

Christine Elliott reflects on her time as interim chair at the College of Policing

Published on 15 December 2020

'Despite the challenges of the past year, the College is in a much stronger position than ever before'

Views 5 mins read

When I was appointed as acting chair of the College back in March this year, I made it clear I didn't consider it a 'caretaker' role. I wanted to help strengthen our connection with the front line and deliver work that supports the police service to keep people safe and I agreed three priorities: digital, diversity and leadership at all levels.

Like the rest of the country and most of the world, we were not expecting to do this in a pandemic. As I come to the end of my interim contract at the end of this month, and indeed, my ninth on six years on the College's board, I wanted to reflect on some of the achievements and areas in which we have made huge strides.

Responding to the pandemic

My role in the chair was to set the tone for the right culture to deal with the uncertainty facing us all.

I am particularly proud of how the College helped the front line respond to the pandemic. So far, nearly 100 pieces of guidance have been swiftly created to keep up with changing [COVID-19 regulations](#). Reception by even critical commentators has shown that our guidance has supported the legitimacy of policing and compliance with the rules during the crisis.

The College has been assisting forces with the 'behind the scenes' pandemic response too. We have developed, reviewed, and amended guidance about recruitment processes, to make sure there is a continual flow of recruits. We put an emergency curriculum in place to keep training initial recruits during COVID-19 restrictions. And the target for the Police Uplift Programme recruitment is well on track. All of this meant there was a flow of new recruits, which – alongside being able to promote existing officers into leadership positions – is essential to making sure forces have the officers they need.

Technology's continued importance

I am really pleased that we have produced a new digital strategy for the organisation. The pandemic has highlighted how important it is that our work in this area continues to move at pace, so that we can improve the experience of officers and staff using our resources and enhance the service's effectiveness and the College's efficiency.

COVID-19 meant exams had to move online in a short period of time. This needed to happen quickly and although there were challenges, more than 1,000 investigators, 3,000 inspectors and 11,000 sergeants were able to take their exams online. The College also created a new platform for the initial recruitment process. This platform has been used by 42 forces and 20,000 candidates. It is just as important to learn from successes as from failures. After all, people get things right more often than they get them wrong and mistakes only have a greater impact because we allow them to make sure recruitment into policing continues.

It was exciting to see the new website launch earlier in the year. As it grows it will improve the connection of the College's products, both online and non-digital, to frontline officers, staff and all those working in policing. While also meeting the government's accessibility standards.

Increasing diversity across policing

To my mind, diversity and inclusion are a fundamental part of good leadership. They are central to what makes for happy, high-performing organisations – and the evidence bears this out. Since March, and with the appointment of Dr. Robina Shah to the board strengthening its expertise, the board has made great progress towards establishing an advisory forum, drawn from diverse representatives within, and outside of the College.

The viewpoints and experience of this group will help to inform decision making, placing diversity and inclusion at the heart of what the College does. We have plans in place to recruit a boardroom apprentice, to help enrich decision making and ensure that our leadership is considering a range of perspectives.

Diversity and inclusion are now embedded in how the College is supporting the government's target to increase officer numbers. It plays a central part in attraction, recruitment, retention, data standards and specific inclusive and positive-action programmes.

The College has been working closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council to create a national race action plan for policing. In addition, we jointly hosted an online senior Black, Asian and minority ethnic leaders' forum to more than 100 participants to help provide development opportunities.

On a personal level, I was proud to represent the College as a speaker at the recent 'Women in Policing' conference. My theme was 'Be the change you want to see'. Alongside many inspirational speakers we discussed how we can manage the challenges of modern leadership, and encourage female leaders in policing.

On the way

We launched a ground-breaking piece of work this year: the College's [Future Operating Environment product](#), which looks at the future of policing up to 2040. We are currently working with forces, OPCCs, National policing bodies and academic institutions to test the toolkit. And this is a national horizon-scanning programme that has never been done before in policing.

Despite the challenges of the past year, the College is in a much stronger position than ever before. We have improved our own governance and communications, and created consistency in

standards, particularly across police training. We are doing more to set standards and how we support leaders and future leaders across policing. A blueprint for a new way to deliver leadership development in policing is at proof of concept stage and it represents a radical, joined up national approach to leadership at all levels. The first beneficiaries are expected to be a diverse group drawn from sergeants and inspectors.

I am proud of what has been achieved, including the focus, drive and effectiveness of our work. The College has a key role to play in public protection and I am grateful for how this has been enhanced by the magnificent work that Mike Cunningham, the team he has developed and all College staff have done. The College has become a strong force for good in policing.

I have every confidence [Bernie O'Reilly](#), his colleagues and the new chair will keep up the momentum in the right direction. It has been an honour to be part of the College and to champion the policing family since I began as a non-executive director in 2015. I look forward to watching the College go from strength to strength as it continues to support the brave and talented police officers and staff who protect us in increasingly complex circumstances.

I am humbled by the support, loyalty and kindness everyone at the College has shown me. And the brilliant guidance and inspiration of the wider policing family. None of that will be forgotten, or go to waste. I wish you each and every one the best possible Christmas. Stay safe, stay well and, fingers crossed, our paths will cross again.

Tags

[Operational policing](#) [Diversity and inclusion](#) [Leadership development](#) [COVID-19](#)