Diversity in the British police: adapting to a multicultural society

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Introduction

The police force has long been stigmatised in Britain as far as race relations are concerned. After the Race Relations Act of 1976, the procedures for recruiting police officers underwent two major overhauls in the 1980s and early 2000s following official inquiries sparked by the 1982 urban disturbances and a botched police investigation into a racist murder. Historically white male dominated, the police service was criticised for having a sexist and racist culture and lacking black, Asian and female officers. Research influenced by the cultural studies school from the mid-1970s revealed disproportionate targeting of minority groups and racist stereotyping.

The low numbers of ethnic minorities in the police service and other public institutions was highlighted in 1999 with the publication of the Macpherson Report into the Inquiry following Stephen Lawrence’s murder. The Race Relations Act of 2000 reinforced public authorities’ duties to prevent racial discrimination, promote racial equality and promote good relations between members of different racial groups. All 43 police forces in England and Wales were required to meet targets set by the government to increase the number of recruits from minority ethnic communities. These targets vary from region to region set according to the make-up of the ethnic population in each region. The National Target set in 1999 to reflect the national average 7% ethnic minority population in England and Wales was 7% ethnic minority officers by 2009. However, in 2012, it was reported that "The proportion of police officers that consider themselves to be from a minority ethnic background has risen from under 2% in 1997 to 5%." This paper examines the nature and extent of the changes in recruitment and training of police made between 1995 and 2005 and examines the reasons for its relative success drawing on interviews with Thames Valley Police officers and staff in 2007.
The Move towards Diversity

3 The Race Relations Act 2000 imposes specific duties on all public authorities in the UK in terms of recommendations for those public authorities concerned to make sure that they execute the general duties imposed by the Act. It required public authorities in England and Wales to produce and publish a Racial Equality Scheme (RES) for the police service or Racial Equality Policy (REP) for schools and other public authorities.

4 To make sure that their equality policies were working, a process of ethnic monitoring was established collecting general statistics on employees' ethnic backgrounds to see if equality of opportunity is achieved by all ethnic groups. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) is able to take action over non compliance.

5 Since the Lawrence Inquiry Report of February 1999 on police failings in the investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, awareness of the notion of ‘diversity’ in the police force recognised that the provision of a service designed for the white majority ethnic population no longer worked. Diversity initiatives have been developed in forces around England and Wales in order to promote awareness of racial issues and discrimination, change police officers’ behaviour and attitudes and reinforce relationships with local minority communities. It was also intended to change the image of the police force into that of a precursor of diversity initiatives thus attracting a wider range of entrants into the force.

6 The new internal approach in terms of training focused on and revolved around what has been described as ‘race relations awareness’ or ‘community and race relations awareness’.

7 Traditional training for police officers had been the provision of information about the law and police procedures but there was nothing about the role of officers in society and what society expected from them. Would-be officers were not aware that a diverse society had different cultures and traditions with diverse demands which had to be dealt with differently. In fact they were not really well prepared to face the problems that communities or they themselves would encounter. Though Community Race Relations training did exist in the early 1970s, it lacked specifics on dealing with ethnic minorities.

8 In his report (1986) on the causes for the 1982 riots in Brixton, a district with a large Afro-Caribbean population, Lord Scarman appealed for the reform of police training and recommended training in community relations.

The training of police officers must prepare them for policing a multi-racial society. [...] the present training arrangements are inadequate. [...] inadequate emphasis is put in training on the problems of policing a multi-racial society. More attention should therefore be devoted, it was suggested, to the training of police officers in, for example the understanding of the cultural background of ethnic minority groups and in the stopping of people in the street. (Scarman 5.16)

Training courses designed to develop the understanding that good community relations are not merely necessary but are essential to good policing should, I recommend, be compulsory from time to time in a police officer’s career up to and including the rank of Superintendent. (Scarman 5.28)
The existing training provisions were reviewed in response to Scarman's proposals. However, few forces had systematically included race relations training within their policies and practices.

