

The Derbyshire  
**Business School**



**POSITIVE ACTION NEGATIVE EFFECT**

A STUDY INTO THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF POSITIVE ACTION  
ON MINORITY GROUPS IN THE BRITISH FIRE SERVICE.

**Dissertation research project in part fulfilment of the  
requirement of the Masters of Business Administration**

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Finally, to the many thousands of women who work for the Fire Service in their many different roles, who I believe are the key to modernising the Fire Service and making it a more pleasant place to work.

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<sup>1</sup> Raekha Prasad. The Guardian newspaper. 15<sup>th</sup> May 2002

## **Executive Summary**

The British Fire Service has undergone many changes over many years. The current Modernisation agenda shows that change truly is, the only constant in a Public Service that has, for many years resisted or even acknowledged the need for, improved stakeholder lead services.

A plethora of reports, reviews and other such documents have bombarded the Service, each producing ‘must do’ action points and forcing Chief Fire Officers to re-prioritise on a daily basis the recommendations of newly published documents.

This report evaluates one such report, which looked at Equality & Diversity in the Fire Service. It set targets to increase the number of women and black minority ethnic employees.

The content of this report does not criticise the findings of this Government report, but challenges the subsequent recommendations and the resulting effects on the minority groups it aimed to encourage and protect.



### ***About the author***

I have served with Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service for 12 years. I joined in 1992 as a recruit firefighter and following basic training was posted to Blue watch at Ilkeston fire station, I spent a short period of time at Kingsway fire station attached to Red watch before being promoted to Leading firefighter (Lff) in the training centre.

At this point I became Derbyshire's only ranking female junior officer.

Two years later I transferred to Alfreton, Red watch before being promoted to Sub Officer back on my old watch at Ilkeston.

In April 2002, I was promoted to Station Officer; I am currently the Station Manager at Kingsway fire station in Derby, responsible for two wholetime fire appliances, 4 watches and 40 personnel. I am one of five other female station managers in England.

Throughout my career I have always taken an active role in careers and positive action events and I have been a member of the Equal Opportunities forum since 1999.

I am married to Paul who I met many years ago in my pre Fire Service life at British Rail. We married in May 2004 after meeting again on our Diploma in Management studies at the University of Derby.



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## ***1.0 Introduction***

The subject matter for this report has been chosen as I have a keen and personal interest in the topic. At the time of writing this report I have served 12 years as a female operational fire officer within Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service (D.F.& R.S). I have been able to produce this report due to my professional and personal involvement with the many women already within the service and the considerable number of other females who have attended careers and positive action events as potential applicants.

On a National basis the subject area of this study is very topical and in light of this the results of this report have the potential to augment the successful acceptance and integration of minority groups within the British Fire Service.

Of the many documents and reports already available, many, if not all have been initiated or carried out by male uniformed officers, generally senior in rank. The results have often been considered damaging to the acceptance of women and other minority groups within the service. The targets set by the Government following the ‘Thematic Review’ were seen as ‘quotas’. This resulted in many people from minority groups being seen as a token gesture in the management’s efforts to reach targets.

I intend to offer a balanced report on the views and experiences of female fire fighters from around the country. Views and opinions of male uniformed personnel and non-uniformed support staff will also be considered.

This report will provide senior management with a background from which they can formulate strategy to improve the acceptance of minority groups by providing understanding of the issues, which prevent or discourage women from considering the Fire Service as a potential career. It will also analyse the reluctance of women already employed within the service to seek promotion.

The final report will be submitted to the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACO) of Human Resources and the Policy and Equality officer. The aim is that the strategy for achieving the HO targets may be influenced by this document, more importantly the

objective of the acceptance of minority groups within the organisation can be improved and implemented.

### ***1.1 Terms of reference***

This report investigated the effect of positive action on minority groups within the British Fire Service. In order to achieve this the following aims and objective were set;

### ***1.2 Aim and Objectives***

‘To critically evaluate the effects of the targets set by government in Fire Service Circular 6/1999, as a result of the Fire Service Inspectorate’s 1999 thematic review, Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service.’

#### ***1.2.1 Objectives***

- To investigate whether there are any tangible/intangible barriers preventing women’s employment or advancement, such as practical selection tests and cultural and sociological issues.
- To explore how relevant internal cultural behavior is, and how it affects the level of acceptance/tolerance of minority groups within the Fire Service.
- To investigate how other white male dominated organisations support minority groups and encourage increased applications from those groups.



### 1.3 Background

In 1999 Sir William MacPherson produced a damning report into the Police handling of the investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence in April 1993. Briefly the report condemned the ‘institutionalised racism’ in the Police Force, which he believed, lead to the inadequate investigation of his murder.

It was seen that, as another white male dominated public sector organisation the Fire Service should also be inspected.

The government published a thematic review of Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service’. The review looked into the possibility of sexism and racism within the Fire Service it resulted from concerns that;

*‘for whatever reasons, the profile of the service’s workforce is not representative of the multicultural community it serves’*

HM Fire Service Inspectorate (1999) Thematic Review

The review made very strong recommendations to fire brigades throughout the U.K. Strong criticism was directed at the culture, leadership and relationships within the service. The review identified a need to;

*‘review a range of leadership and cultural issues in addition to taking specific steps in a wide range of areas to improve the practices attaching to equality and fairness’*

HM Fire Service Inspectorate (1999) Thematic Review

In 1999 a Fire Service Circular (6/1999) was issued to all U.K. Fire Services setting targets to increase the representation of women and black minority ethnic personnel in the workforce. Thus making the Fire Service reflect the community it serves.

During 1999 there were 48,080 operational personnel in the British Fire Service, of which only 949 were women or from black and ethnic origin. This equated to only 1.7%. Of this total only 29 held rank above that of fire fighter, which equated to 0.06%.

HM Fire Service Inspectorate (1999) Thematic Review

By 2001 the workforce had risen slightly to 48,184 of this figure 680 were women (1.4%).

In 1999 D.F.& R.S employed 841 operational firefighters of this number 16 were female firefighters. This equated to 1.9% of the authorised establishment.

The targets set in Fire Service Circular 6/1999 following the thematic review can be seen in the table below.

Year	Actual/ Target	% of females	No of females
1999	Actual	1.9%	16
2002	Target	4%	34
2004	Target	9%	76
2009	Target	15%	126

**Table 1.1** Thematic Review targets for Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service  
Source Fire Service Circular 6/1999 – adapted by author

It is important to understand the perspective of the targets shown in the above table; In order for DFRS to achieve the targets set by government they needed to employ 60 more women and 9 more people from black minority ethnic backgrounds as firefighters by 2004.

Between 2000 and 2004 DFRS trained 73 new recruits. Using the above figures it could be said that white males could fill only 4 places.

During this period only 4 women were accepted as whole-time firefighters, although this was a very positive increase of 25% it was nowhere near the Government's desired targets.

The targets set by the government were very demanding and imposed a more urgent need for positive action within the organisation, in order to increase the number of applications from women and black and ethnic minority applicants. This made it even more difficult to achieve targets, whilst maintaining integrity.

The Equal Opportunities Commission states that positive action;

*‘refers to a variety of measures designed to counteract the effects of past discrimination and to help eliminate sex stereotyping’*

www.eoc.org.uk positive action.15/06/04

Chief fire officers were faced with an almost impossible task; the objectives would not allow for the massive culture change required for the targets to be achieved and for minority groups to be integrated successfully into the service.

The fine line between Positive Action and Positive Discrimination and a lack of understanding of the two phrases resulted in the workforce majority, feeling that white males were being discriminated against. Positive discrimination is illegal and can be defined as;

*‘employing someone because they come from a disadvantaged or under represented group regardless of whether they have the relevant skills or not’*

www.eoc.org.uk positive action.15/06/04.

This had an extremely negative effect on the relationships between men and women within the Fire Service. It was seen that white males were to be excluded from the Fire Service until the female quota had been reached.

It also undermined the hard work already done by serving female fire fighters as it was felt that the only way to increase the number of applications by women was to lower the standards. This then suggested that perhaps those women already in ‘the job’ had been given ‘special treatment’ and their worthiness and ability were once again questioned.

It became very difficult to encourage serving women and other black minority ethnic employees to act as positive role models at positive action/careers events. They were given the title ‘tokens’ and felt isolated from the watches with whom they had worked so hard to be accepted.

Certainly I as a firefighter preferred to ‘keep my head down’ and continue to be ‘one of the lads’, therefore by not drawing attention to the matter of being a woman. The issue of ‘being one of the lads’ is important. Many women seem to conform to the culture and behavior of their peers. By adopting similar behaviors and mannerisms, acceptance and integration was accelerated.

Generally, the minority groups already within the service felt that these targets undermined their hard work and created additional barriers for them to overcome and be accepted within the service.

The Fire & Rescue National Framework 2004/05 pg. 34 mentions the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) ‘inheriting’ the targets set in 1999. Targets can be defined as something to aim at. However, the damage done to those the government professes to value prevails due to two factors; the demanding targets and a failure of the UK services to attain the targets of 2002.

Positive action events held in Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service (DFRS) since 1999 has increased the number of female applicants quite dramatically. Over the financial year 2001/02 applications from white females increased by 136% on the previous year to 164. Of this number only one applicant passed the penultimate stage of interview to then fail at the medical.

The purpose of this report is to understand the effects of positive action on minority groups, specifically women, and to explore ways forward in the recruitment and retention of these groups.

The organisations strategic awareness of the need to reflect the community varies greatly. The questionnaire distributed to all parts of the organisation showed a substantial difference of opinions between uniform and non-uniform personnel and also between male and females. It is also interesting to note the differing comments made throughout the different supervisory levels. The identification of these variations in opinion to the overall equality strategy will help to identify the areas of training needs, raise awareness within the organisation and provide senior

management with a baseline for improving the diversity issues raised as a result of this report.

Strategic awareness on this matter is essential for the organisation. It will protect the organisation from costly employment tribunals and make the workplace a more appealing and welcoming place to work. This can only benefit the workforce as a whole. This will potentially improve morale and increase productivity.

The next chapter will show the review of literature, from which the academic substance of this report evolved. This will assist the reader in understanding the main body of the report.



## **2.0 Literature Review**

The introductory chapter has set the scene for the purpose of this report.

This chapter will assist the reader in understanding the areas, which affect the subject matter; these will include public sector organisations, their culture, change management and the effects of change, and relevant issues relating to gender and socialization.

Many different sources of literature have been used to ensure a broad spectrum of information being gathered. These include; newspaper articles, journals, academic text and previous reports into similar issues.

### **2.1 Public Sector**

The availability of academic text relating to management concepts are in abundance but, only recently have authors started to refer to public sector management. Since the introduction of the Best Value Act 1999 the management of the Fire Service has become subject to a more academic scrutiny and is held more accountable for the service it provides. Public sector organisations just provided a service, how efficient, effective or economic that service was has only recently been questioned.

Public sector organisations are now more openly accountable to the public they serve. Stakeholders' views are not only sought but are reacted to. Consultation is a requirement not an option.

*'Although the public sector organisations are not answerable to shareholders, they are susceptible to greater and more open accountability than those in the private sector. A range of stakeholders such as politicians, pressure groups, taxpayers and voters all have an interest in the performance of the public sector'*

Hannigan (2002 p.32)

Johnson & Scholes have used their knowledge and experience in the private sector and have translated and compared the management practices identified in their "Exploring Public Strategy"(1999) to produce "Exploring Public Sector Strategy"(2001).



The editor's introduction states

*'The purpose of this book is to illustrate how strategic management theory is applicable to public sector organisations and, in reverse, what theory has to learn from public sector practices'*

Johnson & Scholes (2001 p.1)

Rose and Lawton have also published material relating to the reasons behind the changes in public services and their resulting impact of these changes. Chapter 14 of "Public Services Management"(1999) is dedicated to public sector culture. One of the aims of this chapter is to;

*'indicate the issues faced by public services managers when they try and influence organisational culture'*

Rose & Lawton (1999 p.278)

The public sector employs over 6 million people. In 2004 the Equal Opportunities commission released a document: Sex & Power: who runs Britain? This document showed the imbalance in senior positions;

*'There are 4 million women working in the public sector, compared to 2.4 million men – but women hold a minority of the most senior posts. 71% of local authority employees are women, but few make it to the top: just 13% of chief executives are women.'*

Sex & Power: who runs Britain? (2004) EOC

Although in the same document the government pledge that the Public Sector should reflect the community it serves, the mammoth task that this realistically presents cannot be overstated. The Management Journal in May 2003 published an article about the effect of modernisation on management styles within the public sector. This once again shows why women are possibly discouraged or prevented from holding senior management positions:

*'Modernisation is reinforcing 'macho' management styles in councils and leaving little room for more feminine management models which could work better, research has revealed.'*

Management Journal 15<sup>th</sup> May 2003 pg.3

The article also stated that a survey carried out found;

*‘Women felt they have to be twice as good as their male counterparts to be appointed as chief executives.’*

Management Journal 15<sup>th</sup> May 2003 pg.3

This comment is certainly relevant to my personal experience in the Fire Service and is mentioned in a number of the questionnaire responses for this study.

