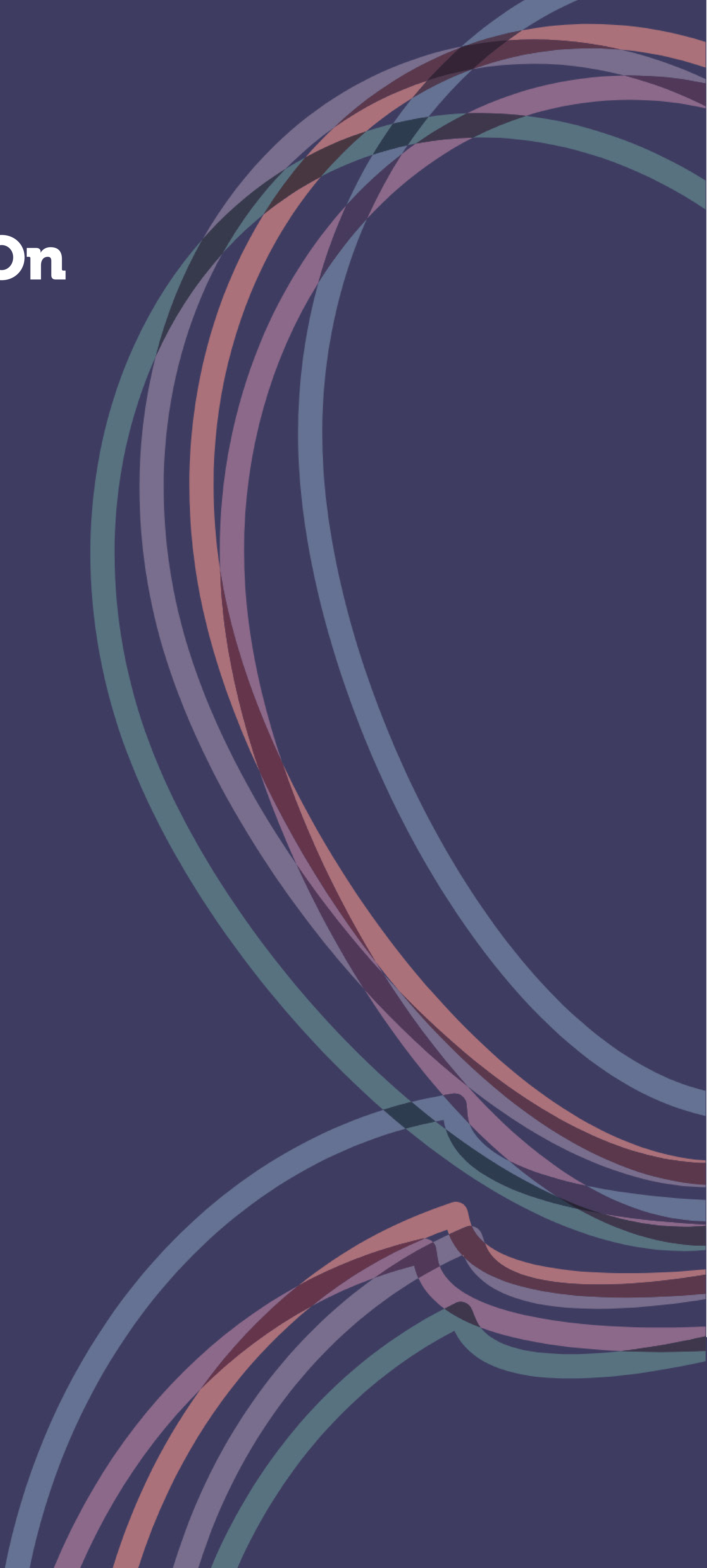


The  
Young  
Review  
**Ten Years On**





# Introduction

The Young Review, published in 2014, highlighted significant racial and religious disparities affecting Black and Muslim men in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). Despite its comprehensive recommendations aimed at addressing these issues, recent data and inspection reports – including the 2023 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) thematic review, and the 2023 Race equality in probation follow up – demonstrate that progress has been limited. The 2024 National Annual Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) report described the poor experiences of Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage people in adult prisons, young offender institutions (YOIs), and immigration detention centres as an urgent and relenting issue made only more complex against the backdrop of the prison capacity crisis, unpredictable regimes, high staff turnover, and complex mental health and special educational needs. High levels of use of force deployed disproportionately against Black and Muslim people in prison, as well as a failing discrimination reporting system, and ineffective consistent adoption of equity initiatives were all highlighted by the IMB as areas of key concern.