The Scarman Report had given direction but issued no requirements, whereas the Macpherson Report (1999) into the Lawrence murder inquiry, instigated a wide ranging review of police training in terms of diversity and racism:

That there should be an immediate review and revision of racism awareness training within Police Services to ensure [...] that training courses are designed and delivered in order to develop the full understanding that good community relations are essential to good policing and that a racist officer is an incompetent officer.¹¹ (Recommendation 48)

It also recommended that these be monitored and measured in terms of their implementation and effectiveness (Recommendation 53) : all police officers but also civilian staff “should be trained in racism awareness and valuing cultural diversity” (Recommendation 49).

Like other forces in the England and Wales, the Thames Valley Police is doing its best to recruit more and more Black and Minority Ethnics in order to meet the targets set by government, efforts which are considered to promote diversity, and improve race relations within the force and within communities. Figures 1 and 2 highlight the number of White and minority recruits to the Thames Valley Police for the years 1994-1995 and 1999-2000 respectively and show the increasing awareness of cultural differences in the statistics : 15 and 12 ethnic groups (Figures 3 and 4) compared to eight ethnic groups previously (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Thames Valley Police recruitment Male/female by ethnic origin 1994-1998 (Source: Thames Valley Black Police Association)

Image 1.wmf

Figure 2. Thames Valley Police recruitment Male/female by ethnic origin 1999-2000 (Source: Thames Valley Black Police Association)

Image 2.wmf

FIGURE 3. THAMES VALLEY POLICE RECRUITMENT 2002-2003 MALE/FEMALE BY ETHNIC ORIGIN (SOURCE: THAMES VALLEY BLACK POLICE ASSOCIATION)

Image 3.wmf

Figure 3 shows that despite more ethnic groups being represented in recruitment to Thames Valley Police during the year 2002-2003, the number of recruits from these groups remained low. People from the mixed category (White and Asian, White and Black African and White and Black Caribbean) were added.

The total number of recruits had more than doubled after two years with 190 officers in 1999-2000 and 463 officers in 2002-2003. However, there was only a slight increase in the number of minority ethnics employed. This can clearly be shown in the Figures 3 and 4 that the trend is barely visible for ethnic minorities despite the increase in total number of officers recruited during those years. This can partly be explained by the negative impact of the Macpherson report in 1999 on police forces in general and attitudes of ethnic minorities to seek a career in the police service.

FIGURE 4. THAMES VALLEY POLICE RECRUITMENT 2005-2006 MALE/FEMALE BY ETHNIC ORIGIN (SOURCE: THAMES VALLEY BLACK POLICE ASSOCIATION)
The number of ethnic minority police officers recruited within the Thames Valley Police remained low in 2005-2006. Certain categories were very poorly represented (Any Other Asian, Any Other Black, Any Other Mixed, Black Caribbean and Pakistani), despite there being a large Indian and Black Caribbean community in the area. The low number of Bangladeshis in the Thames Valley area reported in the 2001 census explains why Bangladeshis are not represented in the four charts above 12.

The Thames Valley Police therefore continued to face under representation of ethnic minorities at a time when 40% of the population in Slough was from minority ethnic communities, predominantly Asian13. Despite the fact that Thames Valley Police have their own Race Equality Scheme, as required by the Race Relations Act 2000, reviewed every three years, and a civilian Equality Schemes Co-ordinator, the force found it difficult to keep pace with and reflect the influx of large numbers of ethnic minority immigrants in towns in their police region. Thames Valley Police have their own Diversity Unit, set up in September 2005 to ensure that all aspects of diversity are promoted14, a Diversity Board to monitor progress and a Diversity Action Group to drive through action on diversity issues15. In order to have a workforce whose composition reflects the communities it serves, the Thames Valley Police have also appointed a team of staff who dedicate their time to recruiting and retaining Black and Minority Ethnics. One of them is the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Recruitment Team who makes sure the recruitment of ethnic minorities is made according to the procedures which exist and also to make sure that they get the support they need once they are already in the force.