## **2.2 Strategy**

To achieve any type of change or to achieve any objective an organisation must have a strategy, this prevents the ‘muddling along’ of the organisation and provides a structure on which to utilize resources effectively and to provide a professional service to the public. A strategy can be defined as;

*‘A carefully devised plan of action to achieve a goal, or the art of developing or carrying out such a plan’*

Encarta Concise Dictionary (2001)

An effective strategy is imperative to bring about cultural change within the Fire Service. The necessity of strategy and strategic decision making is something, which has only recently been adopted within the Fire Service with any level of commitment. Unfortunately long term strategic planning is often difficult to achieve. The success of most Fire Service plans is restricted to the funds and resources available at the time.

## **2.3 Culture**

When discussing any topic associated with the British Fire Service, probably the two most common words used are ‘culture’ and ‘change’.

In 1999, Her Majesty’s Fire Service Inspectorate, challenged equality and fairness in the service and made strong recommendations as to how things were to be improved. In summary the service had to *change its culture*.

A key issue for the Fire Service is that of culture, many authors have defined the meaning of culture in many ways.

*‘the set of beliefs, norms and values which forms the basis of collaborative human behavior and makes human actions to some extent predictable and directed towards a set of commonly held purposes of the maintenance of some commonly accepted state’* (Normann, 1984).

A simpler, but perhaps more accurate description for the Fire Service is from Rose & Lawton’s Public Services Management (1999) who suggests an organisation’s culture can be defined as;

*‘The way we do things around here’.*

Rose & Lawton (1999) pg.279

The Fire Service is steeped in tradition and is rightly proud of its strong public image. Firefighters work closely together within units referred to as watches of between 7 and 20 people. During their time on duty the firefighters work, train, eat, sleep and socialise together. The stronger characters within any group will often manipulate the behavior of the group. This is captured well in the following statement;

*‘The culture of any group of people is that set of beliefs, customs, practices and ways of thinking that they have come to share with each other through being and working together. At the visible level the culture of a group takes the form of ritual behavior, symbols, myths, stories, sounds and artifacts.’*

(Stacey 1999)

In June 2003 the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott presented the White Paper ‘Our Fire & Rescue Service’ to Parliament. The paper highlighted the changing role of the Fire Service and the need for it to modernise significantly in order to deal with the new demands placed upon it. The report not only looked at the operational issues which needed to be addressed, such as the ability to deal effectively with terrorist attacks but also the management and working practices within the service. The report referred to limiting recruitment practices and rigid watch/shift structure. This it stated had;

*‘led to a closed working culture’*

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003) *Our Fire & Rescue Service*. HMSO

The paper went on to say that the Fire Service was not appealing to women or ethnic minorities. It also admitted that bullying and harassment were widely reported. The intention was, to take action, and, to promote a more diverse culture in the fire and rescue service.

*‘To do the job effectively in the community, the service must reflect the community it serves’*

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003) *Our Fire & Rescue Service*. HMSO

Hannigan (2002) further suggests that there are seven factors in the management of culture;

- Socialisation
- Recruitment policies
- Induction processes
- Reward systems
- Promotion policies
- Leadership
- Training and development

Hannigan goes on to suggest that through effective management, the culture of the organisation can be moulded by re-enforcing the expectations of it to a new recruit. It is thought that at this stage and employee is more receptive to an organisation’s expectations, rules and acceptable ways of behaving.

The importance of leadership should not be ignored; Leaders ability to communicate and ‘set good examples’ undoubtedly affects the culture of the Fire Service. Conversely leaders can act as a serious barrier to change.

Rose and Lawton (1999) Public Sector Management dedicate a whole chapter to Public Service culture its effect on the performance of public service organizations. This chapter aims to

*‘analyse the principal typologies of organizational culture and demonstrate their relevance to public services’*

Rose and Lawton (1999 p.278)

It is important to acknowledge that the culture within an organisation can be very influential when trying to change or improve the organisation. Public Sector organisations have ‘deep rooted’ cultures which often hold back change and modernisation agendas.

### *2.3.1 The effect of culture on change*

The culture of the Fire Service is very strong and has an impact on the implementation of any change.

Dependent on the author culture can be seen as having both a positive or negative effect on an organisation.

Wilson (1992) states;

*‘Culture has come to be seen as the great ‘cure all’ for the majority of organisational skills’*

Burnes. B (1996)

This could be described as the operational area of the Fire Service, the ability to cope and deal with many different types and degrees of severity of incident. The culture of the fire-fighters and their belief in their ‘paradigm, encourages a dynamic use of initiative, common sense and the opportunity to think ‘outside the box’. It therefore enables operational personnel to retain the strong public image of which they are so proud.

Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) argued that:

*‘to operate effectively and efficiently, an organisation’s culture needs to match or be appropriate to it’s structure, Given that an organisation’s environment can change rapidly, as can it’s structure, situations will arise where an organisations culture may be out of step with changes that are taking place in the environment, structure and practices of the organisation.’*

Burnes. B (1996)

The Fire Service culture could be considered to be out of step with the many changes that are currently bombarding it. Document after document over the past few years has challenged the culture, leadership, and working practices of the Fire Service. Any manager within the service will accept that to introduce even a small amount of change is often met with distrust and speculation. This could be a reflection on the admission of the government that despite the publication of these reports, there has been;

*‘shortage of action and tangible progress.’*

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003) Our Fire & Rescue Service. HMSO

Recent documents such as The Fires Services Bill recommended drastic changes to the service.

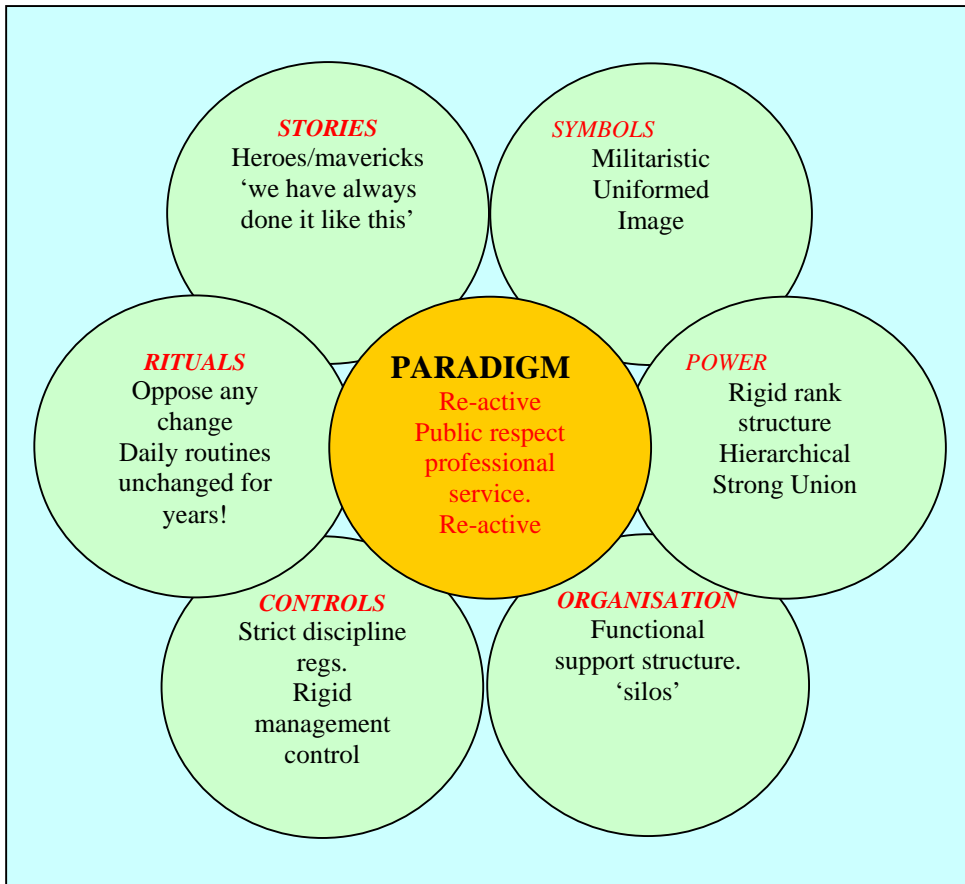
These documents rarely refer to the Fire Service culture in a positive manner.

An analysis of the culture within the service would have immediately identified the fact that the workforce in general were happy within their paradigm and saw no need for change, an attitude of ‘why mend what isn’t broken’ would not assist in a smooth implementation. The workforces regarded themselves as adaptable already; having frequently undergone changes and, was resentful of the implication that they were a ‘closed society’. It was important that they understood why the change would improve the service and to not see it as a threat. John Harvey-Jones (1993) stated

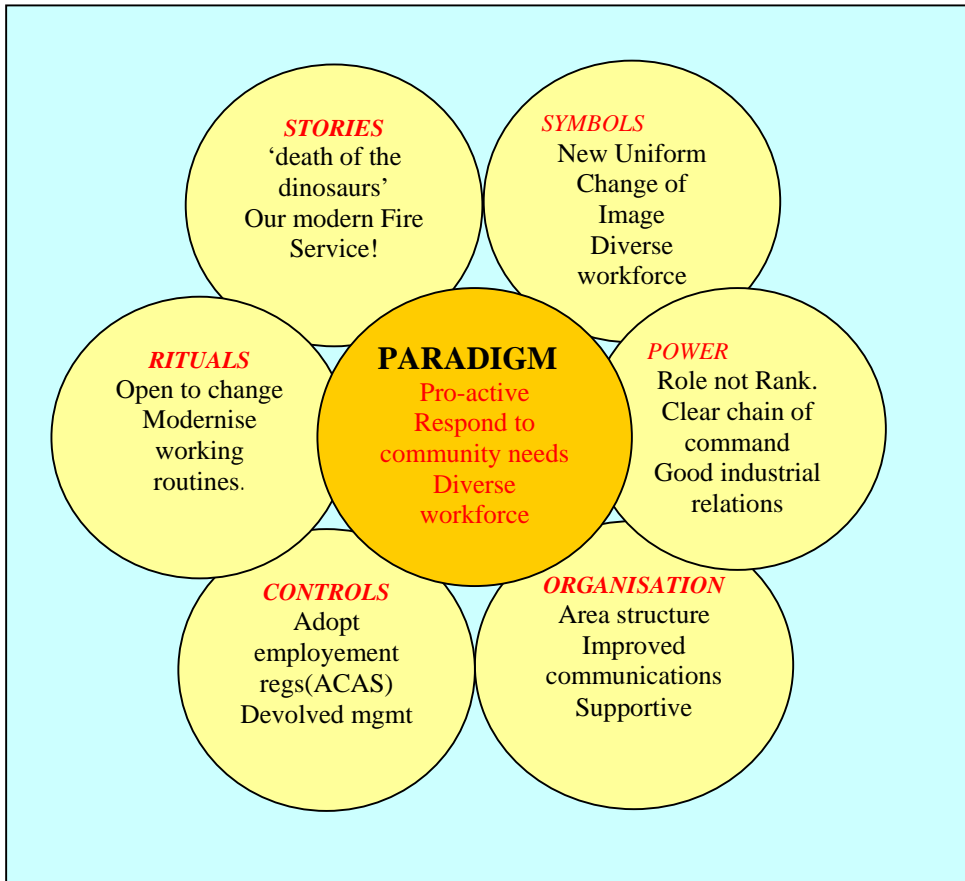
*‘It is impossible to change organisations which do not accept the dangers of their present way of doing things’*

Hannigan.T (2002 )

A clearer identification of the culture of the Fire Service could have identified the potential problems that would be encountered during the modernisation process of reflecting a more diverse community. It would have assisted in identifying current culture and compare it with the vision of the new structure which ultimately could affect the desired paradigm of the Fire Service.



**Figure2.1** Cultural Web – D.F.& R.S. - pre restructure



**Figure2.2** Cultural Web – D.F.& R.S. – Post restructure



## 2.4 Gender & Socialisation

In order to change the gender balance of the Fire Service it is important to analyse and compare global workforce gender issues against the Fire Service. This is necessary to establish whether the Fire Service, is, in itself unique in its attitude and approach to equality or that it merely conforms to the rest of society.

In 2004 the Equal Opportunities Commission published key statistics, which showed that the percentage of women of working age, who are economically active is 69%, this is an increase of 9% from 1975. Despite this increase men still dominate full-time and permanent employment, management and professional roles dis-proportionately to women. This may reflect that women are still considered to be the prime carers for children. This may be by choice or by the fact that employers still do not offer family friendly/ flexible employment opportunities.

More women are now in management positions, the Institute of Management and remuneration economics (IoMRE) states;

*‘Overall, a third of all managers in Britain are women: not a discouraging figure perhaps. However, they only comprise 13% of middle and senior management, and the boardroom remains essentially male preserve’*

(IoMRE 1996)

When comparing these statistics to the number of managerial positions within the Fire Service operational establishment it can be seen that the service has a huge mountain to climb.

Information provided for the annual statistical return to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003/04) shows that only 7 women hold officer ranks in the English Fire Service, this equates to less than 1% of serving female operational personnel. This is obviously not so surprising when women reflect only 2% of the entire workforce. The total number of operational Fire Service personnel in 2003/04 was 48,107 of this figure 4,384 (9.11%) positions were officer rank, women make up 0.15% of those managerial positions.

It is reasonable to compare the Fire Service and police force; both are seen as ‘dangerous’ jobs requiring strength and bravery.

