

# **USER VOICE**

**ONLY OFFENDERS CAN STOP RE-OFFENDING**

**THE VOICE OF PEOPLE ON  
PROBATION FROM A  
MINORITY ETHNIC  
BACKGROUND**

**SEPTEMBER 2023**

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## FOREWORD

HM Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspectorate of probation and youth offending services in England and Wales. As part of our inspection approach we believe that it is important to give a voice to those who are impacted by the services we inspect, including those on probation. We know that taking part in our inspections can have a positive impact on the lives of people on probation, from wellbeing and recovery to future ambitions. As part of our commitment to participation and increasing user involvement, we commissioned User Voice to conduct interviews with people on probation for our inspections. The inclusion of user feedback in all our inspections is now a key part of how we work.

Following on from our first thematic inspection into race equality in probation (2021), we undertook a follow-up inspection into this area. For this inspection, we wanted to hear from the perspectives of minority ethnic people on probation about their experiences of the service and the extent to which it meets their needs. User Voice interviewed 82 individuals as part of this work, who are currently serving a community sentence or on a prison license in the community across the five probation delivery units we inspected.

The report presented here was produced by User Voice and outlines the findings from these interviews. The findings from User Voice's research have shown that, similarly to our case inspection, practitioners are often reluctant to take the opportunity to speak to individuals about their religious beliefs and cultural heritage. Whilst it was positive that 71% of those interviewed said they had not been discriminated against by probation on the grounds of their race and ethnicity, some individuals did report that they felt discriminated against due to religious beliefs or ethnicity. One individual stated:

*“Yes, as a Muslim I feel I am pre-judged and assumptions are made based on my religion. This has been the case since I started with probation, so no, there have been no changes over the last few years.”*

We would like to thank User Voice for their work on this report and for contributing towards our important goal of increasing the voices of people on probation. It is essential that we continue to give a stronger voice to those who are supervised by the services we inspect.



**Justin Russell**  
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

## ABOUT USER VOICE

User Voice is a nationwide UK charity created and run by people with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

We exist to reduce offending by working with the most marginalized people in prisons, probation, and youth offending services. We ensure they have the opportunity to be heard and to influence change. User Voice operates elected Peer Councils and peer-led, solution based, research consultations in prisons and the probation service throughout the UK.

User Voice and HM Inspectorate of Probation share the same goal of creating change that results in high-quality probation and youth offending services that change people's lives for the better.

As part of User Voice's relationship HM Inspectorate of Probation, over 2,500 people had their voice heard as part of thirty-four regional inspections of Probation Deliver Units and four thematic inspections over the past year. The relationship between the two organisations continues to grow as thousands more will have their voices heard in the years to come.

This report outlines the voice of people on probation for the inspection titled 'Race equality in probation follow-up: A work in progress. A thematic inspection' and is just one part of the full inspection. Therefore, we recommend reading the full report published by HM Inspectorate of Probation that we make reference to in this report to get a complete picture.

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## THE PROJECT

From the most recent UK census in 2021, 18.3% of the population in England and Wales identified as being from a minority ethnic background.<sup>i</sup> The percentage of individuals from a minority ethnic background that are currently in the criminal justice system exceeds this. For example, 28% of people in prison in England and Wales<sup>ii</sup> and 19% of those on court-ordered probation supervision are from a minority ethnic background.<sup>iii</sup>

As 1 in 5 people on probation are from a minority ethnic background, it is imperative to better understand the experience of people on probation from a minority ethnic background. The best way to do so is to listen. When we take individuals' experiences into account, we can better understand the issues faced by the population, what works well with the support they're receiving, and what they believe can be done to better support individuals in the future. Such solution-based research can be built upon by the Probation Service to improve the experience and rehabilitation of people on probation from a minority ethnic background and in turn, better protect the individuals and the wider society.

This consultation is part of a follow up inspection to HM Inspectorate of Probation's 2021 thematic inspection titled 'Race equality in probation: the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic probation service users and staff.'<sup>iv</sup> The results of the 2021 inspection were concerning for the HM Chief Inspector of Probation. In the 100 cases inspected, there was little evidence that probation staff had spoken with them about their ethnicity, culture, religion, and experiences of discrimination; little evidence of structured or planned interventions; little evidence that probation services take a strategic approach to meeting the needs of minority ethnic people on probation; and little evidence of good practice.<sup>iv</sup>

Therefore, it was deemed necessary to review the progress made by the Probation Service on this subject two years later. This report is one branch of that inspection and allows people on probation from a minority ethnic background to have their say.

The overall objective of the consultation was to better understand how an individual's race and ethnicity affects their probation experience and create peer-led solutions to the problems they face. Furthermore, our objectives were:

- To understand the experience of people on probation and what support they have (or haven't) had both in general and in relation to their race and ethnicity.
- To understand how people on probation's experience of probation in relation to their race and ethnicity has changed since the previous inspection in 2021.
- To collate people on probation's views on what probation needs to do to better help those from a minority ethnic background.
- To highlight any good practices that could be built upon by the service.

# APPROACH

## PRE-FIELDWORK

- Research materials were developed with the involvement of lived experience panel.
- Participant recruitment had three facets:
  - 1) Gaining access to probation offices for **2-3** days per fieldwork week to engage with people on probation.
  - 2) A text message was sent out to all relevant cases in each probation area offering the opportunity of a remote interview.
  - 3) A mapping exercise was undertaken to highlight any third parties that worked with people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The service users in each organisation were contacted for engagement.

## FIELDWORK

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted by **5** lived experience peers researchers across **5** locations:
  - 1) Bedfordshire
  - 2) Bradford and Calderdale
  - 3) Nottingham City
  - 4) Southwark
  - 5) Walsall and Wolverhampton.
- Fieldwork was two-pronged:
  - 1) Remote interviews via either Microsoft Teams or over the phone.
  - 2) Face-to-face interviews conducted in private at a probation office.

## DATA ANALYSIS

- Thematic data analysis was completed on all responses from the **5** probation regions.
- An analysis session was held with all of the research staff involved on the project and the lived experience panel. The purpose was to identify key themes in the data and areas of focus for the report.