This briefing reviews the extent to which the Young Review’s recommendations have been implemented, the factors impeding progress, and identifies where accountability for these failures lies.

## Context

The Young Review recommendations are reproduced below.

Since the Review was published, the criminal justice system has undergone some structural changes. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) was replaced by Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in 2017. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) took over policy and commissioning responsibilities from NOMS.

The reunification of probation services took place in June 2021, bringing an end to independent provision of supervision, unpaid work and other activity. HMPPS is responsible for prisons and probation services and, as a separate arm, the Youth Custody Service (YCS).

## The Lammy Review

The Young review, which was chaired by Baroness Young of Hornsey and supported by an advisory group of sector experts, pre-empted the 2017 Lammy Review. At the launch of the Lammy Review, David Lammy praised the work of the Young Review for paving the way. Lammy made 35 recommendations spanning the youth and adult justice systems, some of which echoed the Young recommendations, including calling for more effective sub-contracting of by-and-for led organisations by Community Rehabilitation Companies. Despite quickly being recognised as a landmark review which is still frequently recited today,



many of the recommendations made in Lammy were not implemented effectively. In 2023, the Prison Reform Trust [published an update](#) on progress made against the 14 recommendations relating to prisons and found that partial to no progress had been made on each.

## Terminology

The terms BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) and BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) were widely used across Government in 2014, although not without criticism. As catch all terms, they mask differences in experiences and outcomes, conflate race with ethnicity and were often divisively used as a proxy for 'non-white'. In 2021 several broadcasters in the UK committed to no longer using the terms, and in 2022 the government did the same. Government now uses 'ethnic minorities' to refer to all groups except White British and this is reflected in recent data referred to in this briefing. In 2024, Action for Race Equality carried out a survey on racial terminology, seeking to better understand the way individuals and organisations use racial terminology across the UK. We recognise the dangers of perpetuating colonial legacies of categorisation, scientific racism, and racial segregation when focussing on the minutiae of racial terminology, whilst understanding how crucial terminology can be as a tool in building shared understanding of collective experiences.

Categorisation and ethnicity data collection are indispensable tools to identifying structural racism, but there is an inherent tension between the rich and varied terms people like to use for their complex and multi layered identities, and the need for cross-cutting terms that highlight wider injustice and bring shared experiences together. Both Action for Race Equality and Clinks believe that we should use specific disaggregated categories when talking about specific ethnic groups. In the context of the Criminal Justice System, we recognise that at times we may need to use a collective term to refer to inequalities which are shared across ethnic and religious groups. Throughout this brief we aim to use specific language. Given the Young Review's specific focus on Black and Muslim men we will predominantly use these terms, but when aiming to reflect the structural nature of racial inequalities we will use the term 'racially minoritised people'.

Similarly, we use neutral and/or people first language to describe those in the criminal justice system – e.g. defendants, people in prison, people on probation.

# The Young Review Recommendations

The Young Review made five recommendations to improve outcomes for Black and Muslim men in the CJS:

- 1 **Develop rigorously monitored mechanisms** to ensure independent providers address the specific needs of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) offenders.
- 2 **Publish an Equality Strategy** by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to provide transparency and overhaul services for young Black and/or Muslim men.
- 3 **Involve individuals with lived experience** in planning and delivering programmes to support desistance.
- 4 **Dedicate resources to community engagement** and partnership models in prisons over traditional commissioning frameworks.
- 5 **Consider legislative support** for BAME offenders, similar to provisions under the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act for women offenders.



# Areas of progress and persistent challenges

## 1 Limited implementation of monitoring and accountability mechanisms

Analysis carried out by the Guardian in 2025 found that less than a third of the nearly 600 recommendations made across 12 major reports tasked with reviewing racial inequality have been implemented since 1981, indicating a 'performative' cycle of recommendation making and bureaucratic inaction.

