



Thematic review

**The experiences of adult black male prisoners
and black prison staff**

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

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Introduction

The aim of this thematic review was to obtain an in-depth understanding of prisoners who identify as black men (see endnote i) and to suggest what could be done to improve their experience of prison life. We interviewed 100 black prisoners, 17 key managers, including governing governors, and 66 other staff of all ethnicities.

Problems in the relationships that underpin positive communication were at the heart of our findings. Black prisoners generally felt that staff (see endnote ii) viewed them as a group rather than as individuals, were not genuine in the way they related to them and did not have enough understanding of their distinct cultures. White staff often associated black prisoners with gangs, and black prisoners felt that this had far-reaching implications for their day-to-day treatment and progression. When we spoke to officers, they often denied that there was a problem with discrimination or that prisoners experienced racism. They said that black prisoners would often accuse them of racism without good reason – described as ‘playing the race card’ – in order to deflect criticism or sanction. The use of this term was a shorthand for dismissing prisoner concerns, discouraging staff self-reflection, and undermining prisoners’ confidence that they would be taken seriously. This wide gulf between the experiences of black prisoners and white officers exposed the extent of the challenges that this report aims to address.

Difficulties in relationships between black prisoners and staff also informed our findings on use of force. Risk assessment is central to the daily operation of a prison, and both prisoners and staff told us that staff were interpreting behaviour that they found unexpected, hard to understand or discomfiting as indicators of risk rather than difference. One of the key requirements for effective de-escalation and the avoidance of conflict is the ability of staff to communicate confidently with prisoners, and this is supported by good existing relationships.

Poor relationships between black prisoners and staff that were characterised by mutual suspicion were therefore likely to be contributing to escalation of perceived risk and the disproportionately high use of force that we found against black prisoners. A better understanding of how risk is ascribed to black prisoners and how it then affects their subsequent prison journey is an important challenge for prison leaders.

Nearly all of those we interviewed had difficulty in imagining things improving in the short term. Many prisoners did not trust the prison service to take the necessary action, while staff generally pointed to the problems facing prisons, including high staff attrition rates, staff inexperience and lack of time to build working relationships with prisoners, illustrated to some extent by the patchy implementation of the key worker scheme (see Glossary).

The challenges that this review highlights in relation to black prisoners cannot be decoupled from the substantial problems facing the prison service which have contributed to much-reduced attention to equality and diversity. Our inspection reports frequently comment on the poor use of data to understand and respond to disparities and the failure to consult with prisoners from different

groups about their experiences. Prisoners tell us that even where consultation does take place, few actions ensue. The focus on process rather than outcomes was fuelling widespread perceptions of tokenism.

An important objective for this review was to go beyond identifying problems and find credible ways to make progress. Consequently, we spent a good deal of time exploring promising ideas that were often generated by black prisoners and staff themselves. They included familiar short-term concrete actions, such as ensuring accountability for discriminatory behaviour and good quality data and ethnic monitoring, which could be used to identify and address discrimination.

Black prisoners told us racism in today's prison system is predominantly subtle, unconscious and difficult to identify, and current approaches to tackling it have had limited effect in promoting trust and confidence. Alongside important procedural approaches, the measures supported by both staff and prisoners were largely those intended to create opportunities for respectful communication and the development of mutual understanding. They included cooking and eating together, an apparently simple activity that has deep cultural relevance and meaning; 'reverse mentoring', whereby prisoners provide insights into their lives during private discussions with staff; joint prisoner and staff forums, and joint training and education. These initiatives require long-term commitment from both staff and leaders to work in ways that may be more personally challenging than the more bureaucratic approaches to promoting race equality currently in place. However, the proposals in this report broadly focus on communication; this is clearly aligned to the core prison officer role and would benefit all prisoners, regardless of ethnicity.

Black prisoners often came into custody having already had poor experiences of state institutions, including schools and other criminal justice agencies, and this affected their attitude to prison. They were generally sceptical about the prospect of lasting change within prisons without change outside. While prisons cannot control the external environment, we concluded that acknowledging the experiences that black people bring with them from outside prison and having a willingness to discuss them, would help to build relationships within the prison walls. There was a great deal of coherence in the accounts that we heard across different sites and in different age ranges, and this report contains many findings that are difficult to hear. However, while greater staff diversity was seen as necessary, the character, capability and professionalism of staff, rather than their ethnicity alone, were also identified by black prisoners as critical factors in achieving progress. It was pleasing to find many staff were also looking for help to understand and improve their work with black prisoners, and this report identifies pathways to progress.

It quickly became apparent that black prison officers had their own story to tell and we have included their perspectives in a separate chapter. Their experiences had many similarities to those of black prisoners, in which they described the challenges that they had faced from prisoners and colleagues. During our fieldwork, we were told about some shocking use of racist language by staff, and we have taken the decision to publish these words in full.

The over-representation of black prisoners in a number of critical areas such as the use of force, adjudications, assaults, segregation, and their experiences of

discrimination that are described in this and in other studies suggest that the prison service needs to take meaningful action. Our findings from listening to groups of staff from different ethnicities suggest that there is much to be done to transform both the quality of relationships and levels of understanding that must be at the heart of improving outcomes for black prisoners. This requires long-term, sustained commitment from the prison service, governors and their staff to make the changes that we advocate in this report.

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December 2022

Key findings

1. **Black prisoners described persistent race discrimination in their prison, while white staff felt there was very little or none.**

A large number of black prisoners in every prison we visited felt that the uneasy relationships with staff were partly because of underlying prejudice and racism. They reported explicit racist language or direct abuse, but mostly described race discrimination that was more subtle and harder to prove. Staff generally said that they treated all prisoners equitably and very few acknowledged the possibility that prisoners genuinely experienced racism in their establishment.

2. **The notion of ‘playing the race card’ severely impeded relationships between staff and black prisoners.**

White staff thought that black prisoners routinely used false accusations of racism (‘playing the race card’) as a way to undermine their authority or for some form of personal gain. Black prisoners and black staff usually felt that the term was used by white staff to undermine their genuine complaints about race discrimination.

3. **The discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF) system was not an effective means of addressing subtle racism.**

Black prisoners were reluctant to use the DIRF system (see Glossary) and had little faith in its value. Many were either unaware of DIRFs or felt that the subtle nature of discrimination meant that it was too difficult to prove what they had experienced: we found little evidence of DIRFs submitted by black prisoners in our fieldwork prisons being upheld. Many prison officers were even more critical of the DIRF process because they felt it was used to make spurious complaints against them. Our findings suggested that while DIRFs can be useful in holding people accountable for blatant and deliberate discrimination, they were poorly suited to the task of responding to the type of experience usually reported by black prisoners. Most prisoners wanted a fully independent DIRF investigation process external to the prison, but managers preferred external scrutiny of an internal process.

4. **There was a strong theme of mutual mistrust and unease in relationships between white staff and black prisoners.**

Many staff reported that they had not had regular interactions with black people until they started working in prison. Black prisoners felt that staff had gaps in knowledge and understanding that were filled with stereotypes. They believed that staff were uneasy around black prisoners and found it hard to empathise with them, which led to more hostile attitudes and subtle discrimination. They were often suspicious of staff who did approach them, which perpetuated the cycle of mistrust and distant relationships. White staff generally agreed that their relationships with black prisoners were more problematic than with other groups. Many

were confused and frustrated that they did not understand black prisoners' perspectives, and that behaviour that they considered to be fair was experienced by black prisoners as discriminatory. These findings supported our conclusion that improving relationships in the prison community was a more important objective than the creation of more policies, rules or systems.

5. Previous experiences in the criminal justice system and society affected black prisoners' attitudes towards prison.

Relationships between staff and black prisoners could not be fully understood without an understanding of the latter's experiences before prison. Black prisoners' lack of trust in the criminal justice system was illustrated many times during our interviews, in which they spoke about experiences of discrimination in the criminal justice process from arrest to sentencing. They also described school experiences that they felt echoed their prison experiences, such as being stereotyped as aggressive and being punished more swiftly and harshly than was justified. Many prisoners did not feel that the situation in prison would change without broader societal change.

6. Black identity converged strongly with Muslim identity and youth.

Black prisoners as a whole were more likely than other ethnic groups to be Muslim, foreign national and under 25. Consequently, policies and practices relating to religion, foreign nationals and young prisoners were likely to have a greater impact on black prisoners than on other ethnic groups. Prisoners identifying as black African were even more likely to be Muslim, foreign national and under 25 than black Caribbean prisoners, and they consistently reported worse experiences than the latter.

7. There was a theme of resilience in black prisoners' accounts, but many of them were also reluctant to report psychological distress or mental health problems because of a lack of trust in staff and cultural stigma.

Black prisoners have a lower rate of recorded self-harm and self-inflicted death than other ethnicities, and they are also less likely to say they have mental health problems. Many black prisoners took pride in their resilience to stress, but in some cases this had become an unhelpful cultural expectation. It made it hard for those who could not cope to ask for support when they needed it and led to staff assuming that black prisoners did not need their help. Black prisoners were also reluctant to report mental distress because of the stigma that was associated with mental health problems in their communities. They generally said they relied on the help of fellow prisoners or the distraction and discipline provided by activities to cope with stress. They did not trust staff to respect confidentiality and were concerned that knowledge of mental health problems might lead to victimisation from staff or other prisoners. Some felt it would increase their perceived risk if they admitted to these problems, making it more likely that they would be given a 'dangerous black man' stereotype, which would in turn further increase their vulnerability.

8. **Genuineness and professionalism cut across ethnic barriers and were the most valued staff characteristics.**

Black prisoners gave numerous examples of positive relationships they had with staff of all ethnicities. These were characterised by staff making efforts to be helpful and, most importantly, being genuine and professional in their interactions with them. Key workers or personal officers were often seen as the source of the most positive relationships, which helped to cut across barriers of suspicion and mistrust. However, many prisoners still did not have a key worker. Black prisoners wanted greater staff diversity in order to foster more trust and better relationships, but the character, capability and professionalism of the individual member of staff was also seen as being of fundamental importance.

9. **Force was used against black prisoners far more frequently than against other groups. Racist stereotyping and weaker relationships between black prisoners and staff were contributory factors.**

HM Prison and Probation Service data confirmed that black prisoners were more likely than other ethnic groups to have force used against them and, in particular, far more likely to be subject to the use of batons and PAVA incapacitant spray. During interviews with black prisoners, they often told us that the force that staff used on them or fellow black prisoners was not a last resort, and that in the same circumstances staff would have been less likely to use force on white prisoners. Some white staff acknowledged that they were more likely to resort to force against black prisoners because they found it harder to judge the intent or seriousness of their behaviour. Black staff and some managers agreed that lack of staff understanding and empathy led to more use of force against black prisoners.

10. **Black prisoners' risk was sometimes assumed rather than known, especially in relation to gang membership.**

White staff strongly associated black prisoners with gangs and as a threat to prison order, thereby inflating their assessed risk. It was apparent that this label was applied by staff even where there was no specific evidence to support it. Black prisoners saw the work of security departments as fundamental to their experiences and prospects. They were concerned about how their progression through the prison system, opportunities for early release or work could be affected by the gang member label, records of incidents and subsequent adjudications.

11. **Black prisoners had developed various coping strategies in response to their treatment in prison.**

Black prisoners described three main 'coping strategies': avoidance, resignation and resistance to stereotypes. Avoidance entailed trying not to have contact with staff, but also not engaging with staff they had contact with because of their unwillingness to appear vulnerable. Resignation entailed trying not to react to provocations and accepting that they were unable to change things. Resistance was usually

described as working to earn staff goodwill and attempting to disprove whatever stereotypical views staff might have about them.

12. **Black staff made a positive difference to black prisoners.**

Prisoners generally reported better relationships with the small number of black staff in their establishments, who were more aware of their cultures and experiences. In the prison we visited with a relatively high number of black staff, prisoners were noticeably more positive about their prison experiences and were in many respects more positive than the black staff themselves. Black prisoners in other prisons tended to want more minority ethnic staff, especially in leadership roles, because they felt more empathy from them.

13. **Black staff had to navigate complex and challenging relationship dynamics with black prisoners.**

Black staff tended to report good relationships with black prisoners, but this also brought additional expectations and pressure. Most black staff felt that black prisoners were experiencing significant prejudice and discrimination, and many felt a responsibility to support them. However, there was some personal risk attached to doing this; black staff often told us they were worried about being viewed by colleagues with the same suspicion that affected black prisoners and being accused of collusion or corruption. As a result, black staff at all levels of seniority said that they tried to limit their positive interactions with black prisoners.

14. **Many black staff described experiencing high levels of stress at work and discrimination that hindered their career progression.**

Black staff spoke at length about their own experiences of racism in the prison service. They said they were worn down by these experiences and some described resulting poor mental health. While a few said they had been racially abused by prisoners, they experienced far more racism from white colleagues or managers. In this context, many black staff felt they had constantly to prove that they were capable of doing their jobs by working harder and showing more resilience. However, they did not think this would help them to obtain promotion, and cited the lack of black staff at senior levels in their establishment as evidence of this.

Black staff felt that increased staff diversity, especially in leadership positions, could help build trust and support improvement. They also proposed a range of actions, including clear messaging on their commitment to equality from current prison leaders, and the ability to articulate directly their concerns through confidential prison staff surveys and independently facilitated group meetings with senior leaders.

15. **Procedural approaches to address racism were important but of limited value without a commitment to building better relationships.**

Many black prisoners reported experiences of racism that were characterised by low-level victimisation which was difficult to prove. Therefore, their feelings of being discriminated against could not be

addressed through being told, for example, that a DIRF was unproven. This finding highlights the need for a focus both on formal equality structures and on the informal relationship-building that is critical to building trust.

The following suggestions were made to help promote positive change.

- **Black prisoners wanted professional and accountable staff.** This generally meant well-led prisons where high standards of behaviour were demonstrably enforced by leaders and helped to protect prisoners from discriminatory treatment.
- **Black prisoners, managers and many staff of all ethnicities were keen to find spaces for safe expression and communication.**
 - **Reverse mentoring (see Glossary):** Black prisoners thought that reverse mentoring could help staff and prisoners to understand each other and some prisoners felt it would encourage staff to see themselves as being part of the community that could solve problems in relationships rather than blaming black prisoners for tensions and poor communication. White staff were generally supportive but cautious of potential concerns about grooming and wanted clear guidelines.
 - **Forums to promote dialogue:** The idea of groups or forums to help develop dialogue was widely supported by prisoners and managers to help to dismantle myths and improve relationships. Prisoners and staff emphasised the importance of such groups being delivered when promised and facilitated skilfully to maintain confidence in them and bridge gaps rather than create further rifts. Staff were generally open to trialling the idea if the forums were subject to clear guidelines, did not become a venue for addressing individual issues, and focused on promoting dialogue, discussion and mutual understanding. These forums were not the same as the consultation forums that are often run on a small scale to obtain information from prisoners (see endnote iii).
 - **Food as a means of connection and comfort:** One of the more original ideas that we explored during the fieldwork was the role that cooking and eating together could play in helping to support mental health, improve relationships and support rehabilitation. An expansion of the cultural kitchen concept seen in immigration removal centres (see Glossary) was popular. There was support for this idea from most interviewees and particularly from senior managers, as long as there was proper investment in equipment and rigorous health and safety assessment.
 - **Events to promote expression and discussion:** Prisons promoted diversity and inclusion through specific awareness-raising initiatives such as Black History Month and, less often, events related to the arts, such as plays and musical performances. There was some enthusiasm for such events among black prisoners, to bring people together and allow discussion and understanding of different cultures. However, these prisoners wanted to be sufficiently consulted and involved, and to see commitment from prison staff.