The British police force has a greater representation of women in its force, with 16% being women. When comparing to the Fire Service this seems a very positive figure. However when compared to the national figure for economically active women being 44%, the Police Force also has a lot of work to do.

In 2003 the Police Force launched the ‘Gender Agenda’. This showed an acceptance by the home office that women are an essential part of a modern progressive police force and stated;

*‘ A modern responsive police service needs a range of viewpoints that only a balanced workforce can provide. The gender agenda is not about tinkering with the numbers. It is trying to ensure the police service reflects and responds to the needs of the society it serves.’*

The Gender Agenda (2003 p.3)

The executive summary of the gender agenda gives a very positive outlook on the need for change within the police service, it uses phrases that infer the organisation values women officers and puts in place mechanisms which allow women officers to do their job professionally. It also states that by embracing the agenda the service will see’

*‘Significant benefits for the rest of the service.’*

The Gender Agenda (2003 pg.3)

The Home Office did not lay great emphasis on targets. Although the current percentage of female police officers is quoted, future targets are not included, This; to the author suggests a positive approach and determination that embracing change through strong leadership the recruitment of women will increase naturally.

It must be accepted that however hard the hierarchy of the Fire Service work to recruit more women until the culture of not only the Fire Service changes but also that of

society. Only a small number of women will consider the Fire Service as an occupation.

Although the number of women working full time and entering professional occupations has increased, women still tend, generally to work in public services such as government, health and education and men still dominate the construction and primary and utility industries,

In May 2004 a team member of the Organisational Training & Development department in Derbyshire Fire & Rescue distributed a questionnaire to female school leavers at two schools and two colleges in the Derby area. The main aim was to establish their views and perceptions of the Fire Service as a service and also as a possible career.

*‘Of the 118 questionnaires that were returned only one female student stated that she would consider the Fire Service as a career, 104 stated that they gave little or no consideration to the Fire Service as a career’.*

Source; Hayer J (2004)

It would appear that sex stereotyping is still very much in existence within the British schooling system. The Equal Opportunities Commission states that despite the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) ;

*‘assumptions are still made about the roles, behaviour, abilities and needs of women and men. This is sex stereotyping and it can be found throughout society, influencing attitudes, expectations, choices and decisions which are made in all spheres of our lives.,*

Equal Opportunities Commission (2001) Sex stereotyping: from school to work

From an early age girls are generally treated differently to boys in many areas. This can still be seen by the colour clothes they are dressed, and the type of toys they are given to play with. Gender identity and role is learnt from a very early age and reinforced over time.

*‘gender identity is not created once and for all at a certain point in the child’s life but is continually recreated and endorsed and modified or even altered, substantially through a process of ideological representation.’*

Mullins L.J. (1999)

It is through this socialisation process that the role that women undertake in the home and at work is sub-consciously defined.

*‘Of course girls have been reading the so-called boys’ books ever since there were such. But consider what it means to do so. Instead of closing the covers with shining eyes and the happy thought, “that might happen to me someday!” the girls turning the final page, can only sigh regretfully, “Oh, dear, that can never happen to me—because I’m not a boy!”*

Amelia Earhart –Aviator 1897-1937

Reinforcement of gender roles is evident in the media. Continually newspaper articles refer to ‘firemen’ in articles. On numerous occasions I have provided information to journalists, made a point of using the correct terminology and still the newspaper has managed to ignore the fact that I am a woman.

Continual use of the word ‘firemen’ implies that it is a job specifically for men and therefore not inclusive to women.

However by removing these masculine words and making titles non gender specific, it suggests that men and women should be ashamed of their gender. By re-defining these titles, and calling women ‘firewomen’, and men ‘firemen’, what damage can be done. Reverting to these titles will not increase bullying or harassment. People who bully will continue to do so whatever their or someone else’s title is.

*‘When people are referred to generically, masculine pronouns tend to be used (he ,him his etc).. some books endeavour to use non-sexist language. The fact that doing this sometimes makes the language appear clumsy services to reinforce the fact that sexist language is very firmly entrenched’*

Malim & Birch (1998)

## 2.5 Image of the fire fighter

The general image of a firefighter is someone who is big, strong and most of all heroic. Firemen are regularly portrayed in women’s magazines, described as ‘hunks’ and ‘most desired men’, showing muscular naked chests.

These images give an extreme physiological stereotype to the role of a firefighter and hence probably dissuade girls from considering pursuing this role as a potential career.

The job is also seen as one of great danger and extremely dirty with lots of blood and horrible sights. It is therefore interesting to compare the role to that of a nurse.

The ROSPA (1999/2000) statistics show that nurses, assistant nurses and care assistants make up 47% of major injuries of health service staff. The table below shows a breakdown of these injuries.

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>No. of Major injuries</b>	<b>% of total occupations in the health service</b>
Nurses, Care Asst, Assistant Nurses	631	47%
Housekeepers & caretakers	63	5%
Ambulance Staff	61	5%
Cleaners & Domestic	39	3%
Catering Assistants	38	3%
Hospital Porter	32	2%
<b>Sum of above</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>64%</b>
Other Occupations	486	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1350</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2.1** Occupational Injuries – No of Nursing Staff = 706338

Source: ROSPA 1999/2000

Of the 631 injuries sustained by nurses and care assistants, 12% of these injuries were recorded as ‘handling’ injuries and 11% were caused through assault or violence. To put this in context this means that there is one major injury (reportable under RIDDOR) for every 1119 nursing staff.

In comparison the level of injuries to firefighters, for the same year within the same RIDDOR category, was 21 for an establishment of 48,080 operational personnel. This equated to one major injury for every 2289 firefighters.(Source ODPM)

This suggests that nurses are twice as likely to be injured on duty than firefighters.

Nurses see death and trauma on a daily basis, they get paid on average £25,000 per year(excluding overtime and shift allowances), fire fighters earn £25,000 per year.

It seems strange that the nursing profession is considered more suitable to a woman and yet the Fire Service is deemed to dangerous.

Susan Halford and Pauline Leonard (2001 p.85) suggest;

*‘Possibilities may exist for individual women actively to modify, challenge or resist conforming to the traditional gender-power relations’*

This chapter has now provided the reader with the academic background to the chosen subject. This will support the analysis of the results later in the study. The next chapter will explain the processes used to gather and analyse the information used in this report.



### 3.0 *Research Methodology*

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter has given the reader an understanding of the material used in the formulation of this report.

This chapter will explain the type of research methodology used to underpin the findings of the report and will explain to reader the importance of the processes used.

#### 3.1 *What is research?*

The Encarta concise dictionary describes research as

*‘Methodical investigation into a subject in order to discover facts, to establish or revise a theory, or to develop a plan of action based on the facts discovered’*

Encarta concise dictionary (2001) pg.1234.

*What is methodology?*

This is the means by which the research is achieved.

*‘Particular method or procedure’*

Collins English dictionary (1998), pg 345

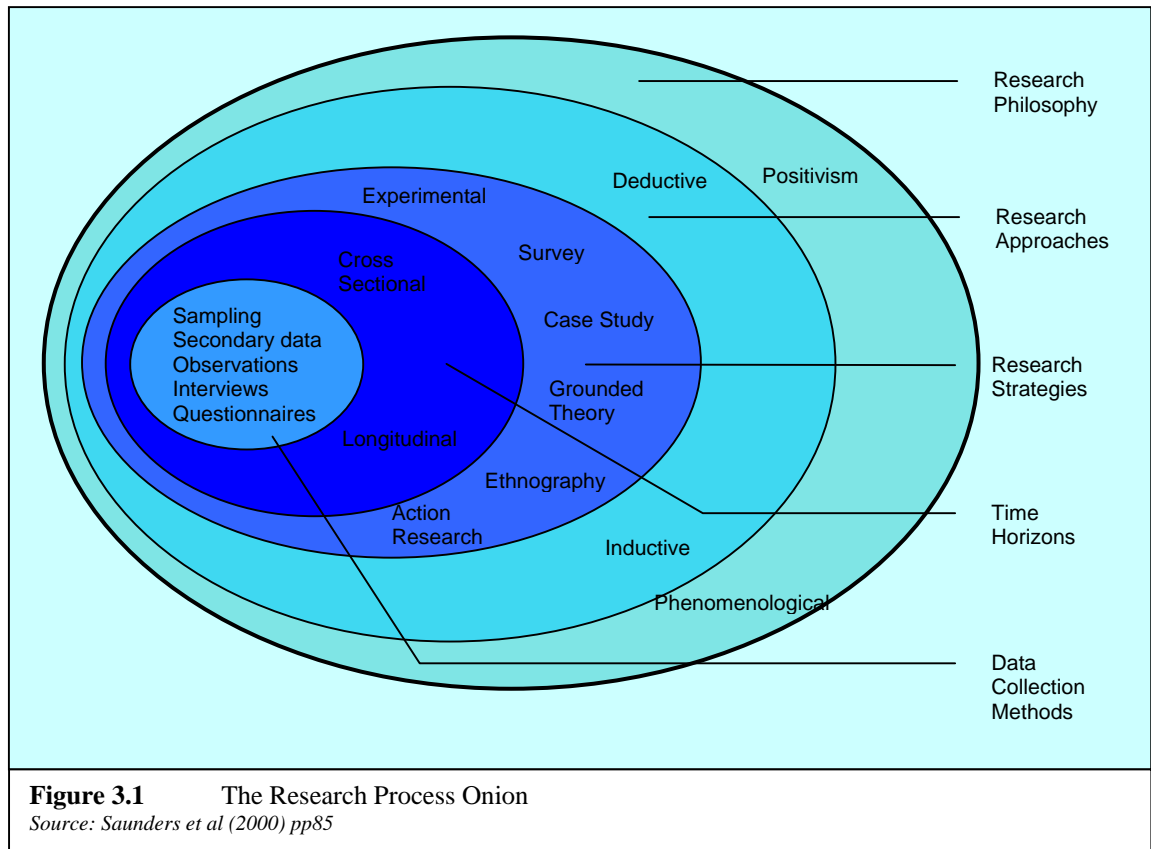
Another definition is provided by Jankowicz;

*‘A systematic and orderly approach taken toward the collection of data so that information can be obtained from those data’*

*Jankowicz (1991), pg.158*

It can be seen that research and methodology is conducted on a daily basis in our everyday lives, to make general life decisions. A more structured research methodology has been adopted for this project.

There are many considerations in planning the research design process and the type of topic to be covered will determine the process most suited to achieve the aims and objectives.



Generally, the 'onion' is designed to be used from the outside to the inside. This method is not set in stone and my research method starts at the second ring of the onion. Taken to their extremes, phenomenology and positivism processes are too restricting and do not comfortably 'fit' this project.

Saunders et al suggests that you should be able to label a research as one or the other, however this study will benefit by being less restrictive and utilising various methods and processes.



### **3.2 Positivism**

Positivism is an approach based on facts and is scientific and objective.

*‘The assumption is that the researcher is independent of and neither affects or is affected by the subject of the research’*

Saunders et al (2000) pg. 85

As explained in the introduction I have a strong personal interest and involvement with this topic and therefore could not use this process. Does this then default my research process to that of phenomenology?

### **3.3 Phenomenology**

The Phenomenological approach is generally based on feelings, observations and perceptions, research is of a qualitative nature and open to speculation. Once again this topic does not ‘fit’ exactly into this process. The data collected is both qualitative and quantitative, and arguably less open to speculation.

Therefore, I have chosen not to ignore these methods, however, neither to label my research as strictly one nor the other. Instead the method to be used will be described as an ‘inductive approach’.

### **3.4 Inductive Approach**

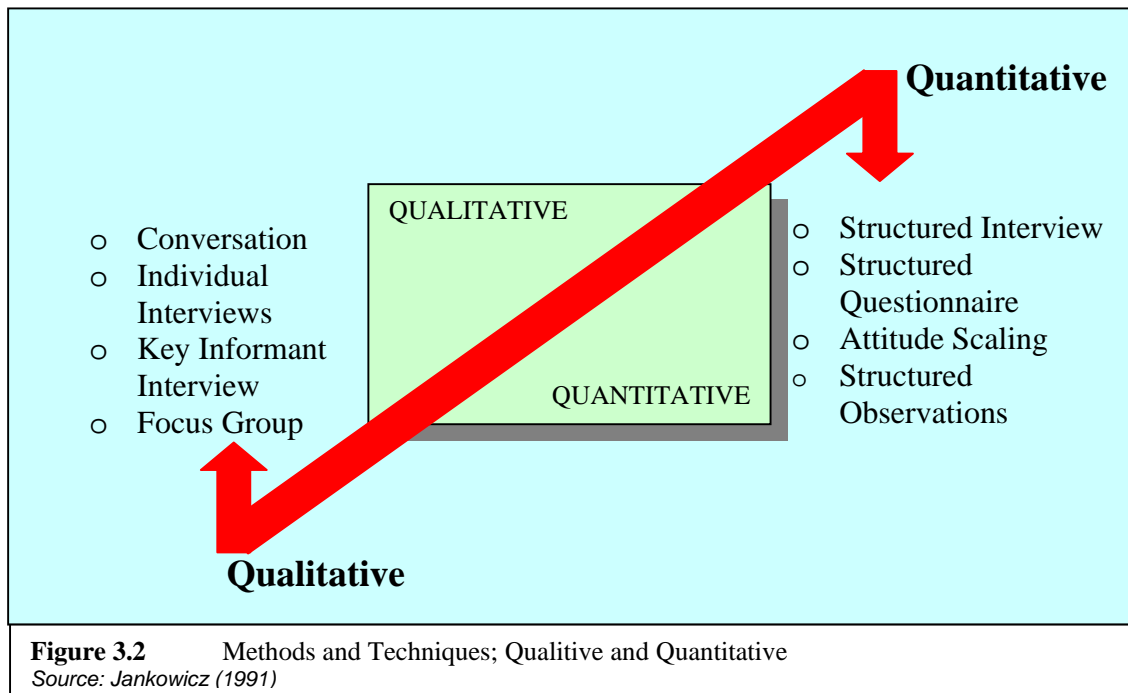
This theory is that of building theory, it advocates the use of interviews and questionnaires to help construct a picture of what is seen to be going on. Rigorous analysis of the data gathered can then be completed to support the ‘feeling’ of what is happening.