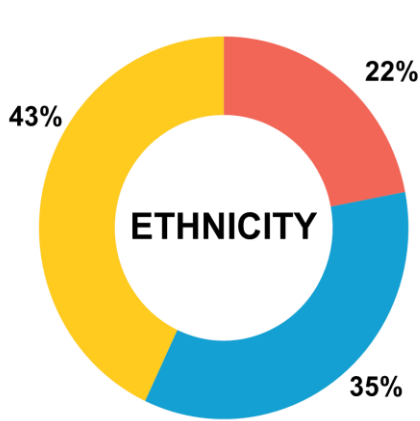
# KEY FINDINGS

- **7 in 10** believe that their race and ethnicity is not a factor that has affected their probation experience.
- However, the fact that the majority of people don't face discrimination from the probation service does not mean there is not an issue in how probation approach race and equality. Many experiences of people highlighted significant discrimination and a "subconscious bias."
- There is a significant void in probation's approach to people's religious beliefs and practices.
- Most participants had not been on their probation orders long enough to demonstrate a change in probation practice. However, the majority of those told User Voice that it has improved for the better.
- **2 in 3** people have an effective and trusting relationship with their probation practitioner.
- Diversity in probation staff at all levels is key to fostering understanding and creating inclusivity and relatability.
- **2 in 3** people on probation feel heard by probation as their stories are listened to by probation staff. However, the majority feel like they don't have a say in how probation is run.
- Participant led solutions include but are not limited to:

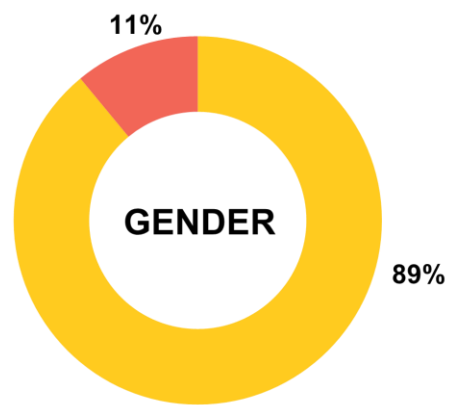
- The involvement of people on probation in training for probation staff.
- Awareness raising for differing religions and cultures.
- Increased diversity in probation staff at senior levels.

## RESEARCH SAMPLE

82 people on probation from a minority ethnic background had their say via semi-structured interviews.

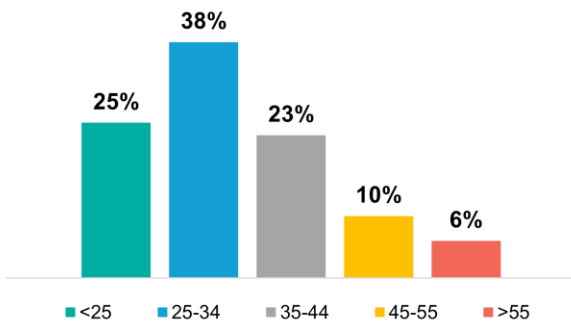


■ Mixed Heritage      ■ Black/Black British  
 ■ Asian/British Asian



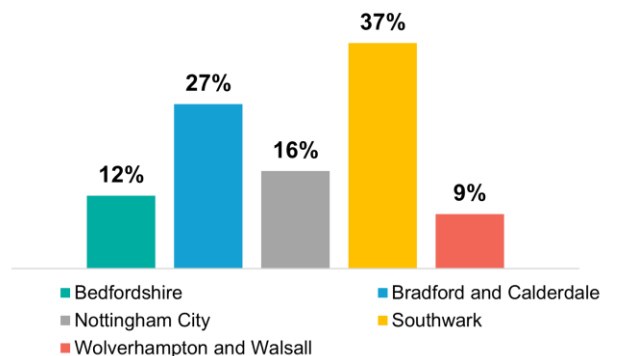
■ Male   ■ Female

### AGE



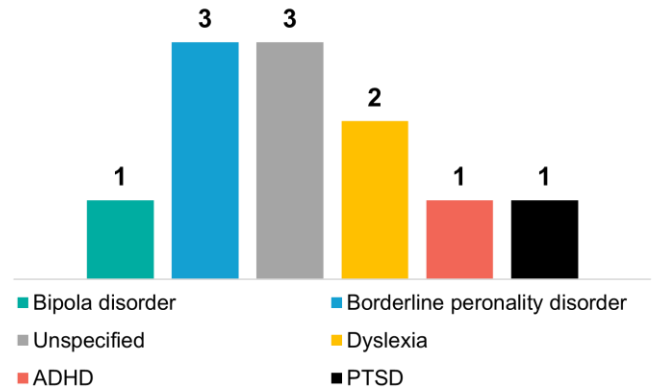
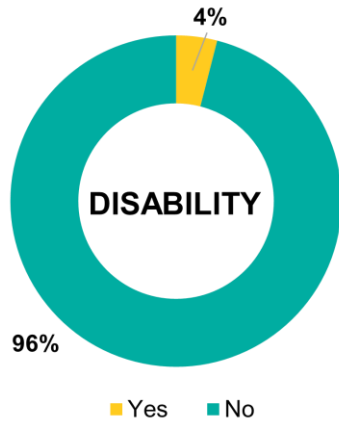
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### PROBATION DELIVERY UNIT



■ Bedfordshire   ■ Bradford and Calderdale  
 ■ Nottingham City   ■ Southwark  
 ■ Wolverhampton and Walsall

## NEURODIVERSITY AND OTHER NOTED CONDITIONS



\*Please note that the rate of less than 10% of participants reporting a neurodiverse condition is low in comparison with general society (estimated 20%), and even lower in comparison with people that have lived experience of the criminal justice system. Further research needs to be done into the barriers of those from a minority ethnic background identifying as neurodiverse.



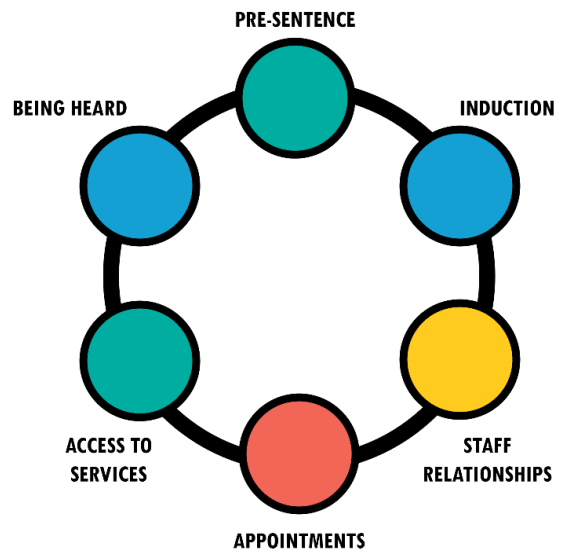
# **CHAPTER 1: OVERALL PROBATION EXPERIENCE**

# OVERALL PROBATION EXPERIENCE

## PROBATION EXPERIENCE MAP:

FOR THIS CONSULTATION, PROBATION EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN BROKEN DOWN INTO SIX KEY AREAS

HOW AN INDIVIDUAL'S EXPERIENCE OF THESE SIX KEY AREAS RELATES TO THEIR RACE AND ETHNICITY WILL BE DISCUSSED THROUGHOUT



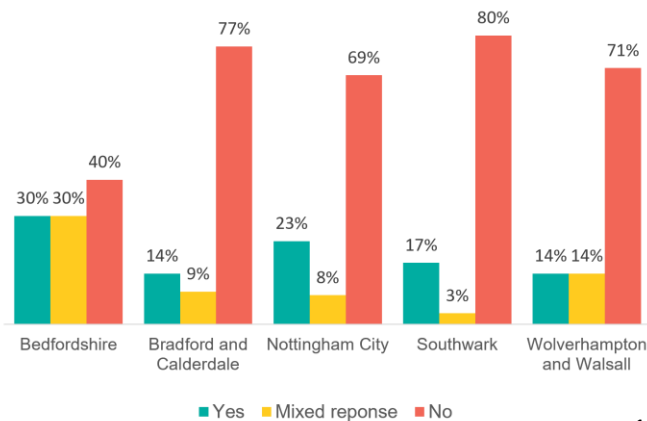
The role of the Probation Service is to supervise individuals serving community orders while protecting the public. For the purpose of this consultation, User Voice broke down an individual's probation experience into six key areas to better understand their experience and how or if they're being supported in each of the six areas. These six key areas were:

Their pre-sentence experience; their experience with induction; their relationship with probation staff; their experience with their appointments; their ability to access services; and to what extent they feel heard by probation.

