

# Women In The Shade<sup>®</sup> CONFERENCE REPORT 2025

*The Power of Colour – What happens when we are not in the room.*



## Conference Report 2025

### Sponsors



# FOREWORD

## WELCOME TO THE WOMEN IN THE SHADE CONFERENCE REPORT 2025

This year's conference marked a powerful moment of reflection, learning, and connection. It was a celebration of resilience, courage, and the collective strength of Black women in uniformed services, who continue to lead and inspire despite systemic challenges.

Together, we embraced this year's theme, 'The Power of Colour: What Happens When We Are Not in the Room,' exploring ways to break barriers, amplify voices, and shape a future of greater equity and opportunity.

The significance of this gathering cannot be overstated. At a time when the underrepresentation of Black women in uniformed services remains a critical issue, this conference provided a platform to acknowledge progress, confront ongoing challenges, and spark meaningful change. It reinforced our shared commitment to creating environments where Black women are empowered, supported, and celebrated for their unique contributions.

This year, we have made strides moving forward—from growing networks of support to initiating vital conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Yet, we recognise that the journey ahead is long and requires continued focus and collaboration. The insights shared, lessons learned, and connections made during this conference will serve as the foundation for our work in the coming year.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to all those who helped bring this conference to life:

- Our **speakers, host, and special guest panel members**: Thank you for sharing your expertise, stories, and wisdom. Your contributions enriched the conversations and helped bring our theme to life in ways that inspired and moved everyone in the room.
- Our **facilitators**: Your engagement and guidance ensured that our sessions were thought-provoking, productive, and impactful. We are deeply grateful for the time and energy you dedicated to creating an environment where everyone could learn and grow.

# FOREWORD

- **Our sponsors:** A heartfelt thank you to British Telecom, Ericsson, National Police Chiefs Council, Surrey and Sussex Police, West Midlands Police and West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, Friends of Women in the Shade – Diverse Matters and National Black Governors Network; and our exhibitors AYA, The Voice and wonnder. Your generous support made this event possible, and we appreciate your ongoing commitment to advancing our mission. Without you, this conference would not have been the success it was.
- **To our delegates:** You are the reasons why we gather. We hope you left feeling inspired, empowered, and more confident in the power of your colour. You more than deserved to be in that room, and we hope you saw that reflected in the conversations, connections, and content throughout the day.

A special thank you to **Charline Diomande**, a valued member of our team, who led our media efforts, including social media, videography, programme design, and production. The incredible visuals and seamless experience at the conference were a testament to her talent and dedication, and we cannot praise her enough for the passion and energy she brought to the event.

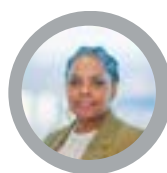
We also extend our gratitude to **Elicia Maxwell**, whose meticulous notetaking at the conference helped shape this report, ensuring that the depth and impact of the discussions are captured and shared.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to **Jak Matthews** – BT; **Grace Gayle** NPCC, **Chief Inspector Christopher Grandison** – WMP BAPA, **Martina Mabale** – Police Now; **Dr Shungu Hilda M'gadza** author of The Six Stages Framework and **Caroline Marconi** from wonnder who has shared their personal reflections on the conference. Your heartfelt and inspiring words truly capture the spirit of the event, and it is incredibly moving to hear how the experience has resonated with you. Your openness, honesty, and engagement are what make this community so powerful. Thank you for being a part of this journey and for contributing to the ongoing conversation.

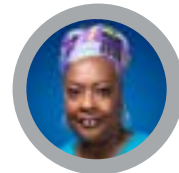
As we look to the future, we are reminded of the power of community and the importance of platforms like Women in the Shade. Together, we can continue to rewrite the narrative, foster growth, and build a legacy that ensures the voices of Black women are heard, valued, and celebrated.

Thank you for being a part of this journey.

FOUNDERS OF WOMEN IN THE SHADE:



*Karen Geddes OPM*



*Marcia Ore MSc MA*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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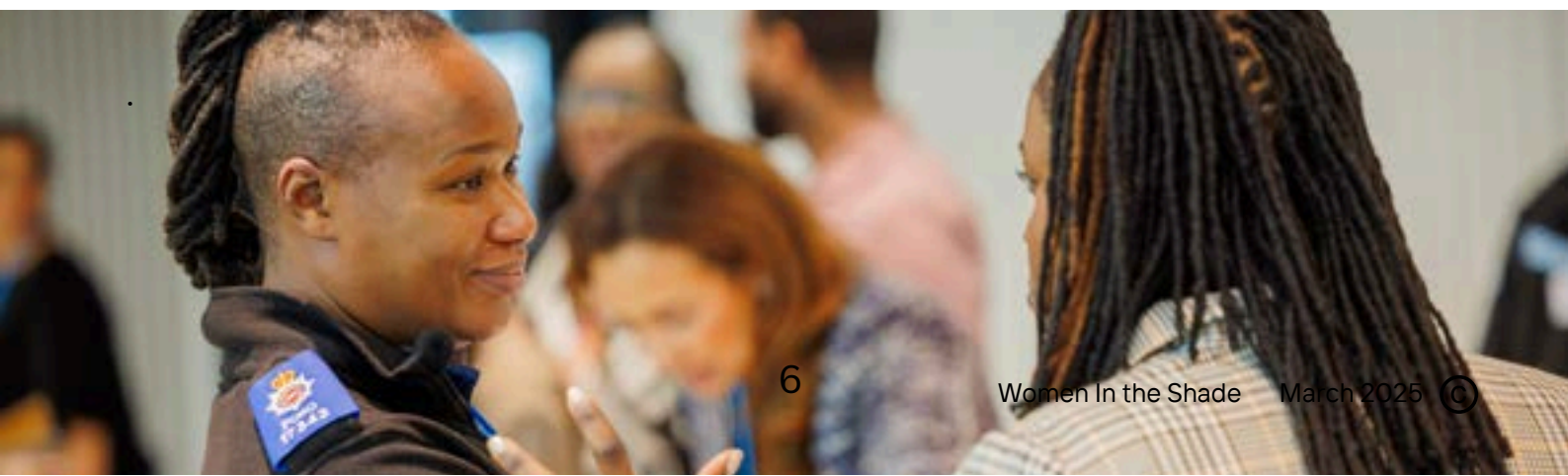
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the 18th of January 2024 we gathered for the inaugural Women in the Shade Conference. That transformative day ignited conversations, sparked action, and left a lasting impact on everyone in the room. The event was a powerful call to discovery, challenge, and mobilisation, and its ripple effects continue to inspire and drive us forward.

**Marcia Ore, Co-Founder of Women in the Shade, reflected on the significance of the event: *'This conference, 'The Power of Colour—What Happens When We Are Not In The Room,' has not only highlighted the lived experiences and reality of where power lies in uniformed service organisations, but also underscored the crucial role everyone, regardless of their identity, plays in perpetuating this narrative. The impact of your individual and collective actions on promoting and facilitating systemic change is significant.'***

Over the past year, Women in the Shade has grown into a resilient force for change. The journey has been filled with challenges, moments of introspection, and triumphs that have reaffirmed our purpose. We keep moving forward because we believe:

- In the unparalleled talent, resilience, and resourcefulness of Black women working in uniformed services.
- In the importance of building and sustaining a network that is collaborative and supportive of Black women.
- That authentic allyship and advocacy can foster inclusive environments where Black women can thrive and achieve their full potential.



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## THE JOURNEY FORWARD

### The Story Continues: Reflections on Progress and the Work Ahead

Women in the Shade (WITS) was founded with a vision: to create a space where Black women in uniformed services can find support, empowerment, and the tools to thrive. As we reflect on the journey so far, it's clear that significant progress has been made, but our work is far from over.

Building on the momentum of our recent conference, we are committed to translating conversations into action, ensuring that WITS continues to grow, influence change, and support those who need it most. Here's how we're moving forward:

### Milestones Achieved

- **Official Recognition:** WITS is now officially registered with Companies House and the Intellectual Property Office, reinforcing our legitimacy and commitment to long-term impact and sustainability.
- **National Engagement & Influence:** We delivered a thought-provoking workshop at the Black Leadership Group's 2024 conference, "Tracks, Trails, and Threads: Courageous Leadership in a Fractured World," sharing insights on leadership, resilience, and navigating challenging environments.
- **Expanding Our Leadership Team:** Recognising the need for diverse perspectives and strategic direction, we have recruited five incredible members to the WITS Advisory Board, bringing a wealth of expertise to shape our future.
- **Parliamentary Engagement:** Advocacy remains at the heart of WITS. We recently met with Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP and attended the AXA Health Parliamentary Reception, further strengthening our connections with key decision-makers.
- **Creating Lasting Resources:** We have designed and published the Women in the Shade Journal – A 30-Day Journey for Black Women in Uniformed Services. This reflective tool offers a structured path for self-discovery, growth, and empowerment.

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## CONFERENCE SUMMARY

The **Women in the Shade (WITS) Conference 2025** was held in Birmingham on Thursday 16th January and brought together trailblazers, advocates, and allies from across uniformed services and private sectors to celebrate, empower, and support Black women in uniformed services. Building on the success of our inaugural event, the conference served as a vital platform for connection, collaboration, and candid conversations.



Photo: L to R : Marcia Ore, The Lord-Lieutenant of West Midlands, Dr Derrick Anderson CBE and Karen Geddes QPM

This year's conference aimed to continue amplifying the voices of **Black women**, highlighting their contributions, addressing challenges, and inspiring collective action to create inclusive environments where they can thrive. Focusing on building resilience, fostering leadership, and creating meaningful networks, the event reflected our unwavering commitment to driving sustainable change.





We were thrilled to welcome approximately **160 delegates** to the Women in the Shade Conference, representing **44 different agencies** across policing, the armed forces, fire and rescue services, government bodies, academia, and private sector organisations. Attendees included individuals from various police services, both regional and national, the Ministry of Justice, the armed forces, including the Royal Navy and Army, as well as key stakeholders in public sector organisations, such as local councils and universities.

In addition, there was a strong presence from equality and human rights organisations, mentoring and training providers, and several influential media representatives. This diverse representation underscores the broad commitment to supporting Black women in uniformed services and advancing meaningful change across multiple industries.

Feedback on the conference was shared across multiple platforms, reflecting its immediate and lasting impact.

Social media comments posted right after the event highlighted the powerful sense of inspiration and empowerment delegates felt. In addition, responses gathered through a post-event survey provided deeper insights into key takeaways, while personal testimonies from attendees further reinforced the event's significance. Common themes emerged, including the importance of representation, open discussions on systemic challenges, and a collective call for action and advocacy.

***Karen Geddes, Co-Founder of Women in the Shade, reflected on the day: "This year's conference came with challenges, and there were moments Marcia and I felt like giving up. But looking at the photos—seeing the joy on delegates', speakers', and exhibitors' faces—I feel proud. It's a privilege to support my sisters and witness advocates leaving with a deeper understanding of our lived experience. We must embrace the power of our colour and claim our seat at the table. And if there isn't one, bring your own. As a Jamaican saying goes, 'Mi only mek fi di top, not di bottom'—we are destined for greatness."***

# MY TIME WITH WOMEN IN THE SHADE

by Charline Diomande



My journey with Women In The Shade began when I stumbled upon the 2024 conference event listing. As I read about the mission behind the event, I felt an immediate connection—especially as someone working in the defence industry. I knew I had to be part of it. Reaching out to Marcia and Karen turned out to be one of the best decisions I've made.

Over the past two years, this conference has given me so much more than just a platform to create and contribute. It has shown me that I am not alone in my experiences. The stories shared, the wisdom of the speakers, and the energy in the room have all been deeply inspiring. I have learned practical ways to manage my mindset and emotions through the workshops, and I have walked away each year feeling more empowered, motivated, and supported.

The impact of Women In The Shade extends far beyond the conference itself. It has fostered a strong, uplifting community and provided invaluable resources for so many of us navigating industries where we often feel unseen.



Knowing that this space exists—and continues to grow—fills me with hope and gratitude.

As I reflect on my time with Women In The Shade, I look forward to seeing how this incredible movement continues to flourish.

Working with Women In The Shade for the past two years has been an incredible journey. Seeing the conference grow, evolve, and make a real impact has been truly inspiring. I am incredibly grateful to Marcia and Karen, the amazing founders, for giving me the opportunity to showcase my skills and contribute to something so meaningful and powerful!

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## KEY REFLECTIONS

The conference brought together a diverse group of speakers, panellists, and delegates to empower Black women, celebrate their contributions, and address the barriers they face in leadership and uniformed services.

**Kerry-Ann Knight's** keynote address set the tone for the day, urging attendees to remain calm and composed in the face of adversity, draw strength from collective support, and use their experiences to inspire change. Her powerful message of resilience and shared strength resonated throughout the event, inspiring attendees to reclaim their narratives.

Speakers such as **Grace Ononiwu CBE** emphasised the importance of authenticity and contributing to positive change despite challenges, while **Dr. Shungu Hilda M'gadzah** introduced her transformative Six Stages Framework, encouraging self-reflection and organisational accountability to address racism and bias.

The **Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP** highlighted government commitments to reducing inequalities, recognizing the pivotal role of organisations like Women in the Shade in driving systemic change.

**Professor Sarah Charman** explored the barriers within policing cultures, emphasizing the need for strong leadership, organisational flexibility, and research into racial disparities, while **Nicolle Ndiweni-Roberts** inspired attendees to take intentional actions to achieve their goals.

Facilitated sessions by **Karen Daber** and **Caroline Ribeiro-Nelson** provided practical insights into navigating challenges, harmonizing identity and health, and overcoming biases, racial trauma, and systemic barriers. Panel discussions further highlighted strategies for empowering Black women in leadership, creating inclusive spaces, and driving equity through actionable change.