Rigorous monitoring and accountability is required to implement change, but this is frequently impeded by limited information sharing, the creation of several accountability structures operating independently and sporadically, and limited enforcement powers.

Following the Young Review, the National Independent Advisory Group was established to help oversee implementation of recommendations and improve independent accountability. Members include representatives from across various governmental departments, academic institutions, and third sector partner organisations. While the group has had notable impact, including increasing the representation of by and for led sector leaders in policy spaces, it has been limited in its remit due to the issues outlined above.

*"Being part of the National Independent Advisory Group (NIAG) has been invaluable for Wipers. It has provided us with a vital platform where our voices as lived experience contributors are not only heard but also able to influence broader discussions and policy. This has affirmed the importance of creating space for those most directly impacted to shape solutions."*

*"Equally, the learning and connections we've gained through the advisory group have strengthened our practice and extended our reach. The partnerships and networks we've built have enabled us to move beyond frontline delivery into infrastructure work that supports smaller organisations coming through. In this way, the Young Review and the NIAG has not only helped Wipers grow but has allowed us to share that growth with the wider sector, contributing to a stronger collective effort to challenge racism and disparities in the justice system."*

*- Sammy Odoi, Managing Director, Wipers Youth CIC*

HMI Probation's 2023 Race Equality in Probation report outlined steps to improve data collection, transparency, and accountability. However, despite these frameworks, significant disparities continue to persist between the prison and general population.

Black people make up 11.9% of the prison population but only 4.0% of the adult population (2021 census). Muslim people make up 18.6% of people in prison, compared to 6.5% of the general population. A 2.6% increase in Muslim prisoners was observed between March 2024 and March 2025. The continued overrepresentation



of Black and Muslim men in prisons indicates several systemic failures; the persistent racialised over policing of Black and Muslim communities; continued failure to divert Black and Muslim men from prison; and monitoring mechanisms designed to tackle these issues that are either insufficient or inadequately enforced.

The HMIP thematic review found that Black prisoners often feel their concerns about discrimination are not taken seriously. The 2022/23 HM Inspectorate of Prisons survey found that prisoners from ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities) reported more negative experiences when in prison. The Prison Reform Trust has found that people in prison feel like tackling racial disparity has dropped down the list of priorities. This further indicates a lack of effective oversight and accountability mechanisms.

In 2018, the External Advice and Scrutiny Panel (EASP), chaired by Action for Race Equality's Chief Executive Jeremy Crook OBE, was established to ensure expert stakeholders can review, assure, and challenge HMPPS' plans and implementation accordingly. This included oversight of the implementation of the Lammy Review, and later the HMPPS Race Action Programme.

HMPPS commissioned the Race Action Programme (2020-2024) to address the ongoing racial disparities in prisons, which ran between 2020 and 2024. The programme was supported by the External Advice and Scrutiny Panel (EASP), chaired by Action for Race Equality's chief executive, Jeremy Crook OBE. There was a significant transition gap between the Race Action Programme, which was due to continue operations as the HMPPS Race Disparities Unit in March 2024. However, the legacy of the programme transitioned to the HMPPS Disparities Unit, and specifically the Race Disparity team, which commenced its work in March 2025. This team will act as 'a national centre of inclusion expertise and will design and implement HMPPS national priorities for race equality'. This work will be supported by the HMPPS Professional Standards External Advisory Board, which will have a broad focus.

It remains to be seen what the scope of the Disparities Unit will be, and to what extent it leverages the expertise of voluntary organisations in implementing a strategy designed to reduce disparities.

## 2 Publishing and implementing an Equality Strategy

The Young Review called for the publication of an Equality Strategy to overhaul services for young Black and Muslim men. While data transparency has improved, there is still no public equality strategy.

The HMIP thematic review in 2023 found that Black men in prison feel "overlooked and undervalued," with limited access to culturally appropriate services. HMIP made the repeated recommendation that HMPPS develop a national race equality strategy for service delivery. HMPPS partly agreed to the recommendation in the Race Equality in Probation action plan, but lacked evidence of implemented, effective strategies that



have led to meaningful change. Economic constraints have meant limited funding for new initiatives that could focus on reducing the high numbers of Black and Muslim men entering prison through improved crime prevention and diversion services. Inconsistent political support has hindered the development and implementation of robust strategies, as well as innovative spending using existing budgets.