Section 1 Black prisoners' experience of racism

The nature of racism in prison

- 1.1 Many black prisoners felt that their uneasy relationships with staff were partly due to underlying prejudice and racism. However, few reported the type of explicit racist language and direct abuse which would lead to disciplinary action and likely dismissal from the prison service. Instead, they described a more subtle form of racism that was harder to identify:

'...when a black guy says something, there's scepticism... when a white guy says something, there's truth to it...' (Black prisoner)

'It's like if you're not white, it's not right to them or if you're not white you're different so we will treat you different.' (Black prisoner)

'... when I first came onto the wing, because I came with my co-d, we're both black, my man [i.e. an officer] would act like we're the same person, we'd be going down the servery and he'd be like which one are you?... We look completely different, he's Somalian, and I'm Jamaican.' (Black prisoner group)

- 1.2 Many described a sense of uncertainty about how to identify racism when it happened. In one prisoner group, we were told that if black prisoners talked about race, 'staff look at you like you are delusional'. Others made similar points:

'It's just certain things happen and you think to yourself, "Would they have dealt with me like that if I was white?"' (Black prisoner group)

'Something might happen and you might go back behind your door and think, was that because I am black?... Am I being paranoid?... Am I crazy?' (Black prisoner group)

'... when I notice it's happened to me a lot... I noticed it's blatant racism, I'm gonna think to myself in my head every situation that pops up, is this racism? And it's gonna get to a point where I start doubting myself, did I do something wrong, is it racism... and it gets to a point where you don't want to talk about it, you don't want to say it's racism, you just go to your cell and you forget these people are racist.' (Black prisoner group)

- 1.3 The above prisoner highlights an associated point, which is that if staff do not entertain the possibility that racism is happening in their establishment and respond defensively or dismissively to prisoners' concerns, it may entrench a belief that staff are racist.
- 1.4 Some black staff felt that black prisoners could sometimes wrongly interpret the actions of white staff as being motivated by racism, but they understood why this might be the case:

'Unfortunately, a lot of these guys do come to feel like the only reason why this is being done to them is because of the colour of their skin... I can understand it because you're very defensive and very sensitive about your skin colour, especially when you look inside the prison and majority of the prison are white staff... so that's where I can imagine they're getting it from.' (Black staff)

- 1.5 Some black prisoners also thought that their peers were too quick to put their complaints down to race and were frustrated about how this undermined 'real' concerns when they came up. In one group, a prisoner said that 'shouting racism' for trivial things meant that serious concerns, such as discriminatory approaches to release on temporary licence (ROTL), 'get washed away' (see 'Reporting race discrimination' below).
- 1.6 While the subtlety of racism was the main finding from our fieldwork, black prisoners and black staff still told us about a spectrum of more easily identifiable racism, ranging from personal comments – sometimes disguised as jokes – to explicit racist language. Hair was mentioned by several prisoners as a target for ignorant or offensive comments; one black prisoner told us that an officer at a previous establishment said to him, 'Look at your hair, it's like a girl... Your hair looks like a dead spider'. Another said a staff member said a black prisoner looked stupid because he had an afro comb in his hair: 'The afro comb, the doo-rag... it's foreign to them'.

'Certain staff make jokes, about my skin, about how dark I am... When I get upset about it, I am the only one who will get in trouble.' (Black prisoner)

- 1.7 Black staff also thought that staff spoke to or about black prisoners in more derogatory terms than those used for white prisoners, and said they had heard offensive language when their colleagues had not

noticed or did not care that they were present. Some described deliberately racist comments about black prisoners. For example, one said he worked in a prison where he was the only black officer and his colleagues would forget he was there; he heard white staff using the N-word and described one instance when a member of staff who was talking about a prisoner said, 'Who does that black cunt think he is?' Another black officer had heard colleagues referring to someone as a 'darkie', and another heard his colleagues referring to a black prisoner as 'Snoop Dogg' as a 'joke'. In each case, the effect was to deny the prisoner respect and individual identity (see Section 5, 'The experiences of black prison staff').

- 1.8 Prisoners and staff commented on how attitudes towards racist language and affiliations with racist organisations had changed. One black prisoner said that he used to see officers wearing badges of organisations such as the National Front and British National Party, and an experienced white senior manager told us that at the start of his career in the 1990s he had seen an officer openly wearing a KKK (See Glossary) badge and had questioned his own place in the organisation as a result. This manager noted that, like him, many current staff had grown up with some family members or friends for whom racist terms were not considered problematic, and that, while attitudes had improved and explicit racism was not tolerated, staff continued to struggle to use respectful language.

'Staff are very concerned... at any grade... staff at times are scared of trying to have open conversation for fear of saying the wrong word'. (Senior manager)

- 1.9 While experienced managers generally agreed that overt racist language and behaviour had diminished over time, some interviewees had noticed a change in reporting following the murder of George Floyd, which suggested to them that there may have been an increase in blatant racist behaviour and/or more likelihood of it being reported:

'DIRFs and the testimony of black prisoners have changed over the years – now they are less likely to be about overt racism, more about microaggressions and how people perceive and interpret behaviours... However, we have noticed a change since Black Lives Matter. We now again see more DIRFs saying, "I was called the N-word" and the like. Perhaps because people were being alerted a little more, and now there is polarisation in society, people feel empowered to say things and challenge, and this seems to be reflected in more name-calling in prisons.' (CVS) (See 'Reporting race discrimination' below.)

- 1.10 In one prison a black senior leader described feeling despondent when, shortly after the murder of George Floyd, she had to deal with the behaviour of an officer who referred provocatively to the circumstances of the murder:

'Four days later... the white officer said to the black prisoner in front of other black prisoners, hurry up and get your lunch or I'll kneel on your neck for nine minutes... as a joke.' (Black senior manager)

- 1.11 She said that prisoners who witnessed it had completed a DIRF but were scared to put it in the DIRF box for collection in case of repercussions (see 'Reporting race discrimination' below), and instead reported it privately to her when she happened to go onto the wing. Coincidentally, in a different prison, we interviewed a black prisoner who had been one of the witnesses to this incident. He confirmed that he felt inhibited from reporting it at first but was encouraged to do so by the fact that a black senior manager was on the wing and willing to listen. The senior leader said she was determined that this incident would not be 'smoothed over' as some of her colleagues wanted, defending the officer as simply engaging in 'banter'. The officer was suspended and ultimately dismissed, and meetings were held with prisoners to brief them on the action that had been taken.

The effect of previous experiences

- 1.12 The Lammy review (2017) showed that black people were more likely to be stopped and searched by the police, to plead not guilty and to receive longer sentences, and subsequent research (for example, MoJ, 2021a) continues to show similar results (see Appendix I, Background).
- 1.13 The depth of mistrust that black prisoners had in the criminal justice system was illustrated many times during our interviews, in which prisoners often spoke about racism as a product of society and a feature of the criminal justice process before they came to prison. For example, black prisoners spoke about being targeted by the police and how negative expectations and stereotyping set in early:

'... I'm a black guy so I've been stopped more times than most of the white guys I know... just a fact... and then I'm perceived in one way but in my mind I'm thinking... I'm not this, what's going on? But I'm perceived that way so I'm automatically being pushed and forced into that category...'
(Black prisoner)

'Police and prison staff... it's the same type of people, they look at you the same, they treat you the same, it's just a different uniform'. (Black prisoner)

‘As a young black boy I was told by my dad and my uncles that I was going to have to work harder than everybody else around you, everybody has that chat. But you don’t take that on board when you are a kid... If I took that on board and my eyes were open to everything that was happening like that, all the racism, all the microaggressions, and all the pushback, and things that happen to you... if my eyes were open to it as a kid I wouldn’t be in jail.’ (Black prisoner)

- 1.14 Black prisoners also spoke of not seeing themselves represented throughout the justice system, and some believed that this led to them receiving worse treatment and harsher sentences than their white counterparts:

‘... I was already found guilty as soon as I walked inside that court... I was the only one black boy in court out of 150–200 people in court – I was the only one black young kid...’ (Black prisoner)

- 1.15 Black prisoners also described school experiences that they felt echoed their prison experiences, such as being stereotyped as aggressive and punished more harshly:

‘I feel like school sets you up for prison, all the little things they do to you in school, when you go to prison you end up looking back and think, “this is the same thing that used to happen to me in school”, it’s the same thing.’ (Black prisoner)

‘There was a time in secondary school where the teacher put me on a table with some of my friends and said you are the “failure table”, you guys stay in the corner.’ (Black prisoner)

- 1.16 The latter prisoner’s friends were all black, and he said that such experiences put him off education, ‘I feel like I give up on stuff very easily because of those situations’. He was excluded from a pupil referral unit because of an incident with white pupils: ‘In their eyes black people are aggressive’. He felt that teachers were not looking at the whole picture and eventually stopped caring about him attending.
- 1.17 A consistent theme from interviews with managers, staff and CVS interviewees was that prison experience and challenges in communication could not be fully understood without an understanding of earlier experiences, where simply coming from certain areas could lead to black people being labelled as problematic:

'... their reaction... or their perception of an incident will be shaped as well by their previous experience... whether in the criminal justice system or the society as a whole, so that will shape how they perceive how, you know, they are being treated. It won't be a reaction to that one incident... but shaped by their whole previous experience up to that point.' (Staff group)

'The problems black men face in prison are not different from what they face in wider society. We need to change the lens I think around asking or really exploring issues on black men in prison.' (CVS)

- 1.18 A black senior manager told us how he saw racism in prison as an extension of the racism in society and that community opinion affected prison life:

'We recruit from the community, we recruit from the same community that says they hate Black Lives Matter... they say it is a political movement... we recruit from the same community where we have racists.' (Black senior manager)

Reporting race discrimination

- 1.19 The DIRF is the key method for prisons to handle and track allegations of discrimination, including racism. Anyone, including prisoners, staff and visitors, can complete a DIRF. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) could not provide national statistics on DIRF submission or upheld rates, but we were able to obtain some information from most of the fieldwork prisons (see data section in Section 6, 'Pathways to improvement'). There was a wide variation in data quality between prisons, but they showed little evidence that DIRFs submitted by black prisoners were being upheld (see endnote iv). The problem with data quality was illustrated at one prison which provided a basic breakdown of submitted DIRFs by ethnicity but could not show if the people who wrote them were prisoners or staff, nor if any were considered proven. The data also generally did not show evidence of the timeliness or rigour of the investigative process, as in most cases we were just given raw numbers. It was therefore difficult to use this data to provide reassurance to prisoners who might not have confidence in the process.
- 1.20 In interviews, many prisoners were unaware of the DIRF process and of those that were, most were cynical about its value. Some explained that the subtle nature of discrimination meant that it was too difficult to describe or prove what they had experienced. Many believed that the report would not be properly or fairly investigated, and that nothing positive would happen as a result.

‘...it's almost like you are fighting a losing battle... the way the system is built is so they win and you lose.’ (Black prisoner group)

‘Prisoners don't have faith in DIRFs because they don't have faith in the system.’ (Black prisoner)

- 1.21 Prisoners told us there were potential negative consequences of submitting a report that named a member of staff, and generally believed that they would be seen as a ‘trouble-maker’. Prisoners described repercussions that they believed had resulted from submitting DIRFs, including spurious warnings under the incentives scheme, negative notes being put on NOMIS, and being moved away from wings where they were settled:

‘It could affect your day-to-day living in this prison... you wouldn't get opened up, you'd get treated differently, they'd probably let you get your food last and things like that.’ (Black prisoner)

- 1.22 Many prison officers were even more critical of the DIRF process, but usually for different reasons. A theme in all of our group meetings with staff was how DIRFs had, in their view, become ‘weaponised’ (see ‘How the concept of the ‘race card’ is undermining progress’, below).
- 1.23 Managers were aware of such problems but tended to have more faith in a well-managed DIRF process. Some described efforts to increase prisoners’ awareness, confidence and trust in the system, believing that improvements would provide a valuable measure of progress for their prison.
- 1.24 A key discussion point with prisoners and managers was the value of a truly independent investigation process. Prisoners generally thought that DIRFs should be investigated by an external authority:

‘Complaining about staff make no sense. Complain about the police to the police. It's like you telling me that my friend did you wrong, I'm going to always have my friend's back.’ (Black prisoner)

- 1.25 Most managers were willing to consider a fully independent investigation process, but there was little enthusiasm for this approach. Instead, they supported external scrutiny of an internal process. One governor explained that he believed the prison should retain ownership of the process because a fully external investigation would result in further bureaucracy and frustration with a system that was already too complex and lengthy. It would also, in his view, lead to more fearful and cynical staff whose concern about external scrutiny would undermine rather than improve trust between them and prisoners. For prisoners,

taking control over the process away from the prison was precisely the point as that was the outcome they wanted.

- 1.26 Equality and diversity managers were aware of the problems in the DIRF system from both the prisoner and staff perspective:

‘... if all members of staff treated all prisoners in a procedurally just way, following a process, and had the same answer for everybody, then I don’t think we would have half the DIRFs we have... and you can’t help but think as a black person, well if he’s getting it [trouble] and I’m not, it must be because I’m black...’ (Equality and diversity manager)

How the concept of the ‘race card’ is undermining progress

- 1.27 With few exceptions, white staff in our groups usually took little responsibility for the problems in their relationships with black prisoners and use of the term ‘playing the race card’ was widespread. In nearly every staff group we held, we were told that staff were routinely falsely accused of racism (meaning the ‘race card’ had been ‘played’). Staff told us they felt they were doing their best but were frustrated and upset about false accusations (see paragraph 2.5). While some were worried about having DIRFs submitted against them, others saw this as an inevitable part of the job and that they should not take such complaints seriously. They did not see the DIRF process as a genuine means of identifying and addressing discrimination, but as a tool that prisoners used cynically to distract from their own behaviour:

‘Everything will focus on that race card rather than the issue that’s got them into trouble in the first place. So if someone is saying someone is being racist, then automatically that’s going to get investigated rather than investigating their negative behaviour.’ (Staff group)

- 1.28 Some staff were using the DIRF system to make a statement of denial rather than to report discrimination; they did this by reporting incidents from their perspective when they believed that prisoners were going to accuse them of discrimination. There was little focus on taking responsibility, a desire for resolution or genuine learning in such defensive procedures, which also reflected, and served to entrench, views about the ulterior motives of prisoners who complained of racism.

‘Playing the race card’

One part of each group meeting with staff was devoted to briefly telling them the key results from our prisoner surveys and asking for their views. The most common reactions were to be defensive and/or dismissive about black prisoners’ negative reporting. For example, in one group of experienced white staff, there was no acknowledgement of the possibility that prisoners genuinely experienced racism in their establishment, and the group went as far as saying that prisoners were either wrong or lying if they reported that they had experienced or seen racism. The staff were adamant that they treated everyone the same and – in common with most white staff we interviewed – felt that black prisoners ‘played the race card’ routinely. This group was more vocal than most of the others we held, but their views were largely in keeping with those of their white colleagues in other establishments. This demonstrated the extent to which the lack of prisoner trust in the motivation of staff was replicated by a lack of trust from staff in prisoner allegations, reporting and perception.

- 1.29 The term ‘race card’ was also widely used by prisoners, who tended to think they were wrongly accused of using it to undermine their genuine complaints about treatment. They said that because racism was covert, it was hard to explain what they were experiencing and easy for staff to accuse them of using the race card. Many prisoners therefore felt that it was not in their interest to report racism:

‘You’re not going to get your enhanced, you’re not going to get a job that you might want, now you are labelled as difficult’. (Black prisoner)

‘... if you use the race card – well basically, you are not allowed to use it... that triggers them... its systemic. They get triggered by it and then they get hands on.’ (Black prisoner)

- 1.30 The message from these interviews appears to be that the term ‘race card’ can become an easy shorthand for dismissing what may be genuine prisoner concerns, discourages staff self-reflection, and undermines prisoners’ confidence that they will be taken seriously. The use of the term diminishes the complexities of cross-cultural understanding and increases the difficulty of identifying and tackling instances of racism or discrimination.