# KEY HIGHLIGHTS



1.

Black women must be **intentional and deliberate**, take ownership of their journeys, and navigate challenges with confidence.

2.

**Resilience, authenticity, and shared experiences** are key to thriving in unwelcoming spaces.

3.

**Breaking the silence** is essential—strong leadership and accountability can address organisational injustices.

4.

The **cumulative impact of racial trauma** on mental and physical health requires organisations to prioritise well-being initiatives.

5.

**The Six Stages Framework** offers a tool to address individual and organisational racism.

6.

**Networking, mentorship, and allyship** are vital to recruitment, progression, and retention of Black women in leadership.



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## PRACTICAL TOOLKITS FOR ONGOING GROWTH

As part of our commitment to lasting impact, we provided delegates with a range of practical toolkits to continue their journey beyond the conference. These resources were designed to offer tangible strategies, insights, and support as they navigate their careers and personal growth.

### CPD ACCREDITATION

We are pleased to offer CPD certification for attendees of the Women in the Shade Conference 2025. This certification provides formal recognition of the skills and knowledge gained during the event, ensuring that delegates can apply their learning towards continued professional development in their respective fields.



#### Benefits of CPD Certification:

- **Recognition:** Acknowledgment of your commitment to developing your leadership skills and understanding of the challenges faced by Black women in uniformed services.
- **Skill Enhancement:** Opportunities to further hone your resilience, leadership, and advocacy skills, which are critical for driving positive change in your organisation.
- **Professional Growth:** Demonstrates your proactive approach to staying informed, engaged, and invested in both personal and professional growth, improving career progression.
- **Networking:** CPD-certified attendees can use the event as a foundation for ongoing collaboration and engagement with like-minded professionals who are also committed to creating inclusive spaces for Black women in leadership.

# WOMEN IN THE SHADE®

## INTRODUCING THE WOMEN IN THE SHADE JOURNAL

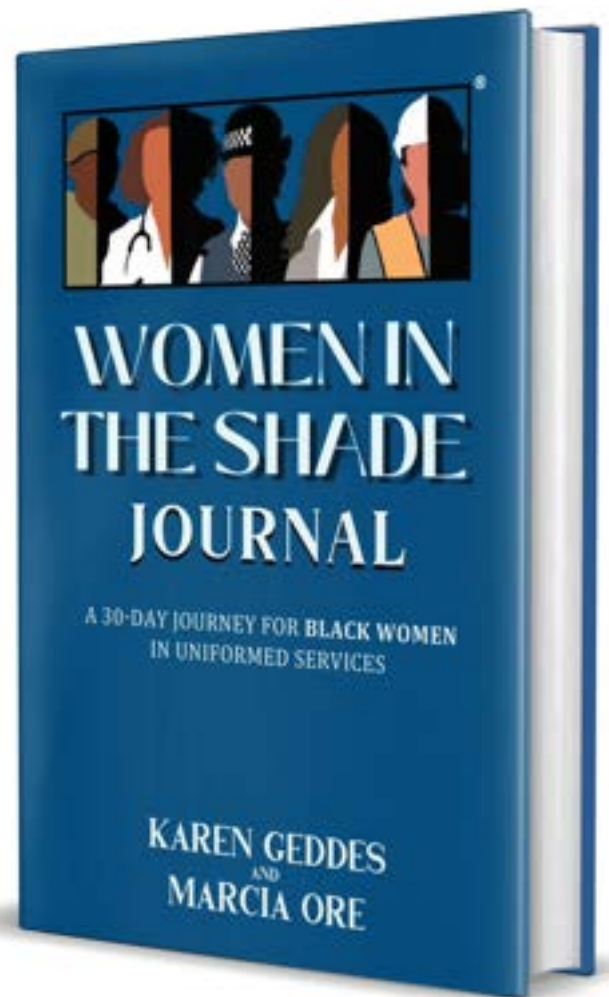
We are proud to launch the Women in the Shade Journal – A 30-Day Journey for Black Women in Uniformed Services.

What makes this journal unique is its deep focus on the lived experiences of Black women working in environments where they are underrepresented. While many personal growth journals exist, this one is intentionally designed to acknowledge the specific challenges and opportunities that come with serving in uniformed roles.

It provides a dedicated space for critical self-reflection, empowering Black women to explore their strengths, identity, and resilience. Through structured prompts, challenges, and insights, the journal fosters both personal and professional development, helping individuals not only to survive but to thrive in spaces that can often feel isolating or difficult.

Alongside the journal, we also introduced **Diverse Mental Health Ltd – introductory Toolkit**, offering additional resources to support professional progression, well-being, and leadership development.

Both the **Women in the Shade Journal** and **Diverse Mental Health Ltd – introductory Toolkit** are accessible to all conference delegates and readers of this report via the **Women in the Shade website**.





# WHAT'S NEXT?

**Conference 2026:** Following the success of our recent event, we're already gearing up for our next major conference in 2026! Exciting updates will be shared soon.

## **Reserve Your Spot Early & Save!**

Reserve your spot before the **31st August 2025** to enjoy an **exclusive 10%** discount on your ticket price. Your place will be secured upon full payment—don't miss out!



Our journey forward for 2025-2026 is about building on these successes while addressing the challenges that still exist. We will continue advocating for meaningful change, expanding our reach, and developing innovative solutions that ensure Black women in uniformed services are seen, heard, and supported.

- **Launching in 2025:** We are developing a range of training initiatives designed to equip Black women in uniformed services with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to excel. These programs will provide targeted learning and development opportunities, fostering leadership, resilience, and career progression.
- **Planning for the 2026 Conference:** After the success of our recent event, we are already looking ahead to our next major conference in 2026—and we have some exciting news to share about this event soon!
- **Delivering Training for West Midlands Police:** Strengthening our impact within policing, we are set to deliver training that fosters inclusion, accountability, and meaningful change within the force.
- **Developing Toolkits for Accountability:** To support Black women in uniformed services, we are creating practical toolkits that will help organizations build accountability, address systemic barriers, and drive sustainable change. Watch this space!
- **Expanding Parliamentary Engagement:** Advocacy is central to our mission, and we will continue to build on our engagement with policymakers to push for tangible changes that improve the experiences of Black women in uniformed services. Strengthening our relationships within Parliament will ensure our voices are heard at the highest levels of decision-making.<sup>16</sup>





# JOIN US ON THIS JOURNEY

*The work we do is only possible because of the collective effort of those who believe in our mission. Whether through participation, collaboration, or support, we invite you to be part of shaping the future of Women in the Shade.*

## **Reserve Your Spot Early and Save!**

Following the success of our recent event, we're already gearing up for our **next major conference in 2026!** Exciting updates will be shared soon.

**Reserve your spot before the 31st August 2025 to enjoy an exclusive 10% discount on your ticket price.**

Your place will be secured upon full payment—don't miss out!

Your participation and support are crucial in shaping a community where every Black woman's voice is valued and heard.

Together, let's create lasting change and empower Black women to thrive. Get involved today.

Stay connected. Stay empowered.





# WOMEN IN THE SHADE CONFERENCE 2025

*"The idea of an organisation born out of the negative experiences of Black women in uniform and how we together turn that into a positive by working together can go on to be a beacon to other organisations. I fully support the ideals and aspirations of Women In The Shade." - Garfield Robinson*

# WOMEN IN THE SHADE®

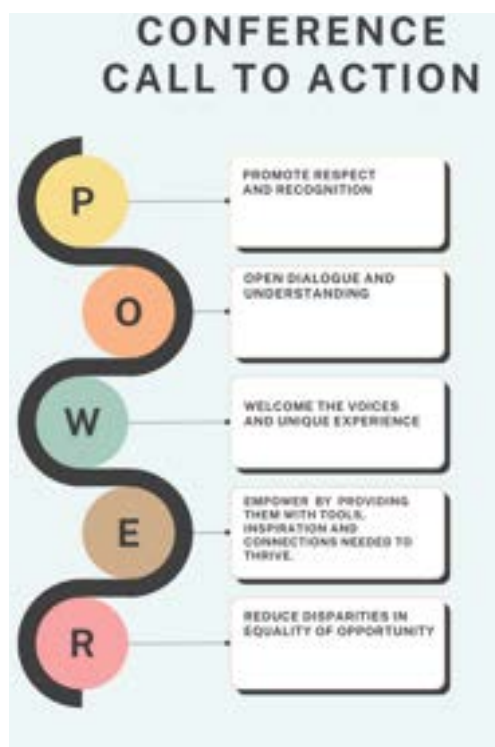
## OVERVIEW

The **Women in the Shade (WITS) Conference 2025** held in Birmingham on Thursday 16th January, brought together trailblazers, advocates, and allies from across uniformed services and private sectors to celebrate, empower, and support Black women in uniformed services. Building on the success of our inaugural event, the conference served as a vital platform for connection, collaboration, and candid conversations.

The purpose of this year's conference was to continue amplifying the voices of Black women, highlighting their contributions, addressing challenges, and inspiring collective action to create inclusive environments where they can thrive. With a focus on building resilience, fostering leadership, and creating meaningful networks, the event reflected our unwavering commitment to driving sustainable change.

As Black women, we may not always be in the rooms where decisions are made. But even when we are present in those spaces, are our voices truly heard? What is the toll on our mental health and well-being of being visible, yet invisible?

Our aim for this conference is to **EmPOWER** Black women in uniformed services by providing the tools, inspiration, and connections needed to thrive.



- **Feel EmPOWERed:** Gain confidence, self-awareness, and the tools to navigate and thrive in challenging environments.
- **Build Meaningful Connections:** Establish a strong network of support with other Black women and allies in uniformed services.
- **Leave with Practical Strategies:** Acquire actionable insights to challenge systemic barriers, advocate for inclusivity, and foster personal growth.
- **Strengthen Their Voice and Value:** Develop the confidence to be heard in spaces of influence, amplifying their perspectives to drive change.
- **Be Inspired to Act:** Commit to creating environments where Black women can thrive, while supporting the next generation to succeed.



# DIVERSE REPRESENTATION

We were thrilled to welcome approximately **160 delegates** to the Women in the Shade Conference, representing **44 different agencies** across policing, the armed forces, fire and rescue services, government bodies, academia, and private sector organisations. Attendees included individuals from various police services, both regional and national, the Ministry of Justice, the armed forces, including the Royal Navy and Army, as well as key stakeholders in public sector organisations, such as local councils and universities.

In addition, there was a strong presence from equality and human rights organisations, mentoring and training providers, and several influential media representatives. This diverse representation underscores the broad commitment to supporting Black women in uniformed services and advancing meaningful change across multiple industries.

## Delegate Demographic Overview

Of the **160 delegates**, a small number did not complete the demographic data, which may result in slight variations in the overall analysis. However, based on the available information, key insights can be drawn about the composition of attendees and the programme's reach.

The **majority of delegates were female (87.8%)**, with male attendees making up **12.2%**. This strong female representation aligns with the programme's focus on the development and advancement of Black and minority ethnic women.

## KEY INSIGHTS

- **Strong Representation of Black Delegates** – The largest ethnic group is **Black British or other Black backgrounds (38.8%)**, reflecting the programme's commitment to supporting Black women in professional spaces.
- **Diverse Attendance** – There is also significant representation from **Asian (21.7%)** and **Mixed Heritage (20.9%)** delegates, indicating that the programme is attracting a broad range of ethnic minority women.
- **White Delegates Still Present** – **18.6% of attendees were White**, suggesting some engagement from allies and advocates, as well as those interested in inclusive leadership, which can help foster cross-cultural discussions and allyship.
- **Predominantly Mid-Career Professionals** – The largest age group is **25-34 (43 delegates)**, followed closely by **45-54 (39 delegates)**. This suggests that most attendees are either in the early to mid-stages of their careers or in senior positions.
- **Opportunity for Further Engagement** – The relatively even spread among **Asian, Mixed Heritage, and White** attendees suggests the programme has broad appeal. However, if outreach to specific groups (e.g., younger participants or underrepresented ethnicities) is a priority, more targeted engagement strategies may be beneficial.

This demographic data highlights the programme's ability to attract a diverse range of professionals, with a strong emphasis on supporting Black and minority ethnic women. These insights can help shape future engagement efforts, ensuring that the programme continues to grow and provide meaningful opportunities for all attendees.





# OUR SPEAKERS, FACILITATORS AND PANEL MEMBERS

**The Women in the Shade Conference 2025** featured an inspiring mix of influential Black female leaders from politics, academia, and uniformed services. Through engaging panel discussions and facilitated sessions, speakers shared their expertise, experiences, and strategies for driving meaningful change. These thought-provoking conversations provided a platform for reflection, empowerment, and action.