Furthermore, there is a wide range of staff associations and staff working groups to provide advice and support and help promote diversity and equality within the force16. One of the associations working together to improve the working environment of Black Minority Ethnic staff within the Thames Valley Police force, is the Thames Valley Black Police Association, a local version of the National Black Police Association, an initiative put forward in the 1990s when a considerable number of black staff were leaving police forces throughout the UK. A Black Police Association now exists in most police forces around the country. Even if all of these units and associations work towards the promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity, there is a difference between the Diversity Unit and the Thames Valley Black Police Association or the Black Police Association in general. The Diversity Unit works on all six strands of diversity which are race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, faith and age whereas the Thames Valley Black Police Association concentrates on Black and (other) Minority Ethnics. At the Thames Valley Police, all new police recruits, including civilian staff, participate in the compulsory race and Diversity Training Programme and a Community Relations Programme aimed at ensuring that they have an understanding of people from different backgrounds.

Community and Race Relations training

In response to the Race Relations Act (2000) and the Marpherson recommendations, Community and Race Relations training was instituted as a means to make staff more sensitive to the diverse cultures and experiences of minority groups. For example,
officers would visit the mosque to learn about Muslim culture and traditions; not wearing shoes in a mosque for instance. They would be aware that they should interact differently with men and women among ethnic minority groups. This would eventually facilitate their work and also strengthen relations with local communities.

Secondly, the Community Race Relations training was also aimed at changing officers’ attitudes as it was believed that behaviour inside the force reflected the behaviour of police officers outside the force when they would interact with the communities. Indeed, prior to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, discriminatory behaviour and racist, sexist and homophobic language were commonplace. One senior interviewee in the Thames Valley Police remarked:

There is no overt racism I would say. Whether or not there is discrimination it is difficult to measure that. But certainly the culture of the organisation has changed [...] I mean fast forward twenty seven years, no racist abuse at all within the organisation actually. I am not saying racism does not exist, it still exists but it is all underground, people are more subtle about it. (Interview)

However the decline in the use of inappropriate language was related to the disciplinary response rather than a changing of attitudes of officers towards racist language.

But even so, I think racism exists within society so there would be racism within the force as we draw people from society. So some might say it might exist more in the force because of the sort of people attracted to the job. But nobody now would make racist comments as they know they will lose their job. We cannot change attitudes and sometimes it enters the bloodstream of an organisation and it is difficult to detect and we talk about institutional racism actually. (Interview)

It appeared to be more difficult to detect who is racist and who is not:

As ethnic minorities we knew who the racists were within the organisation. [...] There is something very interesting. There is this particular character who racially abused me from the minute I bloody joined up really who later went on to be in charge of recruiting ethnic minorities. In my eyes his heart was not in it at all. (Interview)

The awareness training and new disciplinary rules are a way to keep officers abreast of changing accepted terms:

It is a two-sided thing in the UK we have political correctness and sometimes we could be too draconian. Just because somebody says a wrong word, we are not going to jump on them and make an example of them. In 1980, when I joined, it was not uncommon for you to hear people saying there is coloured man there and you thought you were being polite. But now ‘coloured’ is just not politically correct you just do not use that or else you would offend people. Some people have not caught up with the language. When I was born I was ‘half-caste’ then ‘mixed race’ and now I am ‘dual-heritage’. So you would have to keep up with the word and just because somebody would say ‘half-caste’ you won’t sack them. (Interview)

There is a whole hierarchy of sanctions. There is a management advice where they would tell you not to use that kind of language. ‘Things have changed now we don’t use that language anymore’. Then there are higher
sanctions like written warnings, fine, getting involved in a discipline of caution or you get suspended or sacked. (Interview)

25 Thames Valley Police, Slough in particular, with significant ethnic minority communities, was a good example of forces who had introduced training and awareness to meet individual needs of its staff. Many of the initiatives involved community participation in the training which in itself helped break down stereotypical barriers: “Slough in particular has always been the centre of energy for diversity initiatives within the force.” (Interview)

26 Secondly, external approaches were developed to promote diversity in the police force and the trust and confidence of ethnic minority communities. Communities as a whole changed significantly during the decade 1955-2005. Social class was replaced by a growing social and cultural pluralism with a myriad of age, race, religion, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and lifestyles.