### **3.5 Quantitative and qualitative methods**

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative data was used to formulate the conclusions in this study. It was essential to use both types of data to capture individual’s feelings

(qualitative), but also to ensure that ‘raw’ data (quantitative) was used to provide statistical evidence. Miles & Huberman (1994) suggests;

*‘multi-methods can provide insights and triangulation.’*



As stated within the introduction the overall aim of the research is to investigate the effect of positive action on minority groups within the British Fire Service. In order to achieve this it is necessary to;

Critically evaluate the findings of the 1999 thematic review ‘Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service’ and resulting targets set by government in Fire Service Circular 6/1999.

In order to complete this task it was necessary to explore the following key questions;

- Are there any tangible/intangible barriers preventing minority employment or advancement, such as physical limitations and cultural and sociological issues?
- How relevant is internal cultural behavior, and does it affect the level of acceptance/tolerance of minority groups within the Fire Service?

- How do other white male dominated organisations support minority groups and encourage increased applications from those groups?

It has allowed analysis of the varied perceptions and feelings of employees within the British Fire Service relating to equality and diversity.

It identifies the different perceptions between those employed in a uniformed operational role and those who provide the support network in a non-operational role. The research also compared the differing opinions between the various supervisory levels within the organisation.

The methodology could also be described as a form of ethnography. The study of society and customs is an appropriate methodology to apply to the culture and customs, often unique to the Fire Service.

The aim of Organisational ethnography is described by (Stewart, 1998) as;

*‘The components of an ethnographic study are usually participant observation, a holistic construct of the ‘culture’ or ‘society’ under examination, context sensitivity, a sociocultural description, and some element of theory’.*

Partington (2002) pg.117

Data can be collected in a number of ways. This study utilised both primary and secondary data, thus ensuring a broad spectrum of information being gathered.

### **3.6 Secondary Data**

Government publications gave an essential amount of secondary data. This not only provided statistical data but also assisted in the formulation of the questionnaire. The main reports used were;

- Equality & Fairness in the Fire Service – Thematic Review by HM Fire Service Inspectorate (H.M.F.S.I)
- Towards Diversity II – H.M.F.S.I.
- Gender Agenda – British Police Force Association

Performance Indicators introduced as a result of the Best Value Act 1999, which relate to minority groups were also investigated and where necessary their relevance was challenged.

The initial literature search highlighted the fact that previous research in this area had been carried out by people in positions of authority. This could have potentially influenced responses from personnel who may have been intimidated by the authoritative figure. (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Additionally the authors of the thematic review of the Fire Service were generally white males and had no experience of being a minority within the Fire Service.

The effects of cultural and sociological issues on the Fire Service were researched using literature, which focused on human resource issues, women in the workplace and minority issues. This helped in the formulation of questions to encourage better responses.

Historical Data was collated from national statistical returns provided to the home office by all U.K. Fire Services.

Current data relating to targets set by the home office was extracted from documents such as ‘thematic review’, ‘towards diversity.’ And the APU Fireworks web site.

Legal implications referenced within the employment law Act 2002, Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 were taken into consideration.

### **3.7 Primary Data**

An inductive and theory building approach was taken, having previously interviewed personnel and from the returns of questionnaires the author was able to get a feel for beliefs and the underlying culture of personnel relating to positive action and diversity in general. This gave the foundations for building the theory. More accurate analysis of the data confirmed and supported the assumptions made by the author

Qualitative data was gathered during interviews with minority personnel within the Derbyshire Fire Service. This more personal approach encouraged a deeper explanation of personal experiences and feelings. A semi-structured interview technique was used. This was to allow for the many differing experiences that individuals had been exposed to. It also gave the opportunity for more probing questions to be asked to seek greater clarification on some issues. Semi-structured questioning allows for some questions to not necessarily be used if not relevant.

A questionnaire was developed to collect primary data which would give a general 'feel' about the subject matter. The questionnaire was self administered by the author and generally was delivered by hand at conferences attended by target groups and to departments by hand or by post. Most questionnaires distributed at the conferences were returned the same day by hand, those sent to departments were generally returned by internal mail.

A blank copy of the questionnaire is included as an appendix to this report.

The questionnaire was introduced with a covering letter, which included the following information:

- Author, title and contact details.
- The reason for the questionnaire.
- Assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.
- A request for respondents to answer truthfully, not how they felt management would want them to answer.

Additionally at the two conferences attended the author had the opportunity to speak and explain the research project, which encouraged responses.

The majority of the questions used the Likert-style rating scale. Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed on a 5-point scale with a series of statements.

Only one open question was given, this encouraged any additional comments from the respondents.

The questionnaire was split into 6 sections. Each section provided a different field of data.

Section	Content	Aim
1	Personal details - Age, Gender and Ethnic origin	To categorise the respondent and identify minority/target groups.
2	Position in the organisation - Description of post, Length of service and qualifications.	To allow comparison between operational firefighters and support staff, also between supervisory levels.
3	Bullying and harassment - Self & Others	To establish whether a serious issue or only small minority of respondents affected.
4	Respondent's views on equality & fairness (E & F) in the Fire Service.	To gain an understanding of individuals perception of E & F and its 'fit' in the organisation.
5	Additional comments	To give the opportunity for respondents to offer additional information not requested in the questionnaire.
6	Name and contact details.	To gain contact details from those who do not wish to remain anonymous and who would be prepared to be questioned in more detail.

**Table 3.1** Questionnaire Layout

*Source: Alex Johnson (2004)*

The types of questions used in the questionnaire were designed to question the respondent's personal knowledge of diversity in general but also to encourage honest responses on the same subject. The questions also asked for opinions on how the respondent felt the management understood or supported diversity issues.

The questionnaire allowed the author to compare the type of response by their role within their organisation and their personal feelings on why they or other minority personnel did or did not agree with positive action. It also enquired about the general levels of acceptance of minority personnel within their place of work.

The questionnaire asked direct questions, which gave accurate personal data about the individual, however it also gave the opportunity for individuals to remain anonymous to encourage open and honest responses. Both positive and negative statements were included to encourage truthful and well-informed responses.

One of the main failings of the questionnaire was the assumption by the author that ‘all’ Fire Service personnel were aware of the various government reports about equality and fairness. This would have been difficult to overcome, nonetheless; this lack of awareness of some documents suggested a reason for lack of understanding in these issues.

The use of both qualitative and quantitative data within this research project was essential in order to gain an in depth view of the attitudes and experiences and expectations of operational personnel from minority groups within the Fire Service.

A wider understanding of the culture change was gained by investigating the development and increase of women in the workplace and the reason why as a nation women still hold fewer senior positions than men. This knowledge helped to compare the proportionate increase or decrease of women in the Fire Service.

Interviews with Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS) and Fire Brigades Union (FBU) representatives have been undertaken to provide different perspectives to the research project. This may include the number of harassment cases dealt with in relation to employees from minority groups.

This chapter has clarified the method and processes by which the data and results of this study will be produced.

The next chapter will provide the substance extracted from the research and give tangible results in preparation for the recommendations and conclusions.

## **4.0 Results**

This chapter will provide the reader with the results of the primary data collection. The results tend to confirm the beliefs I have held for some considerable time, although it is acknowledged that this is sometimes problematic for qualitative researcher (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). They also, I believe, identify opportunities to address and alter how women and other minority groups are supported within the Fire Service.

As described in the research methodology chapter the questionnaire distributed to Fire Service personnel was designed to gather not only personal details such as age, gender, length of service etc. but also to understand the thoughts and perceptions of personnel in relation to equality and fairness in the service. The questionnaire also gave the opportunity for people to add any other comments that they felt necessary. Where I have used these comments they are in italics. The exact source is not identified to ensure the identity of the respondent remains confidential.

The questionnaire provided a wealth of information. I have therefore chosen to analyse only those, which have identified key issues on the topic matter and which I feel most relevant to the aims of this research.

The results have been grouped in the following manner:

1. Personal details.
2. Bullying & harassment.
3. Equality & fairness.
4. Positive Action.
5. Tolerance & acceptance.
6. Thematic review.

150 questionnaires were distributed at events attended by Fire Service personnel, there I was able to introduce myself and explain the purpose of the questionnaire. This



resulted in an excellent return rate of 68% (102 returns), which is higher than average for this type of method (Remenyi et al, 1998)

During the initial analysis of the results it became apparent that it would not be possible to ‘lump’ together the different groups of people. It was important that the results from female operational personnel were not diluted or absorbed by the other groups such as support staff.

I also felt it was essential to compare the responses between the groups.

The results were divided into four groups and the numbers of returns are shown below;

1.	Operational firefighters – women	27 returns
2.	Operational firefighters – men	14 returns
3.	Control room personnel – men & women	16 returns
4.	Support staff – men & women	45 returns

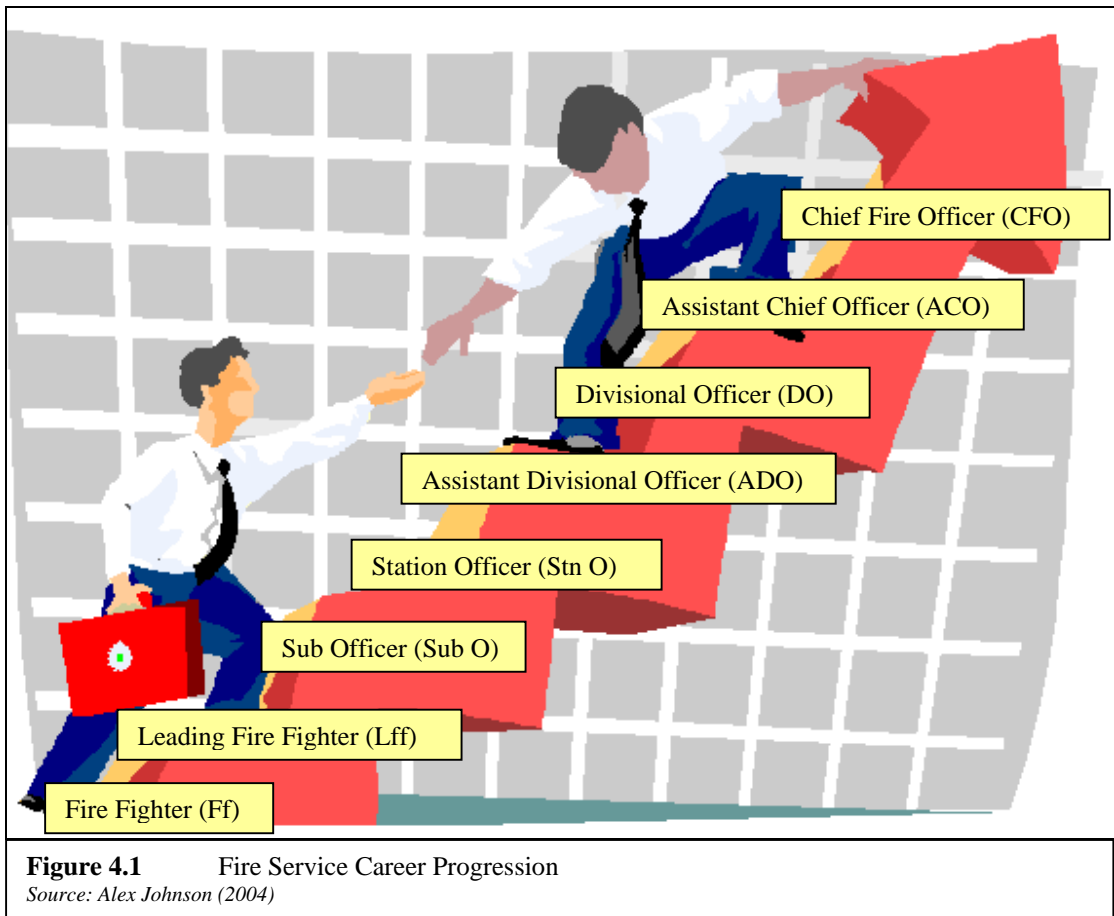
To enable the reader to understand the different roles of these groups a brief explanation is provided.

#### **4.1 Role definitions**

##### **4.1.1 Operational firefighter**

Although the Fire Service is about to change the rank structure and the way in which people are recruited, at the time of this study a strict rank structure was in force. This means that every operational person in the Fire Service started his or her career as a firefighter.

If an individual chose to take and subsequently passed promotional exams they then had the opportunity to progress up the career ladder.