# MERISHA STEVENSON

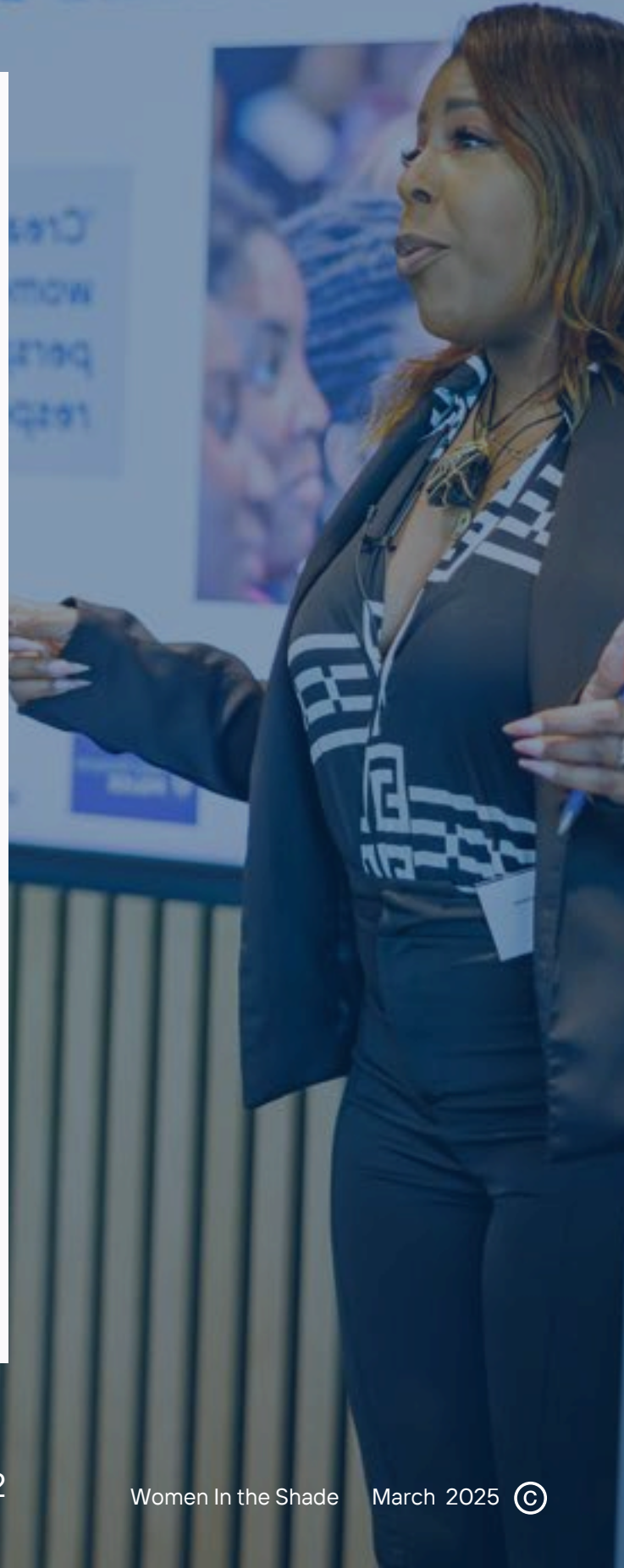
## Our Host

"The Women in the Shade event was a well-organised and highly effective gathering that left a lasting impact. The speakers were not only engaging but also delivered their insights in a compelling and well-structured manner. One of the standout aspects of this year's event was its significant reach on social media, with many attendees not only sharing their enjoyment but also highlighting key takeaways from the discussions. In this respect, this event has stood out for me from the several conferences I have hosted over the years.

While there is always room for further growth and refinement, the dedication and collaboration that went into delivering the second year of Women in the Shade is truly commendable. The event continues to grow in influence, and I am excited to see what year three will bring, given its importance in this space.

As I reflected on the event, I was struck by the level of engagement and impact it had. "This was one of the most effective events I've hosted, not just in terms of the quality of speakers and discussions, but also in how it resonated with attendees long after it ended. The conversations sparked here are invaluable, and I look forward to seeing how it evolves in the future."

With such positive momentum, Women in the Shade is clearly making a meaningful difference, and it's continued to its continued success and elevated voice. "





# SIMON FOSTER

## Our Special Guest

### **West Midlands Police and Crime**

**Commissioner Simon Foster** kicked off the day by acknowledging the invaluable work of police officers, particularly in their roles as protectors and supporters within the community. His remarks highlighted the commitment and dedication required to serve in policing, emphasising the ongoing challenges faced by officers, especially those from underrepresented groups.

Commissioner Foster also stressed the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive environment where all officers, regardless of background, can thrive and contribute meaningfully to the police force. His recognition underscored the significance of initiatives like Women in the Shade in advocating for change and providing vital support to those within the profession.

He reaffirmed his commitment to continuing work to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion within the force, and to supporting efforts to tackle systemic barriers and enhance the wellbeing of officers and staff across all levels.



# THE LORD-LIEUTENANT OF WEST MIDLANDS: DR DERRICK ANDERSON CBE

Our Special Guest

**Dr. Derrick Anderson CBE, Lord Lieutenant of the West Midlands**, emphasised the importance of a communal spirit in fostering a thriving workplace culture. He highlighted the Four Cs—Community, Climate Change, Commonwealth, and Culture Celebration—as key pillars that organisations should focus on to create an inclusive and supportive environment.

He stressed the value of holding onto these principles, ensuring that respect and fairness are embedded in all aspects of work, reinforcing that everyone matters in all contexts. Dr. Anderson underscored the need for compassion in service delivery and emphasised that meaningful change can only happen through honest and open conversations.



# TRIBUTE TO WAYNE BROWN

Wayne Brown  
Chief Fire  
Officer

Je...ris  
C...st

west midlands  
police and crime  
commissioner



RCIA

A moment of silence was observed in remembrance of **Wayne Brown**, a dedicated ally and advocate for the Women in the Shade movement. Wayne, who was a constant source of support, was present at the Women in the Shade conference in January 2024, where his contributions to the cause were deeply appreciated.

His unwavering commitment to fostering inclusivity and supporting Black women in uniformed services left a lasting impact on all who had the privilege of working with him. Wayne's legacy as a champion for equity and his belief in the power of community and solidarity continue to inspire us all. He will be missed, but his spirit and advocacy will remain at the heart of our work.

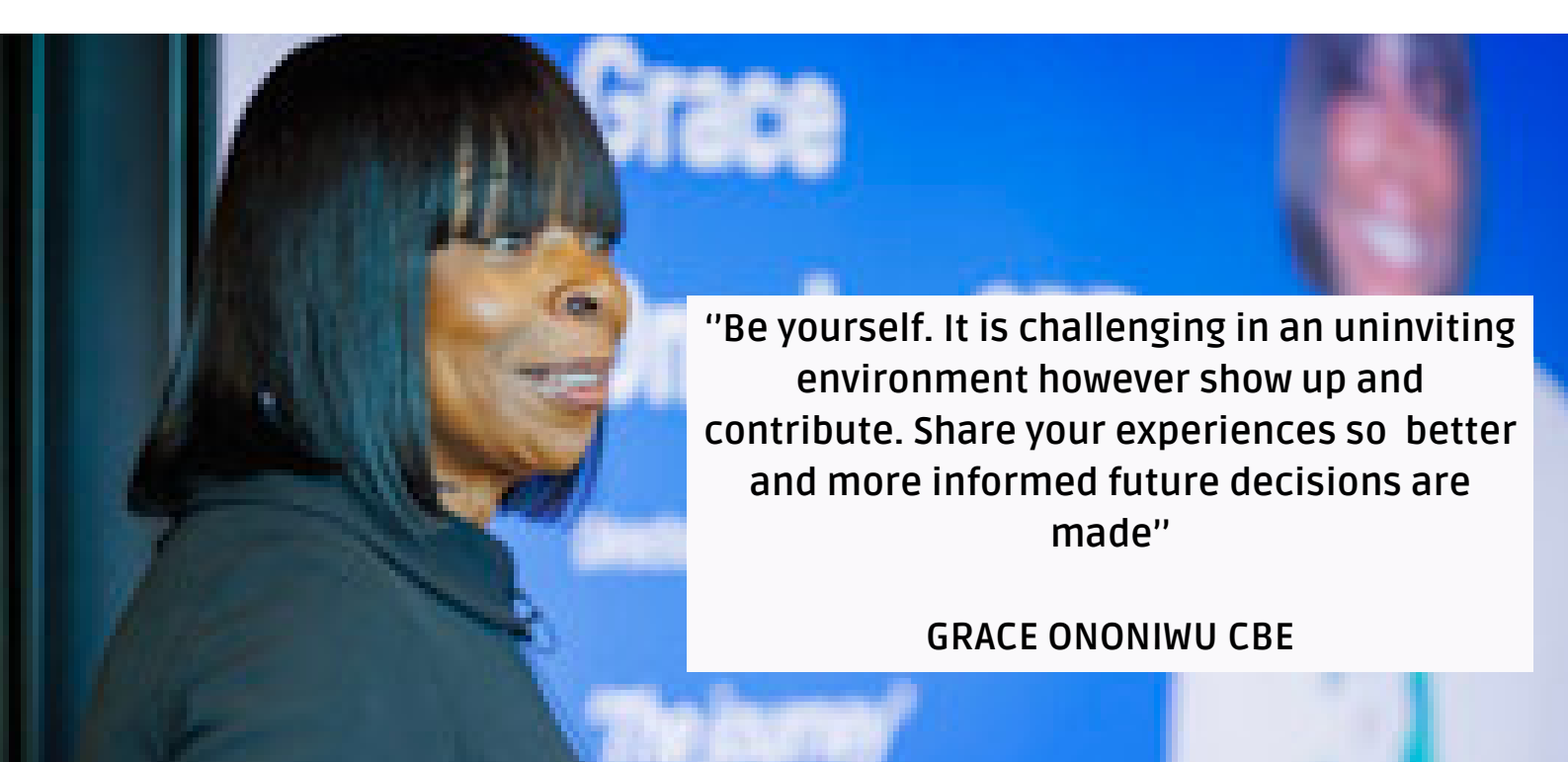
# NEIL TIPPING

## Our Special Guest

**Neil Tipping** provided a warm welcome on behalf of BT, the location host for the conference. As an ally to the event, he spoke about the sense of celebration and inspiration drawn from the stories shared, the strength of communal support, and the importance of public safety and justice.

He highlighted BT's ongoing commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, referencing the company's 2021 manifesto, which sets out measurable commitments to drive innovation in EDI, enhance understanding of customer sectors, and unlock the power of people through balance. Neil emphasized that the manifesto's core purpose is to connect groups, foster meaningful conversations, and raise awareness of critical issues, ensuring that service delivery is both inclusive and impactful.

Our apologies to Neil for the wrong first name appearing on the conference presentation.



**"Be yourself. It is challenging in an uninviting environment however show up and contribute. Share your experiences so better and more informed future decisions are made"**

**GRACE ONONIWU CBE**

## **GRACE ONONIWU CBE**

### **SPEAKER**

**Grace Ononiwu CBE** is the Director of Legal Services at the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and has made history as the first African Caribbean Chief Prosecutor within the CPS. Recognised as one of the most influential figures in the UK, she oversees chief prosecutors across England and Wales, ensuring justice is upheld.

#### **Early Life and Inspiration**

Growing up in London, Grace knew from the age of eight that she wanted to become a lawyer. Despite not having immediate connections to the legal profession, she was determined to achieve her goal. This drive was instilled in her by her mother, who always reminded her: "You can choose anything that you want to be." Those words became her guiding force, shaping her journey into law.

#### **Overcoming Barriers**

Despite her ambition, Grace faced significant obstacles. At fifteen, she attended a career fair where she was advised to consider becoming a legal secretary rather than a lawyer—a reflection of the biases she encountered.

She also failed her GCSEs, an experience that became a turning point. Refusing to accept failure, she retook her exams, progressed to the University of Hertfordshire, and later completed her legal studies at the College of Law, Guildford, achieving her dream of becoming a lawyer.

The job market posed another challenge. Out of 70 applications, she received only one positive response. However, rather than focusing on rejection, she embraced the opportunity given to her. She persevered, commuting three hours to work, each way, in criminal defence with limited resources, determined to make her career a success.

#### **Service and Leadership in the CPS**

As a prosecutor, Grace has dedicated herself to public service, protecting communities through the law. However, being a Black woman in the legal profession presented a unique set of challenges.



## GRACE ONONIWU CBE

She often felt she did not fit in—both within her workplace and in the wider criminal justice system. To some, she was seen as an outsider for working alongside the police; to others, she stood out in a legal profession where few looked like her. Yet, rather than letting these barriers define her, she worked even harder to challenge the system and ensure justice was served equitably.

### Lessons Learned

Grace shared five key lessons from her journey:

- **Know your business** – While you cannot control everything around you, but you can control your level of focus, discipline, motivation, and commitment, which create the foundation for success. You will not always have motivation, but commitment, discipline and consistency is what ensures you reach your desired outcome
- **Mind your business**– don't compete with others – Your journey is yours alone. Focus on your own growth and progression.

Be a good person – Our thoughts and emotions can sometimes hinder progress. It is important to remain kind and professional. You will not be in every room, or privy to every conversation- what will they say about you?

- **Be yourself** – It can be difficult in certain environments, but authenticity is key. You have no choice but to be yourself because everyone else is taken. Sharing your experiences contributes to informed decision-making and lasting change.
- **Empower other women** – Be honest about the challenges, and if you are in a position to help others, do so. When you are in the room, seize the opportunity—don't question your worth. You are there for a reason.





## GRACE ONONIWU CBE

### Conclusion

Grace emphasised the importance of networking, building relationships, and sharing experiences to shape policy and drive meaningful change. She urged everyone to step out of the shade and into the light—creating a legacy that opens doors and keeps them open for future generations and ensures the legal profession, particularly the criminal justice system, becomes more inclusive and representative.

Her powerful message serves as a call to action: **to break down barriers, support each other, and ensure that no one is left behind.**



**"As one delegate said to me afterwards: This is such a powerful tool. There is no denying this, every police force can use this; there isn't one single force where they will not be able to say, yes, we recognise someone who is at each of these stages, including on the negative axis!"**

**DR SHUNGU HILDA M'GADZAH**

## **DR SHUNGU HILDA M'GADZAH**

### **SPEAKER - Empowering You: Navigating Racism and Safeguarding Mental Health with the Six Stages Framework,**

In this session, Dr. M'gadzah introduced delegates to the **Six Stages Framework**, a powerful tool designed to guide individuals and organisations in understanding, confronting, and addressing racism.