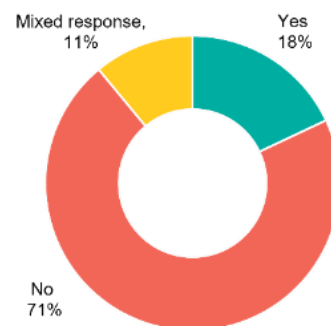
Through better understanding of the current experience of people on probation from a minority ethnic background, we can better understand how to support them and therefore, aid their rehabilitation, increase desistance, and have safer communities.

**7 in 10 people on probation from a minority ethnic background believe their race and ethnicity is not a factor in their probation experience.**

**Q: Do you think your ethnicity or race is a factor in relation to your probation experience?**



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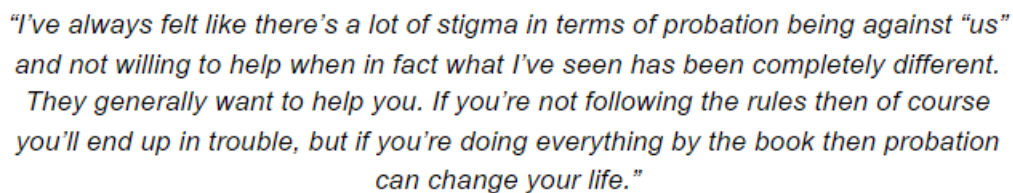


58 out of 82 of participants stated that their race and ethnicity has not been a factor that affected their probation experience. Despite this being a significant majority, we must be mindful of the other 29% that have had their experience affected by their race and ethnicity, often in a serious way. The fact that the majority of people don't face discrimination does not mean there is not an issue in how probation approach race and equality.


Rates of people's perceptions of race and ethnicity being a factor in their probation experience varied regionally. However, responses in Bedfordshire varied significantly to the other four regions where three out of the ten people interviewed thought that their race and ethnicity is a factor in relation to their probation experience.

**Most people on probation from a minority ethnic background haven't experienced any discrimination from probation.**

The most popular theme amongst people on probation when considering their overall probation experience was that people felt like they experienced no discrimination. These individuals reported that they haven't experienced anything that made them pause for thought or question their probation practitioner or any other member of staff's actions.



*"I've always felt like there's a lot of stigma in terms of probation being against "us" and not willing to help when in fact what I've seen has been completely different. They generally want to help you. If you're not following the rules then of course you'll end up in trouble, but if you're doing everything by the book then probation can change your life."*



*"Not at all, I don't feel like I was being outcasted or treated differently to be fair."*

*"I've had no problems. The POs I've had haven't given me anything that made me stop and think."*

*"No, not with probation. There was nothing at all. I haven't noticed anything negative."*

*"Not with probation people. Only the reason I'm here is because I'm a Black man, but I haven't felt anything."*

**Some people on probation from a minority ethnic background described that they have experienced “clear discrimination” and “a subconscious racial bias.”**

Some people on probation from a minority ethnic background felt that they were ‘pre-judged’ because of their ethnicity and faced discrimination in several ways as a result of their religious beliefs, ethnicity, and immigration status.

*"Yes, in every way, shape and form. The fact I am working and yet they're still keeping me on high risk. They have recalled me three times... I've come out of prison, the first thing I did was get a job and yet they're still harassing me. I've showed them my working contract. They send people to my workplace to make sure that I'm working there, and it's just made my life a living hell... It's a lot more than racism. They see me, and they assume I'm a gang member selling drugs. My relationships are destroyed, my career is destroyed."*

*"Yes, I feel discriminated against. I was meant to come out into a hostel but because of my immigration status, they said I'm not eligible to go there. I gave them my auntie's address, but they didn't even do the checks. If I had my citizenship, they would do things quicker and do more to help me."*

*"Apparently, I already have three strikes, although I try to be nice all the time, I don't know why. Could be that ethnicity paid a part. As an Asian person people are quick to judge."*

*"Yes, as a Muslim I feel I am pre-judged and assumptions are made based on my religion. This has been the case since I started with probation, so no, there has been no changes over the last few years."*

Although some felt that they haven't experienced any clear incidences of discrimination, they feel that they are affected by a subconscious bias which means they are treated differently to White people on probation.

*"Yes, because it's probation and working with the public it's not necessarily the individual person or staff member that's there. But once you go back into society people look down on you based on your skin, it's kind of like they expect you to be there, you're judged. I've experienced this all my life, not just in probation. You can kind of tell when it's genuine, you can tell the people that are actually born with it [racism]."*

## AB: A CASE STUDY FROM AN ASIAN BRITISH MAN

While on a course delivered by probation, AB (pseudonym) was taught to how to cope with his old thoughts and feelings.

When he put what he learned in the programme to use by being open to his probation practitioner about his previous internal battle with his faith, he was referred to the police. This caused AB a great deal of psychological distress.

Aside from that incident, AB felt like his faith was also disrespected numerous times. He was not allowed to wear traditional religious accessories, saying they were a safety risk due to parts being made of metal. However, he noticed other service users were not faced with the same restrictions as him.

*"Sometimes you get funny looks from them, they would pull faces and show attitude to me, it feels like they have a subconscious bias about me.*

*They taught us something in a session about fighting an internal battle with the old thoughts and feelings, when I mentioned this to them, word for word, how I was fighting an internal battle and such, they referred me to the police for saying this...*

*...They're treating me differently for something they taught me, just because I look different from them, that's discrimination. It made me really angry, anxious, stressed out. It's recent and ongoing, because I felt compelled to go on with it and work with them. I told them how I feel, but they're not doing anything about it.*

*I feel pressured about my faith. They wouldn't let me wear a special turban because it has metal in as well as traditional religious accessories yet let someone else where boots that have metal."*

**Those on probation from a minority ethnic background serving longer community orders have experienced a positive change in probation's approach to race and ethnicity.**

The vast majority of people interviewed were not able to report on how their probation experience has changed since HM Inspectorate of Probation's previous inspection due to the relative time they have been on their orders – most people we spoke to were not on probation at the time of the previous inspection.