Operational means that the individual will attend operational incidents of varying kinds. Firefighter to Sub officer ranks will carry out the manual work i.e put out the fire and make the rescues. Station officer and above will take charge of the overall incident and be responsible for the logistics, welfare and management responsibilities.

Men and women carry out the same duties as each other at operational incidents, they have completed the same selection tests and basic training courses.

#### 4.1.2 Control room personnel

This group of people receive the 999 emergency calls and mobilise the required number and type of appliances (fire engines) to each incident. Any information at the incident is passed via radio to the control room and logged on a computer. Generally the control room personnel are in the same uniform as the firefighters but, are not operational.

#### 4.1.3 Support Staff

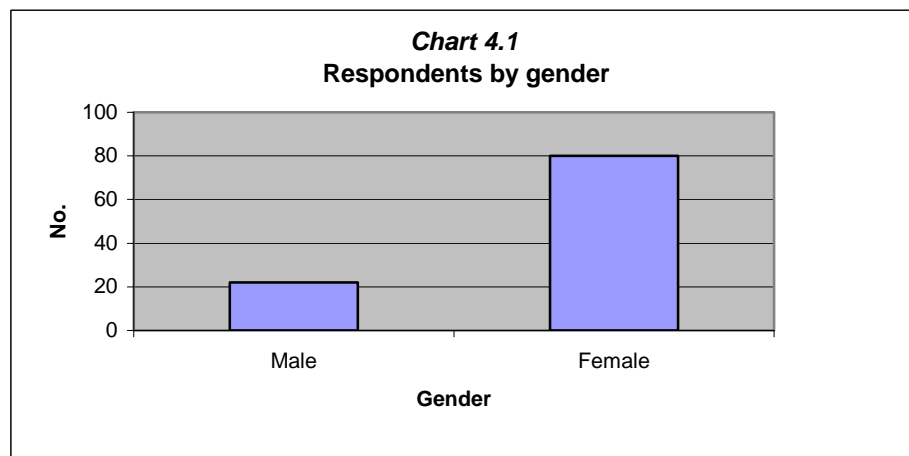
This is the global term for the many people who provide the back up to the Fire Service. They are responsible for the human resource issues, pay roll, health & safety, procurement etc. Support staff, do not generally have a uniform although community fire safety staff do have some corporate work wear.

#### 4.2 Personal Details

The first 3 questions were to establish the gender age and ethnicity of the respondent.

##### 4.2.1 Gender

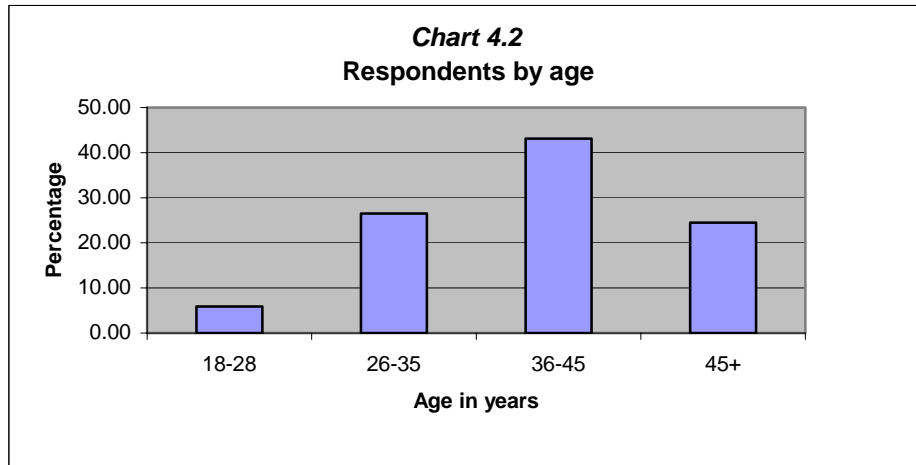
Of the 102 returns 78% were from female and 22% were from male respondents.



##### 4.2.2 Age

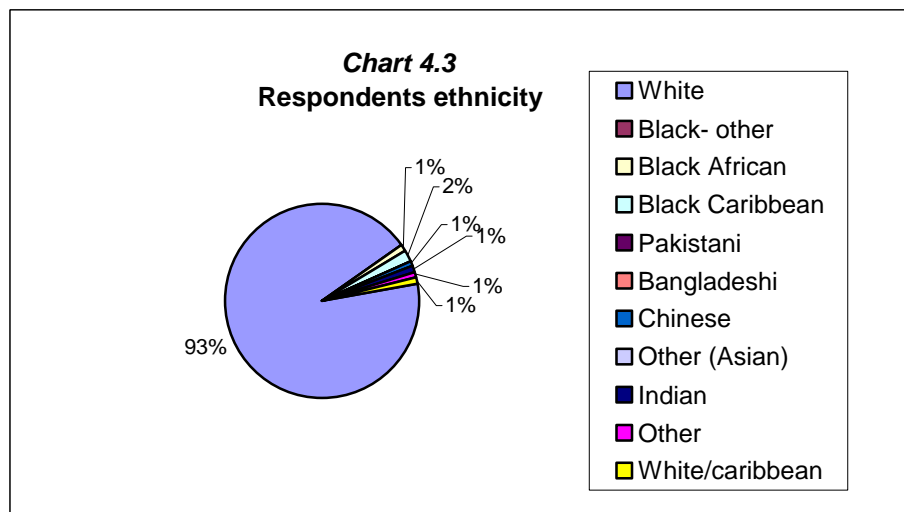
As the graph shows, the majority (43%) of respondents fell into the 36-45 years age category. Only 6% of respondents were in the 18-28 years bracket. The other two age brackets were of similar percentages, 26-35 years (26%) and 45+ years (25%)

A comparison between the responses and ages of female operational personnel will be made later on in this chapter.



#### 4.2.3 Ethnicity

The majority of respondents (95%) were white. Only 7 people were from non-white origin, of these 3 operational female firefighters two were black and one white Caribbean. These three people could be classed as minorities within a minority group.

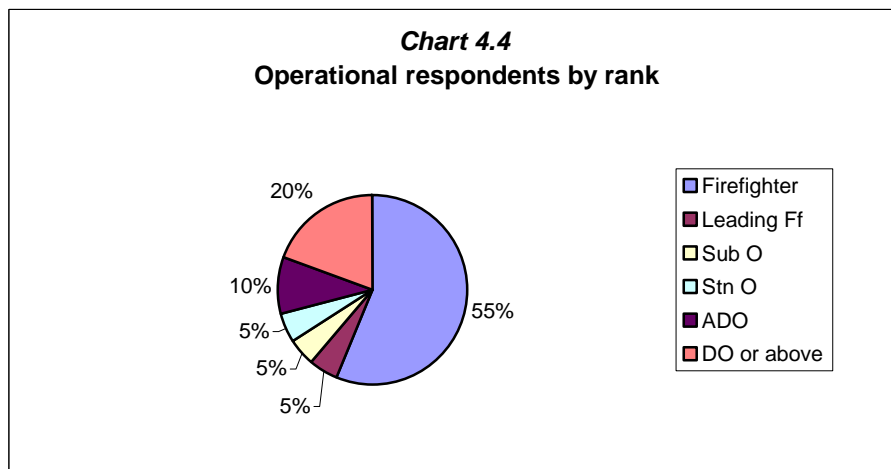


#### 4.2.4 Rank

60% of respondents were non-operational (support staff and control operators) and 40% were operational uniformed personnel. Of the 23 firefighters that responded, 22 were female.

Both Sub officer respondents were male and the two Station officers were female. Of the 4 Assistant Divisional Officers (A.D.O.) who responded, one is the only female A.D.O. in the whole country. All respondents of Divisional Officer (D.O.) rank or above could therefore only be male.

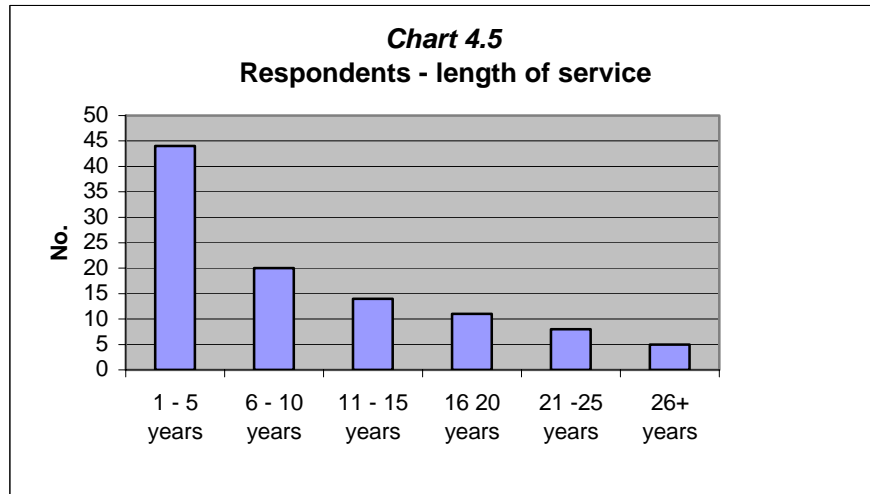
The majority of the operational respondents were female as the events where the questionnaires were distributed were aimed at women, such as networking women in the Fire Service and the Fire Brigades Union, women’s school.



#### 4.2.5 Length of service

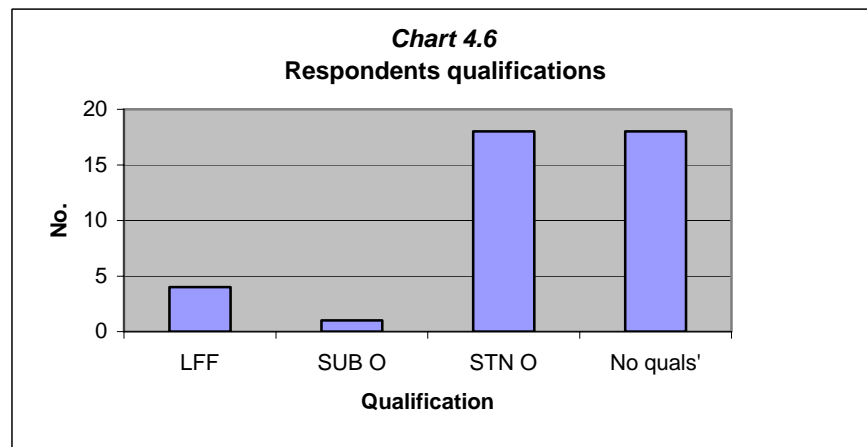
Of the total respondents to this questionnaire 43% (44) had only 1-5 years service. Of these 17 were female firefighters and 23 were support staff. It was interesting to note that of the 45 support staff respondents, 37 had less than 10 years service.

This could suggest that a lot of the people who provide Human Resource support to operational personnel are not aware of the pervasive culture of the Fire Service and may therefore find it difficult to understand the underlying issues that affect equality and fairness in the service. It is likely that these people innocently believe that harassment and bullying is a thing of the past. It may also suggest that people do not stay for long periods of time with the Fire Service. These areas were not investigated further within the constraints of this study



#### 4.2.6 Qualifications

Of the 41 responses from operational personnel, 18 had not passed any promotional examinations; all but one of these respondents were women.



This result was reflected in some of the comments made by female firefighters who felt under pressure from senior management to take qualifications. The women I spoke to often felt that if they did pass exams they may be encouraged to then go for promotion before they felt 'ready'. It is apparent from these conversations that women worry about being accepted by their peers and are even more worried about taking on a management role.

*‘Someone on my watch said; you don’t want to show an interest in promotion because you will be pushed through fast because you are a woman’.*

Female Station Officer 11-15 years service

It was also apparent, conversely, that they felt under pressure from their peers not to take exams. This could be direct pressure or it could also be the need to ‘fit in’ with the watch culture. Regardless of gender, firefighters who take exams will often endure a certain amount of ‘flak’ from colleagues. These are generally those who neither the interest nor possibly, ability to further their career. This pressure is increased as a woman or other minority because of the government targets. It has often been suggested that if you are of a ‘target’ group, the job is yours!

*‘ I once applied for a promotion in another brigade, another candidate actually said to me, there are three jobs, two will be appointed internally and the other is yours, they haven’t got a female officer here’*

Female Station Officer 11-15years service

As mentioned in the introduction, in 1999 the Home Office set very challenging targets for the recruitment of women and black minority ethnic firefighters. These targets also included targets for minority groups to hold positions of rank within the service. This immediately has the potential to undermine the women who have successfully achieved these positions and leave them open for comments of tokenism. Rosabeth Kanter (1993) was one of the first people to discuss ‘tokenism’, she explained the difficulties for women who were promoted to senior positions in predominately male dominated organisations. She also suggested that if the woman could ‘ride’ the storm of tokenism, the additional skills and qualities of woman managers would be recognised.

*‘Minority groups, once recruited are unlikely to pursue promotion because they are fighting for acceptance by their peers’*

Female Station Officer 11-15 years service

*‘This is not a problem solely restricted to the ‘older’ members of the crew who may have old fashioned ideas of women – even the younger ones who are relatively new to the job, view minorities as ‘tokens’.*

Female firefighter 1–5 years service

It is also important to acknowledge that not everyone, man or woman seeks additional responsibility or status. In fact this could have a detrimental affect on the running of the service if everyone wanted to progress up the career ladder.