The session covered the following key topics:

- **Principles and Concepts**
- **Underpinning the Six Stages Framework**
- **The Six Stages of Understanding and Dealing with Racism**
- **The Prejudice-Racism Spectrum**
- **Understanding and Dealing with Prejudice and Challenging Behaviours**

#### **Core Concepts:**

Dr. M'gadzah emphasised the importance of self-reflection, encouraging delegates to assess their own biases and positions. The session underscored that each person is on their own journey toward confronting discrimination and racism, and that growth often requires discomfort.

#### **Understanding & Dealing With Everyday Racism The Six Stages Framework**



Participants were challenged to step outside their comfort zones, as this process is vital for their personal growth and understanding. The Six Stages Framework was presented as an essential tool for identifying both individual and organizational racism and discrimination profiles.



## DR SHUNGU HILDA M'GADZAH

Six Stages of Understanding and Dealing with Racism:

1. **Lack of Awareness** – Ignorance, silence, and denial
2. **Dismissive and Avoidant of Issues** – Not addressing issues of racism or discrimination
3. **Aware of Differences** – Becoming conscious of racial dynamics
4. **Open to Learning and Meaningful Conversations** – Willingness to engage with difficult conversations
5. **Reflect and Engage** – Actively reflecting and engaging in anti-racism work
6. **Leadership in Promoting Equity and Acceptance** – Taking on roles that advocate for racial equity and inclusion

### Prejudice-Racism Spectrum:

Dr. M'gadzah explored the spectrum of racism, highlighting the difference between direct and indirect racism, racial intolerance, and the importance of leadership in navigating these challenges.

She emphasised the need to recognise and call out behaviours when they occur, and to improve the ability to challenge such behaviours constructively.

The Racism Survival Spectrum was also introduced, with an emphasis on the importance of healing and self-care as a response to racial trauma and microaggressions.

### Key Principles for Navigating Racism:

- **Conversations about Discrimination and Racial Bias:** Learning how to talk openly about these topics is essential.
- **Preparing to Be Uncomfortable:** Growth often comes from engaging with discomfort.
- **Data Collection and Outcomes:** Gathering data to track progress and outcomes.
- **Building Empathy and Perspectives:** Bridging gaps between diverse experiences and building mutual understanding.



## DR SHUNGU HILDA M'GADZAH

### Key Principles for Navigating Racism:

- Conversations about Discrimination and Racial Bias: Learning how to talk openly about these topics is essential.
- Preparing to Be Uncomfortable: Growth often comes from engaging with discomfort.
- Data Collection and Outcomes: Gathering data to track progress and outcomes.
- Building Empathy and Perspectives: Bridging gaps between diverse experiences and building mutual understanding.

### Acknowledge the Impact of Racism:

Dr. M'gadzah emphasized that acknowledging the impact of racism and **microaggressions** on mental health is vital. **Giving language to racism** helps to recognise it when it occurs and facilitates more effective conversations about it.



# RT HON ANNELIESE DODDS MP

A portrait of Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP, a woman with short, curly brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark blazer over a white top with a black and orange pattern. The background is a solid dark blue.

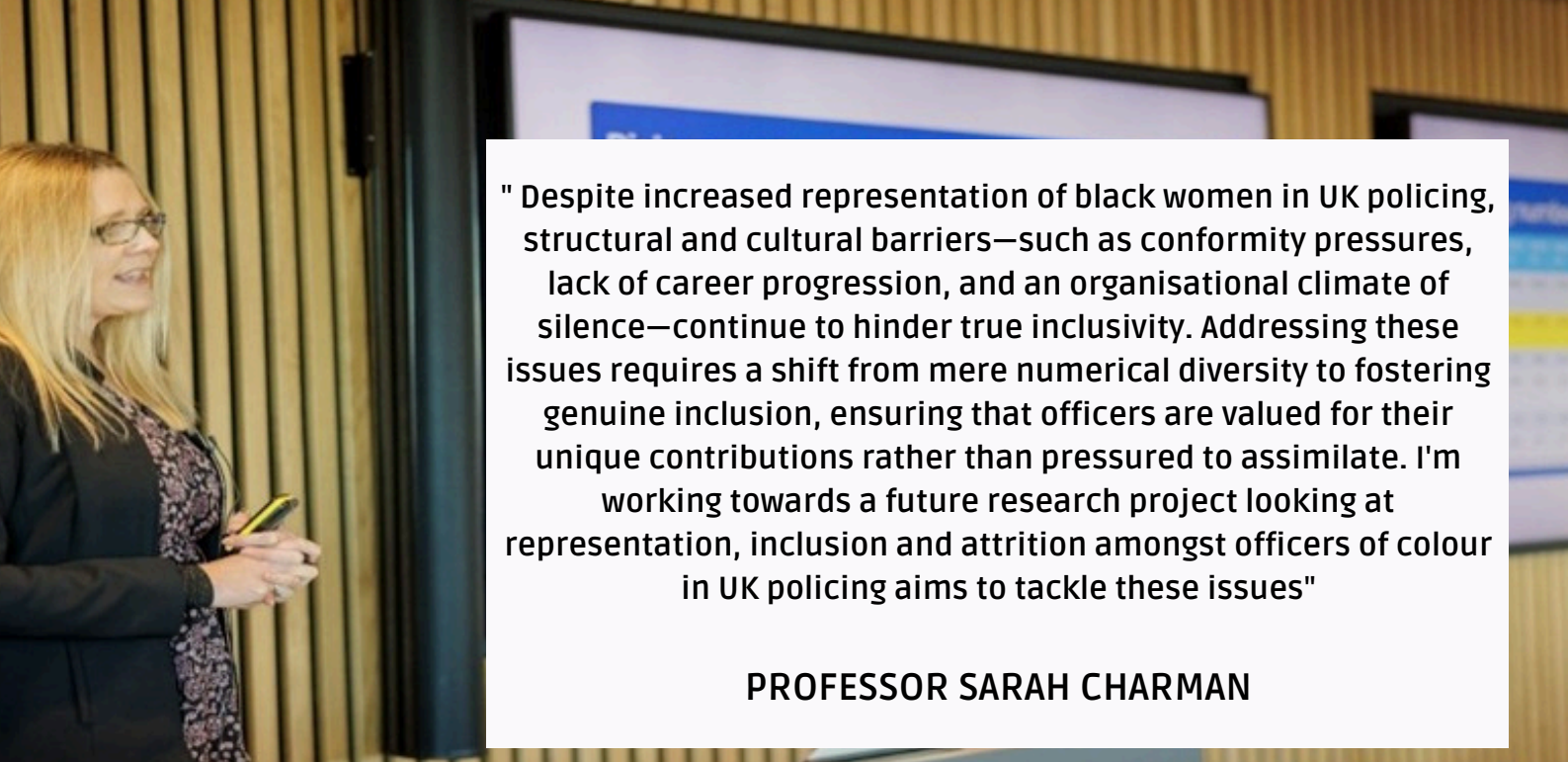
During the conference, a video message from the **Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP, Minister of State (Minister for Women & Equalities)**, was shared. In her address, the Minister reflected on her recent meeting with Karen, Marcia, and members of Women in the Shade, where they discussed the pressing need to break down barriers for Black women in uniformed services across the UK.

The Minister acknowledged the significant contributions of Black women in "strengthening our workplaces, public services, and communities." She also outlined the government's commitment to reducing inequalities through the proposed Equality, Race, and Disability Bill, which includes measures such as:

- Mandatory disability and ethnicity pay gap reporting for large employers.
- Extending equal pay protections to ethnic minority and disabled individuals.

These initiatives aim to improve transparency and accountability in addressing disparities. The Minister emphasised that public consultation and a call for evidence are key parts of the bill's development, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of all stakeholders are considered.

In closing, the Minister highlighted the important role of organisations like Women in the Shade, acknowledging their influence in "shifting the dial towards positive change" and "fostering a more inclusive and equitable future."



"Despite increased representation of black women in UK policing, structural and cultural barriers—such as conformity pressures, lack of career progression, and an organisational climate of silence—continue to hinder true inclusivity. Addressing these issues requires a shift from mere numerical diversity to fostering genuine inclusion, ensuring that officers are valued for their unique contributions rather than pressured to assimilate. I'm working towards a future research project looking at representation, inclusion and attrition amongst officers of colour in UK policing aims to tackle these issues"

PROFESSOR SARAH CHARMAN

## PROFESSOR SARAH CHARMAN

**SPEAKER - "Breaking the Silence: Exploring voices as the key to improving attrition and retention"**

The session featured Professor Charman, who presented a thought-provoking analysis of police culture, with a focus on the six enduring and emerging characteristics identified in 2014:

- **Code of self-protection**
- **Comradeship**
- **Cynicism**

These characteristics were identified as critical contributors to the rising number of voluntary resignations within the police force. Data sourced from FOI requests revealed an alarming increase in resignations, rising from 1,158 in 2011/12 to 5,058 in 2023/24.

Professor Charman also introduced the concept of the **Psychological Climate of Silence**, which encompasses three key elements:



She explained how this pervasive climate contributes to the challenges faced by ethnic minorities in policing, as their voices are often suppressed, unheard, or ignored. Professor Charman stressed the urgent need for further research and data analysis to better understand and address the progression and adequate representation of ethnic women in policing.



## PROFESSOR SARAH CHARMAN

### Exploring Voices as the Key to Improving Attrition and Retention

Professor Charman highlighted the significant gap in data and knowledge regarding the voices of minorities within the police force. She emphasized the necessity of a specialist to understand the culture, workforce, and well-being of diverse employees. To improve retention and progression, there must be:

- Better working arrangements
- Increased ethnic minority representation within the workforce
- A shift in workplace culture

**Representation remains a key issue. At the current rate of progression, it will take an estimated fifty-eight years to achieve an appropriate level of representation for ethnic minorities in policing.**

### Key Characteristics of Policing Culture

Professor Charman shared her insights on the subtle changes in policing culture based on data, with two specific cohorts of police officers observed in their first four years of service. She discussed enduring characteristics of policing culture that impact retention and progression, including:

- **Communication**
- **Cynicism**
- **Categorisation**
- **Compassion**
- **Comradeship**
- **Code of self-protection**
- **Conformity**

There is an obligation to self-categorise in order to navigate these characteristics, with the pressure to conform often leading to ethnic minorities feeling forced to leave the organisation if they fail to align with the dominant culture. The structural issues such as racism, sexism, and the glass or concrete ceiling, create barriers to advancement.

### Sexism and Racism in Policing

These issues are both well-documented and identifiable. Gendered positions, the demands of the job, and the lack of support for balancing personal responsibilities (e.g., family and childcare commitments) contribute to difficulties in achieving career progression. The lack of flexible working arrangements and the pressure to prove competence for temporary positions and promotions further exacerbate the situation.

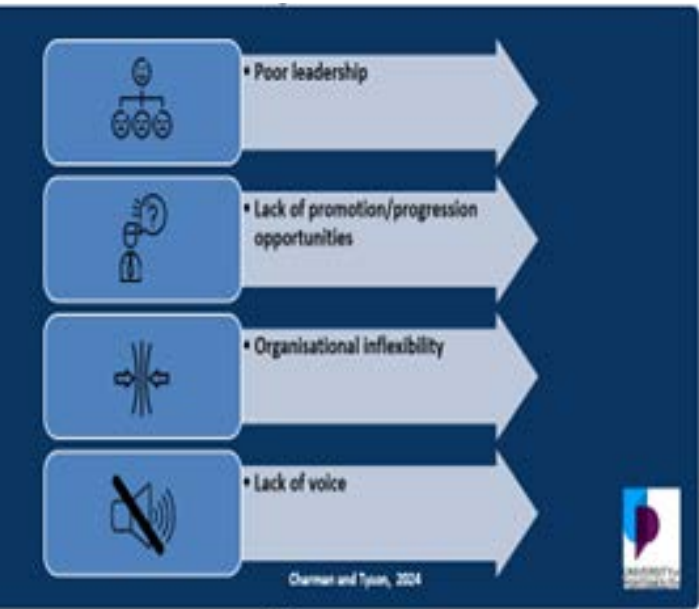




# PROFESSOR SARAH CHARMAN

## Resignations and Retention Challenges

Retention remains a major issue within the police force, driven by organisational injustices such as:



Professor Charman questioned whether current leadership truly desires change, given the psychological climate of silence within the organisation. This climate discourages the sharing of ideas, as officers fear being viewed unfavourably or facing conflict with colleagues. This environment ultimately undermines retention.

## The Need for Change and Inclusivity

There needs to be greater recognition of the voices of ethnic minority officers, with respect and inclusion at the forefront of any organisational change. Promoting identity and inclusion is essential to ensuring diversity has a meaningful impact. Reflecting on the Macpherson Report (which highlighted the persistence of racial inequalities in policing 25 years ago), Professor Charman stressed the need to revisit these findings and focus on progression and adequate representation.

## Future Research Focus

Professor Charman concluded by sharing her upcoming research, which will explore ways to improve the inclusion and retention of police officers of colour. This research will specifically analyse the underlying factors contributing to the persistent racial disparities in retention rates for ethnic minority officers in England and Wales





**"You are in the room. Be intentional. Be deliberate. Plan. Conscious. Take voluntary actions. It is your life and your choice. Take control over yourself and what you want to achieve." - NICOLLE NDIWENI-ROBERTS**

## **PCC DERBYSHIRE - NICOLLE NDIWENI-ROBERTS**

### **SPEAKER**

#### **Early Life**

**Nicolle Ndiweni-Roberts**, originally from Zimbabwe, began her journey into public service twenty-four years later by stepping into the world of politics. Her career has been marked by resilience and determination to make a difference.

