



# Anti-racist systems leadership to address systemic racism

‘be who you ought to be so  
we can be who we ought to be’

## Introduction

This briefing offers an overview of anti-racist systems leadership. It does not shy away from the complexities and challenges of tackling the roots of racism. Enduring disparities and inequitable outcomes persist, systems leadership working together could and should eradicate these inequalities.

The briefing aims to:

- > Support leaders in developing critical thinking to understand how systemic racism is constructed and perpetuated in policies, tools and practice within individual organisations and partnerships.
- > Provide important concepts and signpost to research and resources that illustrate the multi-layered impact of racism within communities, workforces and across local public service systems.
- > Offer tools to enable partners to establish themselves with anti-racist systems leaders and case study examples of local system's development.

This briefing focuses on racism experienced by Global Majority communities and workforces because this is where the voice of the author, the research and other evidence offers a strong direction to inform anti-racist systems leadership. The principles, actions and tools enable transferable learning to address discrimination experienced by other groups.

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## **A note on terminology**

In this briefing the term 'Global Majority' is used. This term includes those people who identify as Black, African, Asian, Brown, Arab and mixed heritage, are indigenous to the global south, and/or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'. Globally, these groups currently represent approximately 85% of the world's population (Campbell-Stephens, 2021, p. 7).

Where other terminology is used in this briefing (for example 'Black or minority ethnic') this refers to the language used in the research or reports being cited. The term minoritised recognises that people are actively minoritised by others rather than 'naturally' or factually existing as a minority (see Gunaratnum, 2003 in Milner & Jumbe, 2020). Research in Practice capitalises the B in Black to acknowledge a shared historical and cultural identity but does not capitalise white due to associations with white supremacy.

For other key terms and concepts underpinning this briefing, see [Key concepts and terminology](#) on page 31.

## About the author



Meera Spillett is a former Director of Children's Services and social worker, with over 35 years' experience in social care, education and public sector partnerships. She started life in care and became disabled in later life. She manages several chronic health conditions. Meera was one of the founders of BALI ([Black Asian Leadership Initiative](#)), a programme designed for aspiring Global Majority leaders, to give them strategies to overcome barriers, learn about different leadership approaches and renew their confidence which is often depleted by everyday racism. She is the author of [Black Leaders Missing in Action](#), [Cultural Competence: Promoting leadership and organisational change](#) and co-author of [Leading in Colour: The fierce urgency of NOW!](#). In 2023, Meera was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by Social Worker of the Year Awards.

In several sections of this briefing, Meera draws upon her own experiences using the words 'we' 'I' and 'our', centring her voice as a Global Majority leader. This approach of engaging Meera's authentic voice means this briefing is noticeably personal, and unapologetically provocative.

The words in the title of this briefing are those of Dr Martin Luther King Jr., at his last Sunday morning sermon before his murder on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1968, 'Remaining awake through a great revolution'. King's message is clear:

*We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be*

(King, 1968, p. 269).

This briefing will be a challenging read for many. It may trigger strong emotions and responses. Indeed, you may experience 'displacement activity' defined as 'an unnecessary activity that you do because you are trying to delay doing a more difficult or unpleasant activity' (Cambridge Dictionary). We encourage you to sit with the challenge and stick with it. Within the construct of systemic racism, it is possible to experience 'racism without racists' (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). Our systems have built-in flaws including deep narratives about 'race' that are inherently embedded within policies, tools, practice and systems.

In the 2014 publication **Black Leadership Imbalance: Black Leaders Missing in Action**, I outlined issues of systemic racism, vertical and horizontal employment segregation and disproportionality. Global Majority aspiring leaders continue to experience a glass ceiling, they remain overlooked, underrepresented as leaders and overrepresented in grievances, disciplinaries and fitness to practice procedures. Talent is being overlooked. Global Majority leaders can bring innovation, experience and diversity of thinking including global leadership paradigms grounded in compassion and critical analysis of context to achieve positive outcomes. I am sad to say that much of the 2014 publication could be reprinted today and most of the issues raised remain the same. Indeed, this briefing will illustrate that these experiences extend across the entire public sector.

In the past decade I have listened to the experiences of Global Majority colleagues, leaders and read report after report evidencing poorer outcomes and racism. The reality is that structural, systemic racism continues to significantly impact human lives; UK Black women are four times more at risk of dying during pregnancy than their white peers, for Asian women this is two times; most startling is that this reality has existed for at least **two decades** (Knight, 2022; 2023). New lives unable to begin, the loss of a wife, daughter, mother in this way should be an issue of high concern. The rhetorical question we should ask ourselves; if white women were losing their lives disproportionately in the last twenty years, would our urgency of approach have changed?

Another seminal moment (there have been many) came in 2020 with COVID-19 and the global ignition of the Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd. In its wake, have organisations delivered what leaders promised in 2020, especially to those Global Majority staff who told their traumatic stories to help shine a light on the truth? Leaders, particularly white leaders, need to understand the racism colleagues and communities face daily and how racism is constructed and perpetuated. Some leaders and organisations are trying hard and have made progress. However, the variable depth and pace of system change begs the question: **has there been enough sustained movement from understanding to action, from action to impact, from impact to enduring system change?** (Leighninger, 2022, p.26).

This briefing highlights challenges and positive ways in which everyone can reflect on the reality of covert and overt racism and its impact on lives. Building anti-racist systems and structures can improve equity for our Global Majority staff and the diverse communities we serve. Creating equitable systems promotes diversity and results are likely to benefit organisational and system performance, capacity to innovate and agility.

Change starts from an awareness of self – your values, your beliefs, your motivation, your actions and how you intentionally take these into your work with multi-agency partners, your workforce and communities. Racism doesn't work on a 9-5 basis. I remain convinced that as individuals we need to take our anti-racist selves into our life outside of work for us to truly eradicate racism.

# Disproportionality and inequity in the public sector

*Society is unwell. The symptoms – racialised violence, and excess morbidity and mortality in minority ethnic populations – reflect the cause: an unjust and unequal society*  
(Devakumar, 2020, p. 112).

Without understanding how our systems have been built, we cannot fully comprehend how systems leaders must tackle racism, oppression, and discrimination. The reality today is that structural, systemic racism continues to significantly impact human lives. Multiple sources of evidence of outcomes show disproportionality and differential treatment of Global Majority children and adults by the systems which should support them. For example:

- > Stop and Search rates for ‘without suspicion searches’ of Black, Black British people are 12 times higher than their white peers. (His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the College of Policing & the Independent Office for Police Conduct, 2023).
- > Black people are nearly five times more likely than white people to be detained under the Mental Health Act (MHA), with Black African and Black Caribbean people experiencing the highest rates of detention (Ethnicity Facts and Figures, 2022).

*Urgent action is needed to address longstanding inequalities in mental health care. We remain concerned that Black or Black British people are more likely to be detained under the MHA, spend longer in hospital and have more subsequent readmissions than white people*  
(Care Quality Commission, 2022, p. 8).

- > **Speak Out** undertook research to consider Global Majority children and families’ experiences of seeking family support and found that ‘experiences of discrimination and racism were commonly reported among the parents and young people’ (Waddell et al., 2022, p.9). Inequity was also highlighted as part of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care (2022, p. 4).
- > The compounding of different disparities affecting the outcomes of Global Majority people can be considered through a Multi-Dimensional Racism (MDR) lens (see page 8).

## Racial inequity in the public sector

Senior leadership teams across the public sector continue to be mainly occupied by people who do not reflect the demographics of communities they serve. Only 6% of Directors of Children’s Services (DCSs) surveyed by ADCS (Association of Directors of Children’s Services) in 2022 were from Global Majority backgrounds. In ADASS’s (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services) 2022 survey, 92% of Directors identified as white. In the adult social care workforce, an estimated 23% of all job roles are held by Global Majority practitioners, but only 16% of managerial roles are held by Global Majority practitioners (Skills for Care, 2022, p. 21).

**Equality and Equity:** *Although both promote fairness, equality achieves this through treating everyone the same regardless of need, while equity achieves this through treating people differently dependent on need. However, this different treatment may be the key to reaching equality* (Social Change UK 2023, para. 4).

