|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| C:\Users\kph63j\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Word\2019 ENGLISH.JPG | **News release**Enquiries: 07889 405930/media@hmiprobation.gov.uk  |

Friday 12 March 2021

Under embargo until Tuesday 16 March 2021 00.01

**Probation service must ‘reset and raise’ standard of work with ethnic minority service users and staff urgently**

Probation services must show greater consideration and confidence in their work with black, Asian and minority ethnic service users and staff, according to a new report.

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation found the probation service’s focus on racial equality has declined since *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms were introduced in 2014.

Inspectors also found the service has no specific strategy for delivering activity to ethnic minority service users.

More than 222,000 people are supervised by probation services across England and Wales. Around a fifth of people on probation are from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Chief Inspector of Probation Justin Russell said: “This has been a challenging year for probation staff and I pay tribute to the way they have pulled together to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. But the service faces other major challenges too – not least, ensuring that every service user, whatever their background, gets proper support and supervision.

“In this inspection, we found very little evidence of probation officers speaking to service users about their race, ethnicity or experiences of discrimination. Some officers – by their own admission – avoided talking about these issues altogether.

“Data about race, ethnicity and religion was missing in almost one in 10 inspected cases. Sometimes staff met with individuals who had experienced discrimination or trauma, but no issues were recorded on their file.

“These are disappointing findings. We have concerns about every stage of probation supervision from the quality of pre-sentencing reports – we found 40 per cent were insufficient in considering diversity factors – to the way that ethnic minority service users were involved in their assessment and sentence plans.

“Probation officers need to find out as much as possible about individuals to support their rehabilitation. How can you help someone if you don’t know what their life is like?”

Some individuals cited it was difficult to engage with probation because of previous negative experiences with the police, prison staff or with white people in other positions of authority.

Some service users reported their probation officers were kind and well-meaning but did not understand their heritage, culture or religion.

Links with local community organisations are poor and culturally-appropriate services are rarely commissioned. There are also few programmes to address racially-motivated offending.

The report also explored the experiences of ethnic minority probation staff. Key findings include:

* inspectors heard distressing stories of inappropriate behaviour towards ethnic minority staff including instances of stereotyping, racist and sexualised language, and false allegations
* ethnic minority staff were not always consulted or supported to work with individuals who had committed race-related offences
* many surveyed staff did not feel it was safe to raise issues of racial discrimination at work and lacked faith that complaints would be handled appropriately. Inspectors heard serious complaints had been repeatedly downplayed, ignored or dismissed
* of the 30 staff from our survey who had raised an issue of racial discrimination, only two felt the process and outcomes had been handled fairly
* some ethnic minority staff felt recruitment and promotion practices were not open and fair.

The Inspectorate’s report includes 15 recommendations for HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the National Probation Service (NPS).

Mr Russell said: “In a little over 100 days, probation services will be unified in England and Wales. This is an important opportunity to reset and raise the standard of work with ethnic minority service users and staff.

“At a national level, we want to see a strategy that sets out how the unified service will work with ethnic minority service users. Data should be gathered and published to identify and address trends, for example if particular ethnic groups are breached or recalled to prison at a disproportionate rate.

“Training gaps across all grades need to be addressed. Training senior leaders and managers will lead to improved understanding and behaviour change. Training probation officers will ensure they understand the impact of racism and discrimination on service users’ lives and on their own practice.

“There is also an urgent job to do to rebuild trust with ethnic minority staff. It was painful to hear stories of discrimination and this was made worse by the fact that staff did not feel heard or believed and were considered ‘trouble-makers’.

“There is a critical need to review the complaints and grievance process and train managers to deal with discrimination confidentially and sensitively.”

In an unusual move, Mr Russell announced his intention to reinspect this work again in two years. He concluded: “HMPPS and the probation service are now paying attention to this issue but need to keep up the momentum. This work needs to be taken forward at pace, and real and rapid progress to further race equality in probation.”

ENDS

**Notes to editor**

1. ‘Race equality in probation: the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic probation service users and staff’is available at [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation) from 16 March 2021 00.01.
2. HM Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth offending and probation services across England and Wales.
3. Prior to 2014, 35 self-governing probation trusts delivered probation services across England and Wales. The government’s Transforming Rehabilitation programme replaced these trusts with seven National Probation Service (NPS) divisions and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). The NPS will take over the supervision of all offenders from end June 2021.
4. We have used the term “black, Asian and minority ethnic” in the first instance and “ethnic minority” thereafter for brevity.
5. There were 222,657 people under probation supervision at the end of September 2020. There were 50,796 minority ethnic service users supervised by the probation service as of 31 September 2019. Sources: Ministry of Justice (latest figures available).
6. This inspection involved NPS divisions and CRCs in five regions: Bradford and Calderdale; Liverpool and Sefton; Hackney and Tower Hamlets; Bedfordshire; Birmingham.
7. The Inspectorate appointed Empowering People: Inspiring Change (EP:IC) to speak to more than 80 ethnic minority service users about their experiences. EP:IC provides research and consultancy by people with a mixture of learned and lived experience of the criminal justice system. Inspectors also examined more than 150 cases and spoke to more than 100 probation staff and stakeholders.
8. Fieldwork for this inspection took place from October to December 2020.
9. For media enquiries, please contact Head of Communications Catherine Chan on 07889 405930 or media@hmiprobation.gov.uk