



Julie Nesbit, secretary of the equality sub-committee

## Federation focus

Forces will soon have a legal duty to promote equal opportunity in the areas of disability and gender in the same way they promote race equality through schemes within force. An amendment to the Race Relations Act means that the police service has an obligation to promote race equality and this is currently being developed to cover the above areas.

This duty to promote race equality originates from the report produced by Lord McPherson, following the death of Stephen Lawrence, in order to deal with what he termed 'institutional racism' by the police. This was defined in the report as 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their race. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviours which, amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance and thoughtlessness and stereotyping which disadvantages minority communities.'

The Police Federation's equality sub-committee has been working with other organisations involved in the ACPO race and diversity group to look at how forces can tackle discrimination within other areas. By having strong equal opportunities policies, an organisation will ensure that its diverse workforce achieves maximum performance. To achieve these policies, police forces have introduced Diversity Equality Schemes (DES).

As part of the schemes, forces have to Diversity Impact Assess (DIA) their policies and procedures. An assessment is basically a set of questions that provide a systematic way of determining whether a policy or approach that the service is introducing affects all groups equally, or whether it potentially may have a disproportionate impact on one or more particular groups of people.

By following this process, any disproportionate impact that the policy could have on any minority group or any unlawful discrimination in the policy will be highlighted. Unless these can be objectively justified, the proposed policy should be amended, reasonable adjustments should be made or it should be abandoned.

Diversity Impact Assessments also encourage the promotion of positive attitudes within policies. It would be fair to say that the true impact of a policy can only be measured once it has been put into operation and is monitored. The legislation requires the results of the monitoring be published and this should add to the confidence, not only of the communities that we police, but of officers who are from minority groups.

Equal opportunities is about tackling discrimination and dealing with inequality. It's about fairness, decency, respect and high standards of behaviour between individuals and groups. In the police service, this translates to policies and procedures that comply with legislation or that provide proper access for the participation in, advancement and development of individuals at work.

Diversity however, is not an option; it can't be written into a policy. Where there are two or more people you have diversity. We are all different from each other be it by age, ethnic background, physical abilities, religious belief, sexual orientation, knowledge, the list is endless and includes all experiences that touch our lives. For an organisation to be successful it needs to recognise and capitalise on the diversity of its workforce.