A report **Leading for Longer: Factors impacting on the turnover of Directors of Children’s Services** (Staff College, 2023) highlighted issues and recommendations involving racism and other discrimination experienced by DCSs, with focus groups sharing their experiences of race and gender becoming ‘weaponised’ in corporate life, increasing the loneliness and vulnerability of being a leader within the sector. Powerful conversations between BALI alumni and Meera about their shared experiences are reflected below:

*Individuals repeatedly report to me that they are overlooked for promotion, given acting up positions but rarely get the job and experience differential treatment and racism in their organisations. Many describe a daily struggle to be seen, recognised for their talent and potential, and treated equitably, with organisations overlooking the value they bring. When people have been on a BALI programme the process can be transformational both personally and professionally, however if there is no work being undertaken by the organisations they return to, their talents will continue to be overlooked, undervalued and discriminated against.*

Global Majority staff are impacted by systemic racism in the workplace across the social care sector. For example:

- > Global Majority social workers in their **Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (AYSE)** accounted for 53% of fails, despite only making up 26% of the cohort (Skills for Care, 2021).
- > Global Majority social workers have been overrepresented in Social Work England **fitness to practice referrals and hearings**. Social workers who identified their ethnicity as Black/African/Caribbean or Black British made up 18% of referrals and 32% of cases referred to hearing, compared to 16% of the register (Social Work England, 2023).
- > 8% of social workers surveyed in 2021 were considering **leaving the profession** because of experiences of racism, while 10% had considered leaving their organisation (Gurau & Bacchoo, 2022).
- > The **Big Listen** (2023), a survey of more than 1000 social workers across London and the South-East, heard repeated examples of the impact of discrimination on Global Majority social workers. Their research suggests this is a significant factor in social workers **moving into agency work**.
- > White employees and stakeholders (including elected members) may be **overrating inclusivity** compared to their 'ethnically diverse employees' (**GatenbySanderson**, 2021).

Similar disparities exist for the Global Majority workforce across the public sector, as outlined briefly here:

### NHS

'Black and minority ethnic staff still remain proportionally underrepresented in senior positions' (NHS, 2023b, para. 4).

Global Majority staff are 1.14 times more likely to enter the formal disciplinary process.

White applicants are 1.54 times more likely to be appointed from shortlisting than their Global Majority peers.

WRES Workforce Race Equality Standard (2023)

### Police, fire and rescue services

In the police force, only 4% of officers at or above the rank of chief inspector are from Global Majority backgrounds. (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2021, p. 6)

Baroness Casey (2023) highlighted disproportionality in the London Metropolitan Police including higher rates of officers discharged from probationary periods and overrepresentation in misconduct allegations.

Disproportionalities were highlighted within the Fire and Rescue Services (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service, 2023).

### Judiciary

National research identified only 1% of judges are Black, 5% are Asian and 2% are mixed ethnicity (p. 5).

In 2022 there were no Black judges in the High Court, Court of Appeal or Supreme Court.

Issues of **intersectionality** are visible from application; Global Majority female solicitors are the least likely to be selected as judges (p. 6).

Monteith et al., 2022

### Education

92.5% of headteachers are white British (Ethnicity Facts & Figures, 2023).

Research has highlighted the under-representation of people from Global Majority backgrounds is most pronounced at senior levels (Worth, 2022, p. 8).

Global Majority candidates for Initial Teacher Training are less likely to be accepted on the course than their white peers (Worth, 2022).

A study across 45 public sector organisations highlighted that ‘greater team diversity does not automatically yield an inclusive organisation. Inclusive leadership is needed to support an inclusive climate in which different team members are valued for what they bring to work practices’ (Ashikali et al., 2021). Global Majority staff often face compounded discrimination as they also experience intersectional discrimination. For example, a survey of Global Majority women across a range of sectors found that 28% Global Majority women (compared with 19% white women) reported that a manager had blocked their progression at work (Gyimah et al., 2022, p. 9). This illustrates ‘**Aversive Racism**’ defined as ‘exhibiting racist tendencies while denying that one’s thoughts, behaviours, or motives are racist (Dovidio et al., in Chen et al., 2021, p. 2499).

Evidence shows that inclusive and diverse teams can increase innovation, improve the quality of decision making, create additional buy-in for policy implementation, and are more collaborative. Where managers lead inclusively, they can see as much as a 70% increase in the proportion of staff who feel included (Bourke & Dillon, 2018; The Prince’s Responsible Business Network, 2020; Hunt et al., 2020). There is a business case for inclusion and racial equity (see, for example, McKinsey, 2023). Public services are missing out by failing to develop overlooked pools of talent. Systems leaders need to see and change the systems that exclude many Global Majority individuals across the public sector.

**Multi-dimensional racism (MDR)** is a methodology (Spillett, 2018) for investigating the evidence and cumulative impact of racism across the public sector. It has five domains: **economy, education, policing and criminal justice, housing** and **health** (including social care).



Spillett, 2018

Collating information across these domains in organisations and partnerships, enables consideration of the interplay between them, their cumulative impact on people, and then acting to eradicate disparities. As Banaji emphasises ‘...*grappling with the correct data is a necessary step on the path to understanding our role in the creation of systemic racism*’ (Banaji, 2021, p. 18).

Integrated Care Systems (ICS) and Integrated Care Partnerships (ICP) could benefit from this approach, aligning MDR with ‘**inclusion health**<sup>2</sup>’.

**See: [Leading in Colour: The fierce urgency of NOW](#)** for an overview of multi-dimensional racism and its application.

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<sup>2</sup> defined in the statutory guidance for ICSs as ‘action to improve health and care for people who are socially excluded, experience multiple overlapping risk factors for poor health (such as poverty, violence and complex trauma) and stigma and discrimination. They are not consistently accounted for in electronic health databases, which makes them effectively ‘invisible’ in health and care needs assessments.’ (DHSC, 2023)



### Questions to reflect on within leadership teams and partnership networks:

- Q. Are white people over-represented in senior leadership positions in our local system? Why?
- Q. Given the disparities for our Global Majority workforce across the public sector how can we tackle the root causes of these issues together?
- Q. What culture do we need to change for us to be truly inclusive?
- Q. How can we review, change and improve recruitment processes for the Global Majority talent pipeline?
- Q. How can we empower prospective candidates and increase their social capital?
- Q. How can we utilise the benefits of a diverse team as a business case for inclusion and equity?
- Q. Can we as leaders identify the excluding nature of our organisational culture and how we can tackle this collectively?

# Systems leadership, individual and partners' ownership

*Personal transformation [is] an essential accompaniment of system change*  
(Dreier, 2019, p. 4).

Change starts from an awareness of self – individual values driving motivation, action and how as a leader you intentionally take these into work with partners, workforce and communities. As Dreier and colleagues outline,

*One of the remarkable aspects of systems-change initiatives is that they can dramatically multiply the impact of individual people and organizations. And by nature, they are non-hierarchical – engaging diverse individuals and organizations on a more equal footing.”*  
(2019, p.31)

The message for all colleagues, at every level of the organisation, is that we can seek to change the system that perpetuates racism.

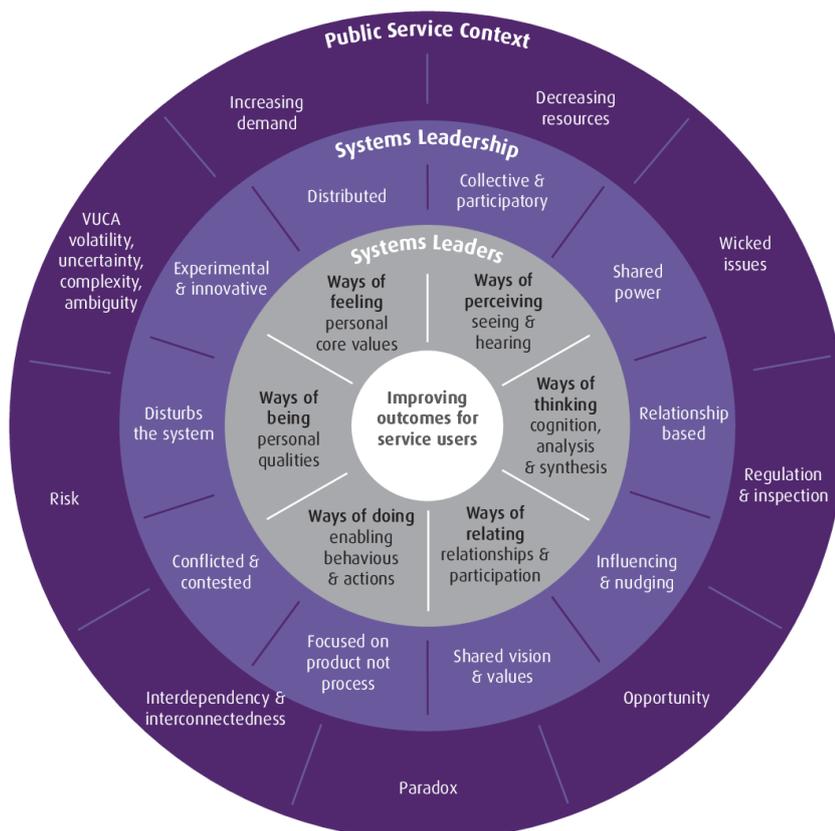
## Systems leadership

Systems leadership has been characterised as:

- > Leadership that is **collective**, with the concerted effort of many people working together at different places in the system and at different levels, rather than single leaders acting alone.
- > Leadership that **crosses boundaries**, both physical and virtual. Systems leaders go beyond the usual limits of their formal responsibilities and authority.
- > Systems leadership is **distributed**; you do not need to have the title of ‘Leader’ or ‘Manager’ to lead.

