

## A student's racist tweets

**Liam Stacey, a 21-year-old student, was sentenced to 56 days in prison for posting racially offensive comments on Twitter, writes Maryam Omid.**



In March 2012, British student Liam Stacey was [sentenced](#) to 56 days in jail for posting [racially offensive comments](#) on Twitter. The remarks were [directed at](#) Bolton Wanderers footballer Fabrice Muamba, who had collapsed during a match following a cardiac arrest. A number of Twitter users swiftly criticised Stacey for the racist nature of his comments; he [responded](#) with a further eight “abusive and insulting” tweets.

As news of Stacey’s comments began to spread, the 21-year-old claimed his account had been hacked. He even attempted to delete his page. When questioned by police, he said he had been drunk at the time of tweeting. According to the [Crown Prosecution Service blog](#), Stacey was charged with a racially aggravated offence under section 4A of the Public Order Act 1986. Under this provision, an offence can be racially aggravated if it causes “intentional harassment, alarm or distress”.

The sentence has sparked debate in the media and on social networking sites, with some backing the judiciary’s decision to make an example of Stacey while others have called the punishment excessive. Thomas Hammarberg, the former Council of Europe’s commissioner for human rights, [criticised](#) the sentence as disproportionate: “Politicians are at a bit of a loss to know how to ... protect internet freedom while having regulations against [such problems as] hate speech and

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child pornography.”

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