*‘People have been asking me almost since I started why I don’t go for promotion, what it boils down to, is the reason I joined. The practical stuff with my hands, solving problems going into a fire occasionally, driving etc’*

Female Firefighter 16-20 years service

At the time of writing this report the promotion system within the British Fire Service changed. The historic system of formal examinations have now been replaced with an integrated personal development system (I.P.D.S.) This systems moves away from the ability to remember lists and formulae and now acknowledges an individual’s interpersonal and moral qualities.

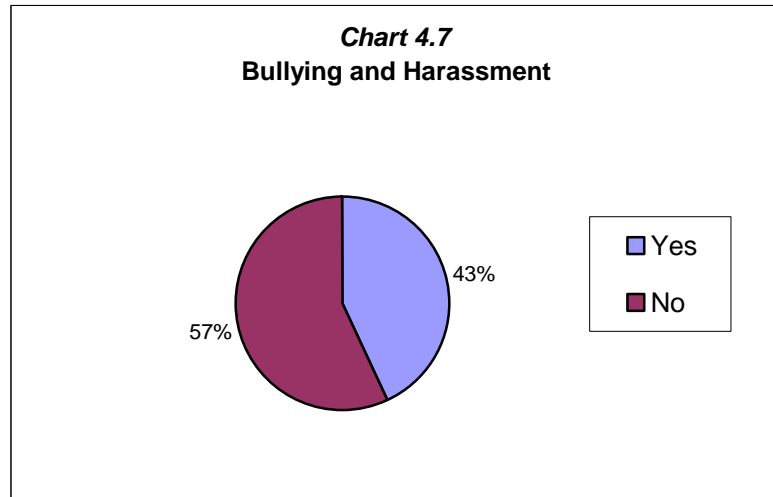
#### **4.3 Harassment & Bullying**

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the Fire Service has regularly been cited for issues of bullying and harassment. This section of questions was to establish whether this issue was as serious as previously recorded.

Question 2.1 asked if the respondent had ever been bullied or harassed at work. The combined results showed that 43% of all respondents had been bullied and/or harassed at work. This in itself is a disturbing result. However when comparing the result between the different groups i.e operational and support staff the results became even more alarming.



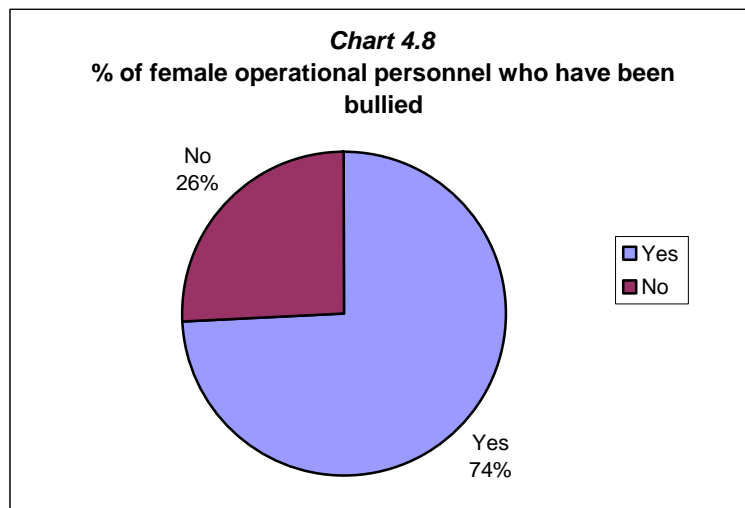




- One third of control personnel responded that they had been bullied.
- Operational male results showed that half of them had been bullied.
- One quarter of support staff responded that they had been bullied.

Treated in isolation these results show that bullying is still a serious problem within the Fire Service.

When the results of the female operational firefighters were analysed a staggering three quarters (74%) responded that they had been bullied.



In hindsight it would have been prudent to restrict the answer to over the last 3-5 years. This may have possibly reduced the figure and suggested that bullying was perhaps more of a problem in the past. Unfortunately this rationalisation is diluted when the operational female results were analysed in more detail.

Taking into consideration that 63% of all female firefighter respondents have served five or less years it would be fair to assume that the vast majority of bullying and harassment is current. Some of the comments, which have been taken from the questionnaires, support this analysis and show the seriousness of some of the harassment.

*‘There are ingrained cultures and behaviours that have continually reinforced and unofficially celebrated for many years’*

Support Staff 1-5 year’s service

*‘for 18 months the firefighter used to wait for me in the dark, he used to grab my bottom, the junior officers knew it was happening and didn’t do anything. I moved stations in the end.’*

Female Station Officer 11-15 years service

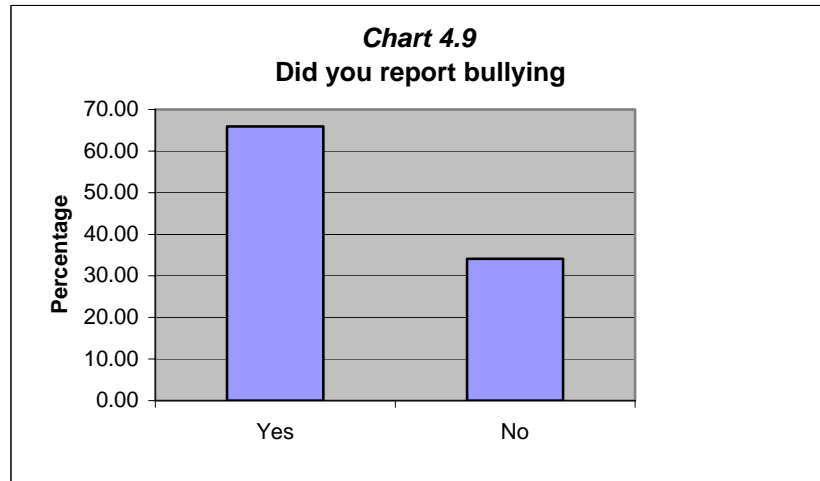
*‘I know one firefighter who had dog faeces put in her fire boots’*

Female Firefighter 6-10 year’s service.

Questions 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 asked the respondent if they had reported the harassment to anyone and if so how it had been dealt with.

Of the 44 people who had been bullied, it was encouraging to note that 66% had been able to report the problem to someone.



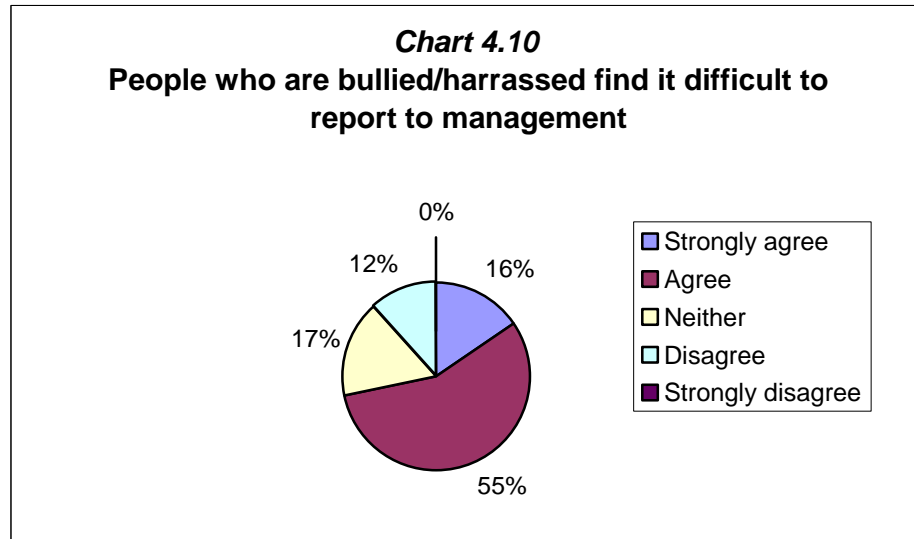


Unfortunately only 39% of respondents felt that the issue had been dealt with satisfactorily and only 25% were offered any form of counselling.

It would have been useful to ask if they had been bullied or harassed again would they report it a second time. From personal experience and interviews with other female firefighters, it is unlikely.

Often the consequences of bullying cases are thought of as worse than the initial bullying.

A further question asked respondents if they felt people who bullied found it difficult to report to management. 71% of respondents agreed with this statement, however 17% could not decide either way and 12% disagreed.



Of the respondents who disagreed the majority were support staff. This brings into question whether people within support roles such as human resources have the correct understanding of the Fire Service to equip them suitably to deal with bullying and harassment issues.

The degree of bullying varies greatly, but as some of the comments show the effects of bullying are long lasting.

*‘In my last brigade, whenever it was someone’s 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, it was traditional to soak them with a soda siphon. When it was my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, they rubbed curry powder in my face instead. These were people I thought liked me.’*

Indian female Leading Fire control operator – 17 years service.

*‘In June 2004, whilst attending a recruitment fair, a man came up to me and said, I hear it’s easier to get into the Fire Service if you are a woman or a person of colour’.*

Female Leading fire control operator 17 years service

Of the four discipline cases (3 formal & 1 informal), of which I have knowledge, the individuals who had been harassed or bullied were all transferred to other watches or stations. Management never forcibly moved them, but due to the fact that they felt ostracized and blamed by their colleagues.

This is almost a double persecution, as often other watch members are aware of the problem but do little to stop the unacceptable behaviour. This is often as a result of not wanting to draw attention to themselves and risking being bullied as well.

*‘people who claimed to be my friend and colleague, stood by and watched. Only a couple of years down the line, when I had moved station did one of them apologise for not trying to stop him.’*

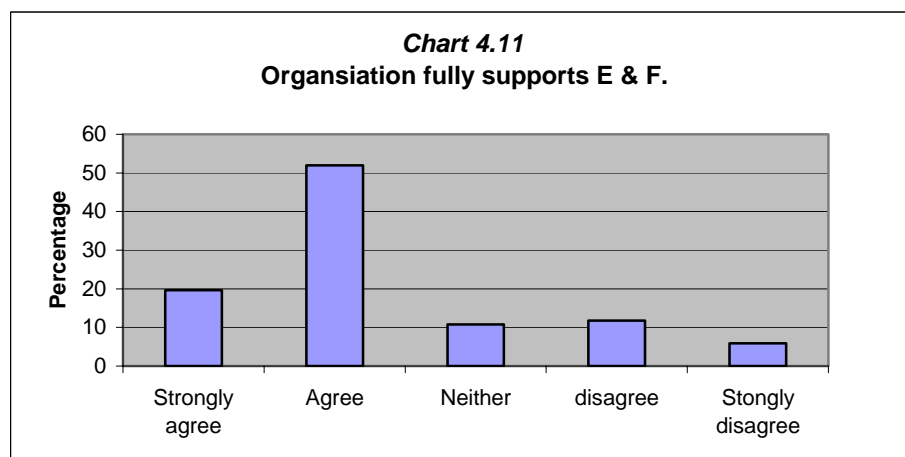
Female firefighter 11-15 years service

The final question in this section asked if the respondent knew anyone else who had been bullied. An outrageous result of 72% stated that they did. This figure is comparable with the number of female firefighters who had been bullied.

#### 4.4 Equality & Fairness

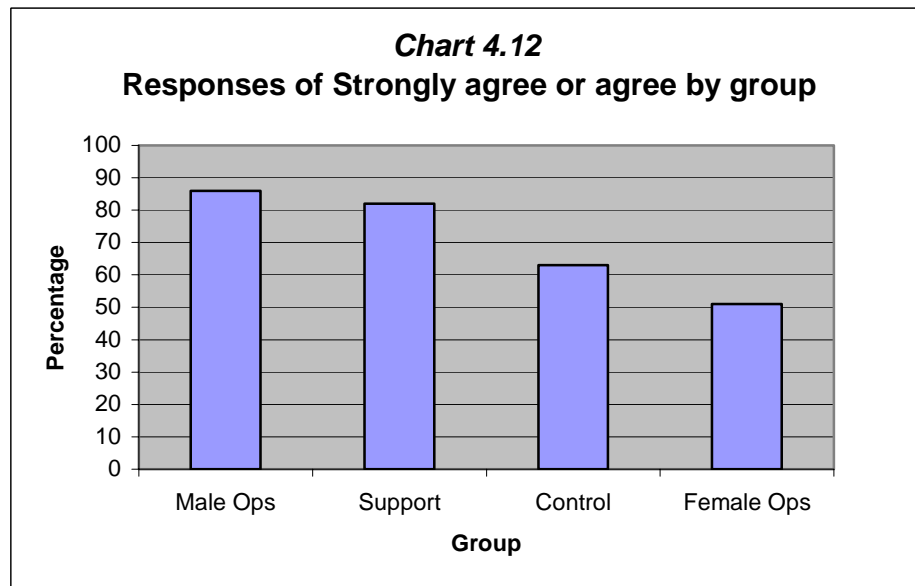
The next set of questions covered general topics about equality and fairness (E & F) in the Fire Service. Both the individuals’ personal view, and their perception of the organisations views, of E & F.

When asked if their organisation fully supported E & F, 72% of all respondents replied either ‘strongly agree or agree’.