(Ghate et al., 2013)

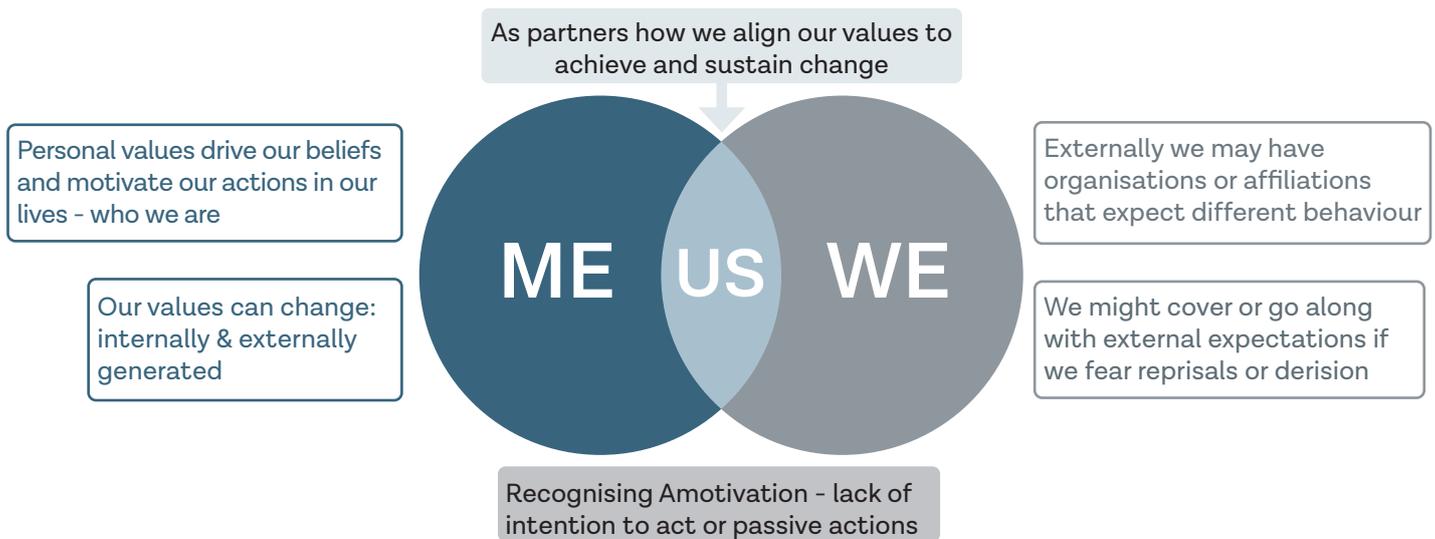
Figure 1 identifies key attributes of systems leaders and their integral place in a holistic, congruent systems leadership approach. These same attributes, characteristics and knowledge may be applied in developing the **critical consciousness** of leaders (at all levels) to interrogate and challenge racism and build anti-racist local systems which focus on addressing inequity and inhumanity for those who experience racism in the workforce and in local communities. **Figure 1:** Public service context, systems leadership and systems leaders – an integrated model (Ghate et al., 2013, p. 11).



# Values, Motivation and Action: ME: WE: US

Individuals are motivated to act on issues such as racism and prejudice based on their own values, which drive how they interact with the world. We are also expected to work to and own the articulated values of the organisation within which we work. In order that this can happen, organisational values need to be internalised: the more internalised or self-determined a goal or value, the more consistent one may be in acting in accordance with it (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The **ME: WE: US framework** is designed to enable leaders to reflect on their own values, their congruence with their organisational values, and how partnerships can build a framework of shared values to underpin their strategic system values. This can provide a powerful impetus for building a framework of shared values to underpin an anti-racist coalition across systems.



Spillett, 2022

When developing partnerships with other systems leaders, individuals bring their own personal values (ME) and the values expressed for their own organisation (WE). Bringing together both value sets, leaders need to establish the values of their partnership (US).

## 1. ME: personal values

### What are your three most important personal values?

Individual and core personal values motivate individuals' behaviours and actions, these can change over time. Congruence with personal values and those of the workplace can bring 'a sense of satisfaction and competence', 'along with feelings of autonomy and internal control' (Legault, 2007, p. 2-3). Within the public sector there may be some degree of similarity in people's personal values – though this should not be assumed.

Self-reflection on personal values is essential in shaping how to see, think and act to tackle racism. It is illuminating, empowering and potentially uncomfortable to explore one's own motivation to tackle racism at a systemic level. Focusing on core anti-racism values, such as equity, social justice, freedom, could bring the highest motivation for leadership action, in sustaining change and continuous self-development.

## 2. WE: organisational values

### What are the three most important values in your organisation?

Workplace cultures and values interplay with those of individuals in the workforce, whether in alignment or in conflict. For some, additional professional values, for example those articulated within social work ethics, also add to this interplay. Developing anti-racist practice will involve the whole of the organisation and wider system partners (Cha & Edmondson, 2006, p. 58). The likelihood is, based on proximity to the issues of racism, the wider values of others – particularly white leaders – may differ.

Three illustrations of individual situations that can overlook or conceal values are: (Legault, 2007):

An encouraged goal, often seen to promote anti-racism i.e., equity, is acknowledged by the individual although not yet part of their core values.

Perceived social pressure exists to adopt organisational or partnership values. Dissonance can create complying with or avoiding discussion.

Performative behaviours, an individual is motivated at an instrumental level to avoid either, negative consequences, or not wanting to appear prejudiced.

(Legault, 2007; Bradshaw, 2021; Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000).

Authenticity is ‘the quality of being real or true’ (Cambridge Dictionary), someone responding in ways that are integral to their core values and their organisation’s values. Incongruence occurs when employees and leaders have different understandings of organisational values. This can produce disenchantment and attributions of hypocrisy (Cha & Edmondson, 2006, p. 71). When this happens, leaders are more likely to ‘unwittingly engage in behaviours that their followers construe as inconsistent with organisational values’ (Edmondson, 2006). We intentionally link the use by Edmondson of ‘unwitting’ to the definition of institutional racism by Macpherson (1999).

### Do you really believe that systemic racism exists?

Amotivation is the opposite of authenticity, it refers to a lack of intention to act or reacting passively, nodding your head in agreement on tackling racism and then not taking any action. Amotivation can manifest in seemingly progressive ways: phrases such as ‘colour makes no difference’, ‘people are people’, ‘there should be one human race’, and ‘progress is achieved through merit’. As Hayes reflects ‘... when individuals and groups, and institutions deploy notions of colour-blindness, meritocracy, and a context-and-history-free focus on the individual, a choice for whiteness and its continued role in racism domination is made’ (Hayes, 2022, p.1-3).

### 3. US: Systems leaders and Partners

**As partners, what personal values and organisational values are we each bringing?  
How can systems leaders, particularly leaders who do not experience racism,  
notice what they have yet to see?**

‘US’ represents the groups that come together as systems leaders. Each will be bringing their personal core values (ME), and organisational / service values (‘WE’), with varying levels of motivation to act on racism. Intentionally creating the ‘US’ from acknowledging and owning personal and organisational values could hold the key to not just seeing and understanding systemic racism but reconstructing these systems at a local or national level.

When senior leaders are seeking to develop shared values, it is important to be clear about what these values mean, explaining and managing tensions and ambiguities, and provide psychological safety for individuals (Cha & Edmondson, 2006).

Collectively all partners need to expand their thinking to recognise systemic racism in organisations, policies, procedures, working culture, values and behaviours. Developing ‘critical consciousness’ as leaders is essential. It occurs when a person becomes aware and thoughtfully considers their lived experience, the lived experience of others and the socio-political environment including all types of discrimination and engages in action in response to their critical reflections such as seeking social justice, and activism (Jemal, 2017).

The link between our values, our motivation and actions is strong. Our brain neural pathways have been developed and influenced throughout our lives and new thinking patterns take persistence and time. If we make that time, there is hope for change.

*The human ability for conscious awareness, deliberate thought, and the motivation to link values to behaviour cannot be underestimated as vehicles of change*  
(Banaji, 2021, p.17).

# Contemporary discussions on ‘Race’<sup>1</sup>

The existence of enduring racial disproportionalities requires understanding of how ‘race’ is constructed and why it matters today. Understanding the past helps us to understand the present and interrogate why racism remains perpetuated within our systems. If we do not see the roots of racism in our systems, we will simply continue to replicate it.

## The construction of whiteness

Whiteness, like ‘race’, is socially constructed. Historically ‘Europeans prior to the late 1600s did not use the label Black, to refer to any ‘race’ of people, Africans included. Only after the racialisation of slavery did whiteness and blackness come to represent racial categories’ (Guess, 2006, p. 667). As Campbell-Stephens outlines, Barbados in 1661 ‘was the first place to create a unique racialised demography described in law, where whiteness indicated entitlement and white people accrued benefits as a result of being white’ (2021, p. 38).

