnt to be interested in finding out about people. There's a black prisoner here who is like the chef, and he loves to cook, we put in together and eat together and it takes away a lot of pressure.

We also noted, above, our observation that people from minority ethnic groups seemed to have more positive views about their prison experience when the surrounding area in which they were located were culturally diverse.

Prisons in areas with a low proportion of residents from ethnic minority backgrounds seemed to give us the most blatant and problematic accounts of race/ethnic relations in their prisons. The extent to which geographies impacted people's experience also applied to prison staff, a significant number of whom had shared experiences of racism and discrimination they faced at the hands of other staff.

While the diversity of staff was seen as important, many prisoners were adamant that the skin colour or ethnic makeup of an officer was no guarantee that they would be treated with more respect. Prisoners across the estate stressed that cultural competency - having a basic understanding of other cultures and the skills necessary to straddle different identities - was more important than physically resembling the prisoners they're dealing with.

What may at first glance look like an issue around staff diversity may actually be more about the lack of lived experience of living with other cultures, or lack of exposure to other ways of living. For example, white officers at inner city London prisons seemed to enjoy better relations with prisoners from minority ethnic backgrounds than their white counterparts in more rural areas. This was explained to us as being about the level to which white officers "feel comfortable" around prisoners from different ethnic/racial backgrounds.

A key suggestion made by many we spoke to was that there should be a more considered work exchange programme, or more consideration to how officers are posted on detached duty. They wanted to see officers from rural areas taken to inner city prisons where staff are already confident working alongside people from a variety of backgrounds, and help staff develop some of their soft skills and cultural understanding.

Throughout the consultation, prisoners and staff have lamented the current state of prisons, both in terms of the basic conditions people face especially after the covid pandemic, and the outcomes for prisoners in areas such as their progression, resettlement and future prospects. Indeed, many people who shared experiences of being the victim or witness to racism and discrimination, still felt that issues such as progression, basic conditions, education, family contact and training remained equally pressing in their lives.

Right now people are struggling to survive day by day, no one is gonna listen about racism when there's no staff to run the wing properly.

Therefore, our recommendations will make reference to both suggestions made by people we've had contact with to improve the experience of people from a range of ethnic and racial backgrounds, but also address some underlying issues that present barriers to doing the kind of work that needs to be done in order to promote harmony and kinship in prison.

5. Recommendations

Accountability Reprioritise equalities and diversity work to make sure it is an important agenda item in governors' meetings, as well as policy teams across MoJ and HMPPS.

Accountability Ensure that all policy leads – governing conditions, regimes, incentives, discipline, security, family contact and others – regularly gather evidence on how their policy area can better contribute to racially equitable outcomes.

Accountability Develop an independent DIRF complaints process including involvement of a paid external invigilator to visit the prison to give the complaints process greater legitimacy in the eyes of prisoners.

Accountability The Number one governor should attend DIRF panels, with the minutes from these meetings forwarded on to the prison group director.

Staff diversity Create a knowledge exchange mechanism for sending officers from prisons in rural, less diverse areas to places where there is a greater collective and organisational understanding of how to work with people from various ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds.

Lack of cultural awareness HMPPS should create a good practice guide based on the work of other organisations that are conducting meaningful work on racial literacy/structural racism to provide governors with a constructive toolkit.

Inequitable structure Improve the food budget in prisons so that the variety of food offered can be increased, and better cater to minority groups who are currently underserved when it comes to being able to maintain a connection to their cultural background through food.

GRT communities in prison Proactive work to help people in prison maintain a connection to their cultural background, be it connecting them with local places of worship, procuring reading materials, allowing people to decorate their cells in ways that remind them of home, etc. This should fall under the work of equalities leads in collaboration with head of residence.

GRT communities in prison Celebration events built into the calendar to give a broader variety of cultural and community events in prison (i.e. GRT celebration day, East Asian/Chinese etc).

GRT communities in prison Create opportunities to share experiences that go beyond prisoner-staff forums and instead utilise more creative means through art and music i.e. creative elicitation methodology.

Staff diversity Minimise use of staff on detached duty to give prisoners and staff the best chance of establishing respectful relations based on mutual understanding and trust, which takes time.

Staff diversity Create more opportunities for prisoners and staff from various cultural backgrounds to share knowledge and experiences (and food) in a setting that is open and safe for all to participate.

Subtle behaviour Better support equalities leads and their staff to be able to ring-fence their time and avoid cross deployment to fill gaps in staffing.

Subtle behaviour E&D work properly resourced to enable consultations, prisoner-staff forums and training of prisoners and staff on issues of ethnicity and race.

Examples of good practice

Independent DIRF assessments in women's open prison

Prisoner led monitoring and reporting on race and ethnicity in a prison holding men convicted of sexual offences

Non-operational staff assessing DIRFs in a male C cat establishment

Diversity celebration events at a prison holding men convicted of sexual offences

Appendix of previously published reports on race and ethnicity

- INQUEST – I can't breathe: Race, death & British policing
[I can't breathe: Race, death & British policing | Inquest](#)
- HMIP – A thematic inspection of the experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system
[A thematic inspection of the experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](#)
- HMIP – Thematic review on the experiences of adult black male prisoners and black prison staff
[The experiences of adult black male prisoners and black prison staff \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](#)
- HMIP – Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning
[Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](#)
- Baroness Casey Review – A review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service
[The Baroness Casey Review | Metropolitan Police](#)
- Prison Reform Trust – Lammy Review: Five Years On
[Lammy Five Years On | Prison Reform Trust](#)
- Traveller Movement – 'Available but not Accessible': Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers barriers in accessing purposeful activities in prison
[TTM-Available-but-not-Accessible-ES_web.pdf \(travellermovement.org.uk\)](#)
- Spark Inside – Being Well Being Equal.
[Being Well Being Equal | Spark Inside](#)

While race and ethnicity have long been a feature within criminal justice debate, the Black Lives Matter protests and the reaction that followed, sharpened the focus on dignity, fairness, respect and decency for those from ethnic minorities living (and working) in the criminal justice system.

Prisoner Policy Network members have often raised the issue of race and ethnicity in discussion groups and correspondences.

In this national consultation, we sought to capture the perspectives of current serving prisoners and former prisoners and their families on race and ethnicity, to understand how their own ethnicity had impacted on their time in prison, and to explore any further views on racial equality or discrimination in the system. We also discussed the topic with a small number of prison staff.

Our intention with this report was to stimulate positive action with clear recommendations for change.