Those few that could offer their perspective often reported a positive change in their experience over time. Some offered a further historical perspective of how probation's attitude towards race and ethnicity has changed over the span of more than a decade.

*"It's changed now, I don't think you see racism outright now but it's still there. You see it more in prison. They are okay here."*

*"No, I don't feel like race has had an impact at all, my experience has been the same for two years."*

*"I used to think it was worse but it's getting better. There's a lot of diverse stuff going on now. The spread of the knowledge of my background coming to probation... It's good, it's kind of adjusting now. There's more interest and change now. I've seen a lot more promotions going on in probations regarding diversity in this field."*

*"I was on probation about 16 years ago, and my experience now and then is completely different. It was different many years ago. I had a bad experience before and had a really good experience this time. Last time I felt there was no understanding and that my race was a reason for that."*

One of the more significant findings that came from speaking to people on probation from a minority ethnic background was around religion. There is a perceived lack of discussion around religious practices and religious freedoms with probation staff. This concurs with the findings in the 2021 inspection, where there was little evidence that probation staff had spoken with them about their ethnicity, culture, and religion.<sup>iv</sup>

Multiple interviewees stated that they were told by their probation practitioner that they are not allowed to speak about religion or their religious beliefs.

In the opinion of people on probation, the induction and first few appointments should be used by probation practitioners to get to know the individual, their cultural heritage, circumstances, and personality to better understand how to support the individual – this includes developing a better understanding of their faith and religious practices. Following such measures would better support people on probation and improve the likelihood of desistance.

*"It's been difficult with probation as my probation officer is not able to talk about religion. I do think that probation should hear our experiences. I think people need to open up. Those working in the criminal justice system need to hear what everyone has experienced."*

*"I didn't talk to her about race but I talked a lot about my religious beliefs and the fight that I'm in due to Christianity and homosexuality and I decided to become celibate. I've always been able to talk to her, but she told me that she can't talk to me about religion because she's a professional. So, despite me telling her, she won't have that much input on my religion, and she made that clear from the beginning that it's a no-go area of discussion."*

In other cases, religion was discussed during induction and whilst developing a plan for their orders. While this is a positive, there was a clear inconsistency in the way probation approached religious events. Certain people on probation felt like they weren't given the flexibility necessary to attend religious events such as prayer whilst completing their orders. In comparison, other people on probation found probation staff to be very flexible around their religious periods such as Christmas and Ramadan.

*"When developing my plan, Eid was coming up, and they didn't consider that at all. Prayers and stuff, I couldn't do that. My religion wasn't considered at all, I was told I had to go to probation despite religious events. When I asked about it, they said it was nothing they could do about it. I wish they would have bothered to get to know us first instead of just prejudging. At least if they try to understand me it would have been a different story."*



*"No, appointments are just a tick box. They didn't take into account my needs around the religious holidays."*

*"They were flexible around Ramadan, but they don't understand stuff like that."*

*"My first couple weeks on probation they tried to schedule meetings on Fridays but because of religious meetings I couldn't attend. They were very understanding."*

*"Yes, my cultural needs are respected, especially around prayer."*

*"I think it's an understanding about cultures and holidays like Christmas. She knew when I cannot see her because of my religious holiday. Very considerate of when I was with my family. She respected my boundaries, ethnicity and religion."*

# **CHAPTER 2: PRE-SENTENCE AGREEMENT**

## PRE-SENTENCE EXPERIENCE

**Most people on probation from a minority ethnic background have experienced racism in the community. However, some don't want to discuss it with probation.**

During the interviews people discussed their experiences with racism throughout their lives. It was commonplace to hear accounts of interactions with the police in which people on probation from an ethnic minority experienced racism.

People either haven't or often don't want to discuss their experience of racism by the police and in the community. Some fear that it won't be taken seriously and that they will be judged further for doing so.

*"Yes, I've definitely experienced racism in the community. It's been more from the police than from other people. It started off when I was about 16, they would target me and stop and search me. They made a thing out of stopping me and pulling me over, constantly. I feel like I was targeted due to my race. I've never spoken to probation about it, I don't really feel comfortable. I feel like you don't speak about stuff like this as no one will even take it seriously."*

*"This area has more racism, there are a lot of people who don't like me around here, for example, they make comments and they can make you feel intimidated sometimes. I've never spoken about this with probation though."*

*"Not from probation, but from people on the side. Like in the recovery sentence, they closed my application saying it was based on my offense. But I believed that it was only because I'm a minority."*

*"The police is a different matter. Because the way I'm dressed, they look at me like "how can he afford that". Kind of racially profiled and they act on it."*

*"Of course I've experienced racism from police and society, I'm 55 years old. In society I get it all the time. I never speak to probation about it. I've gone all my life, I'm used to this. I've heard it since I was crawling."*

**Many people on probation from a minority ethnic background stated that they experienced a bias due to their race during their court experience.**

## **TS: A CASE STUDY FROM AN ASIAN BRITISH MAN**

During his sentencing, TS (pseudonym) felt like he experienced harsher treatment than his co-defendant who is a White British male.

He felt like he wasn't judged equally, not based on his actions but based on his ethnicity and background.

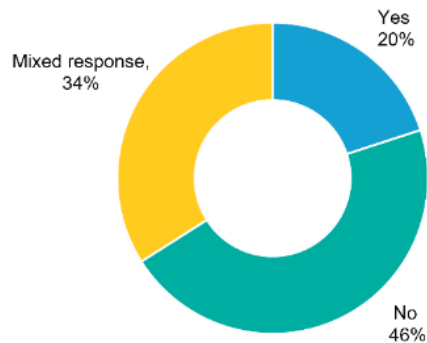
This is similar to what some individuals reported in the 2021 Race Equality Inspection<sup>iv</sup> where they also described their experiences of receiving disproportionate sentences by the court system and unfair jury representation, and regularly felt stereotyped.

*"My co-defendant is of a different race, White British, and he got a different sentence than myself. And we're both equally responsible for what we've done. I felt discriminated against. Because of my cultural background, I feel like we're all classed as one instead of individual people. It's more of an 'Asian group thing' instead of the single person that happens to be Asian. I feel like they could have given more of a fair equality but that isn't something you can get, is it?"*

**1 in 5 people on probation from a minority ethnic background believe that their ethnicity was considered during their pre-sentence report.**

The most frequent theme noted when discussing how their race and ethnicity affected their presentence report was that there was perceived to be "no discrimination" experienced by people on probation.

