

Balancing Act

The federation has been traditionally seen as white, male-dominated and middle-aged. But in the run up to the tri-annual elections, the organisation is working to ensure its ranks reflect all sections of the policing community

Three years ago the national Police Federation launched the 'Make a Difference' campaign in a bid to recruit officers from more diverse backgrounds into the federation. Mick Pearson secretary of the Equality and Diversity sub-committee says, in hindsight, the poster campaign 'didn't really hit the mark'. Now with the tri-annual elections coming up when new people can be voted in as federation representatives, the organisation is launching a new campaign. This time the emphasis will be on promoting the benefits of becoming a federation representative, regardless of an officer's background.

"The reality of the federation is that it is dominated by white, middle-aged males. That's a fact, and we need to get away from that."

"In the short term we have asked for the federation branch boards to give us the details of best practice in terms

of recruiting representatives. That is taking place around the country so we can capture that information and put it on the website for all to share. The truth is we can all learn from some of the good work that the branch boards are doing," says Mr Pearson. He believes the benefits of being a federation representative are not always conveyed fully to rank and file officers.

"We want to give prospective candidates a better

understanding of what they are letting themselves in for in terms of the positive benefits of being a federation representative.

"We need to dispel the myth that being a representative in some way harms your career in the police service."

Mr Pearson is living proof that an association with the federation doesn't spell the end of your police career.

"I started in 1998 as a Sergeant's representative in West Midlands police. I was told I would never get promoted for as long as I was a federation

male middle aged
white heterosexual

tra
women

Young people
gay and
lesbian
minority
ethnic

representative. I was promoted to inspector less than two years later.” One of the reasons, he says, is that these days there is much less of a ‘them and us’ culture in most forces.

“In many forces being a federation representative is a part of the management style of that force. We are more likely to work with a management team at BCU or OCU level as opposed to against them. That’s where the subtle difference lies.

“It is also a fantastic opportunity to get involved in work that is above and beyond what you would normally be privy to. You are in meetings with senior managers, giving your view which could have wide-ranging implications for your colleagues.

“There are many benefits to becoming a federation representative. You certainly develop your negotiation and leadership skills, all of which would help you in your police career. The training provided by the federation is recognised as of the highest quality in the areas of equality, health and safety. The training in police regulations is

really useful for anyone wanting to become a sergeant or inspector.”

While the federation is keen to recruit anyone who believes they have the right qualities, one area the federation is seriously under-represented is with the young-in-service officers.

“With huge numbers of new officers coming into the service we are keen to reverse

this and we would encourage anyone who feels they have the skills to do the job to step forward.

“Some may feel that they don’t have enough years in service to be a credible candidate. We need to overcome that perception.

“Vacancies are often filled by the outgoing fed rep approaching someone they think will do a good job. We need to break that down by selling the federation as part of a police career, not an add-on. It is part and parcel of policing. We need to become more open and inclusive about the way we do business.

“A lot of people think they don’t have the right profile for the job. There is no profile as such. It comes down to whether or not a person feels they have the skills to do the job.”

Sgt Julie Barnes-Frank, a federation representative in Greater Manchester

Police, has been nominated for the Stonewall Hero award for her pioneering work in the force. She set up the Greater Manchester Police Lesbian and Gay Staff Affiliation in 1998 which now offers 24 hour support.

“The federation needs to recognise the need for change and that change has to be from the top down.”

She agrees with Mr Pearson that there is an issue recruiting younger officers into the federation.

“There has been a huge change in society with more ‘job

hopping’. Young people don’t necessarily expect to do 30 years. But even if they only intend to do two or three years it is still worthwhile becoming a federation representative. You can still make a difference.”

How the election process works:
The elections should be publicised by the force and should be out in Orders by mid-October. If they’re not, phone the local JBB office. Prospective candidates then have two weeks to submit their form. They will need to find someone to nominate or propose them and someone to second their nomination. If it is uncontested they will be voted in as the workplace representative. If there is more than one person running for the position, it will be through the election process.