27 The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report had identified a “[…] striking and escapable need to demonstrate fairness not just by police services but across the criminal justice system as a whole, in order to generate trust and confidence with minority ethnic communities.” (Para 46.30) It suggested that “[…] genuine partnership between the police and all section of the community must be developed.” (Para 46.40) The Lawrence Report stated categorically that the police must not deliver a service which is “colour blind” but rather one that “recognises the different experiences, perceptions and needs of a diverse society”. (Para 45.24).

28 Police consultation with local communities received greater resources. Liaison officers were introduced to liaise with black and minority ethnic communities and improve communication as a step towards increasing trust and confidence. White minorities are also taken into consideration with police officers learning Polish to facilitate contacts with the large local Polish community in Slough. Prior to these courses in Polish, translators were needed which must have slowed down the process and incurred misunderstandings. Community talks by ethnic minority officers themselves to listen to the communities’ demands, reassure the minority population about the police culture and encourage people to join the force. Meetings in schools and community centres were held for people to get used to the presence of police without misapprehension.

29 Ethnic minority staff often start with an advantage when dealing with ethnic minority communities, which may simply be the perception of an absence of racism or simply language skills, cultural and religious sensitivity and shared common experiences which can be exploited to improve community relations. The senior officer interviewed remarked “they feel that there is a shared common experience that I would have experienced racism as well.” As a consequence, “they trust me more than they would do a white cop” as “with a white officer you have to earn the trust first and this might take a bit longer”.

30 A further external approach initiated by the Thames Valley Police praised the need to liaise with communities in response to events which had the potential for ‘critical’ impact on local communities. A clear example of that were the impact of the terrorist attacks in New York in September 2001. There were a number of racial attacks and abuse in the Slough area following 9/11 and special effort was made to retain the trust and confidence of communities.
there was a lot of tension. Lots of ethnic minorities, Muslims in particular, but actually all, any non white people were very concerned that there would be a right wing backlash and that they would be picked on and being accused of being the Taliban, Bin Laden that sort of thing. (Interview)

The 9/11 attacks on the USA also had an impact on the minority police officers in England and Wales:

One of the repercussions of that was even ethnic minority cops started to feel a bit concerned that their colleagues would turn on them and say ‘wait a second which side are you on? Are you on the Bin Laden side or one of us?’ So for a few weeks there was some anxiety among our ethnic minority cops. (Interview)

A Muslim Police Constable officer, explains how he felt post 9/11:

I love what I am doing then the problem of fitting in arose again after 9/11 when your own colleagues start looking at you differently, just because you are a Muslim. Though you have been in the force for a long time and have done a good job you start questioning the trust and confidence. (Interview)

Operation Comfort was specifically intended to reassure the community and to deter the far right: “[...] we are getting skin heads coming around targeting things nationally. Wherever there is any conflict the BNP [British National Party] would use that to divide communities.” (Interview)

[...] after 9/11 we saw an outbreak of disorder in town where Asian people were attacked you know like hijab29 ripped off people’s heads, Sikh men attacked and that sort of stuff. In response to that was ‘Operation Comfort’, we wanted to try to reassure the community that the police care about the racist attacks. (Interview)

This operation in Slough consisted of deploying officers from ethnic minority backgrounds in the streets in an area with large ethnic minority communities. There were only eight of them deployed in the streets of Slough as it seemed that too many officers frightened people. The officers were selected for their ethnic origins, their “high level of awareness of race and discrimination” and " high level of language skills" (Interview).