**Q:** Do you think your ethnicity was considered when developing your pre-sentence report?



*"I don't know what the exact blueprint is but they might have considered my ethnicity. I've never felt like they've been biased against me or that I've been singled out due to my race or judged because of the colour of my skin or religion or anything like that. I've never experienced it."*

*"No, not from my perspective. They judged based on the information they had, mostly based on assumption. I experienced some discrimination during the resentencing but not my pre-sentence report."*

*"They were very understanding. My pre-sentence report was done by an Asian lady, so felt like she was very understanding. They couldn't have done anything better."*

However, other participants stated that they experienced clear discrimination in both their sentencing and their pre-sentence report.

*"Yeah definitely. People need to understand that people of Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds, we always get the worse end of the treatment... We get harsher treatment like if you compare it to any other person or any other race."*

*"I was automatically judged based on my colour; I wasn't given a chance to tell my story. I don't know if that's how it works, but they only cared about the incident at hand and not about what brought me there [abuse from partner]. So I feel like I was discriminated against."*

*"It was considered, it feels like it had an impact. I feel like the case would have been different if I wasn't Asian. I feel discriminated against."*

*"I feel I received a harsher sentence. Feel this was based on where it took place. I felt like the judge was deciding based on my colour. I am banned from travelling which clashes with my culture."*

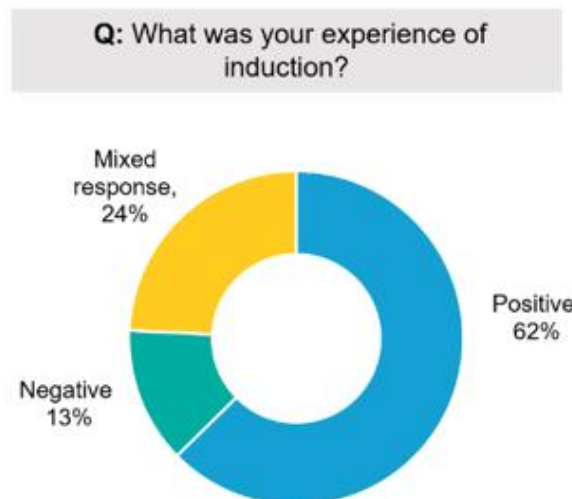
# **CHAPTER 3: INDUCTION EXPERIENCE**

## INDUCTION EXPERIENCE

**3 in 5 people on probation from a minority ethnic background reported having a positive experience with their induction. However, there is a significant inconsistency in experience regarding consideration of their cultural needs.**

51 out of 82 participants stated that they had a positive experience during their induction. People in Wolverhampton and Walsall had on average a better experience with inductions with 86% reporting a positive experience.

Despite the majority having an overall positive experience, there's a lack of consistency across probation when it comes to asking people on probation from a minority ethnic background about whether or not they have any specific cultural needs during their induction.



This lack of consistency in assessment and planning means that many members of probation staff are failing to take diversity, religion, and experience of discrimination into account when considering how to best support the individual. In the words of one individual, “they didn't ask the right questions, for example about religion.”

Most participants reported that they don't have any cultural or religious needs. However, some people do, and these are often not being highlighted when planning the structure of their orders. Whether or not such vital aspects of their lives are accounted for is dependent on a probation practitioner that is aware and understanding – something that is not practiced across the board.



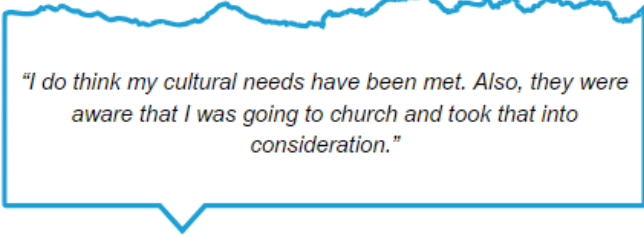
*"We didn't have any discussion about my needs, cultural or otherwise, and I do have cultural needs, would have been nice to talk about it." "I was talked to about family but no questions on my background."*

*"They asked about upbringing, but they had little understanding of it and of the effect it had on me. They didn't ask the right questions, for example about religion and stuff."*

*"It was fairly good, I understood everything. They didn't ask about my cultural needs, but I did bring it up myself as it's important to me."*

*"I don't have any cultural needs, but I was asked about it."*

*"They asked about cultural needs and like I asked to change appointment during Ramadan and she was understanding."*



*"I do think my cultural needs have been met. Also, they were aware that I was going to church and took that into consideration."*

These findings mirror those that were found in the 2021 Inspection,<sup>iv</sup> suggesting that little has changed in the approach to assessment and planning for those from a minority ethnic background. This is supported by what HM Inspectorate of Probation found in the 2023 inspection. Their findings show that there has been minimal improvement over the past two years in the extent to which assessments of minority ethnic people on probation take into account issues of ethnicity, culture, faith and experience of discrimination. Consequently, too many assessments were insufficiently personalised and do not provide a sound basis for engaging effectively with individuals from minority ethnic communities.<sup>v</sup>

## **ZS: A CASE STUDY FROM A MAN OF MIXED HERITAGE**

Like many of those that find themselves in the criminal justice system, ZS grew up with experience of being in care.

ZS (pseudonym) experienced racism all his life – in his care home and subsequently in the community. Being of mixed heritage, ZS felt like an outsider and that he didn't fit in with others of different ethnicities.

Although he has been interacting with probation most of his life, this time around, ZS has had a constructive experience with probation which has had a positive impact on him.

He attributed this positive experience to his probation practitioner, with which he became acquainted with while he was still in prison.

His practitioner made him feel heard and respected by taking time to get to know him and his heritage prior to his release. This created a foundation on which ZS is making positive strides in his rehabilitation.

*"Where I went to school, where I grew up, everything was still kind of segregated. They were catholic schools, schools for Muslims and church of England schools etc. Being mixed race, they were never sure where to put me.*

*All my life to Black and Asian people I was White, but to White people I was Asian. I never really fit in anywhere. I used to pretend to be Portuguese or Spanish so I wouldn't get jumped in the streets.*

*I've consistently been on probation, so I know all of it already, it's more the workers that make a difference in the system.*

*I went through all of this with my current PO before I was released and it really helped, it helped us get to know each other. It's the first time I've been able to openly speak with a PO. I just speak to him like I would speak to anybody else. I don't go in thinking of him as a PO.*

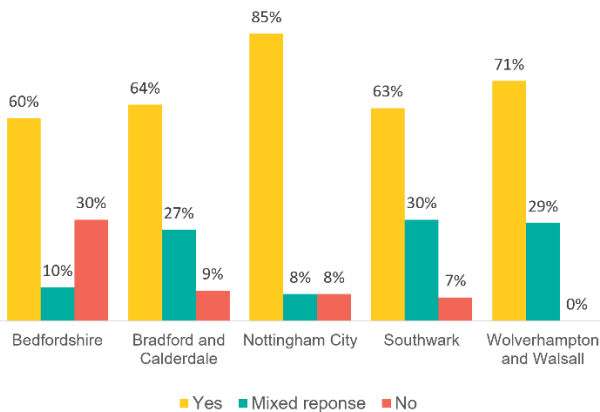
*All my life social services have been in control of my life, whereas now I'm free to make my own choices with guidance from probation."*

# **CHAPTER 4: RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROBATION STAFF**

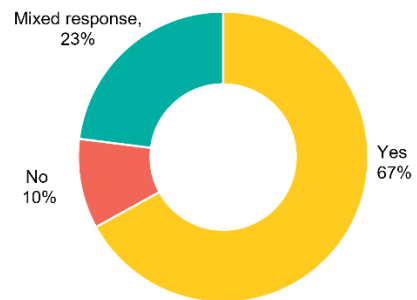
## RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROBATION STAFF

**2 in 3 people on probation from a minority ethnic background reported having an effective and trusting relationship with the probation practitioner. Respect and flexibility are key to developing an effective and trusting relationship between people on probation and probation staff.**

Q: Do you think you have an effective and trusting relationship with probation staff?