Using data to identify and respond to discrimination

- 1.31 Finally, if establishments are to respond effectively to the concerns highlighted above, they need good quality, properly analysed data to build understanding of their population, and to inform subsequent investigations and actions. At each of the fieldwork prisons we requested a basic range of data on areas that could help to inform the treatment of prisoners, including on use of force, behaviour

management, DIRFs and participation in activities. One prison was unable to provide us with any such data. At the others, we usually received fairly comprehensive raw data on behaviour management, but less so on activities. There was some limited analysis, particularly in relation to black prisoners' experience in segregation, but the data generally did not show trends and, in some cases, there was no analysis at all. We saw little evidence of discussion of the data or action to investigation and address emerging concerns. We saw statistics being used to defend rather than explore racial disproportionality. The following examples provide the best and worst practice that we saw during the inspection.

Prison A: Competent collection and use of data

A comprehensive equalities database provided a good overview of key processes broken down by race, but not all of it was analysed. For example, only raw data on use of force was provided. Data for adjudications and segregation were particularly thorough and useful, showing the number of prisoners, broken down by ethnicity, compared with the overall proportion of each ethnic group in the jail. They showed that there was no disproportionality in relation to adjudications but that black prisoners were more likely to be in segregation. In most cases, the data provided a clear enough snapshot for the prison to be able to make informed decisions about what action was required and we saw some evidence of such actions being taken.

Prison B: Weak collection and use of data

Much of the data provided at this prison was rudimentary. There was no analysis and no evidence that the data were being reviewed or used to inform actions within the prison. There were some basic errors in the management of the data; for example, 'BAME' and 'Asian' were given discrete categories, which reflected a lack of staff understanding and provided little insight into the experience of different ethnic groups. We received no data on incentives, activities or use of force, despite multiple requests. DIRF data provided a breakdown of reports submitted by ethnicity, but there was no ethnic breakdown of outcomes, and no breakdown at all of who had submitted them – not even whether they were staff or prisoners – or how many had been upheld.

- 1.32 Another problem was that the ethnic monitoring data was often out of date:

'Again as a service you're thinking if we're really serious about this... we would... sort out our monitoring and IT systems for that.' (Senior manager)

- 1.33 One of the CVS staff saw the problems with data as illustrative of the broader lack of priority given to race issues in prisons:

‘There has been a clearly diminishing focus on racial justice in the prison service. We lack the evidence now – managers tend to put the lack of data down to resources or time, but it is more than that, the lack of action points to a lack of will, in fact a lack of bravery. They tend to resort to non-evidence like the use of gang stereotypes as explanation. I’m not saying it is always the institution’s fault – the complexity of the issues needs to be respected, there are not just two or three factors involved, the factors might include something like gangs, but not just that. What we actually see is either no explanation or response to data at all, or just a very selective response.’ (CVS)

Section 2 Staff-prisoner relationships

Mistrust and unease

- 2.1 In our survey, black prisoners were significantly more negative about staff than other ethnic groups. They were less likely to report that most staff treated them with respect (62% compared with 74%) or that there was a member of staff they could turn to if they had a problem (67% compared with 74%). They were also less likely to report that they were treated as individuals (40% compared with 47%) or that they had a helpful personal or named officer (53% compared with 61%).
- 2.2 We found substantial evidence of fractured relationships between black prisoners and prison staff. There was a belief among many that staff lacked genuineness in their interactions with black prisoners, and there was a widespread lack of trust in them. Many prisoners had little or no confidence that this could be improved; for example, one prisoner told us that he respected staff but did not trust them as a rule, believing that trust between black prisoners and staff was ‘a lost cause’. Others were equally firm in their views:

‘I don’t really have a relationship with staff... there is only a handful of staff that I would talk to.’ (Black prisoner)

‘People don’t trust the system, people don’t trust these people, because these people are untrustworthy.’ (Black prisoner)

- 2.3 Prisoners often believed that staff had not had regular interactions with black people until they started working in prison – a view confirmed by many of the white staff we interviewed – and that they had gaps in knowledge and understanding of black people that were filled by stereotypes.

‘... a lot of... [staff], they don’t even know how to talk to us, they don’t socialise with black people outside.’ (Black prisoner)

‘Before they’ve had a conversation with me, they’ve made up their mind about me and they deal with me a certain way... a couple of months ago I spoke to one of the wing staff and I said why do you treat me a certain way, why do you have a certain attitude towards me... I have a good relationship with this guy now... The answer was there’s only one African guy in my village so I’ve never had an interaction with a black person from an inner city area... He said he didn’t know how to take me...’ (Black prisoner)

'People fear what they don't understand. TV and media doesn't help as BAMEs, if you're Asian they say you're a terrorist... If you're black you must be a drug dealer or knife crime. So the perception that these staff have... is very negative of BAME prisoners.' (Black prisoner group)

- 2.4 In a reflection of this, a staff group talked of being unfairly stereotyped and were frustrated that that could not spend more time with prisoners or give attention to race and diversity work because of pressures on time and resources:

'... we suffer still from an image problem in terms of being the caricature of the knuckle-dragging screw who locks you up... over the last five to 10 years a lot of the positive stuff we were doing even around sort of race and equality has basically been swept aside and forgotten about really.' (Staff group)

- 2.5 There was a high degree of staff confusion and concern about the difficulties they faced in communicating effectively with black prisoners. Some staff were very surprised that black prisoners had reported more negatively than others in our survey. Others told us they were hurt and upset about insinuations that they were racist:

'... I will be honest... if somebody says to me [you're racist] I'll blow my stack... there's no way I'm racist whatsoever... really irritating'. (Staff group)

- 2.6 Prisoners explained that when staff made efforts to communicate with them, they were suspicious about their motives and some thought staff approached them because they wanted information; this perpetuated the cycle of mistrust and distant relationships (see paragraphs 2.21–2.22). Some black prisoners said that they wanted to have better relationships with staff but did not feel encouraged to foster them:

'They don't engage with the coloured folks as much as they engage with the non-coloured folks, so you don't feel comfortable to go and speak to them in that sort of way unless it's somebody that you really get on with...' (Black prisoner)

- 2.7 One of our CVS interviewees summarised the situation as follows:

'We have this breakdown of relationships within prison between staff and black prisoners. We have black prisoners actually not feeling safe to speak openly...' (CVS)

- 2.8 Many white officers confirmed that they found it hard to relate to black prisoners, and this had consequences for their experience of disciplinary processes and use of force (see Section 4, 'Use of force and assessing risk').
- 2.9 In one prison, when asked to discuss relationships with black prisoners, the staff group focused primarily on the concerns they had in relation to disciplinary process and challenge, and very little on positive interactions. They did not think that their training had prepared them for the complexity of the work they were doing and were especially worried that the high turnover of staff meant that new officers were learning from colleagues who were themselves very inexperienced:

'Sometimes new staff probably could be quite timid in terms of challenging a black prisoner because they're scared of comments or something maybe being made to them...' (Staff group)

- 2.10 As the group discussed how to develop more confidence in challenging black prisoners, some were confused and about why they had to think about doing anything differently given that the group as a whole had agreed that they treated everyone the same regardless of ethnicity:

'The whole thing frustrates and baffles me... there's so much segregation between different groups and a lot of it I don't get... you're learning how to challenge somebody as an individual, not as a group.' (Staff group)

- 2.11 The black staff we interviewed usually agreed that relationships between black prisoners and white staff could be problematic, and many reported having similar difficulties themselves (see Section 5, 'The experiences of black prison staff'). They tended to take a broad perspective, suggesting that black prisoners' lack of trust stemmed from experiences before prison, including previous encounters with authority, and the lack of diversity in the criminal justice system. For example, they cited the fact that black prisoners had probably been arrested by a white officer, were in court with a predominantly white bench, sentenced by a white judge and then ended up in prison with mostly white staff.
- 2.12 Black staff felt that their white colleagues were more inclined to talk to and help white prisoners, and that white staff did not try hard enough to get to know black prisoners. Some thought that black prisoners had a worse experience of procedural justice as a result, for example in relation to disciplinary action and job allocations, highlighting the potential impact of weak relationships on day-to-day treatment. A black prison officer felt that this lack of empathy and the strained interactions he saw between white staff and black prisoners had deep roots:

'... they are not used to dealing with black people, basically I think racism is a big problem here... They don't know better, most of them... it's ignorance, they grew up in [local area], they went to school in [local area], they never went anywhere where the population is diverse, so all they know is what their parent and grandparent have been talking about... it's just ignorance.'
(Black staff)

- 2.13 On a similar theme, some black prisoners reported that staff simply could not empathise with them in the way they could with white prisoners, because they could not visualise black people as being their children, parents, nephews or other family members. This resonated with their experiences of authority figures in the community, set low expectations of how they would be treated in prison and put them on their guard:

'You ask any black prisoner or any black person "do you feel accepted or tolerated?" And I've asked this question to loads of guys in here over the last six/seven months... do I tell you what the answer is? Come on man... tolerated... and that's not just even in jail, its outside... your whole existence is based on toleration... so if I exist in this space of toleration right, I've got to be careful what, how, I say...'
(Black prisoner)

- 2.14 A prison governor was equally clear about the problems of both limited staff diversity and the lack of experience of minority communities, which he felt was sometimes leading to staff dealing with their own feelings of vulnerability by overreacting towards black prisoners:

'I have got staff here... they've said they hadn't seen or been speaking to anybody from a minority ethnic group until they came to [local area]. They've lived in... communities that are very closed and don't have any diversity to them... and so they're exposed to new challenges and issues and I think that can make people feel vulnerable and can make them think that people are being aggressive when they're not being.'
(Senior manager)

Diversity within the black group

- 2.15 We found some striking differences in our surveys between the reported experiences of black African and black Caribbean prisoners. Black African prisoners were more likely to be foreign nationals (13% compared with 3%) and Muslim (48% compared with 31%). As being black African, Muslim and younger were characteristics individually associated with a more negative experience, it was not surprising that in combination they tended to produce the worst findings. For example, black African prisoners were less positive than black Caribbean prisoners about experiencing respect from most staff (54% compared with 67%) and about having someone to turn to with a problem (60% compared with 71%). Black Muslim prisoners were also less likely than black prisoners of other religions to report respect from most staff (54%

compared with 67%) and more likely to report being victimised by staff (56% compared with 44%).

- 2.16 Black prisoners were more likely than other ethnic groups to be Muslim (38% compared with 12% of other ethnic groups), foreign national (12% compared with 7%), and younger (17% of black prisoners were under 21 years old compared with 5% of others; and 39% were 25 or under compared with 17%). This meant that policies and practices relating to Muslim, foreign national and younger prisoners were likely to have a greater impact on black prisoners than on other groups.
- 2.17 A nuanced form of racial discrimination that some black prisoners explored during interviews was that of colourism (see Glossary); these prisoners felt that darker-skinned prisoners were treated more harshly as a result of their skin tone, and that lighter-skinned prisoners were viewed as less threatening:

‘The darker you are, you get treated more like a criminal.’ (Black prisoner)

‘So sometimes a darker skin person might be looked at by a fair skinned white person as scary or unapproachable.’ (Black prisoner)

- 2.18 Another prisoner felt that staff were more comfortable talking to mixed heritage prisoners than those with darker skin colours, while a lighter skinned black prisoner described how his colour made things easier for him than for his darker colleagues.
- 2.19 In general, these findings also mean that there is a need to be open to the considerable differences between people who describe themselves as black in the attempts to deepen understanding between staff and black prisoners.

Black prisoners’ coping strategies

- 2.20 Black prisoners had developed ways of managing the difficulties they reported in communication and trust with staff, which can be summarised as three broad and overlapping strategies: avoiding staff, resignation and adaptation.

Avoidance

- 2.21 Although avoidance behaviour was a theme at most prisons, it was more prominent at the open prison we visited, where prisoners could go directly to the departments they needed without asking prison officers for help or betraying any vulnerability (see Section 3, ‘Mental health and support’):

'I don't really speak to staff here... They'll be your friend one day but when they are with their friends, they'll treat you differently and end up getting you into trouble. So I like to leave it simple, hello, bye that's it...once they get comfortable with you, they can do whatever they want.' (Black prisoner)

- 2.22 At one establishment, a prisoner said that wing staff made an effort to get to know him, but he did not trust their intentions and therefore 'shut down' their efforts and tried to deter them through his body language, for example by not looking at them or keeping a neutral look on his face whenever they spoke to him. Another prisoner said:

'If they don't know you, they feel cautious of you, but when they get to know you, they feel like they can tell you to do things, they feel like they can make you do things... The least communication the better because they will probably leave you alone.' (Black prisoner)

Resignation

- 2.23 Other black prisoners were more likely to report acceptance, resignation and a feeling of being powerless to change things. One said that after experiencing direct racism, he approached black staff for help. He felt they understood what he was going through and he followed their advice, which was to submit a DIRF. However, as he saw no result from it, he lost faith in his ability to change his situation: 'It is something that we (i.e. black people) all have to accept and live with'. Many others in different prisons made similar points:

'That's the best thing I learnt from jail. Patience and how to ignore stuff... you can never win so it's pointless.' (Black prisoner)

'Instead of causing a conflict, it's best to just take it on the chin and move on... I've weighed up the options... it's not worth it... You know you don't have the power to do anything, so what is the point in standing forward... there is no point arguing... you're outnumbered so why are you going to start a fight that you can't finish.' (Black prisoner)

'You kind of learn to live with that systemic racism... That is the problem, the fact that you just accept it... But it's just, when you sit here and you are asking us certain questions, I'm sitting here thinking "It's just how it is innit", that's all you can say, "That's how it is."' (Black prisoner group)

Adaptation

- 2.24 A common strategy used by prisoners was working hard to earn staff goodwill and respect, and part of this task was to disprove stereotypes to help make staff more comfortable around them. These prisoners changed the way they would normally communicate, adjusting their speech and behaviour because they believed that would result in fairer treatment (see endnote v).

'If you're a coloured person you have to prove something to the officers to get their respect... like if there's a situation with a non-coloured person, the situation will get put to the past the next day but if you're coloured... by the end of the week, every officer has a situation with you.' (Black prisoner group)

'I always use my manners and politeness, and I always try to speak with a softer voice.' (Black prisoner)

- 2.25 Another prisoner said that once staff got to know you, there was less need to change behaviour to this degree. He thought his own relationships with staff were generally positive because he spoke with 'good English', 'sounding white', which meant he was more accepted by staff.

How much difference do black staff make to prisoners?

- 2.26 The lack of representation of minority ethnic staff, especially in leadership roles, and the way that this affected trust and communication, was a prominent theme in prisoner and staff interviews (see Section 5, 'The experiences of black staff').

'...all the managers here are all white... If prisoners don't see a black member of staff or somebody like them, who do they trust?' (Black staff)

- 2.27 Prisoners generally reported better relationships with black staff – they described how black staff were more aware of their cultures and experiences, and that they felt more comfortable in those relationships. They felt less isolated in the prison and were more likely to seek out their support. In the only prison we visited with a relatively high number of black staff, prisoners in both the group and one-to-one interviews were noticeably more positive about their prison experiences and were in many respects more positive than the black staff themselves (see Section 5, 'The experiences of black staff').