However, some resentment as to the use of this strategy was felt on the part of some senior officers, as it was considered to be a risky business. Indeed, the feedback from the ethnic minority officers was the opportunity to use their diverse talent. “A few of the black people speaking different languages are being visible and being given a licence to use their language skills and target ethnic minority communities.” In fact, there is a perception “when you come into the police you have to forget about all your culture and your heritage and you have to conform, you put a uniform and then you are one of us.” (Interview) Operation Comfort gave them the opportunity to use their ethnic and cultural inheritance. The operational approach proved to be a success and had a positive impact on the community.

The community impact as I then followed up this operation with a number of visits to the temples and the mosques. Without exception when I arrived there, I was about to tell them about the black and Asian officers and they
told me they already heard about that. They said that there were hundreds of ethnic minority officers everywhere in the streets in Slough. There were not hundreds but only eight assigned. So the impact was such that they thought there were hundreds. They asked 'We didn’t know you got so many ethnic minority officers.' (Interview)

36 Ethnic minority officers deployed on this operation were approached and asked questions about the police service:

‘What is it like in the police then? Are they all racists [...]?’ We had some genuine recruiting inquiries and some people joined up purely as a result of that operation. It was a real success’ (Interview)

37 This tactic was to be adopted by other police forces during period of heightened tensions.

38 It had been shown that diversity could be used more effectively to improve the service and that several examples of effective utilisation of diversity held much potential for wider development across police forces. Though there were uncertainties about the use of certain strategies, it was evident that senior officers in other forces recognised the importance of releasing the diverse talent for a positive impact on communities. The Black Police Association was cited as the most important success for ethnic minority staff in terms of opportunities it provided to network with each other.

The Black Police Association

39 The Black Police Association was one of the major initiatives within the police service at a time when it was obvious that the issues of racism and resignation among black police officers were commonplace. Indeed, in the 1990s, ethnic minority officers tolerated racism in order to be accepted by colleagues. Moreover, the Met had difficulties in recruiting and retaining minority officers in the early 1990s. In response to these problems, the first Black Police Association was set up in 1994, by ethnic minority officers and staffs within the Metropolitan Police Service, as a support network that sought to work with the service to improve the working environment of black personnel within the Metropolitan Police. After several years of discussion and planning, the National Black Police Association was created in 1998 and has become a powerful voice within the police service. As a means to foster diversity within the force today, its ultimate goal is help police deliver an equitable service to all sections of the community.

40 The Thames Valley Black Police Association (TVBPA) was created in 1999 as a direct consequence of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry "to support ethnic minority staff, police officers staff and civilian staff, to try to get the best out of them, to tell them to reach their potential, to be a supportive network where people can talk about their shared experiences." (Interview) Most police forces today have their own Black Police Association to improve the recruitment, retention and development of staff from minority backgrounds. The main reason why police forces needed a supportive network within the force was that ethnic minorities could not talk to each other because they were suspected of plotting.

We tended not to talk to each other because we thought if we are seen talking to each other as ethnic minorities, the white majority might wonder what we were planning. This sort of validates the networking of ethnic minorities for the first time that it is ok to get together. When we got
together for the first time we shared the experiences that we had had as we grew up within the organization and they were very similar though we never talked about it before and you only think it’s happening to you as an individual. (Interview)

41 In addition, the networking empowered ethnic minority staff and gave them the opportunity to take their issues to the top of the police service: “We then were able to get to the chief constable and say ‘look at our experiences; these are the sort of stuff that we would like to happen’.” (Interview) The Black Police Association has been often consulted for policy issues since its creation in 1998 on community issues.