#### **The Process**

Nicolle's entry into policing was uniquely through politics—a path that highlights both the opportunities and challenges within the system. Despite years of progress, Nicolle reflects on the recurring nature of discussions surrounding change, acknowledging the considerable work that remains. Her inspiration often operates out of fatigue, symbolising the tireless commitment required to drive real transformation. In 2015, Nicolle was elected as a councillor, marking a significant milestone in her career.

#### **Tiring but Necessary**

The journey has been marked by a persistent feeling of being overlooked—of not having a seat at the table despite wanting to be in the room. This raises a critical question: what happens when you're not in the room? Nicolle believes that facing these fears can open doors to new opportunities. While the next step might be intimidating, she is convinced that it is essential for amazing things to unfold as part of her journey. She urges everyone to reflect on what they can do to be better.

#### **Personal Brand**

Nicolle emphasises the importance of being consistent with one's personal brand—being authentically yourself. She understands that reputation precedes action; by not knowing what will be said or done in one's absence, one cannot influence outcomes. However, Nicolle firmly believes in the principle of service—you are in the room to serve and to bring value.



## PCC DERBYSHIRE - NICOLLE NDIWENI-ROBERTS

### **You Are in the Room**

When you find yourself in the room, surrounded by a diverse pool of people, be intentional and deliberate in your actions—plan, be conscious, pre-arrange, and be voluntary. It's your life and your choice. Nicolle advocates for taking control over your journey, proving that you can deliver and bringing fresh ideas. Often, you won't realise what organisations are missing until you are within them.

### **You Are Not in the Room**

When you're not present, you cannot see or hear what is being discussed. You miss out on the reactions and the context. It is crucial to understand who is saying what, and why. In these moments, silence can be powerful. Nicolle underscores the importance of wisdom—regardless of the room you find yourself in, always observe and absorb.

### **Being You**


Nicolle's message is clear—you have control over your own journey. She advises being precious about oneself, working hard at your plan, and recognising that people will support you when they see value. Adding value, sharing ideas, offering new perspectives, and changing the narrative are all integral to this process.

### **Conclusion**

Consistency is key. Nicolle advocates for speaking confidently on your own behalf and building a network of advocates, because you cannot be everywhere. Be intentional about your career path. There will be struggles, but allies will open doors for you. The relationships you build are essential. Achieving extraordinary results requires going the extra mile.

### **Action Point**

Reflect on what you want to achieve. How will you make it happen? What steps will you take to ensure that you are present and impactful in every room you enter?



**"in the moments of being gaslit and narratives being written, you must stay calm and composed. Stand firm and share your experience with others. Strength can be grown from a diverse collective of sisters and brothers who encourage you to do the right thing".**

**' -KERRY-ANN KNIGHT**

## **KEY NOTE SPEAKER KERRY-ANN KNIGHT**

**The day concluded with a powerful keynote address from Kerry-Ann Knight, leaving attendees with a renewed sense of purpose and a call to continue shaping the future for Black women in uniformed services.**

### **Early Life**

Kerry -Ann Knight faced significant challenges growing up, including child labour, domestic abuse, and time spent in a women's refuge. She struggled with the absence of belonging and familial support.

Black women thrive in organisations with the right support and leadership. However, during her service, Kerry Ann experienced systemic racism and misogyny. In the army, colleagues openly identified with extremist groups and subjected her to discrimination and harassment. She faced microaggressions, verbal and physical abuse, and was unfairly targeted with excessive workloads and derogatory remarks.

Despite raising concerns, leadership dismissed her complaints. Incidents ranged from offensive comments in social settings to workplace bullying, including the misuse of black skin emojis in group chats and derogatory jokes. A 2019 recruitment campaign triggered racial abuse, and her performance was unfairly scrutinised as a result of her raising formal complaints. This led to further victimisation, and she was eventually removed from her role in 2024 without an apology, highlighting systemic failures.





## KEY NOTE SPEAKER KERRY-ANN KNIGHT

### Inclusion

- Increase representation of Black women
- Foster solidarity and support networks
- Ensure fair and independent complaint processes
- Encourage participation in meetings and conferences
- Create internal networks to challenge discriminatory behaviours

**Her testimony was powerful, emotional, and resonated deeply with attendees. Her journey serves as a reminder that progress requires persistence, and true inclusion can only be achieved through meaningful action.**

### A New Path

After becoming a mother, Kerry Ann realised the lack of Black representation in key spaces. Her experiences shaped her into a resilient advocate for change. She emphasised the importance of purpose beyond tokenism in recruitment.

### Strategies for Resilience

- Stay composed in the face of gaslighting and abuse
- Draw strength from community support
- Maintain a strong moral compass
- Advocate for systemic change

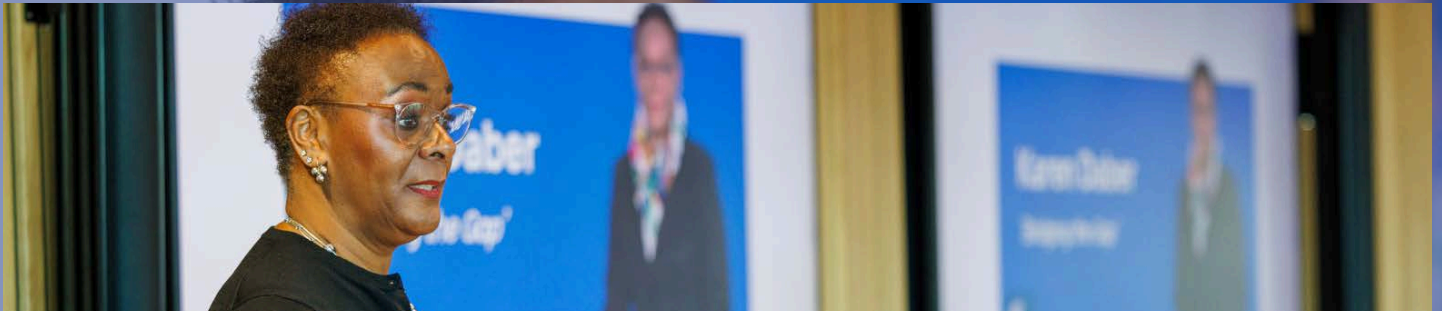


# FACILITATED SESSIONS

*"I thoroughly enjoyed the second annual Women in the Shade conference; it was an invigorating and rewarding experience. The event provided me with the opportunity to hear from a knowledgeable selection of speakers, many of whom are leaders in their respective industries" - Bex Shorunke*

# KAREN DABER

## Our Facilitator : Session 1 : 'Bridging The Gap'



**Karen Daber** led a powerful session exploring the challenges of creating and seizing opportunities, emphasising the importance of feedback, resilience, and maintaining high standards—often under immense pressure.

She shared insights from her career journey, from Uniform Patrol PC and Sgt to T/ACC Police Integrity Program Lead & BME Progress. Throughout her career, her values and integrity were tested by systemic behaviours, prompting delegates to reflect: Were these behaviours influenced by racism, misogyny, or both?

### Thriving, Not Just Surviving

Karen introduced the Arrive, Survive, and Thrive cycle, a framework for navigating new roles and environments. She challenged attendees with three thought-provoking questions:

- What biases do you hold?
- What fears are keeping you in your comfort zone?
- What do you need to step out of and step up to in order to thrive?

Karen urged delegates to challenge the expectation that they must constantly prove themselves. Instead, she encouraged them to build strong relationships, embrace innovation, and seek opportunities to lead. She stressed the importance of stepping outside comfort zones, seeking mentorship, and taking control of personal growth.

Referencing Dr. M'gadza's Six Stages Framework, she highlighted the need for self-valuation, inclusivity, and equity, particularly for Black women in professional spaces.



# KAREN DABER

## Our Facilitator : Session 1 : 'Bridging The Gap'



### Key Takeaways:

- Change comes from taking opportunities and pushing boundaries.
- Hard work, high standards, and resilience are essential—especially for Black women.
- Representation matters: If you're not in the room, you can't influence change.
- Allyship is critical; leaders must create space for diverse voices.

### Key Actions for Success:

- Be brave and proactive in career progression.
- Tune out distractions and focus on personal and professional goals.
- Demand opportunities, time, and space to thrive.
- Cultivate a positive mindset to navigate workplace challenges.
- Advocate for change and create inclusive spaces for future leaders.

### Final Reflections:

Karen left attendees with a powerful challenge:

- Identify one action to bridge the gap between where you are now and where you want to be.

True leadership requires bravery, sacrifice, and a commitment to making a difference. The journey is not easy, but by taking ownership of their careers, delegates can shape and influence their organizations for the better.

*It was a truly amazing experience to be amongst exceptional professional women working hard to keep us all safe as members of the uniformed services here in UK. They all go above and beyond in their respective fields and that is inspiring, despite at times doing this in difficult and challenging times. Keep being strong and making a difference.*

# CAROLINE RIBEIRO-NELSON

Our Facilitator : Session 2 : "Harmonising Identity & Health"



Facilitated by **Caroline Ribeiro-Nelson**, this session explored the unique challenges faced by Black and Brown women and the critical need to reclaim and protect their health, power, and well-being.

Rather than relying on systems that often fail to provide adequate support, the focus was on prioritising self-care, setting firm boundaries, and creating nurturing spaces for personal growth and empowerment. Racial trauma, the psychological and emotional distress caused by racism, discrimination, and systemic oppression, was a central theme. It manifests in various forms, including anxiety, depression, hypervigilance, and fatigue. The cumulative stress of racial trauma, known as weathering, gradually erodes resilience, significantly impacting both mental and physical health.

## Addressing the Barriers:

- **Denial & Gaslighting** – Combat invalidation of lived experiences.
- **Cultural Adaptation & Survival** – The pressure to assimilate and overachieve to be accepted.
- **Intersectionality** – The compounded effects of race, gender, and other identities.
- **The Impact of Negative Experiences** – Increased risk of depression, anxiety, isolation, and burnout.

# CAROLINE RIBEIRO-NELSON

## Our Facilitator : Session 2 : "Harmonising Identity & Health"

### Empowerment Through Intentional Action:

- **Reaffirm Your Identity** – Embrace your presence and walk into spaces with confidence.
- **Challenge Negative Narratives** – Counter harmful messaging with positive affirmations.
- **Set Personal & Professional Boundaries** – Learn to say no when necessary.
- **Engage in Regular Self-Care** – Recognize and address personal triggers.
- **Invest in Mental Well-being** – Practice mindfulness and create intentional space for growth.

Delegates were provided with the Diverse Mental Health LTD Introductory Toolkit serving as a basic support tool for addressing personal and professional issues affecting mental health. It provides information and resources to gain insight, develop strategies, maintain well-being, and manage challenges. Its effectiveness relies on your commitment, active participation, and use of available support structures. Self-driven learning and growth are essential for improvement, with the guide aiming to optimize mental health and personal growth outcomes.

## 12 STRATEGIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Recognise the need to prioritise your health & well-being. Make a clear commitment to yourself and invest in you.

Consistently engaging in these strategies can enhance overall well-being and build resilience against mental health challenges.



- Engage in regular physical exercise to improve mood and reduce stress.
- Eat a balanced diet to support brain health and energy levels.
- Maintain consistent sleep patterns for emotional and cognitive function.
- Use relaxation techniques such as mindfulness, meditation, or deep breathing.



- Build supportive relationships to reduce feelings of isolation.
- Avoid over commitment and prioritize personal needs.
- Reach out to professionals if struggling with mental health concerns.
- Participate in activities that bring joy and fulfillment.
- Reduce exposure to digital devices to improve focus and emotional well-being.
- Reflect on positive aspects of life to foster resilience.
- Learn about mental health to better understand and manage challenges.
- Limit alcohol and avoid drugs to reduce the risk of mental health issues.





# CAROLINE RIBEIRO-NELSON

## Our Facilitator : Session 2 : "Harmonising Identity & Health"

The toolkit is designed to support individuals in understanding and managing mental health, particularly in diverse workplace settings.

It covers key areas, including:

Understanding Your Mental Health  
The Workplace & Diverse Mental Health  
Recognising Poor Mental Health & Illness  
Recognising Reactions to Trauma  
12 Strategies for Mental Health Care

**This toolkit is available now on the Women in the Shade website.**

### Call to Action:

Prioritise self-care, embrace your identity, and intentionally reclaim your power in a world that often seeks to diminish it.

*"Connect with those who affirm and uplift you—whether it's family, friends, or a community of Black and Brown women. Build a trusted circle where you can share, find calm, and receive encouragement without fear of judgment or invalidation."*

### Key Strategies for Reclaiming Power and Well-being:

- **Prioritise Health & Well-being** – Make your physical and mental health a top priority.
- **Set Boundaries** – Protect your energy, time, and emotional well-being.

- **Build a Support Network** – Surround yourself with those who affirm and uplift you.
- **Define Your Value** – Recognise your worth and claim your space with confidence.
- **Choose Your Battles** – Not every fight is yours to take on.
- **Invest in Yourself** – Focus on personal growth beyond oppressive systems.
- **Release the Burden of Change** – You are not responsible for fixing everything.
- **Rest Without Guilt** – Prioritise self-care and avoid burnout.
- **Demand Respect** – Know when to walk away from toxic environments.