'Makes it a bit more bearable [i.e. having black staff], you can just about tolerate the nonsense. Whereas if you are in a jail up north, if you are in a jail in Kent, it's in your face, it can be very blunt'. (Black prisoner group)

- 2.28 These staff helped black prisoners to feel more included in the prison community. They felt that white staff could imagine white prisoners as their family members, and that black staff were more likely to relate to them in the same way. One prisoner described a black officer who many black prisoners called 'auntie', around whom they made an effort to behave well:

'She treats you with respect and she talks to you like she genuinely cares... They look at you like you're one of their kids, that's probably how the white staff look at the white boys. They look at them differently to how they look at us. They look at us like "you lot are born criminals."' (Black prisoner group)

'I think black staff will more look at... me personally as a brother or a cousin or something, so when I'm genuinely talking and if I was to do hand gestures it seems normal for them but white staff see it as more intimidating'. (Black prisoner)

- 2.29 The use of familial nicknames as an indication of connection and a term of respect, especially 'uncle' and 'auntie', was also mentioned by black staff (see Section 5, 'The experiences of black staff'). In contrast, in a prison with no black officers as far as one prisoner knew, he said:

'There's nobody to talk to who will understand the struggle we are going through on a daily basis.' (Black prisoner)

- 2.30 While there were very few black staff in most of the prisons we visited, some prisoners were very positive about the increased diversity they had seen in prisons:

'I decided to also speak to a much older prisoner who said to me that he did a sentence for 16 years eight years ago and he said then when he came into [the prison]... there were literally no black officers you know, at all. And he said that when he walked in this time and saw so many black officers, his words actually were, "it filled me with joy"'. (CVS)

- 2.31 The way that diversity in staffing could facilitate trust and break down some of the barriers between staff and prisoners was also illustrated at the start of one black prisoner group run by inspectors. The prisoners said they were pleasantly surprised that both HM Inspectorate of Prisons interviewers were from minority ethnic groups, explaining that they came to the session hesitant about participating but had now decided 'to stay and give it a go' as they thought their views would be taken seriously.

- 2.32 However, black prisoners told us that black staff sometimes limited their interactions with them to avoid being seen as too friendly and potentially collusive by white staff, a view echoed by black staff

themselves (see Section 5, 'The experiences of black staff'). In a rural prison, prisoners told us that one of the very few black officers had a good rapport with black prisoners, and they were concerned that he had been moved to a different unit because his colleagues were apparently worried about him talking 'slang' to prisoners: 'the moment they see him friendly...it's "oh is he bringing parcels for them"'. Some prisoners also thought that black staff felt forced to be more rigid than their white colleagues in applying rules towards them to avoid accusations of helping black prisoners more than others (see paragraph 5.10).

- 2.33 In another prison with few black staff, prisoners were concerned about the welfare of a black officer who they felt was victimised by his colleagues because he was fair and supportive towards black prisoners. We later spoke to this officer and he told us that he had experienced sustained and debilitating racism from other staff (see case study at paragraph 5.18).

Characteristics of positive relationships between black prisoners and staff

- 2.34 Despite the findings described above, black prisoners also gave examples of some positive and genuine relationships they had with staff. They explained that these relationships improved their experience in prison and made them feel human; they mentioned factors such as care, respect and sincerity. They also reported that when staff made genuine efforts to help them and to explain decisions, it made a real difference to their prison experience.

'He [officer] understands my behaviour... He chats to me like I am a human being.' (Black prisoner)

'If somebody takes time out of their day to ask how your day is going, and ask how you are, and if you're ok, with the situation I find myself in. I feel like that goes a long way.' (Black prisoner)

'For me what I look for as a prisoner, and I think it should be an obligation from staff, to just show a duty of care, not treat you like a number.' (Black prisoner)

- 2.35 The importance of key workers or personal officers in improving relationships was clear. Often prisoners referred to them as the main source of positive relationships with staff, cutting across barriers of suspicion and mistrust. However, many did not yet have an appointed or easily available key worker (see also HMI Probation and HMI Prisons 2022). Some explained that key work had helped them to build trust in the prison system more generally by reducing their anxiety as their questions were answered:

‘Those staff (i.e. key workers) understand what I'm going through and when I see them they are the ones I want to talk to because they care... when I speak to them they listen, sometimes they come to see if everything's all right.’ (Black prisoner)

‘As soon as I got sentenced, I saw my key worker, I was in an A Cat jail and he was helpful and said you know what, let's see what courses we need to do.’ (Black prisoner)

- 2.36 While many interviewees believed that greater staff diversity would help foster more trust and better relationships, the character and capability of the individual member of staff was seen as more fundamental than their ethnicity, as articulated by the following interviewee:

‘Does having a black member of staff qualify them to be an expert in dealing with issues with black prisoners? That's often a mistake that prisons make. One of our practitioners is a white male practitioner dealing with issues as a representative of [CVS group] in a number of prisons. Now what qualifies him to be relevant is not because he's black, but... the awareness and... the confidence to ask the questions that need to be asked. It's an illusion that you have to have a black member of staff to deal with issues for black prisoners. It's like saying that myself, as a social worker working in prison with travellers, needed to be from a travelling background.’ (CVS)

- 2.37 In other words, the competence and professionalism of staff was a critical factor in achieving progress (see Section 5, ‘Pathways to improvement’).

Section 3 Mental health and support

Experience of mental health difficulties

- 3.1 In our survey, black prisoners were less likely than other ethnic groups to say that they had a range of vulnerabilities. Only 29% of black prisoners reported mental health problems compared with 50% of all other ethnicities; 25% reported a disability compared with 38% of others; and 14% said they had a drug problem on entry into the prison compared with 28% of others. One of the main questions explored during our fieldwork interviews was whether black prisoners really had less experience of such things, or whether they were simply reluctant to report them; if the latter was the case, we asked why they did not want others to know about their problems. These discussions almost always concerned black prisoners' management of mental health problems rather than issues such as drug use or disabilities. This section therefore focuses mainly on mental health.
- 3.2 The rates of self-inflicted death and self-harm for black prisoners have historically been lower than for white prisoners and, to some extent, other ethnic groups (see Ministry of Justice 2021c). In 2012, there were 65 recorded incidents of self-harm per 1,000 black prisoners and by 2021, the figure had risen to 197 per 1,000 prisoners. However, this was still lower than all other ethnic groups in 2021; Asian prisoners (208 incidents for every 1,000 prisoners) had the next lowest rate of self-harm and white prisoners (852 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) by far the highest. Similarly, rates of self-inflicted death are relatively low for black prisoners. In 2021, there were 0.4 self-inflicted deaths per 1,000 black prisoners, compared with 1.1 for Asian prisoners, 0.0 for mixed heritage prisoners and 1.3 for white prisoners. In all but one of the nine years from 2012 to 2020, black prisoners had the lowest rate of self-inflicted deaths compared with the Asian, mixed heritage and white groups.
- 3.3 Our interview findings, discussed below, suggested that the lower likelihood of black prisoners self-harming resulted from a combination of individual cultural beliefs, the tendency to look for and find support from peers, and to use the activities on offer to help manage stress. At the same time, we found some evidence of an over-estimation of the resilience of black prisoners by staff and insufficient understanding of how vulnerability can find expression in multiple ways that do not involve direct self-harm.

Reluctance to report because of shame or pride

- 3.4 Many black prisoners and staff of all ethnicities told us that it felt less acceptable for black people, especially younger men, to be open about mental health difficulties they might be experiencing. As a result, black prisoners put pressure on themselves to meet the cultural expectation of 'staying strong'. Staff and prisoners tended to agree that this attitude came from both shame and a sense of pride in showing personal

resilience, although staff were more likely than prisoners to interpret this as 'bravado'. Prisoners told us that many black people would neither recognise nor acknowledge psychological insecurity because talking about mental health was seen as 'shameful'.

'Black people have this pride like "yeah I'm the man", they don't want to be seen as weak and if you demonstrate vulnerability that shows you're weak.'
(Black prisoner)

'I don't know if anyone in my family has ever suffered with mental health, they haven't brought it up, never mentioned it so coming here and hearing these people suffer from ADHD, schizophrenia, all of that, I'm like what is all that, so if they [i.e. other black prisoners] have similar upbringings to me, which a lot of them do, they probably just wouldn't even see it as mental health, they will just see it as, that's the way of life and this is what I'm going through'. (Black prisoner)

'Don't show them that you're scared, don't show them that you're frightened, you know, be proud, they're not affected... I think that's... a result of their parents being treated the way their parents were treated in the 70s and 80s...' (Equality and diversity lead manager)

'... there is a culture of shame around things like mental health, there is a danger that we think things are not going on when they are'. (Equality and diversity lead manager)

- 3.5 Some prisoners told us that what they saw as a cultural taboo against revealing vulnerability was complex and deep-rooted; for example, one prisoner said that black people carried with them the history of their predecessors 'who have been through worse' and therefore felt they should not complain about what they were going through.
- 3.6 Black staff tended to agree that black prisoners were less likely to report vulnerabilities, and some reflected that their own upbringings similarly discouraged them from showing weakness or that they were not coping. However, they thought that black prisoners would ask each other or black staff for help.

'I think that one's more of a cultural thing... I think in the African and Caribbean community, it's only recently in like the last five/10 years, there's been a bigger push to mental health and stuff'. (Black staff)

'.. I think it's just a cultural thing, I think they're mentally strong. When asking for help they'd ask each other as opposed to staff so it would have to be something of a medical nature where [if] they were ill if they were to ask for help from a lot of white staff. However, I'm quite sure they'd bombard certain black staff if they needed some help.' (Black staff)

Reluctance to report because of shallow relationships, fear and lack of trust

- 3.7 Black prisoners told us that relationships with staff were also a factor in them not reporting vulnerabilities.

'I feel degraded by some staff – this is why people don't want to share their personal things like self-harm.' (Black prisoner)

- 3.8 Some felt that staff accepted the 'strong' self-image too readily, reinforcing the expectation that black prisoners did not need support, which in turn discouraged prisoners from sharing concerns as they did not feel they would be taken seriously. This also embedded shallower relationships between black prisoners and staff.

'A lot of prisoners have learned, via school and experiences in the community, that there is no point asking for help because you won't get the support you need, people make assumptions about you.' (Black senior manager)

- 3.9 Lack of trust in authority was a commonly mentioned barrier to disclosure of vulnerability. Many black prisoners said that confidentiality was important to them and that they were concerned that staff would reveal their mental health problems to colleagues or other prisoners. Instead of getting help, they might therefore find themselves victimised.

'I don't make none of these kind of things bother me. Cause any depression, any anxiety and stuff like that, I try to have methods and ways to deal with these kind of things... I am not going to be sad and make it apparent that I am feeling sad about this kind of thing because that what some of these people do want.' (Black prisoner)

- 3.10 Some black prisoners felt that they were already seen through a lens of risk, which meant that admitting to mental health problems would amplify the perception that they were unpredictable and would inevitably be damaging to them. These prisoners told us that staff knowing they had mental health problems would elevate their perceived level of risk and increase the possibility of them being given the 'dangerous black man' stereotype. Similarly, one black prisoner group said that they were particularly concerned about black people being heavily medicated through depot injections (see Glossary), which

was why none of them would seek help from the prison for their mental health. One of the group explained how he actively encouraged other prisoners to avoid medication and look after their mental health in other ways. He said that he read and went to art classes to maintain his own mental health.

- 3.11 Prisoners generally had low expectations of the help that they might be given if they needed support; some gave examples of times when they or friends had sought support and not received it, and others did not feel that staff had the cultural sensitivity, expertise or experience to help them, and therefore did not want to ask for help. This point was made clearly by a CVS interviewee:

‘... we have the benefit of working in prisons where there are therapeutic interventions being delivered and black men tend to be consistently underrepresented... Giving someone medication or referring to the mental health team is sometimes not dealing with the actual core issue, which is about dealing with that unresolved trauma and problems. It's come from their experiences before coming to prison.’ (CVS)

- 3.12 For busy staff, the easiest response to lack of disclosure was simply to accept it and move on to more visible concerns. There was a need to go beyond easy conclusions that black prisoners did not have vulnerabilities because they did not report them as much.

Finding support

- 3.13 In interviews, some black prisoners were willing to tell us about mental health problems and some reflected that they were possibly among the most vulnerable in prisons because of their poorer relationships with staff. Despite the lack of trust that they had in most staff, black prisoners often told us that they were willing to talk with a small number of staff in whom they had more confidence, mostly black staff, but also others of any ethnicity who they felt were comfortable and genuine with them, especially key workers (see Section 2, paragraphs 2.34–2.37).
- 3.14 However, black prisoners more commonly said they obtained support from family and friends outside prison or from peers inside prison, or used activities to help them manage stress without asking for support at all.

Peers

- 3.15 Black prisoners said they more likely to confide in fellow black prisoners because of shared experience and mutual trust. The support that peers provided was described as more genuine than that from staff, who were ultimately paid to do a job. However, black prisoners also recognised that peers might not always offer the most appropriate form of help or that seeking support in peer groups might have unintended consequences. For example, some black prisoners were worried that the use of peer support to help manage stress would make it more likely that they would be labelled as gang members.

Activities

- 3.16 In a previous thematic review, we found that minority ethnic prisoners in general had a strong appetite for prison education, training and work, and felt that they did not have enough opportunities to access these activities, partly because of discrimination (HMIP 2021: 9). These findings were replicated in the current research but in addition, prisoners told us they valued activities because they supported their mental health. In our survey, black prisoners were more likely than other ethnic groups to report having participated in prison education (83% compared with 78%) and voluntary work outside the prison (37% compared with 32%). They were also considerably more likely than other groups to value education (71% compared with 61%), vocational or skills training (73% compared with 63%), voluntary work outside the prison (65% compared with 51%) and paid work outside the prison (73% compared with 57%). However, they were less likely to feel encouraged to attend education, training or work by staff (54% compared with 59%).

Section 4 Use of force and assessing risk

- 4.1 Force should only be used against prisoners as a last resort and should be demonstrably necessary and proportionate. De-escalation of situations is a vital skill that helps to reduce the likelihood of force being used.
- 4.2 In our survey, black prisoners reported more experience of force and other prison disciplinary processes than other ethnic groups. They were:
- nearly twice as likely as other ethnic groups to report physical restraint by staff in the previous six months (20% compared with 11%);
 - more likely to have spent time in segregation (15% compared with 9%), although they reported similarly to other ethnic groups on their treatment once in the segregation unit;
 - less likely to say they had been treated fairly in the behaviour management scheme (usually known as the incentives scheme) (31% compared with 44%).
- 4.3 HMPPS data (see endnote vi) showed that black prisoners were disproportionately involved in behaviour management procedures and in incidents that often result in staff intervention and use of force. The most recent published data show that black prisoners were the most likely out of all ethnic groups to be assailants in violent incidents or involved in incidents with no clear victim or assailant, and the second most likely ethnic group (after mixed heritage prisoners) to be victims (see endnote vii). We took this data as a starting point for a deeper examination of use of force in particular. While making up approximately 13% of the prison population in 2020–21 (see endnote viii), black prisoners accounted for disproportionately more use of force and, in particular, were more than twice as likely as other ethnic groups to have batons and PAVA incapacitant spray used against them. Specifically, they were subject to:
- 18% of planned and 19% of unplanned use of force in 2020–21. This had been consistent over the last few years, with black prisoners accounting for 17% of planned and 18% of unplanned use of force in 2018–19, and 15% of planned and 19% of unplanned use of force in 2019–20.
 - 28% of batons being drawn and 29% of subsequent baton strikes in 2020–21. In 2018–19 the figure was 29% of baton draws and 21% of baton strikes, and in 2019–20, 27% of draws and 21% of strikes.
 - 27% of PAVA incapacitant spray draws and 30% of the subsequent uses in 2020–21 (see endnote ix). In 2019–20 this was 15% for both PAVA draws and subsequent uses.
- 4.4 As black prisoners are overrepresented in the younger age groups – which are more likely to be involved in fights and confrontations that

result in use of force – looking at ethnicity without factoring in age is likely to skew results. We therefore compared the experiences of people from different ethnicities within age groups, specifically focusing on prisoners aged 18–24. HMPPS data covering 2018–19 and 2019–20 showed that black prisoners aged 18–24 were overrepresented in all types of force.