42 The Thames Valley Black Police Association also aimed develop trust and confidence within the community and helped minority staff to promote good relations with ethnic minority communities of the three counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. For instance ethnic minority officers were harassed by their own communities for being a police officer and as such ‘traitors’. The Black Police Association was the instigator of exercises involving ethnic minority officers patrolling their local area, such as ‘Operation Comfort’. As a result of these exercises many young people from minority communities talked about their desire to join the force.

43 Despite the clearly stated aims of the Thames Valley Black Police Association, there was some reluctance among the ethnic minority officers to be a member of the association and this is confirmed by Chief Superintendent Brian Langston who chaired the Thames Valley Black Police Association for a number of years:

So when we created the TVBPA in 1999, there were still a number of people who didn’t join it. They saw it as a militant organisation it’s all black power and a chip on your shoulder or something like that when it’s not like that at all. Why would you want to associate with them you know that sort of thing. (Interview)

44 They were likely to be criticized for leaving their shifts to attend Black Police Association meetings. “The middle management would say ‘Yes you can go to your meeting but it leaves us very short on the shift’; and make them feel very guilty about spending time networking with BPA officers.” (Interview)

45 Some of the minority officers interviewed expressed reservations about the Thames Valley Black Police Association. Muslim Police Constables were reserved about the Association. One, a member of TVBPA said "But I am not sure about ‘Black’ Police Association. Why should it be ‘black’? What if white officers join the association? What about neutral names for it, as things have moved forward now?"

46 The same feelings were expressed by a further interviewee.

I feel that calling it Black Police Association creates confusion for other ethnic minority officers as it could have been called ‘Minority Police Association’. There is a misunderstanding about that. [The Macpherson Report] has benefited only one community; that is to say the black community. Problems encountered by ethnic minority officers do not concern only black officers but also Asian officers and all other ethnic minority officers. (Interview)

47 Another ethnic minority Sergeant who joined the Association, also said that there were still not many people joining the association due to apprehension from communities: “It
“looks too glossy.” The former chairman of the Thames Valley Black Police Association felt that it is not as necessary in 2007 as it was in 1999.

The Numbers Game

The government response to one of the key recommendations of the Macpherson Report into the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, with the introduction of targets for all police forces in England and Wales, was a step towards the recruitment of more black and minority ethnics in order to reflect the different communities which they served. The introduction of targets had its advantages but also put pressure on some police forces which had difficulties in recruiting minority ethnics. As a result, some of them used illegal methods, like positive discrimination, in order to meet targets at the peril of maintaining standards within the force and relations between officers within the force. Indeed, the Race Relations Act 1976 makes it unlawful for a person to discriminate on racial grounds against another in any circumstances.

The Home Office directed each force to meet a target reflecting the racial make-up of its local population by 2009. The same national target for every force would simply have created difficulties for some forces in rural areas where there were few black and Asian people compared to forces in urban areas like London and Birmingham where different ethnic minority communities are concentrated. The Home Office ten year national average target of 7% for minority officers in England and Wales to be reached by 2009. In comparison to other sectors of employment, like the National Health Service or the London Transport for example, the police service remained a white male racist and sexist force. Indeed, the police service is in stark contrast to the other above mentioned employment sectors who have high percentages of ethnic minorities and women employees.

In London, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) for instance was given a target of 26 per cent of ethnic minority police officers by 2009 given London’s 25 percent minority population. In 2005, the Thames Valley Police force had 2.5 per cent of serving ethnic minority officers for an ethnic minority population of 5.35 per cent.

Target settings seemed to have both its advantages and disadvantages in the promotion of diversity within the police service. On the one hand, the main advantage of targets was that success or failure for the recruitment of officers from minority ethnic backgrounds was clearly visible. The annual publication of progress was required and an annual inspection was to be carried out by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) as required by the Macpherson report:

In addition, targets and monitoring were used to influence and persuade black and minority ethnics to consider a career in the police service which was seen to be doing something for the recruitment of ethnic minorities. The annual progress report made by forces in their local area was also used to influence locals into considering the police service and also hope to change their view of the police. “[...] it is inevitable that the black and Asian communities will use this very visible measure to gauge the seriousness of the police intention.”