### 3 Involving people with Lived Experience

Trust and confidence in the criminal justice system continues to remain low, worsening racial disparities. This is illustrated by the disparities in guilty pleas. As highlighted in the Lammy Review 2017, 37% of minoritised defendants pleaded 'not guilty', compared to 27% of White British defendants. A higher rate of 'not guilty' pleas leads to longer sentences due to the loss of sentencing discounts for early guilty pleas, contributing to (but not entirely explaining) disparities in average custodial sentence lengths (ACSL). In 2022, the ACSL was 27.1 months for minoritised people, compared to 19.5 months for White British people. This also has an impact on disparities within diversion figures, as a guilty plea is required.

The Young Review emphasised the need to incorporate people with lived experiences of both criminal justice and racialisation to build trust and effective rehabilitation. The Race Equality in Probation action plan also acknowledges this need but shows limited progress in integrating such individuals into programme delivery. The HMIP review notes the lack of representation of Black staff in prisons, affecting both prisoners and staff morale.

Some effort has been made to increase the representation of Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage staff in prisons, particularly under HMPPS' Race Action Programme. However, the prison system continues to be marked by high staff turnover rates, negative experiences and heightened misconduct processes for racially minoritised staff. Whilst there has been a growing appreciation for experts by experience, these experts remain vastly undervalued and continue to face basic barriers such as being unable to enter prisons to deliver programmes of work that would be impactful and important for prisoners in addition to helping to build trust and confidence.

***"Despite repeated commitments, efforts to tackle racism against young Black and Muslim men in the prison system have been largely ineffective. Systemic racism continues to shape their experiences through disproportionate punishment, lack of trust in the systems, and unequal access to opportunities for progression and rehabilitation. The implementation of The Young Review's recommendations, designed to address these injustices, has been frustratingly slow, and in many cases, has been invisible within the prison system. This ongoing failure is unacceptable. The fight for racial justice in prisons continues, and the Zahid Mubarek Trust stands united with sector partners such as ARE, Clinks, and others, to push for meaningful and lasting change that is felt and seen rather than just spoken about."***

***- Khatuna Tsintsadze, Co-director, The Zahid Mubarek Trust***



## 4 Community Engagement and Partnership Models

The Young Review advocated for shifting resources toward community engagement and partnerships within prisons to provide culturally competent support. This is echoed in the Race Equality in Probation action plan, but implementation is caveated as “work in progress,” indicating ongoing challenges in resource allocation and effective implementation. As elsewhere, economic constraints have limited the establishment of community partnerships. The HMIP thematic report found that opportunities for meaningful community engagement are scarce, impacting rehabilitation and resettlement efforts.

### *Case study: Black and Asian-Led Specialist Services Directory*

*In 2021, Action for Race Equality, then still operating under our former name ‘Black Training and Enterprise Group’ was commissioned to produce a directory of specialist Black and Asian led services as well as a long-term engagement strategy for the National Probation Service (NPS) London. At the time of commissioning, NPS London recognised structural challenges for small service providers in securing contracts through traditional commissioning frameworks. While several recommendations were made, it is unclear how many were formally embedded and whether additional resources were put towards strengthening the organisations identified and offering them additional opportunities.*

*Since the mapping took place, 10% of organisations identified have closed, and many by and for organisations continue to report difficulties in accessing tender opportunities, noting that there is a preference to fund interventions on a ‘pilot’ basis which creates an inconsistent service provision for people in prisons. This is well demonstrated by a report published in December 2024 by Revolving Doors, commissioned by the Youth Justice Board, which sought to map best practice programmes tackling ethnic disparity and over-representation in youth justice across England and Wales. Many of the programmes identified were pilots, and since publication, have ceased operations.*

*The ongoing prison capacity crisis has also created restrictive regimes which limits opportunities for people to access support. People are spending longer amounts of time in cells, and funding for by and for organisations delivering services inside prisons has depreciated.*

## 5 Legislative Support

Existing equalities legislation is weak and fails to recognise institutional and systemic racism and the recommendation to consider legislation similar to provisions under the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act for women in prison has not yet been realised.