Q: Do you think you have an effective and trusting relationship with probation staff?



Out of 82 participants, 55 stated that they have an effective and trusting relationship with their practitioner. The findings from this consultation mirror those that were found in the previous Inspection in 2021

People reported that respectful relationships with probation staff made a positive difference to their rehabilitation. People on probation from a minority ethnic background stated that the key to building this respectful relationship was when the practitioner is attentive to their personal and cultural needs.

85% of people in Nottingham reported an effective relationship with staff, higher than the average. This finding could be in part down to many of the participants in Nottingham being female and having a good relationship with staff at the women's centre.

*"There had been times where I've been ill and I called them to tell them I wouldn't be able to go in, and they told me they'd call me the next day to see how I was feeling. Whereas before, I had the type of PO where I felt like I had to prove everything. Now it's more trusting, I trust him to do his job and he trusts me to do what I do."*

*"She is flexible around appointments and has a good way of working around them."*

*"Any situation where I haven't had a phone and things like that, they've always listened and understood."*

*"My PO is very nice and supportive. I'm very grateful to have her in my life at the moment."*

Other interviewees had a negative experience dealing with their practitioner. A frequent change of practitioner is seen as a significant hinderance to developing trust. This revolving door of probation practitioners does not allow the necessary contact time to develop a solid relationship for which effective support can be delivered.

*"My relationship with probation has changed over time. I'm not as close to this PO as I was with my old one, I don't get out of it as much as I used to."*

*"One officer made comments about my heritage because I'm mixed. We had a bad relationship as a result. The PO was West Indian. Things improved after the second time in probation where I didn't face any discrimination."*

**From the perspective of people on probation from a minority ethnic background, diversity in probation staff is important for inclusivity and relatability.**

Interviewees that attend offices where the staff are predominantly white reported feeling like it is difficult for their practitioners to understand them, their background, and their needs.

In contrast, in cases where the office is more diverse, people feel like there is more of an understanding. For people on probation from a minority ethnic background, the diversity of an office has an impact on everyone's knowledge from within the office. The emphasis put on the importance of diversity in probation staff was one of the more significant findings from the interviews.

Not much has changed in this regard since the 2021 Inspection<sup>iv</sup> where it was found that it could be difficult for White probation officers to truly understand the backgrounds of people on probation from minority ethnic groups.

The experiences of each individual or community do not fit snugly into one box, making a generic approach to support unhelpful.

*"I think diversity in staff is important as they can share what you feel, I think going into the office you can see a lot of diversity in the current staff."*

*"One of the ladies was Black and she had an empathetic tone and sometimes I feel like it can only come from one of our own. I mean this in a positive way. I haven't seen many people that look like me on the other side, everyone is White, so how can they see me and my point of view? There's a level of empathy that can only come from people that look like you."*

*"It was quite mixed here, all and different sorts of people come here so you might feel a certain type of way if there's just one set of people, but if there is a mix you feel more comfortable. They seem more relatable."*

*"I definitely think diversity is important. In this day and age, people need to be more aware, clued up that everyone is different, where they come from and their background."*

*"It is a diverse office, important as it makes me feel more at ease with people that look more like me."*

*"Diversity is important, because in probation service you get a lot of people from loads of backgrounds. It would make it more relatable."*

**Many people on probation from a minority ethnic background feel that there's a lack of diversity in probation staff, with diversity more likely to be found in "lower paid staff."**

Some interviewees stated that you are more likely to see probation staff from a minority ethnic background in roles such as working at reception, in security, or cleaning the premises. This is mirrored by HM Inspectorate of Probation's 2021 inspection which reported that while the proportion of minority ethnic staff was reasonably representative of the racial composition of England and Wales, minority ethnic staff were under-represented in management grades. <sup>iv</sup>

*"It is important to have a mix of every culture. When you just have White race and no one knows any other background, who are they to judge you? it's not very diverse, mostly White I'd say."*



*"It's not diverse, it's only diverse in the security and reception, in the lower paid staff, you know?"*

*"Not really diverse, I only see White women. I saw a Black lady cleaning, but not behind a desk. Diversity is important, because in probation service you get a lot of people from loads of backgrounds. It would make it more relatable."*

*"Yes, there is ethnic diversity in the office, I was quite pleased. It's been a lot better compared to a few years ago."*

**However, other participants feel that ethnic minorities are well represented across probations staff.**

Participants in regions such as Bradford and Calderdale, and Southwark were more likely to report that there were high levels of diversity amongst probation staff, including those in more senior positions. Although other factors may also have an influence, these levels of diversity may be a reason for the two regions being top in perceptions of people on probation from a minority ethnic background not perceiving their race and ethnicity to be a factor in their probation experience. For example, 80% of people interviewed in Southwark and 77% of people interviewed in Bradford and Calderdale stated that their race and ethnicity is not a factor that affects their probation experience compared to an average of 70% across all regions.

*"Yes, there is ethnic diversity in the office, I was quite pleased. It's been a lot better compared to a few years ago."*

*"I think the probation office is diverse, it's important to have different ethnicities as it tackles different needs."*

*"Office is quite mixed, multicultural. Criminals come in all different colours, sizes and shapes. It's very important to have representation to feel comfortable."*

*"They've been really really good, down to earth. I'd feel comfortable speaking up, in fact my PO she's the same race as me. But even the previous one, she was a different race but it wasn't an issue at all. The office is very diverse."*

# **CHAPTER 5: EXPERIENCE WITH APPOINTMENTS**

## EXPERIENCE WITH APPOINTMENTS

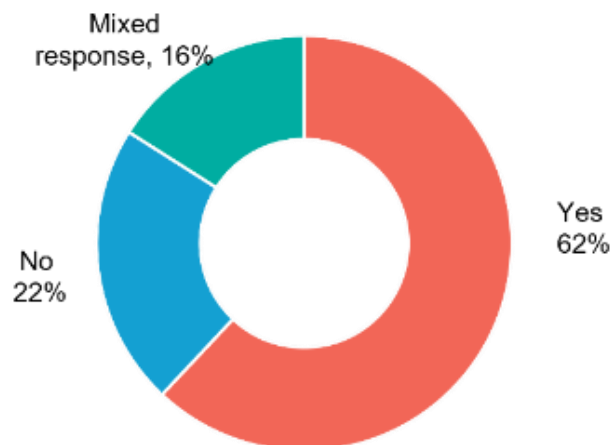
**3 in 5 people on probation from a minority ethnic background get what they need to out of their appointments.**

51 out of 82 people interviewed feel like they get what they need out of appointments. Others however, feel like appointments were needless “tick box exercises” that didn’t offer them anything constructive.