# PANEL SESSIONS

*"It was such a privilege to be in this room, a room full of truly amazing, inspirational Black women. Women In The Shade are doing such important work of holding space for and amplifying the voices of Black women in uniformed services. " - Lucia WMP*

# PANEL ONE: NAVIGATING CHANGE: EMPOWERING BLACK WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND MENTAL HEALTH

**Panel members:** Chief Constable Gavin Stephens QPM, Grace Ononiwu CBE, Gillian Unsworth and Karen Daber



## Key Discussion Points:

- **Personal Leadership & Growth:** Change, though daunting, is also an opportunity. Leadership begins with self-awareness, and individuals must surround themselves with those who push them forward.
- **Breaking Barriers:** Many workplaces fail to see Black women for their capabilities. Organisations and communities, including policing, need diverse talent and perspectives.
- **Overcoming Workplace Bias:** Promotion and career progression often come with bias. Reverse mentoring and advisory roles can help leadership understand the lived experiences of Black women in these spaces.
- **Financial Barriers:** The financial burden of career advancement can be a significant hurdle. Institutions need to provide financial and structural support to ensure fair opportunities.
- **Mental Health & Well-being:** Protecting mental health is paramount. Choosing battles wisely, maintaining a supportive network, and setting firm boundaries are key strategies for well-being.
- **Diversity at Leadership Levels:** Representation at senior levels is lacking. A more inclusive and collaborative approach is needed to ensure Black women are supported and advanced in leadership roles.

This discussion highlighted the need for systemic change, personal empowerment, and collective action in navigating leadership spaces and mental health challenges for Black women. The journey continues, but through strong networks, continuous learning, and strategic action, meaningful progress can be achieved.

## Challenges & Calls to Action:

- **Addressing Bias in Promotion Decisions:** There is a need to level the playing field for Black women, ensuring their talents and contributions are recognised equitably.
- **Shaping Recruitment Strategies:** Recruitment strategies must be adapted to be more inclusive, with a focus on equipping Black women for selection processes and leadership opportunities.
- **Organisational Commitment to Change:** Organisations must actively promote diversity and inclusion, embedding these values into their leadership and policies.



# PANEL ONE: NAVIGATING CHANGE: EMPOWERING BLACK WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND MENTAL HEALTH

**Panel members:** Chief Constable Gavin Stephens QPM, Grace Ononiwu CBE, Gillian Unsworth and Karen Daber



## Key Insights & Takeaways:

- **Cultural Preparation of Spaces:** While Black women bring immense value and identity, many workplaces are unprepared for their presence. Overcoming perceived barriers requires proactive steps, including leveraging voluntary roles to fast-track career advancement.
- **Political Confidence & Strong Leadership:** Developing political confidence and engaging strong leaders and advisors is crucial in overcoming obstacles in recruitment and progression.
- **Creating a Network:** Building and maintaining a strong, diverse network is essential. Checking in with others and being mindful of the feedback and perspectives within one's network can provide critical guidance and support.
- **Recruitment and Selection Readiness:** Widening recruitment efforts for ethnic minorities and ensuring proper preparation for selection processes is necessary to drive real change.
- **Continuous Learning:** A mindset of continuous learning is vital. Every day presents an opportunity for personal and professional growth, particularly when navigating challenges in leadership and mental health.

## PANEL TWO: AMPLIFYING VOICES: ADVANCE INCLUSION AND WELLBEING ACROSS SECTORS

**Panel members:** Nicolle Ndiweni-Roberts, Jo Richardson, Rosemary Russell and PC Stephanie Nicely



### Key Discussion Points:

Panellists emphasised the necessity of speaking up when given the opportunity and urged individuals to take on the responsibility of advancing inclusion to the best of their ability. They highlighted the need for bravery in creating safe spaces where difficult conversations can take place, and for leaders to actively drive change within their organisations.

A key point raised was the importance of acknowledging issues and incorporating insights from both employees and wider research to inform decision-making. Panellists agreed that EDI programs require adequate funding and dedicated, full-time resources to be successful. They stressed the need for an evidence-based approach, using data to understand disparities and develop effective solutions.

The discussion also addressed the unique challenges faced by Black women, who often feel additional pressure regarding how they are perceived in the workplace—an expectation their counterparts may not have to consider. The panellists highlighted the importance of involving entire organisations in racial equity efforts, ensuring that all employees understand why these changes are necessary and how they contribute to the organisation's future success.

### Challenges in Advancing the EDI Agenda:

**Sustaining Change:** The momentum for EDI initiatives must be maintained. Without continued pressure, organisations risk regressing.

- **Understanding the 'Why':** Many organisations lack a clear understanding of why EDI efforts are essential, leading to superficial or ineffective initiatives.
- **Leadership Accountability:** Leaders must be held accountable for driving change. Without clear commitments and action plans, progress remains slow.
- **Overcoming Negative Stereotypes:** Black women often face stereotypes that prevent them from showing vulnerability or being fully themselves in the workplace.
- **Ensuring Financial and Structural Support:** EDI initiatives require proper funding and dedicated personnel to have a lasting impact.



## PANEL TWO: AMPLIFYING VOICES: ADVANCE INCLUSION AND WELLBEING ACROSS SECTORS

**Panel members:** Nicolle Ndiweni-Roberts, Jo Richardson, Rosemary Russell and PC Stephanie Nicely



### Barriers for Black Women:

- **Lack of Leadership Commitment:** Black women often feel they must lead EDI efforts because leadership is not doing so.
- **Limited Allyship:** True allyship requires action, not just words. Advocates must actively push for change and ensure clear, intentional support.
- **Perceptions and Bias:** Black women navigate additional pressures and stereotypes, impacting their workplace experiences.

- **Acknowledging Issues and Research:** Addressing issues requires acknowledging the experiences of employees and insights from research. This helps in creating actionable solutions that drive systemic progress.
- **EDI Programmes Require Investment:** To be effective, EDI programmes need sufficient financial support and full-time commitment. An evidence-based approach, leveraging data, is critical in understanding impact and making informed decisions.
- **The Perception of Black Women:** Black women face unique pressures in the workplace, often feeling they must manage how they are perceived. Addressing these challenges requires intentional support and structural change.
- **Involving the Whole Organisation in Change:** Racial equity efforts must engage the entire organisation, ensuring that all employees understand why change is necessary. This fosters collective responsibility and sustained progress.

### Five Key Takeaways:

**Representation and Advocacy:** Ethnic minorities must use their positions to speak up when possible, demonstrating courage and clarity. By fostering a safe space for open dialogue, individuals can drive meaningful change.

### Moving Forward:

- **Encouraging Honest Conversations:** Leaders and employees must be willing to engage in uncomfortable but necessary discussions.
- **Creating Safe Spaces for Open Dialogue:** Employees need environments where they feel comfortable expressing concerns and sharing ideas.
- **Holding Leadership Accountable:** Organisations must set clear expectations for senior leaders to drive meaningful change.



## PANEL TWO: AMPLIFYING VOICES: ADVANCE INCLUSION AND WELLBEING ACROSS SECTORS

**Panel members:** Nicolle Ndiweni-Roberts, Jo Richardson, Rosemary Russell and PC Stephanie Nicely



- **Using Data to Inform Policy:** Evidence-based decision-making is key to effective and lasting EDI interventions.
- **Empowering Underrepresented Voices:** Some of the most valuable ideas come from employees at all levels. Ensuring these voices are heard is crucial for progress.

This discussion reinforced that advancing inclusion and wellbeing across sectors requires ongoing commitment, bold leadership, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. The panellists' insights provided a roadmap for how organisations can move beyond performative gestures and drive real, lasting change.



# FEEDBACK

'The feedback from this year's Women in the Shade conference has been both powerful and deeply reflective, demonstrating the event's significant impact. Alongside survey responses, many attendees took to social media to share their thoughts, highlighting themes of empowerment, resilience, representation, and the urgent need for systemic change.

These reflections underscore the importance of creating spaces where Black women in uniformed services can connect, be inspired, and drive meaningful progress. This review captures those voices, providing a deeper understanding of how the conference resonated with delegates and what it means for the journey ahead.





## KEY THEMES FROM DELEGATE REFLECTIONS

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The Women in the Shade Conference 2024 was an inspiring and empowering event, bringing together Black women in uniformed services to share experiences, gain insights, and foster professional and personal growth.

Feedback on the conference was shared across multiple platforms, reflecting its immediate and lasting impact. Social media comments posted right after the event highlighted the powerful sense of inspiration and empowerment delegates felt. In addition, responses gathered through a post-event survey provided deeper insights into key takeaways, while personal testimonies from attendees further reinforced the event's significance. Common themes emerged, including the importance of representation, open discussions on systemic challenges, and a collective call for action and advocacy.

The following section explores these reflections in more detail.

### POST EVENT SURVEY

- **Overall Conference Rating:** The conference received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with 98% of delegates rating it as "Very Good" or "Excellent."
- **Conference Organisation:** Delegates highly praised the organisation and structure of the conference, with 98% considering it "Very" or "Extremely Organised."
- **Pre-Conference Communication:** The majority of delegates felt well-prepared ahead of the event, with 83% receiving "All" or "Most" of the necessary information.
- **Conference Duration:** The majority of attendees felt the conference length was appropriate.
- **Speaker & Panel Quality:** The quality of the speakers and panel discussions was rated highly, with many delegates finding them thought-provoking, informative, and inspirational. A few delegates suggested that while most speakers were outstanding, some presentations were less engaging or did not translate well to the audience.



- **Networking & Engagement:** The conference successfully fostered networking and provided a safe space for sharing experiences. 97% of delegates were "Extremely Likely" or "Very Likely" to share information from the conference with colleagues. Several attendees expressed a desire for more networking time.
- **Future Attendance:** Encouragingly, 98% of respondents indicated they would attend the Women in the Shade Conference in 2025.

## KEY THEMES FROM DELEGATE FEEDBACK

The qualitative feedback highlighted several key themes:

- **Empowerment & Representation:** Many delegates described the conference as "eye-opening" and "much-needed," with one attendee stating: *"Being in a room with so many Black women who have thrived, strived, and survived makes me so proud to be Black."*
- **High-Quality Organisation & Delivery:** The event was praised for its seamless organisation, engaging speakers, and diverse presentations.
- **Safe & Supportive Space:** Delegates valued the opportunity to share experiences, discuss challenges, and gain advice in a safe and supportive environment.
- **Impactful Keynote Speakers & Panels:** Attendees found the speakers "inspirational," "thought-provoking," and "informative," with one delegate calling the conference their "favourite event of the year."
- **Areas for Improvement:** Suggestions included increasing networking time and ensuring that all speakers deliver maximum impact.

## KEY RECURRING THEMES DRAWN FROM SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENTS

Following the conference, delegates took to social media to share their immediate reflections, highlighting the event's powerful impact. Posts celebrated the inspiration, empowerment, and sense of community fostered throughout the day.

The key themes from the comments were

- **Empowerment & Inspiration** – How the speakers and discussions reinforced confidence, resilience, and ambition.
- **Representation & Visibility** – The significance of seeing Black women in leadership and sharing their journeys.
- **Challenges & Barriers** – Honest conversations about racism, bias, and systemic hurdles.
- **Action & Advocacy** – A call for allies to move beyond performative support to tangible change.
- **Wellbeing & Community** – The importance of safe spaces, mental health, and collective support.

## CONCLUSION

**The overwhelmingly positive feedback reflects the success of the Women in the Shade Conference 2024. Delegates left feeling inspired, empowered, and connected.**

**The feedback will be used to refine and enhance the 2025 conference, ensuring an even greater experience for all attendees.**



# CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS

*"As I initiate my planned actions for 2025, this conference has provided an excellent foundation for my endeavours. It felt good to be seated amongst likeminded policing colleagues and female leaders. A poignant reminder that I am not navigating these police senior leadership journey in solitude." - Kimberley Lamb*

# REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN IN THE SHADE CONFERENCE 2025

by Jaks Matthews (BT)



This year's left me moved, inspired, and running to share my thoughts again. The theme, "What Happens When We Are Not in the Room," resonated throughout every discussion, anecdote, and statistic shared. It was a privilege to be in the room – to listen, learn, and engage with so many brilliant Black women in uniformed services.'

'Grace Ononiwu CBE's wit, and wisdom shone through in her advice: "Know your business, mind your business, be a good person and be yourself." Her skilful mix of humour with insight was a highlight. I would say that though I love a good joke. I wasn't just nodding along but reflecting on the power of authenticity and integrity, especially in spaces where being authentic can feel rebellious.'

'Dr Shungu Hilda M'gadza's 6 Stages Framework for understanding and challenging racism, made something daunting feel accessible, and actionable. Seeing how this framework could be applied in various contexts, left me with ideas to bring back to my own work.'

'Karen Daber's assertion that "there is a huge amount of difference culture makes on a person" stuck with me. I rarely write verbatim quotes, but I wrote that. A reminder that culture is not just an abstract concept, it shapes perspectives, choices, and opportunities in ways that ripple out and have legacy.'

'Professor Sarah Charman shared a sobering statistic: at the current rate of progress, it would take 58 years for ethnicity representation to reach representative levels in the police force. A stark reminder of how slow systemic change can be. Her point about how diversity doesn't automatically lead to being heard was another punch I've long said inclusion can't be measured by diversity statistics.'

'The keynote speech by Kerry-Ann Knight, however, was the moment that truly lingered with me. I found myself reflecting on how similar dynamics play out in spaces beyond uniformed services. It was a call to action, not just to observe or acknowledge inequities but to question how they manifest and to work toward change.'



'The conference reminded me again of the value of being in the room, not just to witness or listen but to act. Last year it was recognition in myself of often being the one person like you in the room. But really for me being in a room with a host of women that some would try to say I don't even share a characteristic with and reflecting on what happens when they aren't there. Because without them I wouldn't have learned and grown so much today. It also has me reflecting, whose voices are missing from my circle of people I learn from, and what opportunities am I losing?