Once again, when the responses were broken down by the four groups the percentages that replied ‘strongly agree or agree’ were;

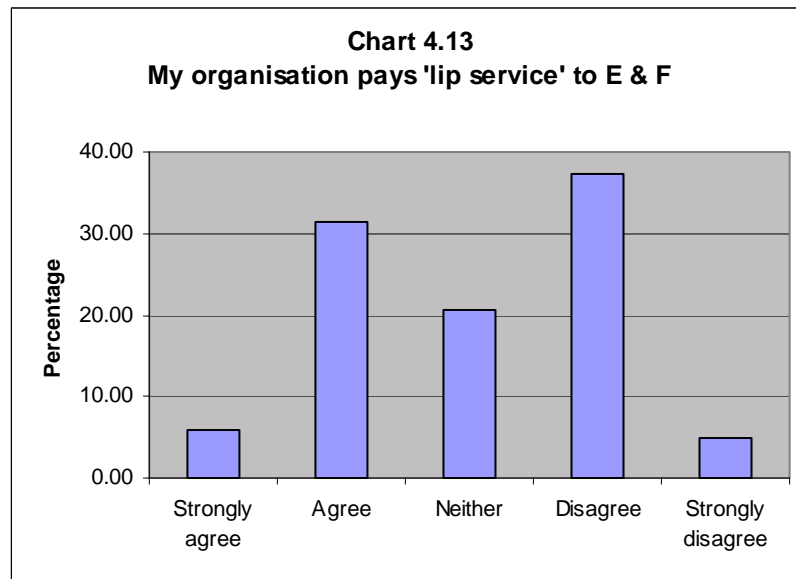
Male operational (86%), Support staff (82%), Control staff (63%) and female operational (51%).



Not surprisingly the female operational result is much lower than the others. This supports the high number of women who have reported bullying. It also reflects that the organisation is possibly apportioned blame for the unacceptable behaviour of individuals. The male operational result may also reflect that the majority of these respondents were high-ranking officers who perhaps answered with what they desired for their own brigade or their own personal view, rather than how their organisation really is. It may also be that lower ranks are unlikely to be open and honest about their views relating to E & F and therefore will answer as per policy to avoid discipline.

The next question asked if the respondent felt that their organisation paid ‘lip service’ to equality and fairness.



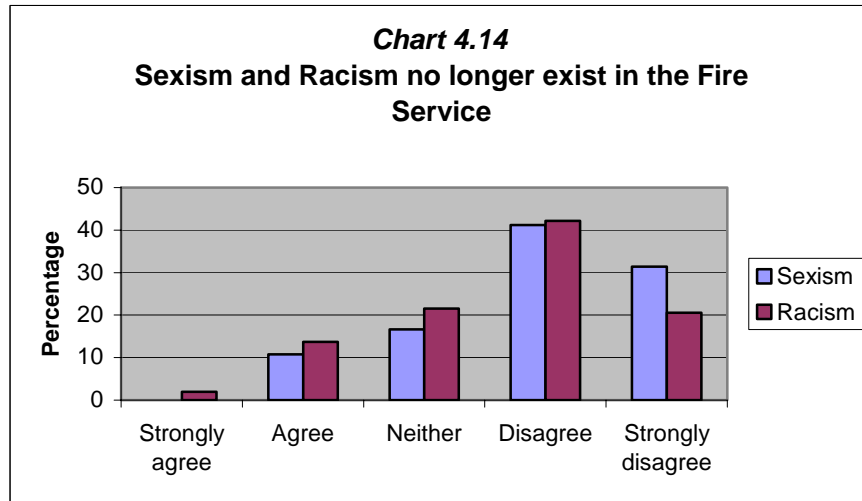


I expected this result to be a mirror image of the previous question, it is strange therefore to note that almost 37% of respondents felt that their organisation still paid lip service to E & F, this suggests that some people felt that their organisation could fully support E & F whilst paying 'lip service' to it!!

#### **4.5 Sexism and Racism**

The next two questions asked if the respondent felt sexism and racism no longer existed in the Fire Service. These questions were very direct and the results were quite surprising. My pre-understanding was that anyone who was not of minority status would only answer 'neither' or disagree with the statement. Similarly it seemed probable that minority groups would be more likely to strongly disagree with the statement.

Of the 11 people(10.78%) who responded that sexism no longer exists in the Fire Service, 2 were control staff(male), 8 were support staff (5 female) and one was a male officer of above Divisional Officer rank. Interestingly this same officer responded that racism did still exist.



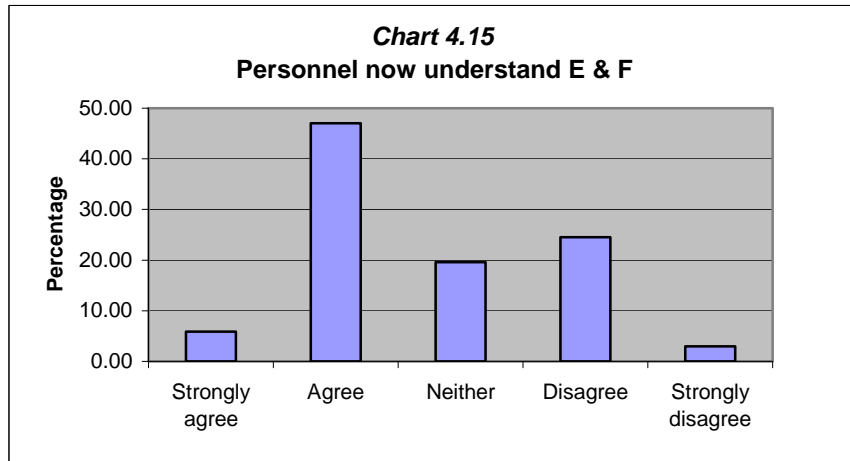
All female operational respondents answered, either ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to both questions.

The concerning issue arising from these results is that all the minority group member respondents feel strongly that sexism and racism is still a problem and yet some of the people who write the policies and provide the support to these same groups do not portray the same issues.

When asked if their organisation encouraged a strong E & F culture it was pleasing to note that 65% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Of the operational female respondents 13 also agreed, this perhaps suggests that it is individuals that do not support E & F rather than the organisation as a whole. Once again the support staff response was very positive to this questions 77% of support staff felt the organisation had a strong E & F culture, again the concern this raises is that support staff may not be as receptive to the needs of minority groups if they truly believe that the organisation does not have problems with sexism, racism, harassment and bullying.

Question 3.10 asked the respondent if they felt personnel now understood E & F. as the graph shows almost 53% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement and 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed, Of the 20% who replied ‘neither’ it is possible that they felt they could not make an overall assumption about all personnel.

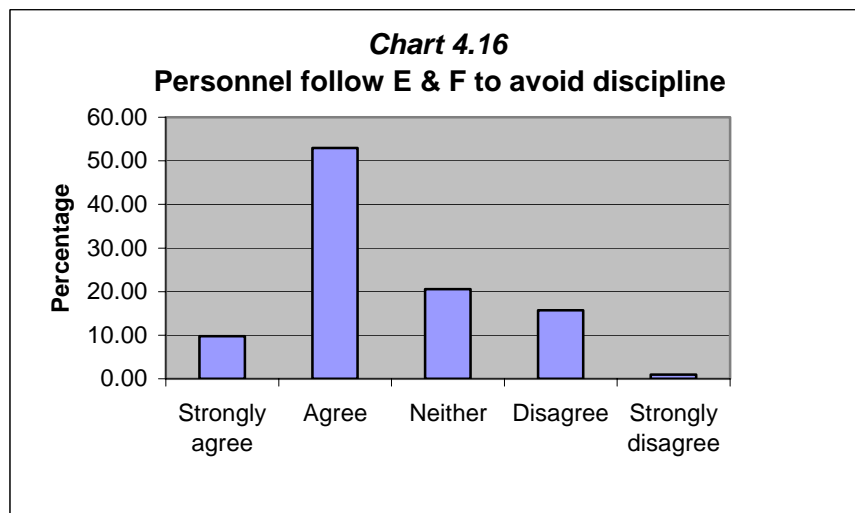




The following question perhaps put the previous one in perspective. By asking if personnel followed E & F to avoid discipline it showed that people understood the concept of E & F and also knew what they could or couldn't 'get away' with. A high percentage (62%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that E & F was followed to avoid discipline.

*'Much of the Fire Service and my own brigade has changed but at station level there are still pockets of antiquated thinking'*

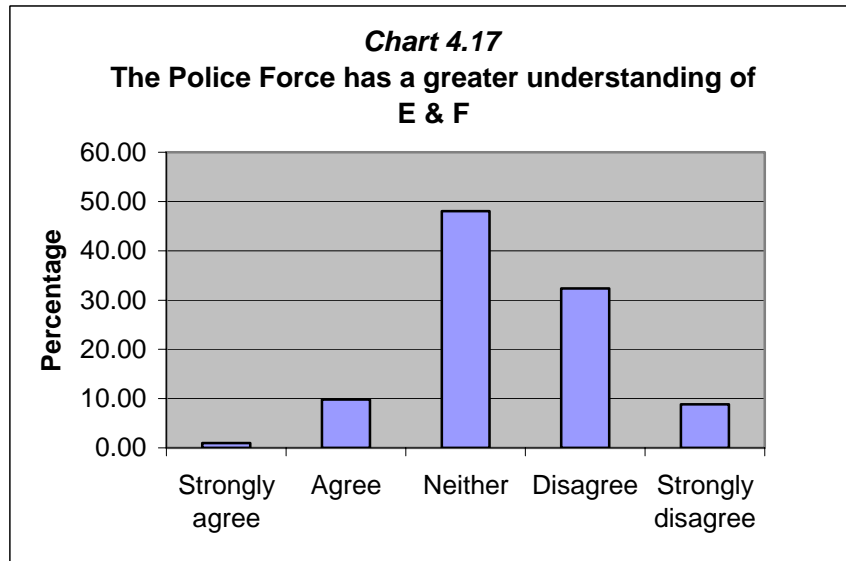
Female firefighter 1–5 years service



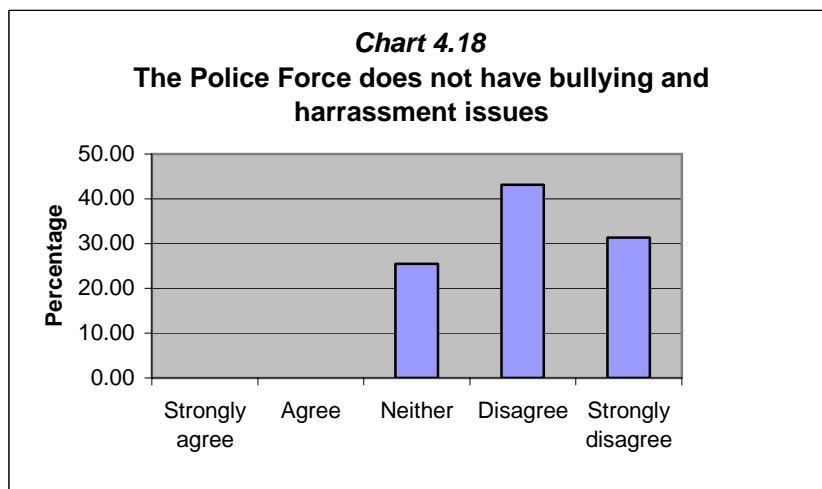
Two additional questions relating to the Police Force were included to compare the views of personnel about another similar organisation.

The first question asked the respondent if they felt the Police Force had a greater understanding of E & F.

Almost half the respondents answered that they neither agreed nor disagreed, this could suggest that they could not make an informed decision on the subject. 41% of respondents stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.



The second question relating to the Police Force suggested that they did not have bullying or harassment issues.

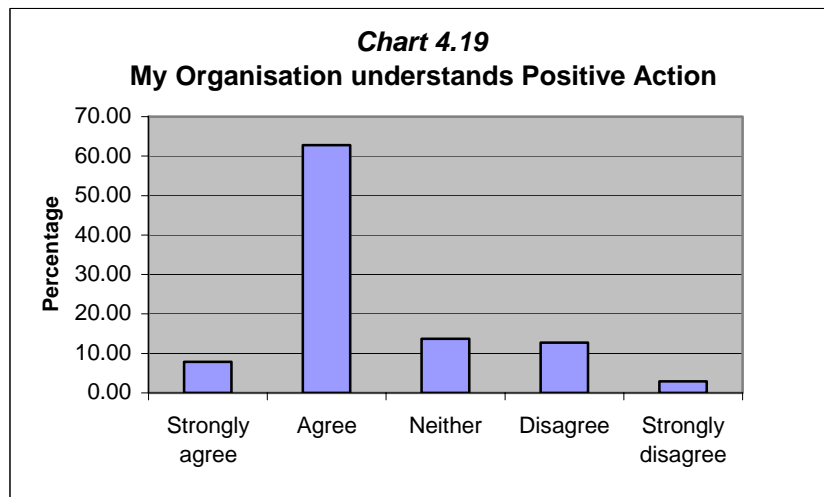


Clearly this statement was not supported as almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

#### 4.6 Positive Action

As discussed in the introduction and literature review, positive action is used to encourage and increase the number of women and black minority ethnic candidates. This subject is a very emotive topic and if not dealt with properly can cause friction and resistance toward minority groups.