In the last five years, we have seen several strategic programmes and plans across the criminal justice system set out to tackle racial disparities. These notably include the HMPPS Race Action Programme, and the National Police Chiefs Council’s (NPCC) Police Race Action Plan. So far, these plans have failed to make a significant



change to the ongoing racial disparities within the justice system. The United Nation's Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has expressed concern over the ongoing institutional and systemic racism and overrepresentation of racially minoritised people within the police and the criminal justice system.

The persistence of disparities in stop and search practices, sentencing, and prison experiences reflects the absence of legal frameworks compelling equitable treatment. The Equality (Race and Disability) Bill presents an opportunity to strengthen the Public Sector Equality Duty, but it appears that the legislation may fail to meet promises set out. Without legislative mandates, initiatives to end racial disparities are hard to enforce.

## Political, Economic, Social, and Cultural Influences on Progress

Change in the criminal justice system relies on public and political support; an economic climate which can support systems change; and a shift in culture that champions rehabilitation over punishment. Imagining and creating a justice system which no longer perpetuates the cycle of crime requires broad support which can be hard to build without each of these elements. Understanding the reservations and issues preventing broader change is necessary to overcome these barriers.

### Political Factors

Political changes have led to fluctuating priorities and a move away from understanding the structural and systemic nature of racial disparities in criminal justice. Initiatives requiring sustained political support, such as legislative changes or significant policy overhauls, have stalled. More broadly, there has been a distinct increase in racist violence in the UK since the summer of 2024, during which fake news about the ethnic identity of the Southport killer Axel Rudakubana led to racist riots across the UK. Since these riots, we have seen increased racist anti-migrant sentiment that is firmly rooted in Islamophobia. This includes a recent policy change which means police will announce the ethnicity of suspects in high profile cases.

In the first half of 2025, when this briefing was written, several decisions were made which undermined efforts to reduce racial disparities in the criminal justice system. In March, the Government announced plans to block the Sentencing Council from implementing new guidance on pre-sentence reports (PSRs). The guidance would have said that a PSR should be 'considered necessary' if the individual is from an ethnic, cultural, or faith minority. Ministers said this would create a 'two-tiered' justice system which will create 'favourable' sentences for minoritised groups, and have now blocked the guidance through the Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Act 2025. This is far from reality, and the notion that there is a two-tiered justice that favours racially minoritised people disregards the deep-rooted disparities in current sentencing outcomes. Instead, there is a two-tier system already operating: one which systematically disadvantages Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage people as a result of systemic racism.



We are further concerned by the omission of race within the Sentencing Review, published in May, which failed to explicitly consider the impact of racial disparities within its final report, and instead called for a 'bespoke exercise or review'. A number of organisations from the voluntary sector have subsequently highlighted these concerns. The ongoing failure to consider racial disparities at the core of policy making and reviews of this kind has contributed to the minimal progress towards ending racial disparities since the publication of the Young Review.

*"I reflect with an overwhelming sense of exasperation and profound anger at the agonisingly slow pace of change. While there has been a long-overdue shift in discourse, with structural racism now more widely recognised, the infuriating reality is that nearly all the fundamental issues highlighted through the Young Review stubbornly persist. Recommendations for rigorous scrutiny and advisory group input on actions to address disparities remain relevant today – a damning indictment of a decade lost. Despite various 'action plans', clear, measurable outcomes vital for genuine accountability were never embedded, and scrutiny mechanisms have fallen by the wayside amidst governmental shifts.*

*"We still hear deeply alarming reports of racism endured by people in custody. Most recently we have seen PAVA spray approved for staff to use against children in prison, despite evidence showing its racially disproportionate use in the adult estate. Statistics relentlessly paint a picture of cumulative disadvantage and discrimination faced by racially minoritised individuals. This systemic failure pushes them into the criminal justice system, blights their experiences within it, and impairs their ability to build fulfilling lives. While the supportive role of organisations led by and for racially minoritised people is more apparent than ever, significant barriers in commissioning and contracting continue to hinder their invaluable work.*