The hierarchy of ‘racial’ categories advanced the false concept of ‘two races’. It dehumanised Black people as sub-human and sub-normal. Their bodies were described as ‘monstrous,’ only fit for hard labour (see [Drapetomania and Dysaethesia Aethiopica](#)). Narratives around Black men and ‘violence’ and women ‘not feeling pain’ continue to underpin racism today. ‘Black women specifically were subject to particular forms of abuse in healthcare settings, such as medical experimentation without consent and forced sterilisation. The medical model that exists in maternity care today was built on this patriarchal, white-supremacist framework’ (Birthrights, 2022, p. 7).

Project READY helpfully summarises four key aspects of whiteness:

1. White is a socially constructed category of “race” with no biological/scientific foundation.
2. The racial category white only exists in relation to other racial categories.
3. The racial category white was created by white power holders to codify the superiority of white people over others.
4. The definition of white has changed over time and has been (and continues to be) determined by the people in power ([University of North Carolina Project Ready: Reimagining Equity and Access for Diverse Youth 2023](#)).

Concepts such as whiteness, white supremacy and ‘race’ are central to the discourse surrounding racism (Stewart-Hall, 2023). White populations in America and the UK exist in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress (DiAngelo, 2011). Discussion or training about the historical construction of whiteness, the invisible privileges it affords and differential outcomes it brings, can elicit some common reactions from white people, including anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, cognitive dissonance, reticence around use of language and visibility of whiteness only in opposition to Blackness (DiAngelo, 2011; Macalpine, 2005), all reactions that metaphorically can bring the ‘shutters down’ for white people. Narratives such as ‘woke’ and ‘wokery’ in response to racism are not new (Hughey & Daniels, 2013), decades ago there existed the same narrative of perspectives being ‘too PC’ (politically correct).

*‘Black Lives Matters [2021] have put structural racism back on the agenda, but the initial optimism felt by many anti-racists that at last action would be taken to promote racial justice has been somewhat dashed by the backlash to this agenda’*

(Pilkington, 2021, p. 14).

When we experience potential threats, research suggests the amygdala part of our brain becomes active (LeDoux, 1998). It is best known to trigger the flight, fight, freeze or fawn response and it sends a signal to the brain to release cortisol to act on those triggers physically and emotionally. Evidence from neuroimaging research identified a connection in the amygdala response by white participants who were shown images of Black males, arguing that negative culturally-learned associations may trigger a threat response (Chekroud et al., 2014, p. 179).

Privileges remain seen or unseen shaping and upholding the power of white people. Even when issues are uncomfortable to ‘... recognise racism’s pervasiveness requires Whites to face their own racist behaviour and to name the contours of racism...’ (Hayes, 2022, p. 3). How white people learn their racial identity is rarely taught as such, it is built within the context of normality. There are many useful articles on the formation of white identity for example DiCaprio (2009). [White Racial Identity Development](#).

We cannot shy away from the facts that dehumanisation of Global Majority adults and children persists. Of the 2,847 children aged 8-17, including [Child Q](#), strip searched by police forces in England and Wales (2018 – 2022), 38% were Black, 52% took place without an appropriate adult, 51% resulted in no further action (Children’s Commissioner, 2023). Likewise, health issues such as sickle cell and mental health continue to see disparities and racism in the way they are treated (see for example [No One’s Listening Sickle Cell Society Report 2021](#); Mahase, 2021). In 2022, research identified in five out of seven cancers studied, ‘minority groups experienced a longer time to diagnosis when compared with the White group’ (Martins et al., 2022, p. 1). Tools to diagnose some skin cancers do not always work on dark skins, oximeters can fail to detect dark skins (NHS Race and Health Observatory, 2021b).

Substantial compensation was paid to slave owners in the UK in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for loss of their ‘goods’ (the enslaved) by a loan taken out by the UK government, ‘refinanced over a 181-year period and repaid by the UK taxpayers until 2015 by the very descendants of enslaved Africans’ (Namakula UN EPAD, 2023, p. 5). Conversely, it took until October 2022 for a compensation scheme for those invited to come to the UK in ships including the HMT Windrush who experienced racism, illegal deportation, personal and financial ruin (See also [UCL Legacies of British Slavery](#)). In 2023 the [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman](#) commented on the Home Office decision to overturn their previous commitment to accept all of the Williams Report recommendations:

*‘This move will be a serious blow to all who suffered from the Government’s mistakes and who were wrongfully pursued and threatened by Immigration Enforcement. It will further damage any trust that remained between the Windrush community and Government and diminish wider confidence in the system’*  
(2023, para. 3).

The dehumanisation of Global Majority people has many unseen roots including the pseudoscience theory of Eugenics (Greek for ‘well born’). Coined by Sir Francis Galton (1833) he was joined by many others in maintaining ‘tests’ that enabled them to label some, mainly white people, as superior to the Global Majority or those with disabilities who were labelled as ‘feeble-minded’ (Day, 2015, p. 6). If you have heard of any of these concepts: IQ, Statistical Significance, Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient, Gifted and Talented and SATs they find their basis within the Eugenics family tree (Clayton, 2020; Daley, & Akintelu-Omoniyi, 2023; Hiermeier & Verity, 2022; Stovall, 2021). Eugenics and its notion of racialised groups with higher intelligence than others, persist today. University College London (UCL) discovered meetings ‘London Conference on Intelligence’ being secretly held at UCL from 2015- 2018. The ensuing [University College London History of Eugenics Inquiry Report 2020](#) is a recommended read.

How we collectively discuss the issues of racism remains complex and can often feel uncomfortable both for white people and Global Majority people, albeit for different reasons. As Banaji outlines:

*‘...the evidence for systemic racism, at the level of institutions and society or at the level of individuals and interactions, requires re-examining the taken-for-granted, whether the water we swim or the air we breathe’*  
(Banaji, p.3, 2021).

## Responding to racial trauma

*Racial trauma refers to dangerous experiences related to threats, prejudices, harm, shame, humiliation, and guilt associated with various types of racial discrimination, either for direct victims or witnesses (Cénat, 2022, p. 676).*

After a critical incident occurs, most organisations mobilise a multi-disciplinary team to support those involved and help them process their thoughts, feelings and be vigilant of post traumatic consequences. The impact of ‘slow racial violence’ is described as ‘difficult to source, oppose, and once set in motion, reverse’ is largely overlooked (Nixon in Hicken et al., 2021, p. 51). Organisations need to recognise and tackle racial trauma in the same way as critical incidents. Responding effectively to racial trauma may lead to reduced feelings of anxiety, anger, sadness, exhaustion, disempowerment and an increased sense of agency and self-determination supporting behavioural and social growth (Mosley et al., 2021). Building critical consciousness emphasises the need for all individuals to witness, process and respond to racism.

**Enhancing safe spaces:** Some organisations have specifically recognised the need to focus on the trauma of racism and well-being by building a framework to support Global Majority staff. Safe spaces can reduce the risks of re-traumatising individuals. Some Global Majority staff wish to share their stories of racism; others prefer not to for several reasons including risk of re-triggering, reactions, resistance and amotivation from their white colleagues and/or a perceived lack of action to tackle racism.

This approach is echoed by Global Majority research participants in a process called ‘**storying survival**’: using stories (whether publicly or privately) to promote collective healing and action against racism (McNeil-Young et al., 2023). McNeil and colleagues link storying survival with building radical hope, cultural self-knowledge and critical consciousness for participants. They also link storying survival with strength and resistance to racism and racial trauma. One participant in a previous study said:

*I’m going to tell it to you so well that you don’t forget it. And I know someone who looks like me probably went through something very similar. So don’t think that this exists in a silo (Geo in Mosley et al., 2021, p. 10).*

Drawing on research and frameworks for anti-racism training (Mosley, 2021, Ishiyama, 2000), three steps could support both Global Majority individuals and white colleagues seeking to tackle racism:

- 1. Recognising or ‘consciously witnessing racism’.** This can apply both to the person experiencing racism and to white colleagues who need to be able to see and notice an event of racism (Ishiyama, 2000). We connect this to the concepts of ‘**appropriated racial oppression**’ or/and ‘**double consciousness**’. The first step supports individuals to reflect on experiences and encourages deeper reflection on the potential racist nature of those events. It requires white colleagues to be aware and actively engage rather than remaining passive, ‘unwilling witnesses’ or in denial (Ishiyama, p.34, 2000).
- 2. Working through and processing events (psychologically and socially).** Being aware of chronic cognitive and emotional burdens of covert and overt racism, and understanding what systemic racism is, ancestral history, its intersectional nature and how to ensure psychologically safe environments in which to tackle racism (Mosley, 2021, p. 7). White colleagues can actively witness racism by expressing disagreement to racist incidents and demonstrate support for those experiencing racism (Ishiyama, 2000, p. 34).
- 3. Taking critical action.** White colleagues becoming ‘ethical witnesses’ (Ishiyama, 2000, p.17) recognising the complexities of racism, acting at a social level, challenging institutional racism and becoming an agent of change. It moves them from being a ‘detached or self-distanced observer or bystander’ (Ishiyama, 2000, p. 34). The importance of our conscience and values driving ethical engagement as a witness is key. For Global majority individuals the importance of contact, support from others experiencing racism, considering the concepts of Black activism, increasing individual and group agency can also support resistance to racial trauma and decide on their individual and/or collective approach.