- While making up 21% of the 18–24 population (see endnote x), young black prisoners made up 26% of planned uses of force in 2018–19 and 25% in 2019–20. They made up 28% of unplanned uses of force in both 2018–19 and 2019–20.
- In 2018–19, young black prisoners were involved in 39% of all baton draws and 49% of any subsequent baton strikes, and were over three times more likely than other ethnic groups to be struck by batons in 2018–19. The following year (2019–20), the disparity had reduced but young black prisoners were still involved in 33% of baton draws and 37% of any subsequent baton strikes, and were twice as likely to have batons drawn and used against them than other prisoners.
- In 2019–20, the only year for which data are currently available, young black prisoners were involved in 24% of all PAVA incapacitant spray draws and 30% of any subsequent uses. However, numbers were very low, making it difficult to draw clear conclusions.

Explaining higher levels of force

- 4.5 Black prisoners said that the force that staff used on them or fellow black prisoners was not a last resort, and both they and staff provided some insights into why this might be the case. For example, one prisoner group described how white staff often mistook their normal interactions, which might involve talking and joking loudly with friends, for problematic behaviour, and confuse a sense of community for gang membership. They said that staff saw black prisoners as being inherently suspicious and risky as a result and did not use de-escalation techniques, instead reacting forcefully: ‘They do not give us a chance to explain ourselves’. Others made similar points:

‘... more staff than not lean towards white people than they do black people... and like I said it's not "oh you fucking this and that", but they're quick to press their bell and get you wrapped up or me wrapped up than say John next door, because they feel, like, they can talk to John, because John's not as much of an animal and they feel they can get him behind his door... they just need educating more than anything.’ (Black prisoner)

‘I feel like black prisoners have been looked at as more dangerous than other people even though they are not. So sometimes a darker skin person might be looked at by a fair skinned white person as scary or unapproachable.’ (Black prisoner)

- 4.6 Other prisoners said that this attitude among staff also led to more negative reports under the incentives scheme, and one prisoner encapsulated the view of many others when he said that staff viewed black people's modes of expression and mannerisms as inherently more aggressive than other ethnicities. In common with the prisoner quoted above, he said he had seen officers pressing the general alarm more quickly than was necessary as a consequence of this. He felt that the way to address staff overreaction to normal behaviour was to build a level of understanding that currently did not exist:

'Before you can implement any sort of change you need to understand us as black people.' (Black prisoner group)

- 4.7 Others agreed that a lack of familiarity with black cultures among white staff was a problem.

'You see black people in general... we're talking to each other, we're bantering, we're all loud... these people over here, they're not used to that... they're saying "oh my god, this is a 'gang', what is going on"... they're thinking these guys are bullies. But they don't understand that's just us being us, that's just how we grew up, that's how our aunties are, that's how our mums are, that's how our dads are.' (Black prisoner group)

- 4.8 When asked if there was a difference in the way that black prisoners from different backgrounds were treated, prisoner interviewees usually perceived little difference, with the significant exception of black Muslims: they generally thought that these prisoners were considered the most risky and least understood of prisoners, and were treated worse than other black prisoners as a result (see also HMIP 2010).

'The Muslim thing has got a bad reputation, it's got a bad name because of all this terrorism shit... I've been called a terrorist before... they tried to make it into a joke like, "what kind of terroristic stuff were you just saying then?" "What do you mean? I was praying."' (Black prisoner)

- 4.9 Black prisoners also felt that staff were not only more likely to use force, but also liable to use disproportionate force when reacting to incidents involving black prisoners because of the stereotype of them being strong, violent and aggressive, especially if they were in younger age groups (see endnote xi). One black prisoner spoke of the 'fear factor' which meant that staff tended to believe threats from black prisoners more than white prisoners.

'The younger black guys are seen as difficult. Black people in general are seen as aggressive anyway'. (Black prisoner)

'If a white inmate and a black inmate react the same way, they'll say one is vulnerable but one is aggressive... they would class me as aggressive but the white one as vulnerable.' (Black prisoner group)

'...it is almost as if they [i.e. staff] are scared, but they are not scared of the person, they're scared of what they might do. It's like they are scared of themselves in that situation.' (Black prisoner)

Resisting victimisation

4.10 There was some evidence that black prisoners felt they had to resist or 'stand up to' staff, which may have contributed to more incidents. It is notable that in our survey, black prisoners were more likely than other ethnic groups to report any form of victimisation by staff (50% compared with 41%), more likely to report physical assault by staff (13% compared with 10%, see endnote xii), and less likely to say they had experienced victimisation by other prisoners (34% compared with 47%). Black prisoners gave some insights into the effect that such findings might have on their involvement in conflicts with staff.

4.11 One prisoner in an area which had very few minority ethnic people in the local population, said he had decided to play up to the stereotype of a 'dangerous black man' to protect himself against staff and get what he wanted:

'They were harassing me, left right and centre... I just had to give them what they wanted... I'm a good guy, they thought I was aggressive, so I just went on aggressive to them... "you want to see a menace, I'll show you a menace". As soon as I showed them the menace, it's like, yeah, "you want your enhanced, you want a big job, what do you wanna do?"' (Black prisoner group)

4.12 Another prisoner said that he felt he had to stand his ground with staff for them to leave him alone and believed that other black prisoners were picked on if they did not do this.

'It goes on your file... oh you've done this and you've done that... but you can either choose to live a hard life... [or]... just stand up one or twice and have it a bit more... not easier but you know.' (Black prisoner)

4.14 Others made similar points:

'To earn respect off an officer, you have to have a few fights, you have to do a few things to let them know you won't accept... you know what I'm trying to say?'... 'What my man is saying yeah, you see this prison yeah, they respect violence... if you assault a lot of gobs yeah, they will make you do what you want, but you see being a good boy you get enhanced and you're behaving, they treat you like shit. But if you assault four officers, they'll give you what you want, violence pays, that's how the jail works.'
(Black prisoner group)

4.15 Senior managers raised the impact of the lack of trust that prisoners had in the entire criminal justice system, and how this might lead to more use of force:

'If you've got a group of people that don't trust the organisations that they've... been through, the justice system, they come in prison, they're challenged, they're told to... do something they don't think they should, and they... disagree, they think the way that disagreement's managed isn't appropriate, that will result in more secondary challenges and more use of force... Staff like to be in charge, don't necessarily like to be questioned, and that can lead to a more conflict type of relationship.'
(Senior manager)

'... with this group [i.e. black prisoners]... you're only one clumsy restraint away from causing significant community tension... we don't have the credits in the bank with that group as much as we have with other groups.'
(Senior manager)

Staff views on use of force

4.16 Some white staff were very frank about the struggles in determining how they should assess and respond to black prisoners (see Section 2, Staff-prisoner relationships). In one prison, white staff told us that black prisoners were more likely to be loud and boisterous, leading to staff feeling threatened and being quicker to use force against them. Among staff more generally, there was a strong tendency to talk about black prisoners in terms of threat:

'They take over certain areas, don't they, they've taken over, like, the smoking shelters and stuff like that... going in and playing dominoes... it just feels like they, you know, they don't welcome anyone else in... you never see any white or Asian men playing with them.'
(Staff group)

'People that don't know what they're doing, there's a lot of noise coming from that area and it could come across as quite intimidating.'
(Staff group)

- 4.17 Black staff generally agreed that white staff were more likely to overreact to black prisoners, for example placing them on report without adequate justification, and resorting to force more quickly than they would for other groups.

'... [if you review use of force incidents] you will then realise really quickly that black prisoners are more likely to be dealt with heavy-handedly.' (Black officer)

'Some of our staff... think they're being professional and being strong... I'm following the rules... but they follow the rules more with black prisoners, and especially the big prisoners....' (Black senior manager)

- 4.18 Black staff felt that they themselves were more attuned to and less intimidated by black prisoners:

'I think there's a widespread unconscious understanding of the black male as aggressive, and of the black body, and yes, it does create more use of force.' (Black staff)

'For me, because I'm black, if they're like shouting and stuff, or like being like aggressive, I know that, I kinda see through aggression because I've seen black people aggressive because I'm black... white members of staff might find it harder to read through that aggression and automatically see it as a threat... and so I've seen like times where a black prisoner's been restrained and I've kind of been like, I don't feel like that needed to happen because you could of just spoken to them.' (Black staff)

- 4.19 Both black and white staff believed that black prisoners were in some cases accepting or even trying to live up to the labelling of them as aggressive or dangerous and were more likely to be violent as a result: 'OK, if that's the stereotype, I'll act up to it, I'll become that person' (black officer talking about a black prisoner). The expectation was set that black prisoners were more aggressive, and more difficult to understand and communicate with to effect de-escalation, thereby increasing the likelihood of force being used.

Perceptions of gangs and violence

- 4.20 Many prisoners told us that staff readily categorised them as gang members and/or people who were involved in violent or drug offences, and that this was a major factor in their greater experience of disciplinary procedures:

'They have put me down to being a gang member but...I am not a gang member... all black prisoners from Birmingham if you're from a certain part they say you're a gang member or gang affiliated.' (Black prisoner)

'They say you guys are a little gang innit? But we are surrounded by you guys, staff are mainly white, guys around us are mainly white and you don't target them. There is 30 of them all standing together, they are friends on the outside that is a real gang. But you don't target them. The only thing we've got in common is our colour.' (Black prisoner)

4.21 They felt that these sweeping characterisations were pervasive and consistent and could have immediate negative consequences: one black prisoner told us that staff viewed him as a gang member and when other prisoners found out, they assumed he was from a rival gang and assaulted him.

4.22 Others told us how such stereotyping was subtly reinforced through inappropriate humour. For example, one prisoner described how an officer regularly came to his door and made what he thought were humorous gang signs. Another said that while at work:

'I was asked to use a nail gun, I asked "how do I use a nail gun?" And the response was, "it's just like using a gun"... I told him I didn't know how to use a gun and he said, "it's just a joke."' (Black prisoner)

4.23 Black prisoners were very aware of how their progression through the prison system could be affected by the gang member label and particularly how NOMIS (see Glossary) could be used to record information about them that was difficult to challenge or have changed. They made similar points about how records of incidents related to use of force and subsequent adjudications followed them around the prison system, hindering their progress and opportunities for early release or work. In this respect, they saw the work of security departments as fundamental to their experiences and prospects as the latter had the power to define them as being risky for the duration of their time in prison.

4.24 Black prisoners' concerns encouraged them to maintain a distance from staff to protect themselves, with obvious negative implications for staff-prisoner relationships. One prisoner explained that he was so irritated by the fact that staff had automatically assumed he was a gang member involved in violence or drugs, that he had stopped all non-essential communication with them. Like others we interviewed, he did not want to risk the consequences of reacting badly to staff:

'At this point in my sentence I am not looking to make any enemies... them writing something, that's it, it's gospel.' (Black prisoner)

‘... it's black groups that get labelled as gangs... Because of the assumptions made about that group, they tend to turn to one another to give support much more so than they're prepared to go externally and ask a prison officer, in the same way that they're much less likely in a community to turn to the police.’ (CVS)

- 4.25 The strength of the association that staff saw between black prisoners, gangs and violence was clear from our staff interviews. Gang membership was widely assumed; for example, when asked to describe relationships between black prisoners and staff, one staff group immediately started to talk about black people as gang members and, despite several prompts from the group facilitators, found it difficult to move beyond this theme, even when it emerged that they were not at all sure of the gang affiliations they were asserting, nor had they considered that there might be white gang members in the establishment. Assumed gang membership was the lens through which staff in this group tended to view all interactions with black prisoners.
- 4.26 Black staff we interviewed tended to agree that white staff had heightened perceptions of risk regarding black prisoners, particularly when they were in groups. Some also felt that the expectation of trouble from black prisoners led staff to react prematurely, which created a vicious cycle.

‘Seeing black young men in a group, white staff will think, “... they're up to something”, without seeing the bigger picture.’ (Black staff)

‘There's an assumption, especially about young black men that they are involved in gangs, that there's no hope for them.’ (Black staff)

- 4.27 Many prisoners spoke of the impact of earlier stereotyping to their subsequent experience in prison. This highlights the importance of considering carefully the way that risk is ascribed to black prisoners and how it affects their prison journey thereafter.
- 4.28 Risk assessment is clearly central to what prisons do and both prisoners and staff told us that staff were interpreting unexpected, hard-to-understand or discomforting behaviours as indicators of risk rather than difference. This means that a fundamental responsibility of the prison institution is not being discharged in an equitable way. A better understanding of how risk is ascribed to black prisoners, how security departments may have a powerful and unaccountable impact on their prison career, and how both factors affect black prisoners' subsequent prison journey, is a fundamental challenge for prison leaders.

Section 5 The experiences of black prison staff

Relationships with black prisoners

Complex dynamics

- 5.1 Black staff we interviewed reported mainly positive relationships with black prisoners, most often citing a shared culture and similar background.
- 5.2 Several said that this explained why black prisoners were more likely to seek support from them when they needed it, including confiding in them about experiences of racism or discrimination. Others said it helped them to challenge prisoners with problematic behaviours or attitudes without the situation becoming confrontational; for example, one officer described how his relationship with black prisoners meant he was able, during a Pride event, to tackle some black prisoners' homophobic assumptions. Black staff reported that prisoners referred to them using familial terms such as 'uncle' or 'sister', which are terms of respect in African and Caribbean cultures.
- 5.3 However, these relationships had complex dynamics and were not uniformly positive. Some black staff said they were seen as no different from other officers:

'Obviously there's a few that see me in the white shirt and they just think yeah, enemy...' (Black staff)

- 5.4 Other staff said that they had been treated with particular hostility by black prisoners who saw them as supporting a prison system that was oppressive and racist. For example, one black senior manager described the reaction she had from some black prisoners on joining the prison service: 'you are a traitor, you are a coconut'. She said she found such hostility especially difficult because she had joined the prison service with the hope of making a positive difference to people in her community and saw herself as challenging discrimination rather than entrenching it:

'For me, my whole reasoning for wanting to join the prison service [was] to make the difference... a lot of people on my estate had gone to prison who'd had horrendous experiences and I thought actually I can go and make a difference about how they're treated and upholding their rights, so that was quite difficult for me.' (Senior black manager)

- 5.5 Several other black staff also said that one of their main motivations for joining the prison service was to help or inspire black prisoners.

Supporting black prisoners and managing expectations

- 5.6 Black staff, especially those in prisons where there were few people who looked like them, described feeling a responsibility to support black prisoners.

'If I don't come to work and be their voice, then who does? Who will they speak to? Who will speak for them?' (Black staff)

'... another reason why I'm determined to be in this job is because I want to help everyone but especially like the black guys because they have no one fighting their corner... all the management are white, the governor of equality, I haven't met him, but I'm pretty sure they're white.' (Black staff)

- 5.7 However, there were also difficulties with the expectations that black prisoners placed on black staff. The latter reported that some prisoners made it clear that they expected them to help them or even give them more favourable treatment, placing an additional pressure on staff who already had concerns about how their interactions might be judged (see endnote xiii).

'They've said it to me a few times... "you're a black officer, support the black"... and I'm like, no I'm not doing that... If I was to be like that, the white prisoners would open up straight away and be like "you're racist, you're racist", and we hear that quite a lot, we hear that almost every day.' (Black staff)

'They play some games, mind games... "I'm a black person like you, I want to do this"... I hate that, treat me like another person, not because of my colour... yeah some prisoners expect more of you.' (Black staff)

'Some black staff feel... the extra expectations from prisoners – they expect you to go the extra mile, you are there to challenge things, you are there to solve their problems – which is very stressful, because as an officer you're there to do your job, to unlock doors, not to challenge racists as a main part of the job.' (CVS)

Accusations of corruption, favouritism, and racism

- 5.8 Partly as a result of such pressures, many black staff saw their ability to develop stronger working relationships with black prisoners as a double-edged sword. A strong theme in our interviews was the constant fear of being accused of corruption or favouritism by white prisoners or staff. The risk of this happening seemed to be greater for

new officers, as black prisoners would try to get to know them and talk to them more, although many experienced staff reported similarly.

