



Mick Pearson, Secretary of the Equality sub-committee

Getting the best person for the job

In June, the *Observer* newspaper ran a story on how some forces had failed to declare the number of Muslim officers in their ranks, presumably because that figure was so low. It also included calls for better monitoring of the recruitment of Muslim officers.

This may have been news to some, but the truth is the Federation has been asking for ethnicity as well as other areas of diversity to be monitored for some time now. Only by having a proper and accurate picture of the make up of the police service can we tackle the perception – or the reality – that the police service does not represent the public. This may also affect our ability to 'police by consent', as some would say that if we do not move towards reflecting the wider population then we are not truly policing by consent. I am only partially supportive of the second part of this, but certainly would welcome wider monitoring, maybe audited by HMIC.

In relation to the number of new officers from Muslim and other minority groups, we have had three years of national targets on BME recruitment. These have led to examples of illegal activity by a small number of forces in their zeal to meet targets that, in many force areas, are simply unrealistic.

The target culture has led to many areas of policing being criticised and this is just one of those areas. The targets are soon to be re-visited and we would have to favour a situation where any targets on recruitment are locally set, so that forces can decide on strategies to enable them to recruit locally, to begin to enable them to reflect the local community.

But the issue is not just about recruitment, it is also about retention, specialisation and progression. Our stance here is firmly that positive action initiatives should be used to ensure the best candidate is selected for each job and each promotion. I do wonder why there are so few Muslim officers working in counter-terrorism

units; I have my suspicions, but it would be almost unthinkable to believe that Muslims are not in CTUs for fear of them being there.

The forthcoming Work-Based Assessment may also be relevant. Whilst the system itself may become a successful replacement for Part 2 of OSPRE, there are suggestions that candidate selection is not subject to scrutiny. This may mean that minority groups may actually be persuaded not to apply, "halo and horns" effect, and that these issues may be difficult to overcome because there will be no way of trapping the data on people who want to apply, yet are talked out of it, or told they would not have the support of their supervisors and managers. At least OSPRE allowed all officers who were qualified to enter the system.

The figures for ethnic minority officers also show under-representation in higher ranks and this should be tackled, but not in a clumsy, knee-jerk manner. Proper initiatives and positive action, such as mentoring and development for all minority groups should be encouraged. Selection processes should be properly 'equality impact' assessed and the results of processes audited against those assessments. Forces should work to eliminate all possibilities that officers are discouraged from applying for specialist posts and promotions on the basis that a local supervisor advises against it.

What do you think?

Is your force doing enough to monitor recruitment, retention and progression?

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