Trauma-informed practice and leadership is required to progress change. Using a Black, intersectional perspective on racism to understand connections in systems that have bias baked-in is essential. Here is an example of what one local authority are doing: [Talking about the impact of racism | Camden](#)

In this video, Rashida Baig (Director of Children's Safeguarding and Social Work) discusses Camden's approach to talking about racism, including how Camden:

- > Took a whole council approach, involving leaders from across the council in raising awareness, promoting reflection and providing education, to build common ground and understanding.
- > Set up catalyst groups throughout the council, recognising that anti-racism is not one individual's responsibility but instead requires whole organisational responses.
- > Created opportunities for professionals from Global Majority backgrounds to talk about their experiences safely, with an expectation that this would lead to change.
- > Created opportunities for all colleagues, including white colleagues, to work together and learn from each other.



**Watch the video here: [Talking about the impact of racism](#)**



**Questions to reflect on within leadership teams and partnership networks:**

- Q. Review your policy and procedures. What is your strategic response to support those who may be experiencing racial trauma?
- Q. Think about where you have witnessed racism in the workplace. Were you an ethical witness? What steps can you take to ensure that you take critical action if you witness racism in the future, and that this approach is embedded in your organisation?
- Q. How can you ensure that you and your organisation is using an intersectional lens to inform your understanding of and response to racial trauma?

# Advancing Anti-Racist Systems Leadership

Research analysis of systems leadership practice in three case studies within UK Public Health identifies three important themes in effective systems change (Bigland et al., 2020)<sup>2</sup>. Here we use those themes and sub-themes adding an anti-racist lens to consider how they could advance anti-racist systems leadership.

## 1 – Getting started

Sharing a ‘**compelling call to action**’ and ‘**assembling an effective coalition of the willing**’, people from across partners to work together. Take time to prepare leaders to work together, through events, keynote speakers, presentation of an issue and ‘holding a mirror up to effectively engender a common purpose’ (Bigland et al., 2020, p. 5). Engaging collaboratively in reflection is an important first step to working together (Doll et al., 2023). By paying attention to these aspects systems leaders can convene and commit.

Deep narratives about ‘race’ can lead to reticence in exploring issues of systemic racism within partnerships. Where there is a lack of racial diversity two things can occur; a presumption that Global Majority leaders will raise issues of racism and/or white leaders expressing their support but not engaging in complex discussions to address it. To counter this, ensure a regular discussion on values ([We:Me:Us](#)), get a closer proximity with racial disparities through understanding multi-dimensional racism and develop critical consciousness to tackle deep narratives. As Robinson highlights:

*Without narrative power, we are not going to change the rules of society—our society’s operating system—and shape society in the image of our values. Without taking a hard, serious look at what we are missing in terms of narrative infrastructure, we cannot truly say we are doing all we can do to fight for those values, and the people they represent*

(Robinson, 2018, p.10).



### Questions to reflect on within leadership teams and partnership networks:

- Q. Who might form your coalition of willing people? How will you ensure this includes a wide range of voices, including those with experiences of drawing on the services your system delivers?
- Q. How could you ensure that you include discussions about individual, organisational and system-partnership motivation and values?
- Q. How might you share the information and resources on the construction of whiteness and systemic racism in this briefing as part of a call to action to address systemic racism?

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<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to Bigland, Evans, Bolden & Rae for permission to use their research briefing and add an anti-racist lens for this briefing.

## 2 – Maintaining momentum

Key areas of systems leadership involved in effectively sustaining change (Bigland et al., 2020), adding key issues from an anti-racist perspective to advance our leadership:

### Structures

*Governance* – explicitly outline an anti-racist focus in governance arrangements. This might include articulating a shared understanding of how the historical construction of ‘race’ has influenced the system within which we are living and working. Recognising the need to cultivate the shared responsibility for identifying and eradicating disparities, use the Three Ps (below) to drive mutual accountability for progress.

*Resources* – review the time and monetary resources required to do the work across the system partnership. Non-monetary resources such as human and social resources should also be considered. Many leaders interviewed by Bigland and colleagues (2020) recommended a dedicated co-ordinator when responding to complex issues that require a systems approach.

### Cultures

Reciprocal trust is important in nurturing robust relationships that can withstand and overcome the challenges and frustrations of addressing complex problems. This involves creating inclusive safe environments, where personal vulnerability can be accepted.

*it’s all about relationships... and the more complicated the system is, the more important it is that people have relationships*  
(participant during interview with Bigland et al., 2020, p. 6).

Nurture open mind-sets – in oneself, the organisation and the partnership. Demonstrating curiosity in understanding the nature of systemic racism, actively listen, and seek multiple perspectives.

Consider both how the system builds resilience and trust in its leaders (for example, externally facilitated sessions to support leaders) and how to build resilience in the system (for example, embedding change so that it survives when key people move on).

Systems would benefit from exploring within their partnership the Everyday Discrimination Scale (Williams D.R et al., 1997) which enables people to reflect on the way in which they are treated daily, teasing out the specific issues faced and why, it can help leaders to maintain their proximity to the lived experience of minoritised groups. It can also be a powerful addition to staff surveys. [Everyday Discrimination Scale](#)

### Resource

### People

Personal characteristics and personal values that support open conversation, building trust and developing a coalition to tackle racism for Global Majority communities and staff. Ensure that equality, equity, diversity and inclusion doesn’t become synonymous with an absence of discussion about racism and its cumulative impact.

Leadership characteristics such as the ability to stay calm under pressure, the ability to persevere, and the ability to work collaboratively have been identified as useful in maintaining momentum (Bigland et al., 2020). Leaders will intentionally need to go towards uncomfortable spaces in their exploration of racism within systems.



### Questions to reflect on within leadership teams and partnership networks:

- Q. How could you use the ME: WE: US framework to identify your personal and organisational values, and agree what your collective partnership values will be?
- Q. How will you build in accountability both individually and collectively for maintaining momentum and holding to those shared values?
- Q. In what ways does your governance framework explicitly outline anti-racism and the roles of those within the partnership to tackle racism?
- Q. How will your governance arrangements enable meaningful participation from those who experience racism and disadvantage?
- Q. Does your practice seek to ensure you are representative of the population?
- Q. What resources may be necessary for developing anti-racist systems across your partnership?

### 3 - Paradoxes: Power, Conflict, Uncertainty

Importantly research highlighted ‘Issues around balancing power dynamics, managing conflict and acting in an environment of uncertainty were all paradoxical issues.’ (Bigland et al., 2020, p. 9).

**Power:** Seeing both the authority that leaders have and the importance of distributed power relations. Taking an anti-racist lens, leaders should explicitly ‘articulate the role of power dynamics within a system, and identifying who benefits or is disadvantaged by those dynamics, is an important aspect of the mapping and insight’ (Dreier et al., 2019, p.15).

Dynamics of power, racism and whiteness are interlinked; ‘through whiteness and white identity, white privilege works as a mode of supremacy. White groups set the rules and standards in society, from which all “others” - minorities and people of colour -must adhere to’ (Bhopal, 2023, p. 117). White supremacy exists ‘where the interests of white identified people are given precedence over the interests of other groups through political, social, economic, and cultural structures and practices that have evolved over centuries and are maintained and continually recreated by these structures and through individual actors and actions (conscious and unconscious)’ (Walton, 2020, p. 6). Reflecting on these issues of power and racism requires confronting, challenging and rethinking whiteness (Bhopal, 2023).

**Conflict:** Allowing for tension and disagreement while co-operating and working collaboratively is essential. This can be supported by the ability to learn, challenge and mediate conflicts through humble and hopeful leadership in the face of changing narratives around racism.

**Uncertainty:** ‘Balancing acting now and risking doing the wrong thing, against waiting for better information and doing the right thing but too late’ (Bigland et al., 2020, p. 10). Taking action to address systemic racism involves working with and navigating uncertain spaces.



#### Questions to reflect on within leadership teams and partnership networks:

- Q. Have you identified the power dynamics in your system – who may benefit and who may be disadvantaged?
- Q. Do you understand the personal characteristics of those whose outcomes are inequitable?
- Q. How can you collaborate on problems, like racism, that are characterised by complexity, confusion and conflict? (Dreier et al., 2019).