On the other hand, it was recognised that targets put pressure on some police forces in certain areas where these forces found it difficult to recruit minority ethnics to meet government targets. As a result, forces were tempted to recruit ethnic minorities using...
illegal practices, such as positive discrimination, just to hit targets. In 2006 for instance, two forces, the Gloucestershire Police and the Avon and Somerset Police, obsessed with reaching targets, adopted a kind of ‘deselection policy’ and rejected white applicants. Though they used positive discrimination to recruit ethnic minorities, their intention could be purely founded on the promotion of diversity within their workforce. However, they were not allowed to do so as positive discrimination, considered as ‘reverse discrimination’, is illegal. Candidates whose applications were turned down started to think they were being discriminated against because they were white. The question of positive discrimination in the UK was raised following these cases and the confusion between positive action, used by police service to promote equality of opportunity and diversity within the workforce, which is lawful under the Race Relations Act 1976, and positive discrimination.

Positive action was a Home Office initiative to enable minority groups to compete for jobs on an equal basis with the majority groups, for instance, by offering special training to the minority groups who are under-represented in the workforce of an institution or by providing additional courses for educational tests. It was not intended to give privileges to minority ethnics but to promote racial justice. Unfortunately, it was too often misunderstood as positive discrimination, also known as ‘reverse discrimination’ which consists of promoting one group over another group of people.

[...] there are two people one is an Olympic athlete and has trained for years and years and is ready for the race. The other person has been kept in a prison cell for five years and has been fed on bread and water you put both on the starting line and fire the gun. Who is going to win? If you took this person ‘hang on, we are going to put you on a diet plan, we are going to feed you properly, you do some exercises’. Now he can compete in the race on an equal basis. Now you have the race and may the best person win. That bit to prepare you for the race is Positive Action [...] Positive Discrimination would be ‘oh you Olympic athlete, you wait here while he starts off’. (Interview)

Thames Valley Police say they do not select ethnic minorities based on race but adopt positive attitudes towards recruitment. Nevertheless, positive action was frowned upon within the force. Indeed there was a growing perception that minority officers were given preferential treatment and arguments about the reduction in the standards of the quality of officers.

People say ‘Oh he only got promoted because he is black and black people aren’t as good as white people’. Once the standard of recruits starts to erode then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because then people say ‘look they let him in but he is not as good as we are’. If we look at some of the standards that we are getting in now, I am concerned that the standards have already started to be eroded. (Interview) We speak to people who are waiting to join the police. White people have to wait for a year and black people have to wait for a month. It already creates a tension as they would meet each other at training and they would know they had to wait longer. That’s when they would ask: ‘why he had to wait only a month and I waited for a year?’ It is really divisive only to meet short term targets. (Interview)

Conversely, black and minority groups probably did not want to be made special, just because they were black, and would prefer to be recognised and valued for their potential and personal achievement. But, negative perceptions could turn the public and other
officers against minority officers and lead to underestimating their potential. “[…] any element of positive discrimination would stigmatise black and Asian recruits as second class police officers.”

If you can get into the police just because you are black and get promoted so where is the achievement in that? […] Whenever an ethnic minority gets promoted there will be some people who say ‘he only got promoted because he is black’. And I know some people must say that about me I suspect. I’d like to think that I have got a good reputation within Thames Valley and people who know me think that actually ‘he got promoted because he is good’. But when you are an ethnic minority that is always said behind your back I think. (Interview)

Despite the targets, according to recent statistics, in 2002-2003, only 9.8 per cent of officers in the Metropolitan police were from minority backgrounds. Though the percentage of minority ethnics was twice as high as in 1999, it seemed that the Metropolitan Police had difficulties in recruiting candidates. In 2005, there were 2.5 per cent of minority officers for a minority population of 5.35 per cent. In 2006-2007 the force had only 3.76 per cent of ethnic minority officers for a minority population of about 6 per cent.