3 in 4 of those that stated that they have an effective relationship with their probation practitioner get what they need out of appointments. It’s clear from the findings in each area that having a positive and constructive relationship with a probation practitioner is vital for continued progression.

Across all interviews, there was a polarity in experience when it comes to appointments taking an individual's needs into account around race, ethnicity, and religion.

**Q: Do you get what you need out of appointments?**



*“I get what I need, talk over issues and work our way through them.”*

*"Yeah, I do [get what I need out of appointments], sometimes it feels like therapy."*

*"Not really, it could be more done. Talk to the person prior to appointment, if there's things that need to be done or spoken about, give a heads up. I think it would make a big difference."*

*"My new probation officer is more considerate, she's more able to adapt to my cultural needs."*

*"No, just a tick box. They didn't take into account my needs around the religious holidays."*

## **ZK: A CASE STUDY FROM AN ASIAN WOMAN**

When she arrived at her probation office, ZK (pseudonym) had issues communicating due to her difficulties with speaking English.

Her experience was profoundly shaped by her language barrier. She has had a negative probation experience as she couldn't understand when probation tried to communicate with her. Therefore, she was unable to communicate her needs and no effort to provide her with a translator/interpreter were made.

The interview with User Voice staff was held using Google Translate.

*"The lack of language made everything difficult. I didn't have a translator and probation staff didn't know what to do with me.*

*It is hard to make my voice heard because of language barriers. Probation needs to put more support in place for non-native people."*

**Most people on probation from a minority ethnic background feel comfortable discussing race. However, some avoid the topic completely.**

*"I would be comfortable raising issues if I felt discriminated or treated unfairly."*

*"If I had any issues with race, I feel like I'd be able to tell them about it and something will be done."*

*"I feel comfortable discussing about various issues with them."*

*"I don't know if I would raise any issues because they have me on a leash and the leash starts at prison and it ends up here."*

*"I don't think they care about me so I can't raise any issues about race, I've been insulted so much."*

**Some people on probation from a minority ethnic background reported that they believe they are more likely to be breached due to their race and ethnicity.**

Most people interviewed had either had no experience of being breached or believed that their experiences with breach and recall have had to do with other things such as 'miscommunication' rather than their race or ethnicity.

However, to a lesser extent, some felt that their experiences with breach are either directly related to their race or ethnicity or question whether it played a part. Therefore, in such cases, people do not think that enforcement is fair and appropriate.

*"My new probation officer is more considerate, she's more able to adapt to my cultural needs. In the past I've been threatened with breach around Friday prayers, because I went to that instead of coming to an appointment."*

*"They breached me because they said I wasn't engaging, but I felt it was down to my race... Is enforcement fair and appropriate? I'm not so sure."*

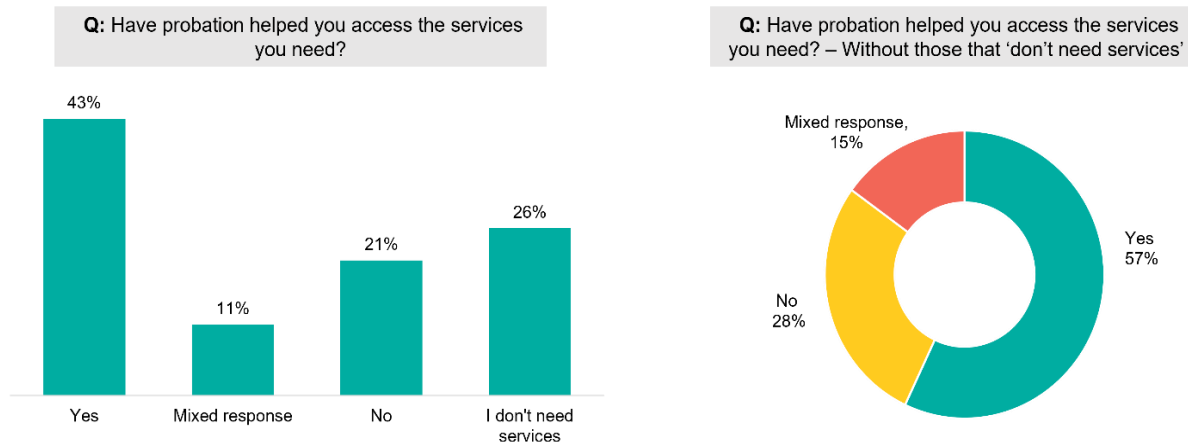
*“Yes, I’ve been recalled and breached, because I’m working and can’t make it to my appointment. The PO dictates the days of my appointments rather than asking me what times I’m available for. No understanding. It’s centered around control and power and their need to “put me in my place”. It’s deeper than race.”*



# **CHAPTER 6: ACCESS TO SERVICES**

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

Over half of people on probation from a minority ethnic background that need access to services stated that that probation has helped them access the services they need.



**Most people on probation from a minority ethnic background don't feel like services need to be relevant to their cultural needs or heritage.**

As has been noted in other areas of probation experience, the effectiveness of the relationship between the individual and their practitioner has a direct impact upon people getting access to the services they need.

Less than 10% of participants stated that their cultural background was considered when it comes to services.

However, the majority of people stated that services don't need to be relevant to their culture or ethnicity. People would rather have help with housing or help finding employment. A few people did state that there needs to be more inclusive courses relating to race and ethnicity.

Unlike the Inspection in 2021,<sup>iv</sup> none of the 82 participants stated that they have had any support from probation or links to support groups in the community specifically regarding race, ethnicity, or religion. During this current inspection, HM Inspectorate of Probation only saw one organisation commissioned to deliver services for minority ethnic people and noted that practitioners' knowledge of available services and resources in minority ethnic communities is fragmented.<sup>v</sup>

*"Yes, housing support, she's been very helpful in getting me the help and checking in on me. However, I don't see why services need to be relevant to race and ethnicity. Everyone needs the same support. Everyone needs housing and employment."*

*"No. They haven't offered any help. What are they meant to do? I don't know what they are there for. They have only 'helped' me to lose my job in the past."*

*"They used that excuse saying that everything was closed and such. But then they referred me to catch 22 and others. I can't really say if they take diversity into account, but they're not relevant to my cultural needs."*

*"I got put into accommodation where people in the same house were cooking pork in front of me. This is obviously a difficult situation for a man of my faith."*

*"They should have more courses around race."*

*"They should sign post more about  
cultural crimes."*

# **CHAPTER 7: BEING HEARD BY PROBATION**

## BEING HEARD BY PROBATION

**2 in 3 people on probation from a minority ethnic background felt that their story is heard by probation. However, those interviewed did not feel like they had a say in how probation was run.**

54 out of 82 of people interviewed feel that their story is heard by their practitioner. However, others believe that they either haven't had a chance to tell their story or that it is respected.