'Conversations like today can't stop. They need to carry on in boardrooms, breakrooms, and policy discussions. I am so grateful to have been part of this event and leave with not just inspiration but a renewed inspiration to inclusion.'

'To Karen Geddes QPM BA (Hons) and Marcia Ore thank you. Keep building spaces where everyone can be heard.'



# REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN IN THE SHADE CONFERENCE

by Chief Inspector Christopher Grandison (WMP BAPA)



I wanted to take this opportunity on behalf of West Midlands Black and Asian Police Association (BAPA) to firstly say well done and congratulations for delivering a phenomenal conference on Thursday 16th January 2025.

The Women in Shade conference is one of its kind and there is nothing available like it. The lack of investment and celebration of black females is an industry-wide failing however as evident within your conference, it is more prominent within policing and then in turn more damaging to black communities. You will have been personally been subject to some of that lack of investment, celebration and recognition during your time as a police officer but it is a testament to your character, values and passion for supporting others that you have turned this negative experience into a positive one and created a space and a movement that allows black females to recognise their worth, value and contributions, as well as challenging and encouraging those in positions of power to drive change, recognise black talent and take positive action.

Whilst the conference was about celebration and empowerment it was also about us creating future black leaders back within West Midlands Police and generating that positive impact and ripple effect in force. Some of that has already started to take place and this is in turn is because of the positive and nurturing environment you have created, thank you.

I know that you will have given so much of yourself both personally and professionally to ensure not only the successful outcome of the conference but to ensure it was impactful. I wanted to take this opportunity to remind, you that all the energy, passion, sweat and even at time tears was worth it because you have not only created something special but encouraged, lifted up and shone a positive light on those that came after you.

Thank you for involving West Midlands Police and BAPA in this special journey and allowing us to be part of the magic behind the scenes.

Never lose sight of the amazing and important work you both do and I look forward to supporting and working with you both even more next year for the Women in Shade Conference 2026.

# ‘UNAPOLOGETICALLY MYSELF’

by Martina Mabale (Police Now)



**POLICE: NOW**  
INFLUENCE FOR GENERATIONS

If there is one thing, I would like to remind myself from this year's Women in the Shade Conference, is that change is not an abstract concept. Change is the act or process through which something that already exists becomes different either by modifying it or by replacing it. We witnessed brilliant and powerful contributions throughout the day that showcased how this can be done and what tools could be used, not only by all the present women but probably even more importantly, by those "critical leaders" as Karen Daber mentioned, that have the power to lead change in certain spaces. It can be very difficult to maintain the level of passion, discipline, and diplomacy that bringing change requires. We all attended this year's Conference for different reasons but I'm sure we all left inspired.

I left thinking - ***"Martina, what can you do with this boost of inspiration? How do you jump to the next level?"*** I'm one of those who believe you should have different people in the room - people who motivate, people who lead, people who listen, people who make uncomfortable questions, people who mediate the conversations, and people who take action.

I like taking action, and probably asking questions too, but I definitely think one step ahead, and this brings me back to my childhood and how I always persevered to be able to be in that room.

My experience as a mixed-race woman, born and raised in Spain, has been very different compared to what I probably would have experienced in England, not just in terms of racism but also regarding my identity journey as an individual from a biracial background. I grew up in a predominantly White country but with a very different historical and cultural context and therefore understanding of race as opposed to England's. I was regarded as Black in the eyes of the society that surrounded me, so I never allowed myself to question my own identity in public; I knew my father was Black and born in Guinea Ecuatorial and my mother was White and born in Spain, but I built up my character around the identity of a Black woman, not just because I was raised surrounded by them, but also because my mother ensured I grew up proud of being Black too even though she is White.



# ‘UNAPOLOGETICALLY MYSELF’

by Martina Mabale (Police Now)

I used to come back from primary school crying about my skin color and not understanding why I was different from everyone else; I used to ask her to “rub off the brown color” so I could be like everyone else. She knew I was never going to be seen as mixed race, so she never allowed me to doubt myself within that space and she always empowered me to be proud of my Black background; we never discussed this later on in life but I will be forever thankful because thanks to that core strength and pride around being Black, I have been able to navigate my childhood and my teenage years with self-confidence and being unapologetically myself, even in those moments where I experienced fear and anger.

I grew up not understanding what colorism is and what being mixed race entails in certain contexts. I was very proud of my roots and both backgrounds at home but when I stepped outside of my house, reality was very different. When I was twenty-one years old, an old lady asked me to change seats on the bus because she didn’t want to be sitting in front of a “mulatto”, she whispered **“Democracy in the streets but dictatorship in my house”**. When I was in my last year of high school, two classmates left a drawing of the KK chasing me beneath my desk; when I turned fifteen, a different classmate made a collage on his phone of different pictures of a monkey and myself asking everyone to “find the differences”.

The list goes on, but my parents never left me in those instances, they were always waiting for me at home ready to remind me of how greatness can be threatening, of how ignorance is louder than intelligence; it was almost like every incident built a layer of strength within myself. When I was sixteen, I managed to join the European Youth Parliament and participate in policy discussions with people from all over Europe. From that instance, I managed to fund my studies with academic excellence scholarships to be able to study abroad. I came to England six years ago with 200 in my bank account to chase my dream, study Politics, and participate in change through policy and the non-profit sector.

I never understood why, I never understood the rationale behind all the non-justified hatred. I always wished I had grown up with people like me in school and within different areas of society apart from my family. This brings me to clarify that I wouldn’t want my experience to be a showcase of pain, but a highlight and reinforcement of how important it is to feel represented. We need our generation and the upcoming to see more Black women in positions of power. I believe we all agreed on a common ground throughout the Conference, which is the idea that regardless of the professional or cultural background, Black women experience and feel a similar sense of invisibility and injustice.

# ‘UNAPOLOGETICALLY MYSELF’

by Martina Mabale (Police Now)

I will never know, and I will never compare my experiences to those of a Black woman, because regardless of my upbringing, I will always experience privilege to some extent, but I will always use my voice to open spaces, pathways, and conversations. I will never not feel or be part of the community, it's part of me and therefore I will always feel the responsibility to bring change.

**We have the power to change, I don't think it happens overnight, and certainly not through individual efforts, but I do believe we can use the Conference's takeaways, and regardless of how big or small of an impact you can make, it will contribute to the long-term change.**



# PROUD. DETERMINED. REFLECTIVE.

by Grace Gayle (NPCC)



These are my feelings after attending yesterday's #WomenintheShade 2025 conference in Birmingham. It was a struggle to get there, for one reason or the other including childcare arrangements, train delays at Euston, accessing a ticket lastminute (thank you Anita Grant) but I made it....and it was so worth it!

I am in awe and deep admiration of all of my sisters working in uniformed services, especially in policing of course, but also those in the Army, Fire, Ambulance, Probation, NHS and all in military personnel, corrections, etc...

Our purpose is to maintain the equality, safety, security and health of the public we serve...and in turn, these attributes for ourselves gets overlooked if not at times completely disregarded. So to have a space to listen to experiences, advice and provided toolkits to take away was hugely valuable.

The host Merisha Stevenson was on point. The speakers Lord-Lieutenant Derrick Anderson CBE on behalf of the King, Simon Foster West Midlands PCC, Dr Shungu Hilda M'gadzah, Professor Sarah Charman, Karen Daber and Caroline Ribeiro-Nelson were absolutely outstanding!

Loved the panels as well as the additional panel members, which I know I won't be able to include them all...but Gavin Stephens QPM, Jo Richardson, Gillian Unsworth, Rosemary Russell, PC Stephanie Nicely and Sharon Warmington helped bring their perspectives and a few a-ha moments too. In particular Grace Ononiwu CBE left me spellbound, Nicolle Ndiweni-Roberts was inspiring and Mrs Kerry-Ann Knight, the Keynote speaker's story of survival and service in the Army will stay with me.

So much to process, but the priority meaning behind of this post is to simply say a huge thank you to Marcia Ore and Karen Geddes QPM BA (Hons) for a wonderful conference, which was enriching and providing encouragement to stay true to what I have decided is my purpose in policing and to stand tall, remain a good person, protect my mental health and keep moving forward...for me.

Great to see so many familiar faces within policing, and a shout out to Peter Kitosi-Isanga, Dr Alison Heydari PhD and Vanisha Mistry (Bhogal).



# REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN IN THE SHADE CONFERENCE

by Dr Shungu Hilda M'gadzah



It was a real privilege to be invited to speak at the Women in the Shade Conference. Surrounded by so many Black and brown women the conference title was apt- The Power of Colour.

The presentations and panel discussions reminded us that all too often there are systemic barriers and challenges that try and diminish and extinguish that power.

Presenters and delegates shared their experiences, and we were reminded of the pain and suffering of many simply because of their gender and the colour of their skin.

I was able to introduce **The Six Stages Framework** as an action-based tool for change which helps individuals and organisations navigate racism and other forms of discrimination. I was also able to share an adaptation of the SSF called the Six Stages Framework Racism Survival Spectrum which empowers victims and survivors to navigate racism, reclaim their identity, and turn their pain into power.



This is available on the SSF website: <https://www.sixstagesframework.com/survival>

**"The Six Stages Framework is a dynamic and transformative model designed to guide individuals, organizations, schools, and communities through a journey of personal and collective growth. It is a developmental tool that emphasizes empathy, inclusion, and adaptability, enabling users to navigate complex social and cultural landscapes with greater understanding and confidence."**

The feedback from delegates about the Six Stages Framework was heartening. One of the delegates asked about the applicability of the Framework to schools as she and others recognised the importance of beginning these conversations about biases and discrimination early. The adaptability of the SSF and its intersectional lens is one of the key strengths of this dynamic Framework.

# REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN IN THE SHADE CONFERENCE:

by Dr Shungu Hilda M'gadzah

A key activity from the SSF toolkits is: What stage are you at on the SSF in terms of your understanding and ability to deal with racism (and other forms of discrimination)? And what stage is your Organisation?

In the panel discussion that followed my presentation, Chief Constable Gavin Stephens reflected on the SSF and said having listened to the presentation, I am both at Stage +3 and Stage +6. I was able to discuss this later with him before he left, and it was clear that he was recognising the need to separate out his considerable leadership skills and competencies from his understanding of racism. "I am still learning." he said.

The SSF explores inclusive leadership and the Chief Constable in his comment demonstrates that the starting point in this work is not only with individuals but also in supporting individual leaders to identify where they are on the SSF.

As one delegate said to me afterwards: This is such a powerful tool. There is no denying this, every police force can use this; there isn't one single force where they will not be able to say, yes, we recognise someone who is at each of these stages, including on the negative axis!

So, where are you on the Six Stages Framework and where is your organisation.

Many thanks to Karen Geddes QPM BA (Hons) and Marcia Ore for such a brilliant conference and for the opportunity to present on the SIX STAGES INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORK.

## Understanding & Dealing With Everyday Racism The Six Stages Framework



# REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN IN THE SHADE CONFERENCE:

by Caroline Marconi (wondder)



Attending the Women in the Shade conference as an exhibitor for **wondder** was an eye-opening experience that deepened my understanding of diversity, inclusion, and the impact of VR in shedding light on underrepresented realities. My role was to present wondder's work and showcase our VR demo, *Being Black in Blue*, a project designed specifically for this event. This immersive experience was created to highlight the discrimination and sense of isolation that Black women in law enforcement often face, offering attendees a deeper understanding of these challenges.

As one of the few white women in the room, my experience at the conference was as much about personal learning as it was about presenting our work. Stepping into an environment where whiteness was not the default provided a rare opportunity for introspection. I realized, with humbling satisfaction, that, in many professional and social spaces, I have moved through the world without questioning the privilege of feeling "at home" in the room. The conversations I had throughout the conference illuminated the nuances of navigating a professional space where one's identity is constantly scrutinized or dismissed.

Hearing firsthand accounts from Black women about their experiences within institutions meant to uphold justice and order underscored how deeply systemic these issues remain. It was a stark reminder that inclusion is not just about representation—it is about actively creating environments where all voices are heard, valued, and respected.

My experience at the Women in the Shade conference reinforced the vital role of immersive storytelling in DEI initiatives. The conference provided a powerful platform for fostering these discussions and reinforcing the importance of allyship. It was an honour to take part in an event that not only amplifies these critical voices but also challenges attendees to reflect on their roles in shaping a more inclusive future. I left with a stronger commitment to listening, learning, and advocating for meaningful change, recognizing that these conversations must extend beyond the conference space and into ongoing action.





# CONCLUSION

*"We must not also forget the emotional toll/labour that Black women face in and out of the workplace (that is backed by many pieces of research and evidence). Although Women in the Shade focuses on uniformed services, many of the discussions, sentiments, and experiences are faced in all sectors." - Natasha*

# CONCLUSION

The overwhelmingly positive response to the conference affirms the necessity of these conversations and the role Women in the Shade plays in fostering them. The challenge now is to sustain this momentum—turning inspiration into action, ensuring that the lessons learned translate into real-world change. As we reflect on this feedback, it is clear that the community built here is more than just an event; it is a movement. Moving forward, we will continue to amplify these voices, advocate for change, and create even more opportunities for Black women in uniformed services to thrive.

## Overall Impact:

The conference served as a catalyst for empowerment, providing attendees with practical tools, evidence-based frameworks, and a supportive community to navigate their journeys. It highlighted the urgent need for systemic change, actionable strategies to address inequality, and a collective commitment to fostering inclusive environments where Black women can thrive. By amplifying voices, sharing lived experiences, and equipping attendees with resources, the event underscored the transformative power of reclaiming narratives and creating a legacy of equity and inclusion.