Four main reasons for the lack of potential minority applicants have been found. Firstly, the lack of role models in the force is a barrier to entry for black and minority ethnics. A vicious circle exists, whereby people do not apply unless they see a more diversity in the force but it will never be diverse unless people apply. In addition, many ethnic minority officers are leaving during the first two years of their probationary period, or early in their career if they do not get promoted. The reasons given are paradoxical.

We find that ethnic minorities still feature more in what we call a regulation 15 procedures which is like performance issues which is during their probation period. Ethnic minority officers are always on the regulation procedures. Sometimes people say the reason there are regulation procedures is because white managers need to be seen to be properly managing them. (Interview)

Thames Valley Police have a whole retention strategy in order to help keep police officers in the force and recognised that using positive discrimination to increase the numbers was pointless.

[…] yes we can get as many people in the front door as possible but if they are all going out the back door within two years what is the point? We need to keep them within the organization. […] the more important is not about numbers but where they sit within the organization. (Interview)

Indeed, the lack of role models particularly in the senior ranks may explain why minority members, who wish to move up the ranks and gain promotion, are reluctant to apply. There were no minority officers above the rank of Chief Superintendent.

Secondly, the increasingly diverse ethnic population of the Thames Valley area makes it difficult for the service to be reflective of its communities. In Slough, significant numbers of Polish, Romanians, and Bulgarians settled following the entry of their countries into the European Union. Simply employing black and Asian people would not help Thames Valley Police to deal with the Polish community, and would not be reflective of the
community. Yet, according to the criteria for entry into the Thames Valley Police Force, Polish people cannot apply to become police officers as they need to have lived in the UK for at least three years.

Finally, the biggest barrier for ethnic minorities was the perception that the police were institutionally racist, white male dominated, sexist. The poor reputation of the police created strong feeling and resentment among the minority communities. According to a senior officer interviewed in 2007, although the police had done more than any other public sector, it was still considered to be the worst on the issue of racism. Their reputation impacted on recruitment which in turn dragged down the image of the service. A white, male dominated colonial culture still appeared to cling to the police force. Nevertheless, 'customer' surveys began to show that positive attitudes were beginning to emerge by 2004 both among white and minority ethnic groups.

NOTES

5. G., Berman, 'Police service strength' Standard Note: SN00634, House of Commons Library, 4 March 2013, p.3.
7. The CRE was replaced by the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) in 2007.
8. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>. The Police Human Resources Unit inside the Home Office is responsible for overseeing police numbers and recruitment
10. Ibid., p.132.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
20. The headscarf worn by Muslim women.
30. Statistics for the number and percentage of White and Ethnic Minority officers within the Thames Valley Police divided into different ranks in 2007.

**RÉSUMÉS**

Historically white male dominated, the police service was criticised for having a sexist and racist culture and lacking black, Asian and female officers. The low numbers of ethnic minorities in the police service and other public institutions was highlighted in 1999 with the publication of the Macpherson Report into the Inquiry following Stephen Lawrence’s murder. The Race Relations Act of 2000 reinforced public authorities’ duties to prevent racial discrimination, promote racial equality and promote good relations between members of different racial groups. All forty-three police forces in England and Wales were required to meet targets set by the government to increase the number of recruits from minority ethnic communities. These targets vary from region to region set according to the make-up of the ethnic population in each region. However, the National Target set by the government in 1999 of 7% of ethnic minority officers by 2009 to reflect the national average 7% ethnic minority population in England and Wales. By 2012, the proportion of police officers that consider themselves to be from a minority ethnic background had risen from under 2% in 1997 to 5%. This paper examines the nature and extent of the changes in recruitment and training of police made between 1995 and 2005 and examines the reasons for its relative success drawing on interviews with Thames Valley Police officers and staff in 2007.
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