- 5.9 These dynamics led them to adjust their behaviour and constantly self-monitor to make sure they were protected from such suspicions and the negative consequences that might follow. For example, one member of staff said that she thought it was important to engage with prisoners during recreational activities (such as playing a game of pool with them) because she could have meaningful conversations about family life and future plans – something that is encouraged by the prison service – but felt inhibited from doing this with black prisoners. Another officer said she felt that black female officers in particular had to be careful to avoid giving the impression that they were favouring black prisoners because they were at risk of being accused of flirting.
- 5.10 She felt she had to be particularly careful as she was female, young and black, and working in a male prison; this meant that she was vulnerable to accusations not only of corruption, but also of having inappropriate intimate relationships with prisoners. As a result of such pressures, some black staff described being deliberately harsher in the way that they interacted with black prisoners, for example by enforcing rules more rigidly (see endnote xiv).
- 5.11 One officer summarised the concern as black staff being ‘terrified of putting a single foot wrong’, and it was clear that black staff felt they were subject to a high level of scrutiny. Black prisoners were often sympathetic, acknowledging that staff had to moderate their relationships with them in front of their colleagues to avoid accusations of collusion, even if on a one-to-one level they were supportive (see Section 2, Staff-prisoner relationships, paragraphs 2.32 and 2.33).

‘I can see back in the office they've got their own battles going on.’ (Black prisoner)

Black staff under suspicion

A black senior manager described powerfully how he was worn down by having to battle suspicion and discrimination over many years. He said that colleagues had previously reported his friendly but professional interactions with black prisoners as suspicious, making him wary about how he now dealt with prisoners. He said he had recently given a dyslexic black prisoner some yellow paper because they found it easier to read against this background. He then decided to submit an information report (the term used for a report to the security department) to explain why he had given the prisoner the paper. He was convinced that someone else would report him if he did not do it himself.

Another black senior manager described similar experiences of racism from other prison staff and was resigned to it: ‘I know I still have to prove myself even right now... it's the world we live in... you know you can complain, or you can just get on with it.’ He said that despite his experiences making him

feel angry at the prison system, he was glad to have had them as they had driven him to be better and allowed him to act as a role model and motivator for younger black staff and other minority ethnic staff.

Most of the black managers we spoke to said that things had become easier for them as they became more senior, but that such challenges never went away.

Exclusion, alienation, and a lack of support from colleagues

- 5.12 Some black staff described being unable to form strong connections with white staff and that they felt they were viewed as being less important and less capable:

'I am not a prisoner but not quite on the same level as the rest of the prison officers'. (Black staff)

'Being a prison officer is not deep enough to form a bond by itself.' (Black staff)

'We always had that stigma... Black officers they can't do shit... I'm part of the RISE team [see Glossary] and it was raised, why are there no black officers in security... no one could answer that question... why's there no black people in security... are we gonna let them out the gate or something?' (Black staff)

- 5.13 Many black staff reported being undermined rather than supported by colleagues. For example, one officer said he was spoken to dismissively in front of prisoners and when he approached managers about it, they told him that he needed to tackle the problem himself. He said that things had changed only when a new black custodial manager (CM) was appointed, at which point staff became more careful about how they spoke to him, simply because the CM was there.
- 5.14 There were numerous accounts of black staff feeling excluded by colleagues, feeling alone and being avoided by white staff. In one case, a black officer was even excluded from attending a Black Lives Matter discussion group:

'... I walked in, sat at the back, a CM said "what are you doing here?" I said, "It's a Let's Talk meeting", he said "Yeah, yeah, but you're not supposed to be here". "Why can't I be here?" "Because we want the staff to be able to talk freely". I said, "They can talk freely". He said "No, no, no, you can't be here". I said I'd just sit at the back of the chapel, I'll not be included... he said "No you can't be there, just get out..." (Black staff)

- 5.15 Black staff seemed to receive most of their support from black colleagues or black prisoners. One CM told us that when he first became a wing officer, staff would not acknowledge him and he had to learn things mostly from black prisoners. Another officer told us:

'When you're new here... you're just trying to fit in, even when we go away for training they don't teach us that much so you're just trying to find your feet and the black prisoners will probably give you a heads-up about certain things.' (Black staff)

Experiences of racism and discrimination in the workplace

- 5.16 Experienced staff described more overt racism in the past, for example being called 'monkey' and being given National Front (an extreme right-wing group) Christmas cards. There were also more recent experiences of this type of explicit racism and provocative comments. For example, one black member of staff in a prison where nearly all staff were white, said that he was approached during a staff social event and called a 'black bastard', while another officer said that after the Brexit vote a manager asked him, 'Where does that leave you?' However, in general, black staff thought that racism that was now less pronounced, albeit 'Still there... in a subtle way, a very gentle way, indirect, not direct.'
- 5.17 In an echo of what we were told by black prisoners (see Reporting discrimination, paragraphs 1.19–1.26), black staff said they were not confident to report discrimination by colleagues because of the potential repercussions and a lack of faith in the confidentiality of the process.

'He's on this power trip, we all know he's a racist, and yeah so, he's got friends in security so if we wanna raise a grievance, security will know about it, they'll tell him... you know what I mean... you've just got to deal with it differently which is now why I'm part of the RISE.' (Black staff)

- 5.18 Black staff commonly described feeling worn down by their experiences in the prison service, referring to deteriorating mental health (see 'Black staff under suspicion' above).

Impact on mental health

A black officer in a prison with very few minority ethnic staff was described to us by colleagues as a widely respected member of staff. During a confidential interview with an inspector, the officer described a long history of negative experiences throughout their career. These experiences had been layered on top of each other over time and resulted in the officer's current poor mental health. The officer saw racism as being in the 'fabric' of their current prison and felt that staff tried hard to prevent black prisoners from progressing. The officer felt the need to monitor their own behaviour to avoid suspicion and was particularly upset by the staff hostility they had experienced on being promoted.

- 5.19 A relatively new member of staff said that when he started, it was 'very isolating' as he was the only black person in his cohort. Since starting at the prison, he had tried to understand his experiences and feelings of exclusion and racism, and had felt that they had set off a deep psychological distress at being seen as 'inferior' by his white colleagues.
- 5.20 While most black staff saw white colleagues as the main source of racism, a few had also experienced it from white prisoners. One officer had been called a 'cotton-picking nigger' and, echoing the desire we often heard from black staff to support others coming after them, he had pursued disciplinary action against the prisoner despite reluctance from managers because:

'... for these young officers, these young black guys, because they're at the start of their career, there's got to be some boundaries to be set for them, so I pushed it for that reason'. (Black staff)

Career progression and acceptance

- 5.21 One of the most common workplace issues reported by black staff was that they felt they had to continuously demonstrate their right to be considered competent employees by working harder and showing more resilience than others (see 'Black staff under suspicion' above). Many interviewed staff thought that black officers were more likely to be overlooked for promotion. Some said they had become reluctant to apply for more senior roles because they did not see others being successful, noting that decisions about promotion were mostly made by white staff who, they felt, were less inclined to promote a black officer.

'I haven't applied... other black officers... they've been shut down... one of them, he said, he has a strong African accent... so a CM said to me, "Look at him, do you think he's gonna get an SO?"... this is a black CM... "He won't get it because of his strong accent"... He's a brilliant officer and he'd be an awesome SO and he was just like... he won't get it... so he wants to leave now anyway.' (Black staff)

- 5.22 One officer said that when he complained about the promotion process, he was accused by colleagues of using the 'race card'. Staff also mentioned a lack of encouragement, guidance and mentorship when seeking promotion, and described what they saw as informal support networks among white staff that were generally not available to them.

'As a black officer, for you to get someone to push you, you'd be very lucky so the intention or the aspiration to want to go for that has to come within yourself.' (Black staff)

'The kind of connections that we have is very limited because you don't tend to see a lot of black governors who can mentor you or say I can carry you along myself because you have the potential... like I've never seen a governor call me after work, like are we gonna have a drink, but you see some of my colleagues, they will go drink, play games, do things, even with governors, senior ranks, stuff like that... so that might have an effect on it.' (Black staff)

- 5.23 Black staff in one prison told us that a 'blind sift' model was applied for applications, which was positive, but that the subsequent lack of support offered before interviews and assessment centres undermined the value of that approach.
- 5.24 Almost all of the black staff who had achieved seniority said they had found it difficult to be accepted in these positions (see 'Impact on mental health', above). For example, an experienced black senior manager described how it was often assumed that he was a junior member of staff when he was with white colleagues. This had made him conscious of the way he spoke to people and even how he dressed so that he could avoid embarrassment for himself and others:

'I've been with my dep who is white, and people talk to him before they talk to me, I warned my dep this would happen. He was shocked when it did... it's almost a given now that it's going to happen... lots of governors... wear open-neck shirts. I don't because it's an armour for me, when people see me in a suit they are more likely to treat me with a bit more respect than if I don't and if I'm wearing a tie. So that's a very deliberate thing for me to cope with the circumstances.' (Black senior manager)

- 5.25 A CVS interviewee also thought that black prisoners could see that black staff were less valued because of a lack of progression.

‘...where you would see black officers... you would see less black senior officers and custodial managers. It's very obvious when there's been a black officer who has really been there much longer and worked much harder. He would not get the promotion...’ (CVS)

- 5.26 Black staff told us that they were subject to a disproportionately harsh treatment from senior managers if they did something wrong compared to white staff.
- 5.27 Data in the ‘HM Prison and Probation Service annual staff equalities report: 2020 to 2021’ shows that promotion rates for black staff were indeed lower than for any other ethnic group. Some of our interviewees also spoke about racial disparities in disciplinary action, and the equalities report shows that black staff were more likely to be subject to conduct and discipline action than all other ethnic groups, as well as being more likely to be dismissed following such action than white staff.

Possible solutions

- 5.28 Black staff generally discussed ways of improving outcomes for prisoners, which are reported in the final chapter. Here, we report only their ideas for tackling the concerns outlined about staff experience. It is notable that many of their comments on routes to progress mirrored what we were told by black prisoners (see Section 6, Pathways to improvement).
- 5.29 A black senior manager said, ‘My first thought is I want my employer to create a safe space for me to work in’, which echoes black prisoners’ desire for professional and accountable staff (see paragraphs 6.7 and 6.8). Although nearly all staff wanted improvements to be made in prisons, some did not believe that what was done inside prison could have sufficient effect given that many of the problems were imported from society.

‘We live in a racist world, I believe, and prison reflects the outside world.’
(Black staff)

- 5.30 In terms of what could be done in prison, most staff felt the main objective had to be to increase the diversity of staff, and that having more black staff in leadership positions would build trust in minority groups and drive improvement. To achieve this, they were often keen to have more mentoring opportunities, including reverse mentoring (when senior staff seek the views of junior staff to help them increase understanding and insight), and positive encouragement that might eventually lead to more of them in positions of leadership.

- 5.31 Some staff focused on the need to increase understanding and communication between prison staff:

'... there's still that gap between whites and blacks, as officers anyway. It's always going to be there. I think there needs to be some training for the white officers who have never experienced black people in their lives... they need to just know that we are here, we're just like them, we've got a job to do, we have to work together, bridge that gap...' (Black staff)

- 5.32 In the only prison we visited with a relatively high number of black staff, they felt it would be useful to have a strong collective voice, which was heard by senior managers, for example through regular confidential surveys or through independently facilitated groups, the results of which were then acted on by leaders. The black staff who attended a group interview with inspectors were very positive about the opportunity it gave them to discuss the feelings and concerns that most of them shared, and requested that we give their feedback directly to the governor. They had faith in the governor but had nevertheless been unable to formulate and deliver a collective message about how they felt until now. They believed that groups such as the one we had held with them should take place regularly to keep the momentum going. The governor welcomed the feedback and undertook to act on it.

Section 6 Pathways to improvement

- 6.1 In addition to gathering evidence on the experiences of black prisoners, we set out to explore how progress could be made towards improving their experience of prison life. We asked staff and black prisoners for their views on a range of potential ways forward, which were identified mainly from relevant recommendations and good practice from previous inspections and thematic reviews; and promising work aimed at improving outcomes for black prisoners from anywhere in the prison system, as identified by HMPPS. In addition, where new ideas emerged during fieldwork visits, we explored them in subsequent discussions, helping to ensure that solutions generated by those living and working in prisons themselves were explored. One example of positive practice at HMP Swaleside was highlighted to us by HMPPS (see paragraph 6.13) and we also found that the programme for young black men identified in a previous thematic review (HMIP 2020a) was still running at HMIP/YOI Isis (see endnote xv).
- 6.2 As one of the most important means of understanding outcomes and planning for change is to have comprehensive data, we also assessed if prisons had the information that they needed to help them better understand the experiences of black prisoners and plan for change.

The twin-track of accountability and communication

- 6.3 Black prisoners regularly reported experiences of racism that were characterised by low-level discrimination which were difficult to prove. Their feelings of being discriminated against therefore could not be addressed through being told, for example, that a discrimination incident reporting form (DIRF, see Glossary) was unproven or that ethnic monitoring was not showing any disparities in treatment. This may help to explain the widespread lack of faith in DIRFs, which were rarely upheld in the fieldwork prisons, and the weak correlation between what appeared in some prisons to be fairly robust formal structures for equality and diversity work and the likelihood of prisoners reporting experience of discriminatory treatment. This finding supports an equal focus on the informal relationship-building that is critical to developing trust and formal race equality structures. The former can help to legitimate the latter in the eyes of prisoners. The evidence therefore points to the need for changes in the ways that prisons are run and supports the argument for the approaches described below, which are intended to increase opportunities for communication and building trust. A CVS interviewee summarised the importance of a multifaceted approach to making improvements:

'What I say to HMPPS and individual prisons looking to improve outcomes meaningfully, is that the approach needs to be consistent, coherent and convincing. Consistent means that it must continue 12 months of the year. Coherent means seeing the programme as a whole. For example, seeing use of force as a stand-alone and addressing only that is not the point. It has to be part of a whole. For me, complaints are a temperature-checker as to what is going on in the prison. It's no good applying a sticking plaster when, overall, things are falling apart. And to be convincing, there must be results.' (CVS)

- 6.4 Prisoners were enthusiastic about having spaces for conversations that could start to break down cultural barriers and improve mutual understanding:

'It's not like there is a specific way of how you approach a black person, it's not like there is a specific way of how you speak to a black person but that is how they treat it. They treat it like "Oh we have to walk around eggshells around you and make sure we say the right things." It's not about that, you approach me the same way you approach an Asian person, you approach me the same way you approach a white person it don't matter.' (Black prisoner)

'... first and foremost we're not asking you to be friends with us but have some knowledge, have some insight into our culture.' (Black prisoner)

- 6.5 Some interviewees urged that prison leaders should specifically ensure that black prisoners are better informed about actions that affect their progression, providing as much transparency as possible within the bounds of security requirements:

'This is about who is giving the prisoners a voice. Often there is a complete lack of transparency – prisoners are told there's a security issue, or an intelligence issue, and because it is not specified, it can seem like racism. Some of those barriers can be overcome by better informing a group of prisoners who will [otherwise] say, well, actually this is nothing new to us, and because you are not giving us any information, we just have to assume this is the same level of discrimination that we know from our whole time within the criminal justice system.' (CVS)

- 6.6 In addition to ideas about increasing opportunities for communication (see below), many interviewees from all groups thought that more black staff would help to address perceptions of a racial hierarchy and give black prisoners greater confidence in being able to approach staff. Black prisoners and black staff were especially keen to have more minority ethnic staff in leadership positions (see paragraph 5.30).