**The conference highlighted the critical importance of Black women reclaiming their narratives and stepping into leadership roles with confidence and purpose. By fostering intentional networks, prioritising mental well-being, and advocating for systemic change, attendees left equipped with actionable strategies to drive progress within their organisations and communities. Above all, it reaffirmed the collective power of women to break barriers and redefine leadership for future generations.**

# CALL TO ACTION

The conference inspired attendees to reflect on their personal and professional journeys, leaving them with a clear roadmap for action and empowerment. It served as a reminder of the importance of resilience, collaboration, and self-advocacy in overcoming systemic challenges and creating meaningful change. Centred around the lived experiences of Black women in underrepresented spaces, the discussions offered a space to build

- **Develop intentional networks:** Build diverse and supportive professional networks, seeking mentorship from people who understand your struggles and can advocate for your success.
- **Champion allyship:** Actively seek allies in spaces where Black women are underrepresented and encourage them to be proactive in dismantling systemic barriers.
- **Take care of mental well-being:** Prioritise mental health by focusing on self-care and emotional resilience. Recognize the toll that working in difficult environments can take on your psyche and seek support when needed.
- **Be proactive in leadership and growth:** Step into voluntary roles to gain experience, visibility, and leadership opportunities. Commit to continuous learning and personal growth.
- **Push for data-driven change:** Advocate for research, data analysis, and measurable outcomes to address systemic issues such as underrepresentation and bias in recruitment and progression.





# CLOSING NOTE

As we look ahead to 2025, Women in the Shade remains committed to delivering on our strategic aims to transform the experiences of Black women in uniformed services. We invite you to stay connected with us and continue to be part of our empowering journey. Keep an eye out for exciting opportunities to engage, grow, and make an impact:

- **Take Positive Action** – Join our WITS network, sign up for future events, and access valuable training, mentorship, and conferences. Support others by becoming a WITS mentor or advocate and share your skills and experiences to help create a stronger, more inclusive community.
- **Commit to Drive Change** – Partner with Women in the Shade on a project, research initiative, or event sponsorship or by become a Friend of WITS. Your involvement can help drive real change, whether through collaboration or support for training events and the Women in the Shade Conference 2025.
- **Self-Empowerment** – Take control of your own journey. Engage in our training and mentorship programmes and attend our Safe Space events to foster your continuous learning and personal development.





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to our sponsors. Your belief in our mission and your ongoing support have been instrumental in helping us make a difference.





# THANK YOU TO OUR FRIENDS

A Friend of Women in the Shade is more than just a supporter—it's someone who stands alongside us as an advocate for change, empowering Black women in uniformed services to thrive. By becoming a Friend, you join a growing network of allies committed to fostering inclusion, representation, and opportunities for those we serve.



# THANK YOU TO OUR EXHIBITORS

We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to our exhibitors. Your belief in our mission and your ongoing support have been instrumental in helping us make a difference.



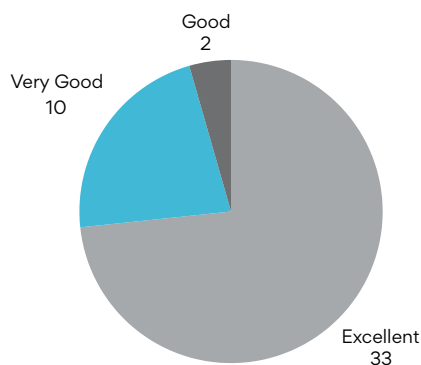


# APPENDIX

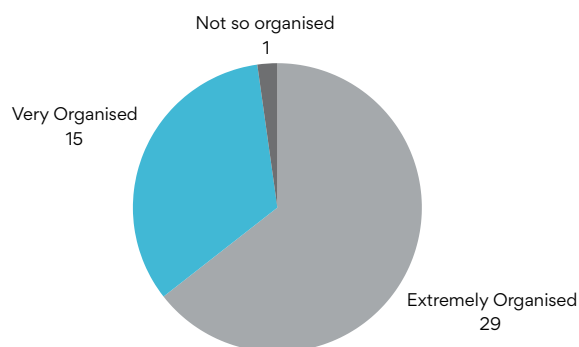


# APPENDICES 1 - SURVEY

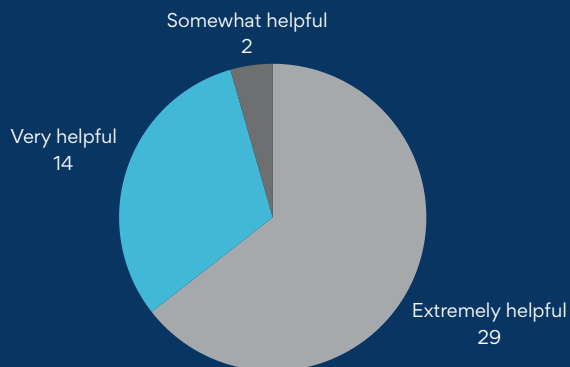
1. OVERALL, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THIS CONFERENCE?



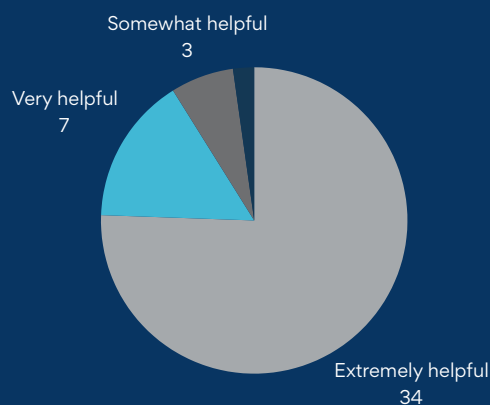
2. HOW ORGANISED WAS THIS CONFERENCE?



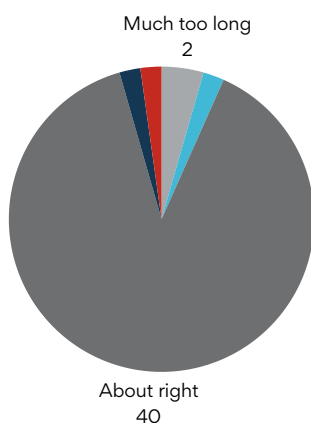
3. HOW HELPFUL WAS THE STAFF?



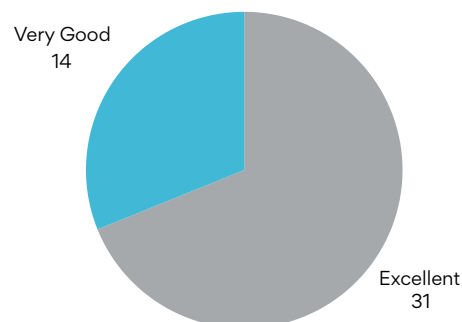
4. PRIOR TO THE CONFERENCE, HOW MUCH OF THE INFORMATION YOU NEEDED DID YOU GET?



5. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE LENGTH THE CONFERENCE

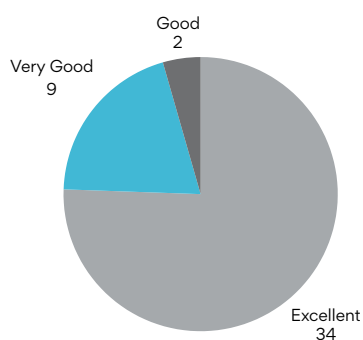


6. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE QUALITY OF THE HOSTING OF THIS CONFERENCE

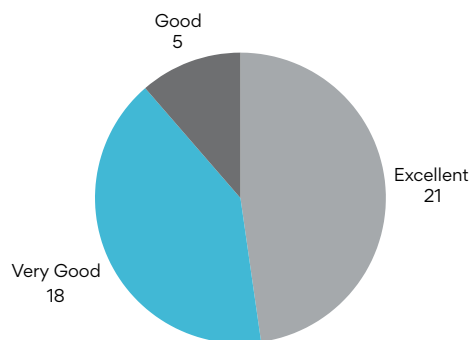


# APPENDICES 1 - SURVEY

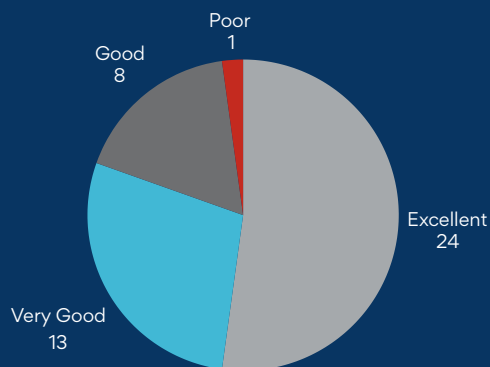
7. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE QUALITY OF THE SPEAKERS



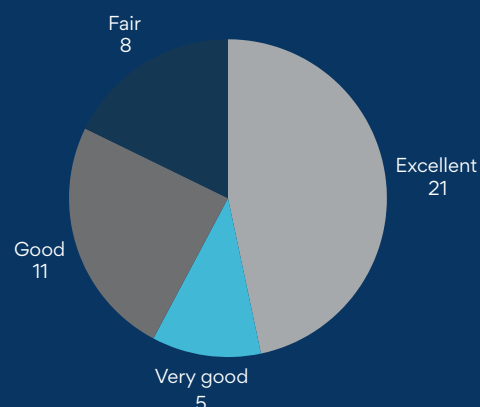
8. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE QUALITY OF THE PANEL DISCUSSIONS



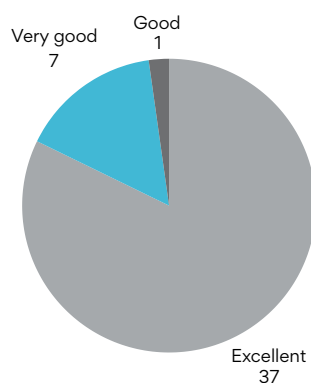
9. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE QUALITY OF THE OF THE FACILITATED SESSION BRIDGING THE GAP'?



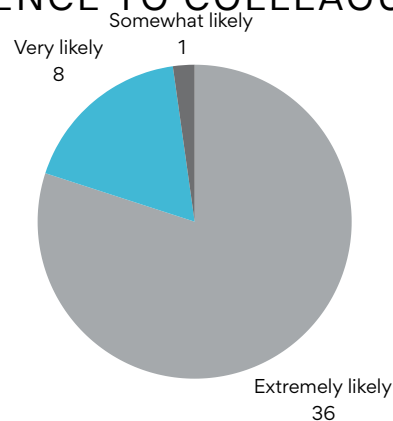
10. HOW WOULD RATE THE FACILITATED SESSION 'HARMONISING IDENTITY & HEALTH'?



11. HOW WOULD RATE THE CONFERENCE VENUE

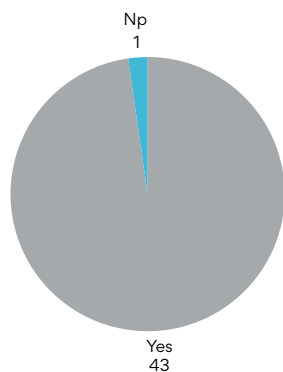


12. HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOU WOULD SHARE INFORMATION FROM THIS CONFERENCE TO COLLEAGUES

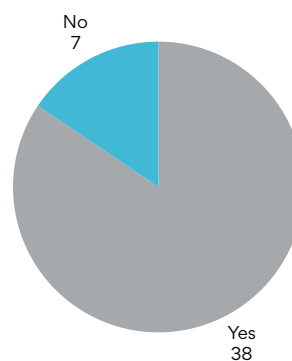


# APPENDICES 1 - SURVEY

13. WOULD YOU ATTEND  
THE WOMEN IN THE  
SHADE CONFERENCE IN  
2025?



14. WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE  
MADE AWARE OF WOMEN  
IN THE SHADE ACTIVITIES?



CONTACT  
**INFO@WOMENINTHESHADE.COM**  
FOR FULL SURVEY OUTCOME



# APPENDICES 2 - LIST OF ORGANISATIONS AT THE CONFERENCE

AGSM Solutions	Puranda CIC
Anglia Ruskin University	RAF
Anglia Water	Railways & BTP
Birbeck University	Royal Anguilla Police Force
British Army	Royal Navy
Buckinghamshire Fire	Sandwell Council
Cambridge Police	Sellafield Ltd
Centre for Military Justice	South Yorkshire Police
Civil Nuclear Constabulary	Surrey & Sussex Police
Community Trade Union	Thames Valley Police
Crown Prosecution Service	The Guardian newspaper
Derbyshire Police	Training Personified
Devon & Cornwall Police	Warwickshire Police
Diverse Matters	West Mercia Police
Equality & Human Rights Commission	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service
EY	West Midlands Police
Hampshire Police	West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services	West Yorkshire Police
JP Donaldson Consulting	
Marcia M Publishing House Ltd	
Ministry of Justice - Probation Service	
National Black Governors Network	
National Black Police Association	
National Police Chiefs Council	
Norfolk County Council	
Nottinghamshire Police	
Police Now	

# APPENDICES 3 - LIST OF ARTICLES

## **Black History Month**

Women In The Shade 2025 Conference: Empowering Black Women in Leadership - BHM2025

## **The Voice**

Women In The Shade Conference 2025 – The Voice

## **The Phoenix Newspaper**

Women In The Shade' unveils powerful lineup for 2025 Birmingham Conference - The Phoenix Newspaper

## **Blackwall St Media**

Join us for Women in the Shade Conference 2025! - Blackwall St Media

## **Police Now**

Race Equality Week: PC Nilufar Ali drives inclusion in West Midlands Police - Police Now



# THANK YOU

We hope you find this report insightful and valuable. If you have any questions or require further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact us.



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WOMEN IN THE SHADE

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