

Leading from the front on diversity recruitment

Published on 8 October 2020 Written by Chief Constable Ian Hopkins, Greater Manchester Police

Why the need for positive action and cultural change within policing is a priority for us

Case study 3 mins read

I've said publicly that this country is not very tolerant of difference. So why would we expect the police to be otherwise, given that we reflect wider society? As police chiefs, we must get better at understanding and talking about difference, and we must not be afraid of occasionally getting it wrong.

We need to explain that positive action is about ensuring that everyone has the same starting point. And, importantly, we need to take the majority with us. It's all about leadership and cultural change. If we don't get that right, the shift we need is not going to happen. That's why I've personally driven it. I demonstrate the behaviours that show that I'm serious, and it's a priority.

What drives me to come to work is keeping people safe from harm and safe from hatred. When I was studying for an MBA, I was told about the business case for diversity – to get the best talent, policing needs to attract applicants from all backgrounds – but that isn't how you sell it. It's about people and it's about legitimacy. In Manchester, more than 200 languages are spoken. How can we maintain our legitimacy if we don't represent the communities we serve? We've got to appeal to the heart as well as the head – this is the right thing to do.

I've been involved in Greater Manchester Police's (GMP) diversity recruitment since I was the deputy chief constable in 2014. I adopted my usual approach of getting people together: our own HR team, representatives from the National Black Police Association and the Association of Muslim Police, and people from the private and public sectors. I wanted to find out what good practice looks like.

We held focus groups with people from different ethnic backgrounds who had been unsuccessful in their applications to GMP. I wanted feedback about how we could improve our recruitment process. They were brutally honest. They felt frustrated. They didn't have a chance to show who they were, their values and what they could bring to the force. It was obvious that there were people in those

focus groups who could've worked for GMP. If I could, I would've given them a job on the spot.

What came across strongly was that for a White man like me, the decision to join the police is fairly straightforward. However, for Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people, there are a whole host of additional considerations to take into account.

Representing the communities we serve

We used the acquired knowledge and experiences to challenge ourselves about our recruitment processes. We stopped advertising. Instead, we now target BAME communities so that we have conversations with the people we want to reach and recruit. We put a lot of effort into encouraging expressions of interest and then follow them up with telephone interviews.

Prior to the internal assessment centre, all BAME applicants, as well as others with protected characteristics, are invited to attend a positive-action programme. We've changed the role-play scenarios so that they draw on the sorts of situations that BAME people are more likely to have experienced. And we've dropped the need for references because they weren't providing any helpful information.

I do intervene when I need to. For example, a few years ago, the two final candidates for a promotion were Asian Muslims but the interviews were due to take place during Ramadan. I spoke to the officer in charge and asked, 'What's going on?' Since then, we've never run promotion processes during Ramadan.

The work would continue even if I wasn't here, because there are enough senior people, such as my deputy chief constable, who are invested in it. At the chief superintendent level, there are people who have come through who are passionate about diversity, equality and inclusion, too. Looking ahead, I'd like to employ someone as a sort of non-executive director, a specialist in diversity, who can help take us to the next stage.

GMP is not perfect, far from it, but we are heading in the right direction. I really do believe that we will get to a tipping point when women and minority ethnic people will be accepted as the norm in all ranks and roles in policing – and we are set on that goal.

About the author

Chief Constable Ian Hopkins of GMP is also the NPCC workforce lead for diversity, equality and inclusion and a non-executive director of the College of Policing.

Tags

Diversity and inclusion