- 6.7 Black prisoners, especially those who thought that staff were consciously discriminating against them, often told us that they simply wanted staff to be professional and fair, and that this could be achieved through more effective oversight and accountability.

'We don't have to be friends... just follow the rules... It's not hard to get back the trust of the inmates... just do your job the right way'. (Black prisoner group)

'If they have not complied with rules then remove them... We need tighter penalties for when if you do breach something, or when your name has been brought to the attention for any sort of racism, a thorough professional investigation is conducted.' (Black prisoner group)

- 6.8 Black staff were similarly keen for leaders to ensure decent workplace behaviours and protection against bullying:

'... my first thought [i.e. about how to make progress] is I want my employer to create a safe space for me to work in.' (Black senior manager)

Building a culture that promotes trust and learning

- 6.9 In order to develop more positive relationships between staff and black prisoners, measures that promote empathy and reduce the tendency towards a blame culture appeared critical. Black prisoners wanted their individuality to be respected, to have increased information and accountability from staff, and not to be victimised by them. For their part, staff were usually not aware how race might influence their reactions and frustrated about being blamed for racism that they could not identify. They wanted recognition of their efforts to behave fairly and, when this was not forthcoming from prisoners, they tended toward a closed and defensive mindset that did not allow for learning or progress (see paragraphs 1.27 and 2.5).
- 6.10 An example of how a more positive approach to this negative cycle of behaviour might be implemented is in relation to use of force. The sense of threat that many staff felt from black prisoners implies that a more rigorous and transparent approach is needed to examining the reasons for force being used, to make sure that important learning is taking place. Staff who use force are often making complex risk assessments in limited time and may not be aware of how prejudice, whether conscious or not, is contributing to their reaction. This suggests that, in the spirit of learning rather than blame, post-incident debriefs – which are already standard practice in many prisons – should routinely ask the officers involved to say why they saw the prisoner concerned as a threat, and the prisoner to explain their view of why force was used on them. Some of the means of communication

discussed below could then also be used to further explore such incidents.

- 6.11 The main ideas that were discussed are addressed in turn below. They were: reverse mentoring; prisoner and staff discussion forums; cultural and other events to promote expression and discussion; and using food as a means to enhance communication.

Reverse mentoring

- 6.12 Reverse mentoring is a process that usually involves more junior staff mentoring leaders who are senior to give them an alternative perspective on their work and insights that they may not have the opportunity or confidence to provide in normal circumstances. The principles of this approach can be adapted for prisoners and prison staff but there are some challenges to doing so if levels of trust are low and if staff are not confident about maintaining professional boundaries.
- 6.13 HMP Swaleside (not one of the fieldwork prisons) has, for some years, had a traditional mentoring programme, which encourages black professionals in the wider community to provide black prisoners with support, advice and guidance. This programme was expanded to include reverse mentoring of staff from all backgrounds by black prisoners and was described to us as an opportunity for prison staff to share their personal experiences and talk about anything they felt comfortable to discuss. While evidence of the reach and effectiveness of the scheme was still limited, it appeared a promising and potentially impactful measure (see HMIP 2021, HMP Swaleside report).
- 6.14 When we explored the potential wider value of this form of reverse mentoring, black prisoners were usually positive about at least trying it. For example, one prisoner described how he would welcome the opportunity for staff and prisoners to gain knowledge about each other and see each other as individuals; another told us that, in the past, he had been surprised and encouraged by staff knowledge about his background, and felt that reverse mentoring was a good way to promote learning. A prisoner who thought that reverse mentoring was the best idea he had heard, thought it would be a good way to encourage staff to see themselves as being part of the community that could solve problems in relationships rather than blaming prisoners for tensions and poor communication. One black prisoner suggested that it would work best if done in the early stages of a prison officer's training, to help influence the culture from the start.
- 6.15 Staff were usually willing to try reverse mentoring, but some were cautious about the potential for grooming and the possibility that younger prisoners might lack the maturity to engage properly with the approach. One staff group suggested that key work might be developed to entail an element of reverse mentoring, commenting that reverse mentoring would happen 'by accident' if they got key work right. Staff also emphasised the need for clear guidance on what reverse mentoring entailed and on the potential risks.

Forums to promote dialogue

- 6.16 The idea of groups or forums to help develop dialogue were strongly supported by prisoners and by managers, and largely by staff, although they were more cautious. Both staff and prisoners stressed the need for regular delivery and skilful facilitation, as there was a risk that confidence in this approach would be undermined if the conditions were not met.
- 6.17 One prisoner gave an example of a discussion group held during Black History Month at a previous establishment that allowed staff and prisoners to talk about relationships. He said staff discussed their experiences and difficulties in trying to understand black culture without being inadvertently offensive; and black prisoners spoke about their experiences of being black in a largely white local area. The prisoner said he felt this was a healthy and safe conversation and wanted more opportunities for staff and prisoners to voice their opinions and concerns. Others were similarly keen:

‘... we need a forum to sit down and shatter stereotypes, shatter myths...’
(Black prisoner)

- 6.18 However, such forums were seen as having a general value that went beyond addressing race issues. Black prisoners stressed that an important role of such forums was to give them a voice in a setting where there was less of a power imbalance between staff and prisoners than on the wings, and some suggested that they could be similar to those that take place in therapeutic communities (see Glossary). Group meetings were seen as a place where black prisoners could both support and, where necessary, challenge each other; for example where they believed that their fellow prisoners were unreasonably attacking staff or identifying racism where there was little evidence (see Section 1, ‘Black prisoners’ experiences of racism’).
- 6.19 Staff made the point that prisoners would lose interest in them if they were not clear about their purpose from the start and confused them with consultation meetings; they did not want prisoners to see the forums as meetings to address individual issues and complaints, but instead realise that their explicit purpose was to promote dialogue, discussion and mutual understanding. One idea supported by some staff was to use an hour during which they would otherwise be doing key work sessions to instead run a group for a larger number of prisoners, thereby addressing the problem of resources.
- 6.20 One of our CVS interviewees thought that forums could help prison officers to move beyond the aspects of their role in which they were likely to feel most competent, that is discipline and control:

‘... when I deliver training with prisoners, I will invite a prison officer or a few prison officers to be a part of the session sometimes... In taking prison officers on that journey with hearing first-hand the experience, the lived experience, in their account from the prisoner group, the prisoner group tends to really benefit from their presence, and they really enjoy the opportunity to be able to speak openly and freely within a safe environment. There's far too few safe environments in prisons... it's very important that they have trust in the facilitator and the facilitator is building that trust. (CVS)

- 6.21 As was the case with many of the possible approaches discussed, interviewees often did not want such forums to be just for black prisoners, but also take place for other ethnicity groups and with mixed groups, to avoid the perception that this was some form of special treatment or only of value to one ethnicity.

Food as a means of connection and comfort

- 6.22 One of the more unusual ideas that we explored during the fieldwork was the role that cooking and eating together could play in helping to support mental health and improve relationships. Specific food preparation can reinforce confidence, pride and enjoyment in cultural identity. It is a point of connection with other people and has a deep emotional significance. Cooking is also a key skill and eating together helps to promote pro-social communication:

‘... culturally food to black people is a really big deal. Like your family, whenever you go round, they're always trying to feed you, ya know, they're trying to look after you, it's a way of welcoming each other and sharing things... As a community, sharing, looking after each other, is done through food...’ (Black prisoner)

- 6.23 The potential value of focusing on something as basic as cooking and eating together is illustrated by the fact that the quality of food was a common complaint: in our survey, only 39% of black prisoners compared with 47% of all other ethnicities said that the prison food was good, and during interview they often mentioned that it was not sufficiently culturally diverse or cooked properly (see endnote xvi).
- 6.24 There was support for this idea from most interviewees. Some senior managers thought that they could start to explore this suggestion immediately because they had enough space and cooking facilities in their establishments, and they were particularly enthused by the potential benefits:

‘Food is a great leveller. It brings people together and provides lots of opportunity’ [for communication]. (Senior manager)

'How great would it be if... on a houseblock you've got a group of prisoners... different cultures... staff and the prisoners sit down together and eat. It just breaks down barriers, doesn't it?... I think it's a really good concept.' (Senior manager)

'Many, many centuries ago it was referred to as "breaking bread"... if you broke bread together you didn't fight. If we could get that as a principle across, that would be great to the service... that common understanding that staff are there to offer a service, prisoners are there for a specific reason, get over it and move on.' (Senior manager)

- 6.25 A challenge that was raised was to find space in often cramped prisons, and staff stressed the need for proper investment in equipment and health and safety assessment. Immigration removal centres have what are usually called 'cultural kitchens' (see Glossary), where groups of detainees are able to obtain raw food ingredients, cook meals together and then invite others to share meals with them. An expanded version of this type of facility might provide a useful blueprint for prisons, and we have already seen self-catering kitchens work well on inspection, providing prisoners with opportunities to socialise, plan meals and practice budgeting skills (HMIP 2020b). Some prisons already ran some cultural events centred around food and others had previously allowed prisoners and their families to eat hot meals during special visits.

Events to promote expression and discussion

- 6.26 Staff and black prisoners thought that one way to achieve increased communication and mutual understanding might be joint training and courses in black history that staff and prisoners could jointly attend if they wished to do so. Prisons also promote diversity and inclusion through specific awareness-raising initiatives such as Black History Month or occasionally events related to the arts, such as plays and musical performances. Black prisoners supported such events, where they could bring people together and allow discussion and understanding of different cultures. They wanted to be properly consulted and involved in the planning, and to see staff showing a genuine commitment to them. Black prisoners gave examples of times when such consultation had not happened, undermining the initiative, including when Black History Month events had focused narrowly, and in their view lazily, on slavery rather than positive elements of black history. Similarly, a black senior manager said he was invited to do a talk at another prison for Black History Month and was disappointed to find that many of the managers did not come, demonstrating a lack of leadership commitment and setting a poor example for others.

Endnotes

- i. Prisoners identified for interview were recorded as black on the prison's database. As ethnicity is normally recorded following self-identification on reception, this was the most effective means of locating prisoners for interview. Their ethnicity was confirmed again at the start of the interview. Prisoners who had self-identified to the prison as mixed heritage were not invited to interview, but a small number said they were black and mixed heritage at the start of the interviews; in these cases we completed the interview and included them in the final analysis.
- ii. In all but one of the prisons we visited, there were very few minority ethnic staff. In the prison with a high number of black staff, we held one group meeting for staff who did not identify as black, and another for black staff, along with some individual interviews. In all other prisons, black staff were interviewed individually. Therefore, where we use the term 'staff' or 'white staff' in this report, we are referring to the almost entirely white staff participants who attended our general group meetings. Otherwise we refer specifically to 'black staff' or 'all staff'.
- iii. See also HMIP 2020a, page 8, paragraph 1.2, discussing similar forums to help improve understanding between minority ethnic prisoners and staff.
- iv. In fact, few submitted by any prisoners were upheld in the data that we saw. This finding reflects more comprehensive past research: in their analysis of 610 DIRFs submitted in 2014, the Prison Reform Trust and Zahid Mubarek Trust (2017) found that where staff alleged discrimination by a prisoner, 76% were upheld, but where a prisoner alleged discrimination by an officer, only 1% were upheld. The majority of reports in their sample were about race (62%) and religion (15%). Prisoners submitted 70% of the reports and staff 30%.
- v. This reaction is encapsulated by the concept of 'code-switching', which refers to the way black people may adjust 'style of speech, appearance, behaviour, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others in exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities. Research suggests that code-switching often occurs in spaces where negative stereotypes of black people run counter to what are considered "appropriate" behaviours and norms for a specific environment.' See [McCluney, C.L.](#), [Robotham, K.](#), Lee S, Smith, R and Durkee M. (November 2019) 'The Costs of Code-switching', in the *Harvard Business Review*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-costs-of-codeswitching>
- vi. Unpublished data provided to HMI Prisons.
- vii. Ethnicity facts and figures 2021, available at: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/prison-and-custody-incidents/violence-involving-prisoners/latest>

- viii. Percentage taken from 'Offender management statistics quarterly – October to December 2021'. Available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2021>
- ix. The overall numbers were fairly low for PAVA, with 119 total draws of PAVA and 67 uses for all groups.
- x. 'Ethnicity and the Criminal Justice System, 2020', available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ethnicity-and-the-criminal-justice-system-statistics-2020>
- xi. In our survey, black prisoners were more likely than other ethnic groups to be younger: 17% of black prisoners were under 21 years old compared with 5% of others; and 39% were 25 or under compared with 17% of others.
- xii. It is notable that in our later scrutiny visit survey, the gap between reporting by black prisoners and other ethnic groups widened further in relation to victimisation by staff: 47% of black prisoners compared with 31% of others said they had experienced some form of victimisation by staff.
- xiii. There were strikingly similar findings in the thematic review on race equality we published in 2005: 'Prisoners from minority ethnic groups who believe that white staff favour white prisoners might logically expect black staff to do the same for them...' (HMIP 2005: 23).
- xiv. Our 2005 thematic review again had similar findings: '... some visible minority staff were loath to alienate their white colleagues whose support they needed, and took a tough line with visible minority prisoners...' (HMIP 2005: 23).
- xv. 'At HMP/YOI Isis, the 'Changing the Game' programme was designed specifically for high risk young black prisoners, and linked work on cultural identity with desistance from violent offending. The project had been independently evaluated with positive early findings. Prison managers felt that the programme was helping to address a range of concerns that specifically affected young black men.' (HMIP 2020a, p.53, paragraph 10.)
- xvi. Similarly, black prisoners were critical of the range of goods provided in the prison canteen, with only 49% compared with 67% of all other ethnicities saying that the canteen sold the things they needed.
- xvii. <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2020-06-30d.172.0>

Appendix I Background

As of March 2021, 13% of male prisoners in England and Wales identified as black (MoJ, 2022), compared with only about 3% of men in the general population (ONS, 2011). The overrepresentation of minority ethnic groups in the prison population and criminal justice system in general is a long-established concern. David Lammy's 2017 review of the treatment of minority ethnic people in the criminal justice system highlighted several factors that are likely to lead to a disproportionately high black prison population (Lammy, 2017). These factors included black men being more likely than others to plead not guilty, partly because of a lack of faith in the criminal justice process, and then receiving more severe sentences when convicted.

The Lammy Review also pointed to several areas of concern that suggested deep-rooted problems of inequality, including the fact that minority ethnic prisoners were much more likely than white prisoners to be sent to high security prisons for the same offences and more likely to be reconvicted following release. The report also noted that a lack of diversity among prison officers and leaders 'helps perpetuate a culture of "us and them"... [and] contributes to an atmosphere in which many rebel against prison regimes, rather than start on the road to a life without offending' (Lammy, 2017: 45).

In the last 20 years, numerous other studies and reports have sought to understand and address concerns about race inequality in prisons, driven initially by the racist murder of Zahid Mubarek, a young Asian man held in HMPYOI Feltham in 2000. This tragic event generated two reports by the Commission for Racial Equality in 2003, and a public inquiry chaired by Mr Justice Keith (Keith 2006). HMI Prisons conducted its first thematic inspection into race equality in 2005 and the Prison Service published its own 'Race Review' in 2008 (MoJ, 2008). The 2005 HMI Prisons thematic investigation concluded that black and minority ethnic prisoners and mainly white prison staff agreed on so little about prison life that the report should be called 'Parallel Worlds' (HMIP, 2005). A few years later, in 2010, a briefing from the Prison Reform Trust drew on a range of prison research and inspections to conclude that, despite some positive changes, prisons had not done enough to go beyond addressing blatant acts of racism to tackle structural discrimination and the prevalence of more subtle racial bias (Prison Reform Trust, 2017).