#### 4 – Indicators of success

**Sense of enjoyment and a shared endeavour:** A feeling that this work aligned with the personal and professional values of leaders taking part. While this may be a success factor, if there is a lack of diversity -i.e. too few Global Majority people within these spaces - there is a danger of reinforcing echo chambers. Working together to improve racial equity in recruitment, retention and promotion to overcome the barriers of discrimination, racism and disparities will give a feeling of positive difference and progress. The **NHS WRES (Workforce Race Equality Standard)** and **Social Care WRES** are tools that can demonstrate positive changes to celebrate in their work.

**Increased momentum with gains to the system:** A potential sign of success is increased momentum, for example, additional funding, more people joining in, and recognition of this work at a local and / or national level. Ensure the momentum has been fuelled by empowering voices otherwise unheard, to bring dynamic gains.

**Shifts in evaluation metrics:** improved qualitative and quantitative indicators of success (Bigland et al., 2020). A rebalancing of racial disparities and disproportionality that can be seen to be improving by a system that understands systemic racism and how to tackle it.

## Examples of developing anti-racist local systems

These examples of developing anti-racist practice from a range of local authorities show work in progress; they give examples of how organisations are currently responding and developing their anti-racist practice, including in their work with partners. One way that organisations and systems can intentionally hold themselves to account for on-going action is by using the Three Ps tool outlined below.

### London

The Leadership in Colour programme was commissioned by the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS). It is led by a reference group of Global Majority children's leaders from across London, who work closely with The Staff College as commissioned provider. The programme supports individual staff development and looks to effect organisational change which includes:

- > Funded places on the Black and Asian Leadership Initiative (BALI) programme for London's children's services workforce.
- > Workshops for DCSs, Chief Executives and Practice Leaders on cultural competence, deep narratives, and building anti-racist organisations.
- > Two Pan-London Global Majority staff conferences.
- > The reference group acts as a critical friend to ALDCS around policy development, for example policies about employee support and professional development.

The activity links closely with the London local government [Tackling Racial Inequalities programme](#), which works on whole council approaches and develops regional activity and action including London-wide working groups; developing a London local government anti-racist statement; creating guidance on responding to racial trauma; launching a Global Majority Senior Leaders Network; and creating good practice repository. See [LIIA London Priority Areas Workforce](#) and [London Councils Tackling Racial Inequality annual reports](#)

## Essex

Essex County Council children and family services have developed the role of Service Manager for Anti-Racist Practice. This was supported by an anti-racist practice working group, made up of Global Majority members of the workforce and was sponsored by the Director for Local Delivery.

At the heart of anti-racist practice in Essex is overarching leadership and employee support which promotes the values of anti-racism, recognising that system and culture change takes time and sustained effort. The first 12 months included:

- > **Working with frontline practitioners** to hear and understand their experiences, as well as supporting frontline practitioners to have the language and racial literacy to talk about anti-racism internally, with multi-agency partners, and with children and families.
- > **Recognising and responding to racial trauma:** creating psychologically safe spaces for Global Majority colleagues to talk about their experiences of racism. There are aspirations for racial trauma to be included within occupational mental health referral forms.
- > **Working with leaders:** the Service Manager acts as a critical friend for leaders, who also have spaces to deepen their understanding of racism and anti-racism and reflect on their own values, leadership styles and responsibilities.
- > **Launch of a 5-year Anti-Racist Strategy:** In May 2023, their first anti-racist strategy was launched to develop structures, review policy and procedures, support the professional development of Global Majority Staff and develop anti-racist practice tools.
- > **Working with partners:** 16 months in, with the anti-racist practice strategy launched, Essex children's services are now looking to work collaboratively with partners to deliver the strategy. At a strategic level, work is planned to explore:
  - Data with colleagues in education (for example, data about exclusion).
  - Developing work with Higher Education Institutes to ensure that processes and procedures are anti-racist.
  - Working to create psychological safety for students.
  - Working with the police - the Service Manager sits on the EDI Stop and Search Review Panel with Essex Police.

The work is overseen by a board of senior leaders and is being externally evaluated. Antonia Ogundayisi, the Service Manager, highlighted the importance of establishing a shared value base for anti-racism, creating trust with the workforce through authentic and collaborative leadership:

*Ultimately, solidarity is at the heart of what we are aspiring to achieve. It's not about them and us; it's about us working together as agents of change and taking a unified approach*

(Anti-Racist Service Manager, Antonia Ogundayisi).

## Brighton & Hove

In 2019, Brighton & Hove produced a thematic audit on practice with Black and Global Majority families. From this, an anti-racist project was developed across the authority. This work has included:

- > **Dedicated leadership roles** (an anti-racist lead practitioner and a strategic anti-racist lead) and a senior leadership team statement about anti-racist practice.
- > **An anti-racist practice board**, chaired by a Black social worker and including Black managers, foster carers, practitioners and also the Senior Leadership Team.
- > **Black practitioner group** with monthly drop-ins for practitioners and managers which offers a safe space to share experiences and access support. A psychotherapist has been commissioned to support the group with ongoing impacts of racial trauma on the workforce.
- > **Support for practitioners:** Via weekly drop-ins, workers can discuss inter-agency working and are supported to advocate for families. Issues are raised at a strategic level where possible.
- > **Involving families:** most successfully achieved when working with established community groups, for example local groups that represent Global Majority young people.
- > **Developing work with partners:** Work with children and families forms part of wider council approach and Brighton & Hove have begun to work collaboratively with partners with the aim to become an anti-racist city, based on systemic change over the five council directorates: **Anti-Racism Strategy 2023 to 2028**. The Safeguarding Children Partnership in Brighton & Hove has agreed an **Anti-Racist Practice Statement**, supporting collaboration between multi-agency safeguarding partners.
- > Along with 17 other local authorities, Brighton & Hove have also been part of Workforce Race Equality Standards (WRES) since 2021. The data collected as part of this has been used to inform a **WRES action plan**. Brighton and Hove WRES steering group includes representatives from adult and children's social care. They have collaborated on events and engagement sessions, supporting holistic learning across services.

Brighton & Hove continue to evaluate their anti-racist work, allowing progress to be measured and work to be adapted and developed. This has included thematic audits of anti-racist practice every two years and formal engagement sessions with staff. See **Anti-Racism Strategy Priority Actions 2023 to 2028: Families, children and learning directorate**

The Principal Social Worker highlighted the importance of value-based leadership at the core of anti-racist work, aiming to build trust across the authority especially with people who may feel sceptical about change based on previous experience:

*It's about sitting with people, talking to people, demonstrating that you're listening and taking action based on people's experiences*

(Principal Social Worker, Tom Stibbs).

### *Hackney: Anti-racist conference*

Hackney children's services anti-racist action plan includes a dedicated leadership role (Head of Service for Race Equality and Inclusion), anti-racist practice standards which have been embedded through training for the entire workforce, an inclusive recruitment protocol, and individual and group support for Global Majority colleagues across the council affected by racism.

One important element of creating shared values, motivation and momentum within Hackney has been anti-racist practice conferences. The first conference in 2022 was a four-day event led by children's social care in partnership with education. The primary audience was the workforce in the Children and Education Directorate, who were joined by partners from across the Council, health, and police sectors, as well as children and young people. The conference aimed to explore the complexity of racial trauma and its impacts, to repair damage and support effective future prevention. More information, including the content and an evaluation can be found here: [Anti-racist praxis conference: Briefing paper](#).

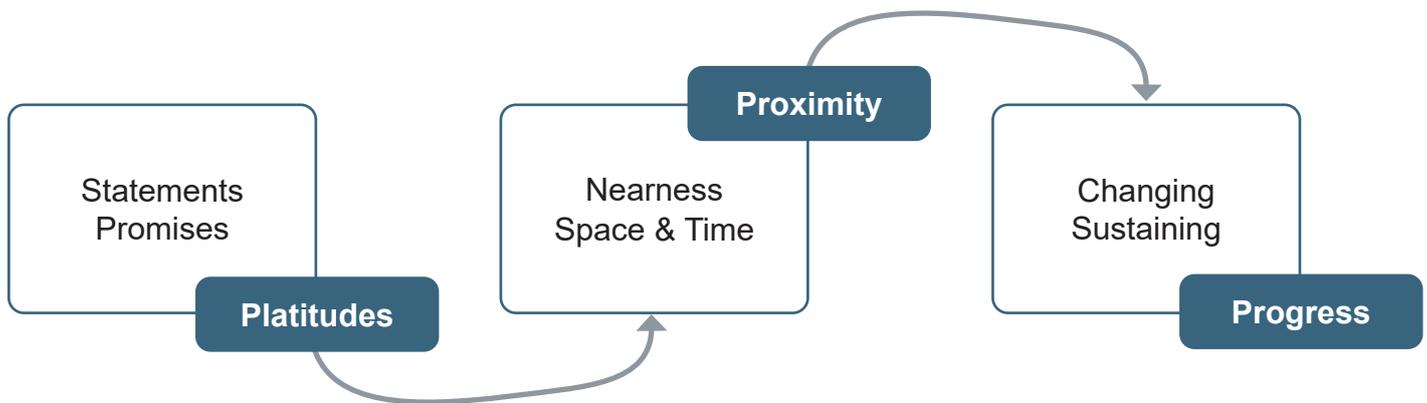
Building on the success of this approach, a whole council summit took place in 2023. This started with a whole council launch, and then each directorate had month to work together on developing approaches to anti-racism, focusing on practice, behaviour and culture. The whole council then returned together, with each directorate bringing commitments about what actions they will take forward. Multi-agency partners were invited to join in this work, for example the police, local hospitals and schools.