A prevalent theme amongst the data was that people feel like they weren't asked about their supervision and that they don't have a say in how probation is run. The majority of these people would like to have a say and recognize the importance of the perspective of lived experience.

Some feel like they don't need to have a say in how probation is run. They believe the service is functioning how it should be and there's no need to.

*"Yes I do and can speak and feel my story is respected. I would like to have a say in how probation is run and it would be more focused on rehabilitation if it was up to me."*

*"Yes. Obviously, there's a hierarchy here. My voice is heard by my PO but if his superiors have heard it, I'm not so sure. Feel like I've been heard. They give more insight. I definitely think lived experience can help improve the probation system. I wish I had more of a say in how probation is run. It shouldn't be so much of a punishment because you've already been punished."*

*“Feel like I'm heard more in a conversation and not a dictatorship, you don't feel like you're generally talking to the police. It's less authority in some places. They respect my story and you are seen as a person from my experience.”*

*“They listen to me. They give me a chance to tell my story and it's respected.”*

*“I don't feel heard. I feel like nothing changes. If I were to go tell all this, there might be temporarily changes, but nothing that would last, it would go back to “normal” or how it was. I feel like I could tell my story, but it wouldn't change anything. I would like more of a say on how probation is run based on how things are. I would appreciate that. At the moment it just feels like I'm controlled, if I had more of a say there would be more equality and more consistency.”*

**People on probation from a minority ethnic background want the involvement of more lived experience in the probation service that takes race and ethnicity into account.**

*“I think communication and trust would be improved by lived experience and it could tie in with race and ethnicity as it prevents pre-judgement.”*

*"Lived experiences are important because if someone has 'been there, done that' will be able to speak to someone who just started of doing crime and just tell them I've been there done that, and from experience you don't want to do this."*

*"How will probation get to know certain things, without having people with lived experiences contributing."*

*"People with lived experience understand the system from the other side. especially those from a diverse ethnic background, they could be impactful."*

*"Lived experiences can help improve the service, more peer led. There's a lot of stigma around different cultures and ethnicities, it could break barriers."*

*"Lived experience could be helpful in all kind of services because they might take you more seriously as people know you've been through similar things."*



# **CHAPTER 8: PEER-LED SOLUTIONS**

## PEER-LED SOLUTIONS

**2 in 3 people on probation from a minority ethnic background reported having an effective and trusting relationship with the probation practitioner. Respect and flexibility are key to developing an effective and trusting relationship between people on probation and probation staff.**



### **THE ISSUE:**

People on probation feel like their lived experience is not incorporated enough by the service but could have great benefit. Key decisions are often made without them having their say. People want to have their say in how probation is run. They want a voice.

### **SUGGESTED SOLUTION:**

A peer-led approach which significantly increases the involvement of people on probation that have both the lived experience of the criminal justice system and being from a minority ethnic background.

*"Lived experiences can help improve the service, more peer led. There's a lot of stigma around different cultures and ethnicities, it could break barriers."*



### **THE ISSUE:**

The religious beliefs and practices of people on probation are not being considered during the planning and assessment induction session.

### **SUGGESTED SOLUTION:**

Probation practitioners need to take the time during inductions to speak to an individual about their religious beliefs and their cultural heritage. However, this cannot be in a 'tick box style' way. Such topics need to be discussed during an open conversation where the practitioner gets to better understand the needs of the individual, and simply, get to know the person better.

What is learned during these conversations needs to be reaffirmed and acted upon during appointments.

*"Being heard and understood from the start. If I was Muslim and needed to pray, I would get the opportunity to do that in the middle of my appointment. If I need a cultural day they will change appointments, so if my family decide to put on an event, I get a leeway. Or for instance, I don't eat pork, make sure I am not put into a situation where you got to try and be around pork."*

*"Allow me to wear my Turban with traditional metal-wear, as it's part of my heritage." "Probation needs to put more support in place for non-native people."*



**THE ISSUE:**

Foreign national people on probation, for which English isn't their first language, are often left in the dark with little means of accessing the support they need aid their rehabilitation.

**SUGGESTED SOLUTION:**

Make better use of translation services and make sure courses and support is both accessible and suitable for non-English speakers.

*"Probation needs to put more support in place for non-native people."*



**THE ISSUE:**

The variance in experience that people encounter with their probation practitioners and probation experience in general is vast and their rehabilitation suffers because of it.

For many practitioners there is a lack of understanding of the cultural background and religious beliefs of the people in their caseload.

**SUGGESTED SOLUTION:**

In-depth training that involves both people with lived experience and staff of a minority ethnic background.

*"They need to train their staff more.  
Communication is key, Education is key. Lived  
experiences help understand the system more."*

*"People on probation should support training, but  
only certain people, there just needs to be a bit of  
ethnicity around the place."*

*"More training, it could help if people on  
probation help so we can tell you what we  
expect from you."*



**THE ISSUE:**

The diversity of some offices was praised by people on probation. However, some feel like the diversity is mainly focused in less-senior positions.

**SUGGESTED SOLUTION:**

Employ more people from a minority ethnic background into senior positions. Where this is already the case, it has been noted to foster understanding across the rest of probation staff.

*“Employ more diverse people, from different backgrounds.”*

*“More diversity in probation staff, increase the quota of how many ethnic people you hire.”*



**THE ISSUE:**

For many practitioners there is a lack of understanding of the cultural background and religious beliefs of the people in their caseload.

**SUGGESTED SOLUTION:**

Celebrate the cultural heritage of people on probation through campaigns, posters, awareness sessions, etc. This would foster knowledge amongst probation staff and other people on probation which would result in those from a minority ethnic background feeling more welcomed and considered.

*"They need a bit more knowledge about where we're coming from. From this inspection, I'd like to see more knowledge, posters, billboards, promotions. They need more awareness of religion and ethnicity."*

*"Just learning about different cultures, more of a better understanding of different cultures, races. We are a diverse nation and if you look at jails, they are even more."*

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<sup>iii</sup> Offender Management Statistics quarterly: October to December 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2022>

<sup>iv</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2021). *Race equality in probation: the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic probation service users and staff*. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/race-equality-in-probation/>

<sup>v</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2021). Race equality in probation follow-up: A work in progress. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/race-equality-in-probation-follow-up/>



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