

Federation hits out at female officer report

Increasing numbers of women in the police service will not be the answer to ensuring equality and could be discriminatory – forces should focus on the reason why women leave, according to the Police Federation.

The Home Office published an *Assessment of Women in the Police Service* report last month which suggests if forces hit 35 percent recruitment of female officers, that would hit the ‘critical mass’ point where women experience less discrimination in the workplace due to their numbers.

However, Ian Rennie, general secretary of the Federation, said in relation to recruitment and the numbers of women who leave, that there is little point in ‘turning on the tap if the plug is not in the sink’.

The report includes figures from national exit interviews in which more than 60 percent of female officer resignations are for domestic reasons, compared to 46 percent of male officers stating the same reason for resigning.

The Federation believes that improving opportunities for promotion, maternity leave benefits and opportunities for part time and flexible working all need to be looked at, as well as the gender pay gap for women officers.

“We are particularly disappointed that we have raised these issues in meetings with the Home Office, but they have been ignored,” says Mr Rennie.

The Federation also say that recruiting massively in excess of 35 percent of women into the police service could leave forces open to charges of positively discriminating in favour of women.

Mr Rennie said: “Rather than encouraging forces to simply increase the numbers of women officers by any means, the Home Office should be promoting policies and procedures that ensure women officers who join the service are able to enjoy a full career. By simply recruiting more women who are then unable to stay in the service could arguably make matters worse.”

Key facts from the Home Office report, *Assessment of Women in the Police Service*, published last month:

- Female recruitment varies hugely between forces, from 25 percent to 58 percent of new recruits last year. Women remain underrepresented in the higher ranks
- Although women have made considerable headway in progression over the last ten years – the statistics suggest that women are facing barriers in gaining promotion to sergeant, and this warrants further investigation
- The data also highlights discrepancies in female representation in specialist roles such as firearms with its possible implications for progression

Main Federation concerns:

- It identifies that some forces have recruited as many as 58 percent women as new recruits, and that other forces could learn from this. When just 35 percent of successful recruits through the national recruitment police assessment process are women, we consider that forces who are recruiting massively in excess of 35 percent could be positively discriminating in favour of women and that this needs to be properly investigated
- It misrepresents research to suggest that 35 percent representation is where a ‘critical mass’ occurs and women experience the least discrimination and greatest acceptance by men in the workplace. Suggesting that women will not be subject to discrimination simply because there are more of them is not correct and ignores the real issues that need to change in the service before women can really be said to have equality of opportunity
- Whilst the report recognises that “the proportion of women officers leaving for domestic reasons is greater than for male officers”, it does not properly identify the average length of service of women and men leavers, or consider what needs to be done to enable officers to combine a career and a family.

Keeping the balance: more options are needed to keep women in the service

Home Office: more women; less discrimination?