# Supporting critical conversations: Platitudes, Proximity and Progress

*A disconnect between what the company says and the progress it is making on the ground can seriously erode credibility both inside and outside of the organization, and further contribute to a lack of experienced inclusion.*

(HR director in Hunt et al., 2020, p. 30).

What is impeding efforts to tackle racism as individuals, collectives and coalitions? The 'Three Ps' offers a way to reflect as organisations and systems leaders on tackling racism, getting closer to areas of systemic racism, encouraging critical conversations to grasp the 'reality of disparity' in the outcomes for Global Majority people. To challenge whether progress is timely and consider what may be holding progress back: a lack of intentionality, wilful blindness or 'unwilling witnesses'.



Spillett, 2022

Each P is described with a dictionary definition (Cambridge Dictionary and Oxford Languages) and what characterises them.

**Platitudes:** *'have little meaning as it's been said many, many times before, often delivered with a moral content'*

In 2020 organisations and individuals committed to understanding and tackling racism. Have these commitments been delivered by your local system? What was the purpose of Global Majority colleagues sharing their stories when many continue to experience daily racism and disproportionality inside and outside the workplace?

Talking about racism and diversity without acting upon it challenges credibility, undermines trust in leadership and can lead to Global Majority workers leaving organisations. Sometimes, passive resistance or displacement activity can replace action – for example retreating into circular discourse about 'language' and 'terminology' at the expense of driving change forward.

**Proximity:** *'nearness in space, time and relationship'*

Proximity is relational and intentional and builds relationships that are based on values (see **ME: WE: US**). Systems leaders, particularly white leaders and colleagues, need to situate themselves in a way that enables them to recognise systemic racism and be accountable for action. The lens of critical consciousness needs to be used to maintain proximity and accountability for challenging covert and overt racism.

Below is an example of disproportionality in deaths from COVID-19, the data from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) remains available today although a decision to 'pause' this data has been made by HM Government. Situate yourself in proximity to the graph and answer the questions below it.

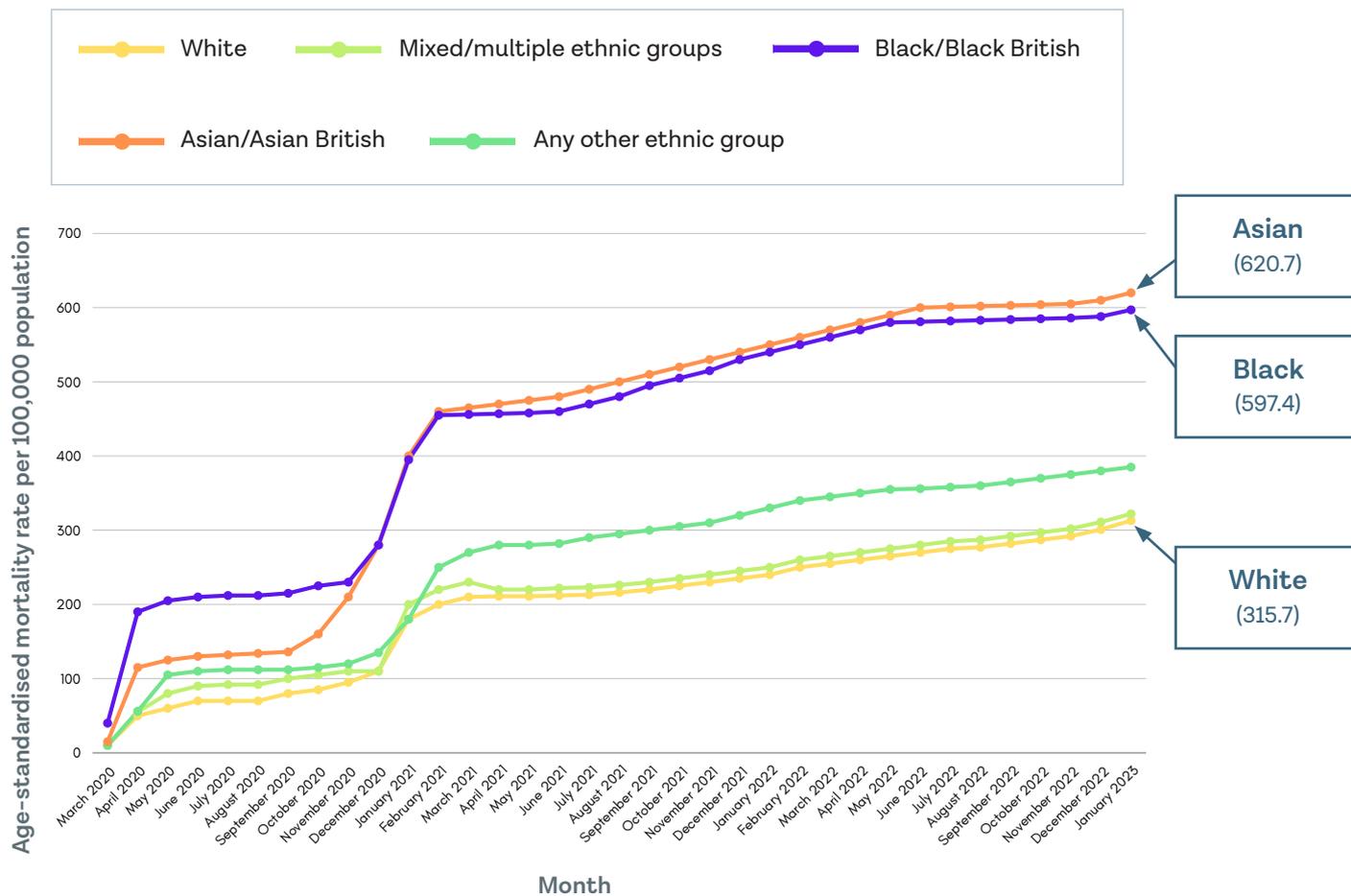


Figure 1: Cumulative mortality rate per 100,000 population, for deaths involving Covid-19 in England, by ethnic group, for all ages, March 2020 to January 2023 (OHID)

- > Where were you in January 2023 and what were you doing?
- > Where are you represented in this graph?
- > Think about where others in your family, those you work with, or communities are in this graph?
- > What are your reactions to this?
- > What conversation will you have within your organisation and partnership about this?

Professor Sir Michael Marmot indicated the disparities in deaths of Global Majority people in the UK from COVID-19 needed to be questioned and suggested that structural racism had to be a candidate in the disproportionate deaths. Subsequently Marmot added ‘tackling discrimination, racism and their outcomes’ to his 2010 recommendations on reducing health inequalities (Marmot, 2022a; 2022b, para. 8).

Some leaders’ amotivation may relate to their lack of proximity to racism, a sense of overwhelming and/or powerlessness to navigate solutions in the face of prevailing public narratives that perpetuate racism (Hughey 2013; Legault, 2007; Stewart-Hall 2023).

**Progress:** *‘forward and onward movement towards a destination, goal or aspiration’*

Creating conditions for progress will involve shifting culture, creating psychologically safe workplace environments, listening, hearing, and taking action on racism in workplaces, workforce and wider communities.

Wilful disregard of racism and narratives that support racism must be identified and challenged if progress is to be made. Discernible progress in relation to goals and plans around anti-racism need to be evidenced and celebrated. The pace of progress needs to be assessed and we need to hold ourselves as systems leaders accountable for progress or lack of progress.



### Questions to reflect on within leadership teams and partnership networks:

- Q. Where do you recognise yourself or organisation in each of the Three Ps (Platitudes, Proximity and Progress)?
- Q. Which specific platitudes are you aware of in your organisation and in those you partner with?
- Q. In what ways are leaders/colleagues, including white leaders, adopting and maintaining proximity to racism in the workplace?
- Q. What progress has been made (or not) in tackling systemic racism in your organisation?
- Q. What evidence is there to support that progress is being made or not being made?