Since that time, research has continued to paint a repetitively poor picture of race equality in prisons. For example, a study published in 2018 (Chistyakova, Cole and Johnstone, 2018) concluded that despite evidence of a commitment to address race inequality, most of the concerns raised in the Prison Service's 2008 Race Review persisted. Similarly, a recent HMI Prisons thematic report on 'Minority Ethnic Prisoners' Experiences of Rehabilitation and Release Planning', published in 2020, concluded that the increasingly popular concept of 'rehabilitative culture' held little meaning for minority ethnic prisoners (HMIP, 2020a). Meanwhile, Lammy himself considered that several years after his report was published, many of the recommendations had yet to be implemented (see endnote xvii).

Themes from existing research

In recognition of the need to produce a more granular understanding of the experiences of minority ethnic groups, this thematic review focuses specifically on the experiences of prisoners who identify as black and are held in men's prisons (see HMI Prisons, 2020a: 12). The existing research generally provides little data about most areas of black prisoners' experience and much of it is dated. However, a few themes can be identified from this literature with reasonable confidence.

Poorer relationships with staff

There is some recent evidence, derived from HMI Prisons' survey analyses, that black prisoners have the most negative experience of relationships with staff (Quinn, Hardwick and Meek, 2021), and a few studies have suggested that black men and boys in prison are stereotyped as being associated with gangs and violence (Young, 2014; Clinks, 2020). Older research by Genders and Players (1989) and McDermott (1990) found that prison staff often stereotyped black prisoners as belligerent or difficult. In wider research, studies indicate that young black men are typically viewed through stereotypes associated with gangs, leading to their overrepresentation in the use of gang suppression measures such as police gang intelligence databases, gang injunctions, and joint enterprise prosecutions (Williams, 2015; Williams and Clarke, 2016; Gunter, 2017; Lammy, 2017; Williams and Clarke, 2018).

Other research suggests that Muslim identity is an important factor that affects relationships with staff, and there is over-representation of black Muslim prisoners compared with black Muslims in the community (HMIP, 2010). HMI Prisons' 2010 thematic review of Muslim prisoner experiences found that black Muslims were more likely than other Muslims to say that they had been victimised by staff, a finding replicated in more recent HMI Prisons survey data (HMIP, 2021). Muslim prisoners commonly reported being perceived through stereotypes associated with religious extremism and terrorism. This makes it important to consider the significance of the intersection of faith and ethnicity when exploring the experiences of black male prisoners.

In general, it is unclear whether the biases of staff who are not black lead them to view and treat black prisoners differently, whether black prisoners wrongly attribute treatment to race, or whether some combination of the two affects staff-prisoner relationships. However, black prisoners consistently report more negatively on their relationships with staff in general.

Worse experience of prison discipline

A recurring theme in the literature on black prisoners is their experience of harsher treatment within prison discipline processes. Government data shows that, between 2011 and 2018, black prisoners were overrepresented in the prison adjudication process (MoJ, 2019), although adjudications against black and mixed heritage prisoners were less likely to be proven. There is also evidence that the prison incentives system – used to sanction or reward prisoner behaviour – is used disproportionately against black prisoners and the Prison Service's 2008 Race Review noted that black prisoners were consistently more likely to be on the basic (lowest) level of incentives schemes.

Recent HMPPS data also shows that 5% of prisoners who identified as black were on the basic regime, compared with 3% of white prisoners (HMPPS, 2020).

The use of force and segregation in prisons has also been shown to disproportionately affect black men. The 2008 Race Review found that, on average, black prisoners were 50% more likely than white prisoners to be in the segregation unit for reasons of good order or discipline, and 60% more likely to have force used against them. Recent HMIP survey data also found that black prisoners, and in particular black Muslim prisoners, were significantly more likely to report that they had been physically restrained and had spent time in segregation (HMIP, 2021).

These factors, combined with the fact that many black prisoners have reported that complaints and the discrimination incident reporting system are ineffective and unfair, has led to recommendations for stronger oversight of disciplinary systems and consultation with minority ethnic prisoners to try to address overrepresentation (Race Review, 2008; Lammy, 2017).

Less identification of vulnerability

The Lammy Review identified potential weaknesses in prison reception screening, finding that black prisoners were less likely than white prisoners to have needs identified in areas such as mental health, substance misuse and learning difficulties. The Review also noted that the data were too poor to fully understand the extent to which care needs were in fact unmet (Lammy, 2017).

There is also some evidence to suggest that black prisoners are – or believe themselves to be – exposed to heightened levels of violence in prison. Burnett and Farrell (1994) found that black prisoners were more likely to report being victim to or witnessing violent incidents in prison, and significantly more likely than white prisoners to report being the victim of or witness to racially motivated incidents carried out by both prisoners and staff. Recent (2020) HMPPS data supports this, showing that black prisoners were more likely than white prisoners to be the victims of assaults, and were more likely than other ethnic groups to be identified as perpetrators, or to be involved in other violent incidents with no clear victim or assailant (MoJ, 2021b). Again, it is unclear whether higher numbers of black prisoners are involved in such incidents, or if black prisoners are more likely to be accused of incidents due to racial biases.

These themes and our own updated survey analysis (see Appendix II for methodology) helped us to design the current thematic project.

Appendix II Methodology

This report draws on a range of evidence, including:

- Prisoner surveys undertaken with 7,526 men from 47 full inspections, which were published in inspection reports between December 2018 and February 2020. Unless otherwise indicated in the text, all survey figures quoted in the report refer to results from these full surveys. In addition to this, 32 scrutiny visit surveys conducted between July 2020 and April 2021 were analysed, which included 4,958 men. The results were broken down by ethnic background, age and religion, and were made available to inspectors in advance of the fieldwork visits to inform the focus of the fieldwork and review.
- Fieldwork was conducted in seven establishments from October 2021 to December 2021. Fieldwork included interviews and focus group discussions with black prisoners, and interviews and focus groups with a range of staff, including black staff and senior managers in the establishment. Additional data was also collected from the seven prisons during the fieldwork.
- In total, the following people were interviewed:
 - 100 black prisoners were interviewed individually using semi-structured interviews (55) or in-group interviews (45).
 - 27 black prison staff took part in individual semi-structured interviews (17) or a group interview (10). The former included three black prison governors and four Unlocked Graduates (see ‘Other contributors’, below) who were not based in our fieldwork prisons.
 - 17 senior managers, including equality and diversity leads, governors and prison group directors (PGDs), took part in semi-structured interviews.
 - 39 prison staff took part in focus group discussions.
- National-level data on use of force was also provided by HMPPS and was analysed.

Evidence from all sources was triangulated to strengthen the validity of judgements.

Fieldwork

We conducted a pilot of the methodology at one establishment in August 2021. This allowed us to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the methodology before we started the fieldwork. All the interview guides were piloted, resulting in a reorganisation of questions and changes to clarify the topics and refine some of the prompts.

Selecting prisons

Seven fieldwork prisons were selected to represent a range of different functional types (four category C training prisons, one open prison, one local prison, and one high security prison) and geographical locations. This allowed us to capture a range of offence types, sentence lengths and time served in prison. In six of the seven prisons we visited, there were very few minority ethnic staff and even fewer identifying as black. Staff who attended our group meetings were randomly chosen and almost all were identified by the prison as white. Where we refer to prison 'staff' or 'officers', we are therefore referring almost exclusively to white staff unless black staff or other minority group staff are specifically mentioned.

Fieldwork with prisoners

We selected prisoners to make sure we had the widest possible range of experiences and views. Across the establishments, we made sure to capture a diversity of experience and characteristics: we selected prisoners from a range of ages, different black backgrounds, religions and nationalities to participate. Establishments provided this information for all their current prisoners.

An invitation letter, which included details about the project, was sent to the establishment to pass onto the selected prisoners; this gave them the opportunity to provide informed consent to participate. A 'reserve list' was also prepared so that we could replace any prisoners who declined to participate. At the beginning of each interview prisoners were also asked to give consent to participate.

To reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission we did not interview any prisoners who were shielding, symptomatic or quarantining. We also took safety and security advice from the establishments to ensure our own and prisoners' safety.

• Interviews

Researchers and inspectors conducted semi-structured interviews with 55 black prisoners. A topic guide included questions about the following areas:

- relationships with staff
- experiences of vulnerability within prisons
- their experiences of behaviour management processes
- opportunities for self-improvement within the prison
- experiences of discrimination
- their views on potential solutions.

A semi-structured interview methodology enabled prisoners to describe their experiences in their own words and allowed them to focus on the topics that were of most importance to them. Interviewers were also able to ask follow-up questions to get more detail about specific experiences and concerns.

- **Focus group with black prisoners**

Focus groups with prisoners were conducted by a researcher and inspector at all seven establishments. The number of prisoners in the groups ranged from three to 13, with a total of 45 prisoners participating. The discussions focused on the following areas:

- relationships with staff
- experiences of vulnerability within prisons
- their experiences of behaviour management processes
- experiences of discrimination
- their views on potential solutions.

The focus group format allowed prisoners to discuss their experiences together and collaborate to develop solutions.

Fieldwork with staff

- **Interviews with black staff**

To select black staff to interview, the prisons provided us with a list of staff who would be working on the days we were conducting fieldwork at the site. From this we selected staff we wanted to invite. We sent these individuals an email inviting them to consent or decline to take part. Once we had a list of staff who wanted to be involved, we informed the establishment so that these staff members could be released from their duties.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with eight black prison staff members across five prisons (two prisons that we visited for the fieldwork did not have any black staff we could interview). The interviews covered their perspectives on the treatment of black prisoners, and the experiences black prisoners have reported to HMI Prisons through inspection surveys. We also explored their own personal experiences of racial discrimination in prisons.

- **Focus groups with staff**

We conducted focus groups with staff from a range of ethnic backgrounds in all the establishments we visited; a total of 39 staff took part in these groups. In the groups we presented findings from the survey analysis about black prisoner's experiences, and gave staff the opportunity to share and discuss their views on why black prisoners reported more negative experiences. We also gave staff the opportunity to work collaboratively to come up with potential solutions.

- **Interviews with senior staff**

At all the fieldwork sites there was a designated equality and diversity lead, governor, and prison group director (PGD). These individuals were invited to take part in an interview with an inspector.

During the interview we used the findings from the prisoner survey to explore their understanding and opinions of the black prisoner experience

and what plans they had to improve it. Senior managers also had the opportunity to explain what strategies or initiatives were currently in place, or planned, to improve the experiences of black prisoners.

Other contributors

Black governors

There are few senior black managers in the prison service and we did not come across any in our research prisons. We therefore decided to target existing black governors to take advantage of their experience and perspective.

Unlocked Graduates

The Unlocked Graduates scheme was launched in 2016 and encourages graduates to work as prison officers for an initial period of two years while completing a Master's degree in Applied Custodial Leadership. We wanted to talk to this pool of staff as we believed that they would provide a unique perspective, having joined the prison service within the previous two years via a different route. We contacted Unlocked Graduates who circulated a summary of the project and an invitation for any black officers to register their interest in taking part. Four Unlocked Graduates were interviewed via video calls. The interviews covered the same areas as those conducted with other black staff during the fieldwork visits. We have identified Unlocked Graduates as 'black staff' in our quotations.

Community and voluntary sector (CVS)

In recognition of their key role in supporting many prisons with equality and diversity work, we viewed CVS staff as important contributors to the review. With the assistance from CLINKS, the Criminal Justice Alliance and the Zahid Mubarek Trust, we contacted a wide range of relevant CVS groups, giving an overview of the project and inviting organisations to contribute. We interviewed staff from four organisations: Ipswich & Suffolk Council for Racial Equality (ISCRE), Spark2Life, Zahid Mubarek Trust (ZMT) and BAC-IN Drugs and Alcohol Service in Nottingham. Additionally, SparkInside gave us written material and we also heard from Support When It Matters (SWIM) Enterprises (Hackney, London), People Plus, the Shannon Trust, and the Muslim Chaplains Association. We asked members from these organisations to address similar questions asked of other contributors, focusing on how to improve the experience of black men in prison.

Data collection and analysis

With the consent of prisoners and staff, the interviews and groups were audio-recorded. Having a full audio recording of the interview, rather than relying on interviewer notes, allowed for a more rigorous approach to analysis, and the inclusion of verbatim quotes throughout this report. Some of the participants did not want to be recorded and in these cases we took written notes.

These audio recordings and notes were summarised to facilitate thematic analysis, and direct quotations were also included in these summaries. A

thematic analysis was undertaken to identify key themes both within and across the different contributors. There was a focus on retaining the voices of the participants throughout the process of analysis.

Throughout this report specific phrases or terms used by the interviewees are embedded in the text to show the language used and to convey participants' experiences and views. Verbatim quotes and case studies have also been used to illustrate themes and provide more detailed information on the specific experiences of prisoners and staff. To protect the anonymity of those we spoke to as part of this work, no establishments or individuals (staff or prisoners) who contributed are named.

Analysis of HMPPS data

HMPPS provided us with an unpublished dataset which contained information on use of force (planned and unplanned), baton uses (drawn and used) and PAVA uses (drawn and used) for the periods 2018–19, 2019–20 and 2020–21, covering all prisons in England and Wales. This data was then cleaned to only include prisons that held adult male prisoners. Information on incidents where the age or ethnicity of the prisoner was not provided was also excluded.

HMPPS does not publish figures for the total number of people who have been in custody in a given year, but a total prison population for a set date. In order to explore over- or under-representation of this population within published statistics, we have assumed that the proportions of each age group and ethnicity within the total population across the year remained relatively stable. Ethnicity was not stated or unknown for 1% of male prisoners across all years.

Analysis was conducted to compare the proportion of incidents which involved black prisoners to prisoners from all other ethnic groups, as well as the relative rate of incidents based on ethnicity. Where references are made to the overall prisoner population, these exclude any prisoners with a non-disclosed ethnicity. It was possible to break down ethnicity by age group for 2018–19 and 2019–20 using published statistics but this information was not available for 2020–21, so we have not been able to provide this level of analysis; instead published data showing ethnicity in prison was used.

Appendix III Glossary

Colourism

A form of prejudice or discrimination that privileges people with lighter skin tones over those with darker skin. Colourism can be practiced by people within the same overarching ethnic group (see Garner 2010: 80–81).

Cultural kitchen

A place where groups of people detained in immigration removal centres are able to cook their own food and share meals together. They may also invite other detainees and/or staff to eat with them.

CVS

Community and voluntary sector. Over 1,700 voluntary organisations work in the criminal justice system. Organisations range from volunteer-led groups to large organisations with thousands of staff.

Depot injection

A slow-release form of medication, including some antipsychotics, that lasts longer and therefore allows less frequent administration.

DIRF

The discrimination incident reporting form is the key means that prisons use to handle and track allegations of discrimination and prejudice, including racism; anyone, including prisoners, staff from any agency and visitors, can complete a DIRF.

KKK (Ku Klux Klan)

A racist and extremist US organisation that promotes white supremacy.

Key worker

Entails a prison officer being assigned to each prisoner and meeting with them for an average of 45 minutes a week to provide support and encouragement to meet sentence planning goals.

NOMIS

The 'National Offender Management Information System' is an operational database used by prisons to record details including type of offence(s), prisoner case notes and involvement in breaches of prison discipline.

Reverse mentoring

A process that usually involves more junior staff mentoring leaders who are senior to give them an alternative perspective on their work and insights that they may not have the opportunity or confidence to provide in normal circumstances. The principles of this approach can be adapted for prisoners and prison staff.

RISE

Standing for 'Racial Inclusion and Striving for Equality', RISE is a staff network open to all HMPPS employees. RISE promotes equality and diversity in the workplace through supporting members, recruiting allies, and providing cultural awareness training to all staff.

Therapeutic community

A participative, group-based approach to long-term mental illness, personality disorders and drug addiction. As part of their pathway to recovery prisoners live together in a community that promotes positive relationships, personal responsibility and social participation, through group psychotherapy as well as practical activities.

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Appendix V Acknowledgements

Project team

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