



# Operational Report

Target Use in Recruitment and Selection

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## **Acknowledgements**

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### **1. Executive summary**

Policing is suffering considerable pressures to increase the diversity of its employees. These pressures have led to the use of performance targets for the recruitment and progression of BME (Black, Minority, Ethnic) candidates. This study took a qualitative approach to analysing the effects generated by these targets, with a particular emphasis on culture and the unintended consequences produced by their implementation. The study found that police officers widely accept the need for increased diversity. However, they are uncomfortable with the use of targets to support this aim. Of particular concern was the belief that this produced a process which was unfair to all candidates. The study makes a number of recommendations, which emphasise the need for improved communication between all concerned in the recruitment and selection process.

The report is a condensed version of an MSc thesis which examined the effects of the use of targets within recruitment and selection in two separate UK constabularies. The full report is available on request.

### **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 Current diversity rates in forces across the country are well below the level of the communities that they police, with two UK police forces disclosing that they do not have a single member of BME staff. Political pressures have been compounded by the recent riots in London and continued negative press generated by race relations tribunals throughout the country.
- 2.2 This pressure has caused constabularies to employ targets for increasing the rate at which they recruit people from BME backgrounds.
- 2.3 There has recently been a number of reports within policing that look at the damaging effects of targets in the policing environment, but these reports have focused on crime. Targets are being employed in other areas of policing. This study aimed to examine the effects of this use, whilst being informed by the theory of procedural justice.

### **3. Methodological approach**

- 3.1 Qualitative study methods were used. A total of 17 semi-structured interviews took place, using officers from the 'frontline' in two separate constabularies. The interviews were transcribed, and the themes collected and analysed with regard to the theory of procedural justice.

### **4. Key findings**

- 4.1 The intended beneficiaries (in this case BME candidates) are disadvantaged by the use targets in recruitment. There is an automatic presumption of lack of competence with regards to a BME candidate's selection or promotion.
- 4.2 The fairness of any selection process which utilises targets is called into question. This perceived 'unfairness' results in a lack of legitimacy for those promoted.

- 4.3 The use of targets reduces morale in the workforce. Unless the procedure is viewed as fair, many candidates are motivated not to even apply, or have accepted defeat before the process has begun. This is exacerbated by statements such as: “We welcome applicants from [particular background or sex]” statements. This means the accessible talent pool is limited.
- 4.4 Any communication gaps with regards to the processes used are immediately filled by the prevalent aspects of the culture. A lack of engagement around these processes will only benefit organisations whose culture is open, trustworthy and transparent. In the case of the police, suspicion, cynicism and distrust are common themes, making engagement all the more important.
- 4.5 There is a hierarchy of diversity, with particular categories holding more ‘importance’ than others. This is counter-intuitive to any real addressing of diversity issues and therefore results in confusion amongst staff.
- 4.6 Utilising procedural justice theory, the use and the results of these targets may be having effects upon the way that police officers are behaving towards the public. This is a concerning finding and should be the subject of further research.
- 4.7 Officers believe that there is a need for increased diversity in the force and welcome increasing numbers. They do not feel comfortable with the use of targets to achieve this.
- 4.8 In summary, there are several areas within the recruitment and selection process that give immediate cause for concern. These areas can be addressed utilising practical solutions, but the approach must be iterative. Some may work and operationalise easily, others may undermine desired aims and objectives.

## 5. Recommendations

### 5.1 General Recommendations

- 5.1.1 **Co-production of the recruitment process.** If the officers themselves are party to the creation of the process, then there is ownership, understanding, and the decision is made when they are in possession of the relevant information. It does not have to mean that the decisions are made by the frontline; instead it could mean that they just help to design it. However, there is no need for officers to be abstracted to a ‘team,’ they can just attend focus groups, or be visited by those holding the projects. It is important that their concerns are addressed during the process and relevant information is provided as questions are asked. The finished product does not therefore ‘belong’ to the HR department or Chief Officer Group, but instead belongs to the workforce, and is implemented by HR.
- 5.1.2 **Filling the communication gaps.** Any current information/understanding gaps around the process are filled with the culture. The Police culture is considered by some as notoriously negative, cynical and suspicious. This results in conjecture that often results in disengagement and mistrust. Any future processes around recruitment and selection need to be ‘saturated’ with communication. This communication should be locally and centrally led, with interactive question and answer threads on internal message boards or forums to address ongoing concerns.
- 5.1.3 **Communicating the rationale for decisions.** When decisions to remove or disbar someone from the process are made, appropriate feedback must be given wherever possible. This adds legitimacy to the decision making. Without this feedback there will be no understanding about what ‘success’ looks like for candidates, and again culture will fill the gaps pro-actively. Feedback given in this way also allows for better development of CPD as candidates can focus on their future, instead of speculating on the reasons why they were deselected. This is a thematic consideration and should not be addressed in isolation. Rationale for

decision making should be a 'must provide' utilising both social and formal communication channels. The reduction of uncertainty is a pre-requisite for trust in the workplace, and is therefore essential to legitimate leadership.

## 5.2 Specific recommendations in relation to the recruitment process.

### 5.2.1 Detailed recommendations are set out in the table below.

<b>Recruitment Opens</b>	<b>Positive Action</b>	<b>Internal/External Support received for the candidate</b>	<b>Competence questioned of people subject to +ve action</b>	<b>Feedback mechanism</b>
Officers raise questions around BME Targets	Officer's direct experience of positive action initiatives	Targets are unfair Targets cause lowered morale	Competence should be the primary consideration	Feedback given to unsuccessful candidates
<b>Breach of Organisational Justice area</b>				
Informational Justice	Distributive Justice	Distributive Justice	Procedural Justice Informational Justice	Interactional Justice Informational Justice
<b>Possible Solutions</b>				
<p>Involve frontline officers in the design of positive action</p> <p>Publish the full Positive Action program</p> <p>Open out the Positive Action program to be inclusive</p> <p>Include education on diversity in the training syllabus</p> <p>Management briefings delivered internally</p>	<p>If distributed assistance is to be unequal, the understanding behind that must be fully understood and expressed</p> <p>The distribution must be fully visible and the decision making behind it made available</p> <p>Consult with BME officers about whether there is subject support for initiatives</p> <p>Anonymised process to build confidence</p>	<p>If targets are to be used, their basis in evidence and reason for their existence is to be published and shared</p> <p>If there is evidence that they 'work' without adverse unintended consequences, then this must be made available and shared</p>	<p>The selection criteria for recruitment/ selection/promotion is to be co-designed and shared.</p> <p>Involve the frontline in their leadership requirements and co-produce the process</p> <p>If Management wish to move away from Skills/Command as selection criteria, this must be communicated clearly with rationale.</p>	<p>Feedback from the process for candidates must be authentic and provide detail about de-selection.</p> <p>The subject matter should be regularly broached by management with open feedback sessions available to officers.</p> <p>The taboo needs to be publicly broken, threat of sanction stifles dialogue, and therefore understanding.</p>