

# Progression through the Police Service: Barriers and Facilitators for Women and Black and Minority Ethnic Officers

Lessons learned from a *very* rapid evidence assessment

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## Research, Analysis and Information Unit

- The NPIA is a national police owned and led organisation with a purpose of improving public safety
- The Research, Analysis and Information Unit provides research, analysis and information for colleagues across the NPIA and for the agency's main customers: Home Office, Association of Chief Police Officers and Association of Police Authorities
- The unit's research programme contributes to the growth and use of the evidence base on policing issues by:
  - Providing advice and support to the NPIA and its stakeholders on the generation and use of research evidence in policing
  - Synthesising evidence
  - Carrying out / commissioning rigorous social research

## What is an REA?

A rapid evidence assessment:

- Is based on the same principles as a systematic review: a methodical and prescriptive search of good quality data sources to assess the current thinking and evidence on a defined subject area or research question
- Differs to a systematic review in that it is less detailed and so provides a quicker assessment of the evidence
- Is not as comprehensive as a full systematic review, so the conclusions drawn may be subject to revision if a more comprehensive review of the evidence is carried out

## REA purpose and aims

To support the NPIA in increasing the proportion of female and black and minority ethnic police officers in senior ranks by:

- Assessing the evidence that there are real or perceived barriers to the progression of female and minority ethnic officers in the police service and reasons for these
- Identifying previous interventions and recommendations to improve diversity at senior ranks, the extent to which these have been implemented or not, and with what effect

REA to be carried out by equivalent of 2 full-time researchers within 2 months!

## REA method – design

Research questions:

- Are female and ethnic minority officers **under represented** in senior police ranks?
- Are **real or perceived barriers** in the police service affecting female and black and minority ethnic officers; what are the **reasons for those barriers**?
- What **interventions** have been proposed to **tackle these barriers**; have they been **implemented**; have they been **effective**?

## Design – what we learned

- Need for a tight research question
  - preferably an impact question (or a question about the impact of an intervention) and just the one!
- Carefully consider whether REA appropriate
  - conduct some preliminary searches to get an idea of scope and amount of relevant evidence
  - Consider results of preliminary searching (ours showed a lack of intervention evidence) and the advantages and disadvantages of REA approach alongside other options
- Importance of working closely with policy colleagues at design stage
  - to identify what their key needs are
  - to manage customer expectations

## REA method – search strategy

What we did:

- We used 4-5 categories of **search terms** against each research question
  - E.g (*police or policing or “law enforcement) and (officer or employ\*) and (ethnic\* or race or racial minorit\*) and (lead\* or manag\* or promotion) and (barrier or problem or issue) etc*)
- Searching covered 7 **social science databases** and 8 **websites**
- Only those studies in **English** and published between **2003 - 2008** were included
- Initial screening based on **titles and abstracts** only

## Search strategy – what we learned

- Need for careful planning and project management
  - Appoint a coordinating role to a member of the team
  - We underestimated the resource needed for the number of searches required – need to allow adequate time for piloting
  - Our team consisted of 5 researchers working part-time and remotely therefore needed clear and regular communication about process to ensure a consistent approach
- Engagement with library colleagues
  - Need to discuss search terms and techniques with library experts early on in process
- Importance of accurate record management
  - Need to ensure a consistent approach to managing information
  - Much more difficult to ensure consistent approach to searching websites than databases
  - Need for an administrator role to input and update reference database and obtain studies

# REA – assessment and synthesis

What we did:

- Too many studies to review in the timeframe required meant we had to **prioritise and assess** only those that were **most relevant**, rather than all
- Each study assessed against a series of questions in relation to **relevance to research question, quality of research and overall usefulness** to needs of NPIA
- Data extraction focused on **identifying the barriers and describing interventions**
- Used a **narrative approach to synthesis**: overall descriptive summary, thematic analysis of evidence by type of intervention

## Assessment and synthesis – what we learned

- Need to ensure consistency of approach in quality assessing studies
  - Ideally would have two researchers assessing each study but we did not have time therefore all researchers pilot assessed two studies and compared notes
- Be explicit about how research is synthesised
  - The need to be systematic at the synthesis stage is often overlooked in REAs but different methods of synthesis may yield different findings
- Importance of working closely with policy colleagues at synthesis stage to identify most useful presentation of findings

## REA - high-level findings

What we found:

- Barriers to progression of women and minority ethnic officers fall into four main categories: **police culture** and values; **organisational** and structural issues; **weaknesses in management** and leadership practices and **personal issues**
- **No** robust evaluation evidence found as to what works to tackle these barriers
- Interventions most commonly *discussed* in the literature included: **mentoring**, **support groups**, **flexible working** and **development programmes**

## Findings – what we learned

- Importance of clearly communicating two layers of findings to policy colleagues
  - the quality of the evidence that the findings are based on
  - what the research evidence tells us
- Finding that there is no robust evidence to show ‘what works’ is a useful finding in itself
- A ‘best available evidence’ approach with a strong message about the limitations of the research quality is more useful for policy colleagues than reporting that there is no reliable evidence

## Contact details

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