

**If anything is going to change, we need to change the culture around fatigue.**

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In 2019, I was invited to give a presentation to the Police Federation Annual Roads Policing Conference, talking about fatigue in the Police Service. This followed on from the Police Federation Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey (2018), which had (once again) highlighted the extent of the problem of officer fatigue.

Nearly two thirds of respondents to that survey had found it difficult to carry out their work in the previous 12 months because they had been too fatigued; three quarters reported that fatigue had interfered with their family or social life. Of particular concern, over two thirds agreed with the statement *'Current levels of fatigue amongst my colleagues pose a significant risk to officer safety.'*

The Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey was repeated in 2020, with the results showing that fatigue continues to have a serious impact on police officers.

So how has the Police Service responded to these and similar findings? Well, there have been some positive initiatives. The appointment of a National Lead on sleep and fatigue (Chief Inspector Dr Yvonne Taylor), who understands the topic from both a policing and academic perspective, is a step in the right direction. In addition, the National Police Wellbeing Service: Oscar Kilo has run webinars to help improve the sleep quality of police officers, as well as linking up with academics to provide an education and screening programme for sleep disorders. Oscar Kilo also provides valuable support for officers experiencing stress and poor mental wellbeing, which is often linked to fatigue.

Initiatives such as these, that aim to mitigate the harmful, personal consequences of fatigue, are, of course, welcome. But do they address the underlying issues that result in police fatigue in the first place? Under-resourced forces, staff shortages and operational demands mean that stress and workload remain high, cancelled rest days and officers not being able to take breaks are a common occurrence, and there is a regular requirement for officers to work overtime.

Research has consistently highlighted that fatigue has a significant impact on many of the cognitive skills essential for safe, effective policing: problem solving, effective decision making, reasoning, judgement, emotional response, communication and risk perception are just some of the many skills that are undermined by fatigue. So, should we be doing more than providing 'sticking plaster' solutions?

Following on from the Demand, Capacity and Welfare Survey results, I called for the establishment of a national policy on fatigue risk management within the College of Policing Wellbeing framework. Such a policy would include a clear commitment from management to address the issue, and recognition that fatigue is not 'just part of the job' or unavoidable, but

has real consequences for officer wellbeing, the quality of policing provision and ultimately the service delivered to the public.

But what is really needed is a fundamental change in the culture around fatigue. Other safety-critical industries have woken up to the need for a shift in attitudes around this issue at all levels of the business. Effective fatigue management requires a shared responsibility approach, whereby senior management acknowledge the harm associated with fatigue and take steps to minimise the contributors to fatigue, and employees take seriously their responsibility to manage their fatigue.

Of course, policing faces a range of challenges not experienced by other professions and it would be wrong to think that the problem can be managed in the same way. But the Police Service could learn from the advances that have been made in aviation, rail and the energy industries. One of the most significant of these advances has been the change in focus; from managing fatigue – a reactive approach focusing on managing a negative state – to one where the focus is on promoting the positive state of alertness. Alertness management concentrates on identifying initiatives that result in a more alert workforce, not just minimising the harm caused by fatigue.

A key driving force behind this switch in focus has been increased recognition of the true costs of fatigue to the business. Once the costs associated with high sickness rates, at-work injuries, traffic collisions and poor staff retention (to name but a few) are linked to operational practices that contribute to fatigue, there is a real incentive for change. Until that time, fatiguing practices will be allowed to continue and we run the risk of having a Police Service that is too exhausted to deliver the quality of service expected of it.

***About the author:*** *Dr Paul Jackson is a Chartered Psychologist who has been helping safety-critical organisations to manage fatigue and alertness for over 20 years. He has worked with over 50 airlines, as well as regulatory bodies including the UK Department for Transport, the ORR, the UK CAA, European Aviation Safety Agency and the Energy Institute. Currently, he is working with Network Rail, helping them to develop and establish their Standard on fatigue risk management and roll this out to the organisation's workforce of over 43,000 employees and suppliers. Paul has also worked as an Expert Witness in a number of criminal cases involving suspected driver fatigue.*

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