*"The time for genuine, accountable change is long overdue."*

*- Jess Mullen, original contributing author of the Young Review*

## Economic Constraints

Limited funding has been a significant barrier to implementing the Young Review's recommendations and the action points in subsequent reports, though this alone does not explain the lack of progress. The long-term impact of austerity has severely impacted the criminal justice system in all aspects – from maintaining buildings to ensuring recruitment and retention of staff, provision of prison healthcare and recovery services, to resettlement services and support on release. An increasing population in prisons, and increasing probation caseloads, have added further pressure on dwindling resources. The resulting degradation of systems means significant investment is now vital to simply tread water. In these circumstances, racial equity has come to be seen as a 'nice to have' rather than an essential component of a fair and effective criminal justice system. While these economic constraints persist, the recent Spending Review illustrated that funding is available, but it needs to be used more effectively by being geared towards areas such as early intervention.



## Social Influence

Despite the difficult and sometimes traumatising nature of advocacy and campaigning, there has been a much broader, decades long fight to build awareness of the institutional and systemic racism in the criminal justice system. This movement building has been important to provide a stronger contextual backdrop for systems change that should not be underestimated.

Movements like Black Lives Matter have raised public consciousness about racial disparities, yet despite the pressure this has created, significant policy reforms have not materialised. Arguably, the greater public consciousness has also stimulated competing political agendas and institutional resistance.

## Cultural Shifts

There have been attempts to improve cultural competency through training. However, as the 2023 HMI Prisons report highlights, that cultural awareness training is often insufficient, with deep-seated biases continuing to affect staff-prisoner interactions. We are aware of ongoing work, being led by HMPPS, that explores the experiences of adult black male prisoners, their general wellbeing and their access to mental health services. It is essential that these findings recognise the importance of formally embedded and compulsory cultural competency training for staff in order to effect a significant cultural shift.



# Accountability

## Where Accountability Lies

- **Government and Policy Makers:** A lack of sustained political will and inadequate funding allocations have hindered progress.
- **CJS Institutions:** Prisons and probation services have not fully embraced or effectively implemented recommendations, often due to institutional inertia and resistance to change.
- **Independent Providers:** Without rigorous monitoring and accountability, service providers did not adequately address the specific needs of Black and Muslim offenders.

## Conclusion

Despite the Young Review's clear recommendations and the reinforcement of these issues in subsequent reports, progress has been limited. The high levels of racialised and Islamophobic violence experienced by Black and Muslim men in the criminal justice system, overrepresentation of Black and Muslim men in prisons, ongoing disparities in sentencing, and the lived experiences of discrimination in criminal justice indicate persistent systemic failures. This is despite the opportunities for reform that should have produced from mechanisms that include the Sentencing the Review, as well as any proposals contained within the forthcoming Equality Bill. Given the findings from [the RR3 Reference Group on tackling racial disparities in the criminal justice system](#) mirror those of the Young Review, there remains an opportunity to implement many of the [report's recommendations](#). Action for Race Equality's [Independent Sentencing Review submission](#) offers further recommendations. In addition, opportunities have been missed to use the Public Sector Equality Duty to enforce the recommendations contained within the Young Review, alongside other relevant reviews.

### To achieve meaningful change:

- **Cross government strategy:** Treating issues of racial disparity in solitude fails to have an impact on the cumulative impact that we see within the criminal justice system. A cross-departmental anti-racism strategy with effective scrutiny and oversight measures is required to create broad change.
- **Political Commitment:** There must be a consistent, cross-party commitment to addressing intersecting disparities, including considering legislative action.
- **Adequate Funding:** Allocating resources to organisations led by and for racially minoritised people to implement training. Funding should be allocated equitably to address existing imbalances regarding funding for racially minoritised-led organisations working in this space
- **Institutional Reform:** CJS institutions need to prioritise cultural competency, integrate individuals with lived experience, and establish effective accountability mechanisms.
- **Monitoring and Enforcement:** Robust systems must be in place to monitor progress and enforce compliance with equality objectives.

Without these concerted efforts, the CJS will continue to fall short of providing equitable treatment, and the disparities highlighted over a decade ago will persist.



The  
Young  
Review  
**Ten Years On**