Leaders need to remain persistent in tackling racism as Martin Luther King, Jnr reminds us:

*'...human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals... Without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation. So, we must help time and realise that the time is always ripe to do right'*  
(1968, p. 270).

## Conclusion

*Among the blind spots that we will need to shake off, once and for all, is the belief that racism is the product of a few bad people in our society, and that removing them from power will suffice to deal with the issue*  
(Banaji, 2021, p.18).

We have an inordinate amount of data which evidences the continuing, persistent and enduring racism across the public sector that affects individuals before the cradle and into the grave, blighting every aspect of life. Wilful denial of racism remains and achieving change in the face of this, is complex, challenging and relentless (and yet essential).

It is vital for systems leaders to also pay attention to the stress and trauma facing their Global Majority workforce and communities. Many experience everyday racism, both overt and covert, and their outcomes show enduring complexities and disparities.

Systemic racism replicates itself and will do so until systems leaders recognise and actively seek to uncover its flawed foundations and reconstruct them. Developing meaningful workforce strategies must take account of the racism inherently built into systems, organisations and processes. Recognising power differentials is crucial to building, admitting and empowering Global Majority staff and leaders. There are tools in this briefing and resources to support anti-racist systems leaders, starting with our own values, learning about our blind spots and intentionally acting to eradicate racial equity.

We return then to our opening quotation from Martin Luther King Jnr. and conclude that without anti-racist systems leadership our Global Majority leaders and aspiring leaders, cannot be what they ought to be until all our leaders, including white leaders, are who **they** ought to be.

*For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.  
And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be*  
(King, 1968, p. 269).

### Acknowledgement

Thank you to all BALI Alumni who continue to inspire the oneness of humanity. Without Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, the late Patrick Scott and The Staff College, BALI would still be an idea. Good work handed to the next generation of BALI facilitators you will be awesome. Thank you to Emily Smith and Dez Holmes for their support and patience. Thank you to Kjeld, my husband for his unstinting support and love.

## Further resources

### Getting started, maintaining momentum and measuring progress:

**Anti-racist approaches to workforce equity (2022):** Joan Fletcher explores the issues around Black progression in leadership in this 25-minute film.

**Broken Ladders: The myth of meritocracy for women of colour in the workplace** provides guidance for employers seeking to address disproportionality experienced by Global Majority women.

**CPD Guide: Equity, diversity and inclusion for practice supervisors** This guide has been developed to support practice supervisors to use open-access resources on the **Practice Supervisor Development Programme**. It provides guidance for six half-day sessions of CPD, supporting practice supervisors to develop anti-racist, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. These resources were developed for children and family social care but have applicable messages in adult social care.

**Cultural competence: promoting leadership and organisational change:** This resource looks at how organisations can create conditions to support Global Majority leaders and staff to survive and thrive. It includes a toolkit for self-assessment.

**Just Fair: Leading in Colour - Spotlight on Youth Justice:** Helpful resources and conversations for leaders, partners, children's social care and youth justice.

**Leading in Colour: The fierce urgency of NOW,** a call for action and a helpful resource to support white leaders across the public sector to become and stay an inclusive, culturally competent leader in a fairer workplace.

### Disproportionality and inequity in the public sector

#### Read

[Inquest | Deaths in Racialised Deaths in Prison 2015-2022 Executive Summary](#)

[Build Back Fairer | Sir Michael G. Marmot](#)

[How Covid Exposed the racial segregation rife in the workplace | Runnymede Trust](#)

#### Watch

[Inquest | Racialised Deaths in Prison](#)

[Exposed Nursing Narratives](#)

### The history of racism and eugenics

#### Read

[Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege Racial Equity](#)

[How eugenics shaped statistics | Nautilus](#)

[Race and racism in intelligence testing](#)

#### Watch

[David Olusogo in Conversation | Black History Matters | The British Library](#)

[How does it feel to be a problem? | W.E Bois](#)

#### Listen

[About Race – a podcast series with Reni Eddo-Lodge and guests.](#)

[UCL Provost Inquiry Eugenics History: The history of eugenics, including podcasts and explanations of where the phrase 'gifted and talented' came from.](#)

#### Explore

[Eugenics Discovery Tree Tool](#)

## Appendix: Key concepts and terminology

**Appropriated Racial Oppression:** ‘A process by which an individual’s racial self-image is based on direct and indirect stereotypical messages experienced throughout one’s life that in turn influence the individual’s self-image and worth, thoughts, emotions, and behaviours.’ (Versey et al., 2019, p. 230).

**Aversive Racism:** a form of racial prejudice felt by individuals who outwardly endorse egalitarian or non-racist attitudes and values but nonetheless experience negative emotions in the presence of members of certain racial groups, particularly in ambiguous circumstances. For example, if a white employer who supports equality nonetheless favours white candidates over Asian candidates in job interviews when all the individuals’ qualifications for the position are unclear, then they are demonstrating aversive racism (APA Dictionary of Psychology).

**Black:** Black with a capital letter is used as an inclusive/political definition to recognise those who are discriminated against because of the colour of their skin or their Black or Asian heritage.

**Black perspective:** *A Black perspective recognises the collective capacity of Black people to define, develop and advance their own political, economic, social, cultural and educational interests* (Best in Healicon & Sapin, 2006). An affirmation of strength and ways in which that strength can be used to respond to continuing oppression of Black people. Using a Black perspective to view issues of racism and to understand systems that have baked-in bias can enable everyone to reflect critically on themselves, their practice and their leadership.

**Critical Consciousness:** Conceptualised by Freire (1970). It’s the ability to recognise and critically think about socio-political environments and individual lived experience, and take action in response to reflections (El-Amin et al., 2017).

Critical consciousness deepens capacity and confidence for recognising and taking action to tackle racism. The concept can be used for white people to critically reflect on themselves, it also supports Global Majority people to maintain their resilience, self-care, safety and limit the trauma from racism. (Angyal et al 2021).

**Double Consciousness:** A sense of Black people looking at themselves through the eyes of others, both experiencing themselves through their own consciousness and through their awareness of how they are perceived by white people. (Du Bois, 1903).

**Drapetomania and Dysaesthesia Aethiopica:** Dr. Samuel A Cartwright’s 1851 paper, ‘Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race’ invented Drapetomania a ‘disease which causes slaves to run away’ and Dysaesthesia a disease causing ‘rascality’ in black people free and enslaved that could apparently be cured by oiling and hitting with a leather instrument to bring the person out of a ‘malaise’.

**Equality and Equity:** *Although both promote fairness, equality achieves this through treating everyone the same regardless of need, while equity achieves this through treating people differently dependent on need. However, this different treatment may be the key to reaching equality.* (Social Change UK 2023, para. 4).

**Global Majority:** This term includes those people who identify as Black, African, Asian, Brown, Arab and mixed heritage, are indigenous to the global south, and/or have been racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’. Globally, these groups currently represent approximately 85% of the world’s population (Campbell-Stephens, 2021, p. 7). Watch: [Rosemary Campbell-Stephens define the Global Majority](#).

**Intersectionality:** is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw:

*Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking*  
(Crenshaw, 1989, p. 3).

Watch [Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality | The Big Idea](#) (5 minutes)

**Minoritised:** as a term provides a social constructionist approach to understanding that people are actively minoritised by others rather than naturally existing as a minority, as the terms racial minorities or ethnic minorities imply (see Gunaratnum, 2003 in Milner & Jumbe, 2020).

**'Race':** We bracket the term 'Race' to acknowledge that the concept is socially constructed. It is a historic means of classifying people that is linked to theories of pseudoscience and notions of inferiority and superiority used to support the rationale for slavery. The myth of two races is still used despite genome research that there is one race: humans (Rutherford & Wigley, 2021). **Listen: Genomics England Podcast: Genetic Diversity and the Language of Race** (45 mins).

**Systemic racism:** The processes, practices and outcomes of racial inequity which permeate institutional and social structures and the everyday interactions of individuals.

*The whole point of systemic racism is that it is possible to have racism without racists, as the system has flaws within it to perpetuate the deep narratives of racism that are inherently embedded within policies, tools and practice*  
(Spillett, 2023).

Systemic racism is perpetuated through deep narratives which minoritise, pathologise and dehumanise people based on race. While individual racism may be more overt and identifiable, systemic racism is less so, partly because it 'originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society' (Carmichael (Ture) & Hamilton, 1976, p. 4) and thus may operate with or without individuals' awareness that it exists (Banaji, 2021, p. 2).

**Whiteness:** Understanding racism requires knowledge about the social construct of whiteness (Stewart-Hall, 2023). There are many useful articles on the formation of white identity for example DiCaprio (2009) **White Racial Identity Development**. Visible and invisible privileges remain that shape and uphold the power of white people. Even when issues are uncomfortable, to 'recognise racism's pervasiveness requires white people to face their own racist behaviour and to name the contours of racism' (Hayes, 2022, p. 3).

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