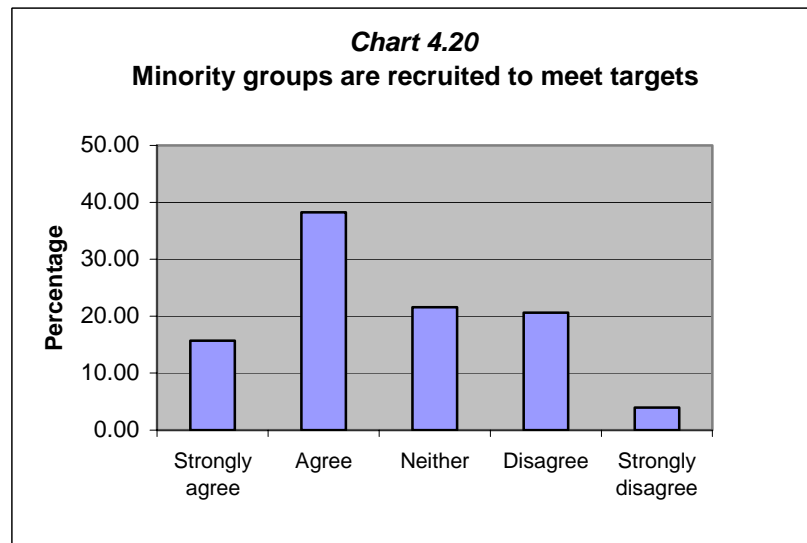
The first question asked was to ascertain if respondents felt their organisation understood positive action.



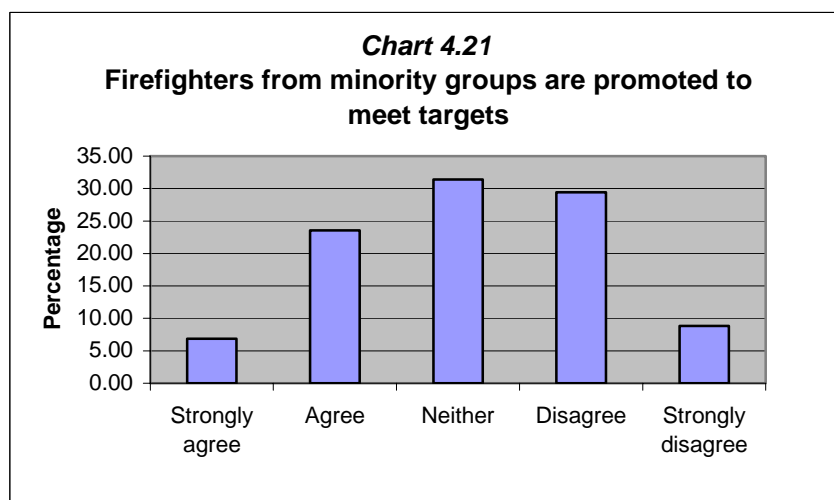
On the surface this looks quite a positive result, over 70% of respondents felt that positive action was understood by their organisation. Unfortunately the 30% who did not agree with this statement were predominately, uniformed personnel. This once again suggests that the non-uniformed or support staff have either (a) a better understanding of what positive action means or (b) they do not understand how it affects the people affected by positive action. It could perhaps suggest both.

The next question asked if people from minority groups were recruited in order to meet targets. This was, to me one of the saddest responses, over 54% of respondents agreed with this statement. Almost half of the female firefighters agreed with the

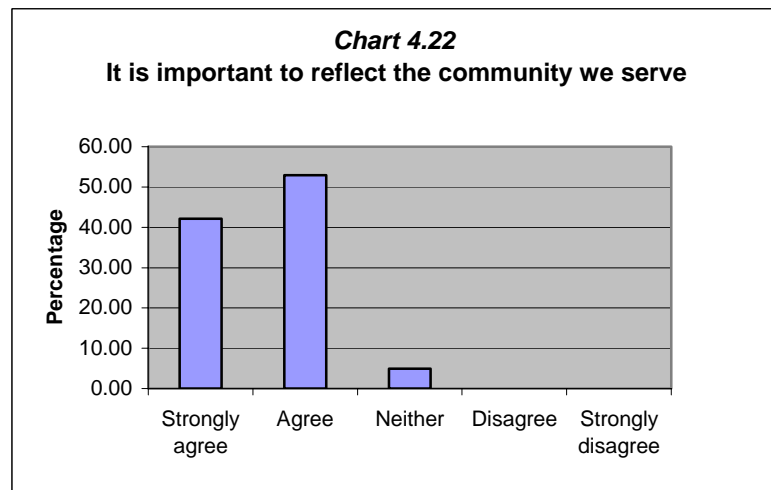
statement. It would have been interesting to have asked if individuals felt they had been employed because they were a minority.



As a follow on to the previous question, respondents were asked if minority groups were promoted to meet targets. I expected this result to be very similar to that about initial recruitment; however respondents seemed to believe that minority groups are not as likely to be promoted because they are a minority as they are to be recruited initially. This is perhaps because many people are not aware that there are targets relating to the advancement and promotion of minority groups.

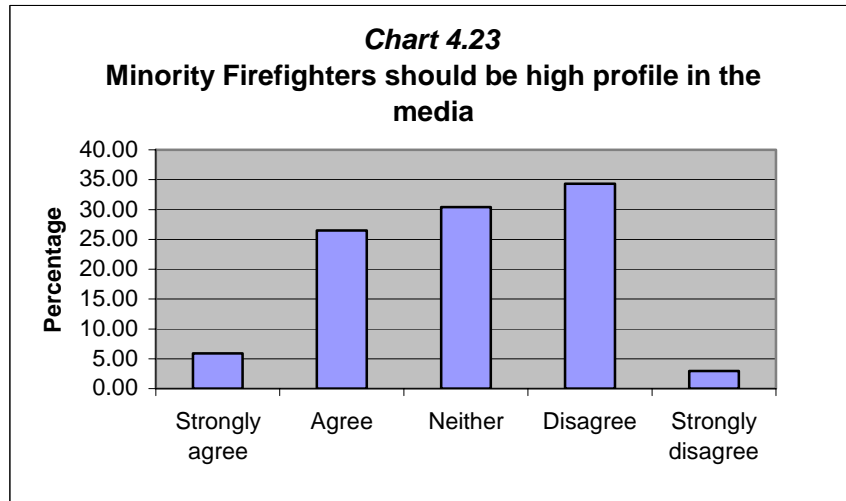


On a more positive note the next question asked if minority groups were encouraged to reflect our diverse communities. Only 6.5% of respondents disagreed with this comment. A very similar question, worded slightly differently resulted in an even more positive response. When asked if it was important to reflect the community we serve, all respondents replied that they agreed or strongly agreed.



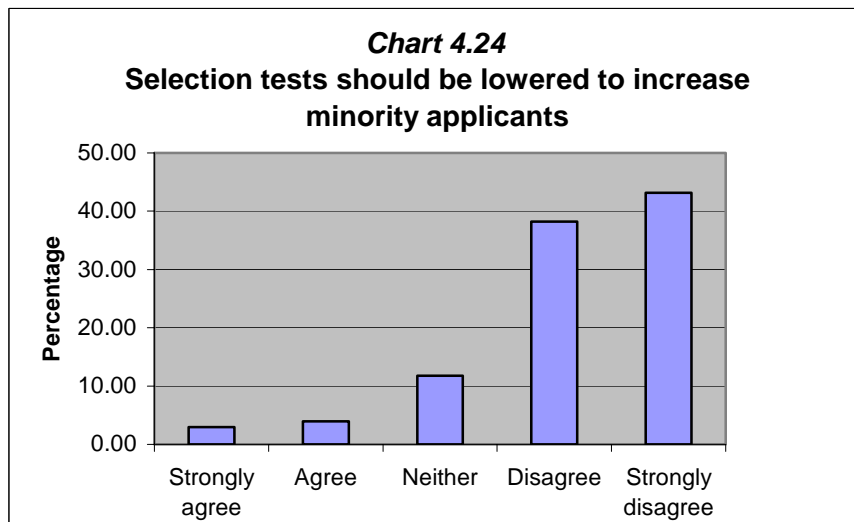
When asked whether firefighters from minority groups should be high profile in the media, the responses showed that in the four groups an even number in each agreed or disagreed with this statement. This I confess to being quite surprised by. I would have expected a more negative response from uniformed personnel and a more positive response from support staff. This hopefully suggests that either people are seeing the need for raising the profile of minority groups or possibly that media coverage is being carried out in a more inclusive way i.e. by showing people within a team not as a singular person.



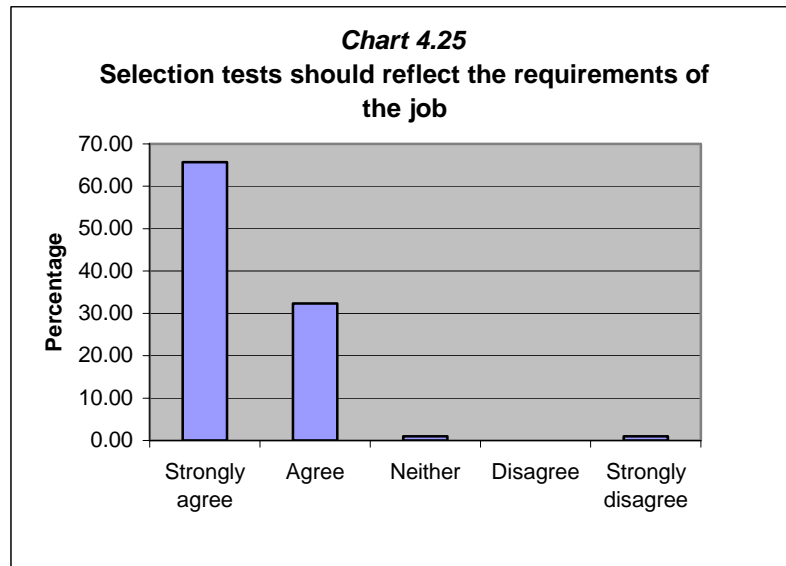


Two questions asked about the selection tests, currently used in the Fire Service. One suggested that they should be lowered to increase the number of minority applicants. Although the vast majority (81%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this suggestion, it was interesting to note that 12 people (11.8%) did not appear to have an opinion on the matter, and 7 people (7%) strongly agreed that selection tests should indeed be lowered.

Of the female operational personnel 92.5% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, this suggests that the serving female firefighters strongly oppose any relaxation to entry requirements.



The follow up question relating to selection tests asked if the selection tests should reflect the requirements of the job. Not surprisingly 98% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, one respondent did not express an opinion and one strongly disagreed with the statement. It can only be assumed that this individual did not read the question correctly.

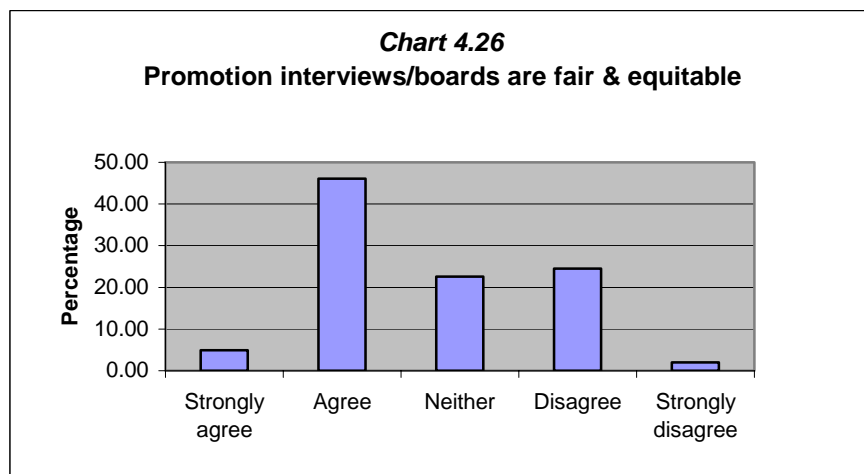


The results to this question suggest that it is important that when selection tests are changed that their relevance and suitability to identifying the correct calibre of person is carefully assessed. It is also imperative that any changes are communicated properly to the workforce, unfortunately any change in criteria that, for example lowers a weight lifting requirement, is automatically identified as a way to let more women pass the selection tests. The fact that Health & Safety manual handling regulations have forced these changes for the good of all workers does not seem to be made clear.

It is also important for the sake of women that the tests do reflect the requirements of the job. It does not benefit a recruit, of any sex if the selection tests are easier than the recruits' course content. This is automatically putting the recruit in a position where they do not have the required physical strength to succeed. This will potentially result in the recruit leaving the Fire Service or continually struggling to meet the required competencies.

The final question, which, has been categorised under Positive Action, related to promotion interviews and promotion boards. The question asked if respondents felt they were fair and equitable. It is disappointing to note that only 37% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. A similar percentage disagreed or strongly disagreed whilst 29% did not show any particular opinion.

This result shows a serious lack of trust in the promotion system, which, will hopefully be addressed, with the introduction of the new Integrate Personal Development System.



#### **4.7 Tolerance & Acceptance**

This section of questions was designed to assess the overall perceived acceptance or tolerance to minority groups, especially women in the Fire Service.

It will be useful for the reader to identify the difference between acceptance and tolerance.

The Encarta dictionary gives the following definitions;

**Acceptance** – ‘to tolerate something without protesting or attempting to change it’ or ‘willingness to treat somebody as a member of a group or social circle’

**Tolerance** – ‘the act of putting up with something or somebody irritating or otherwise unpleasant’ or ‘the ability to put up with harsh or difficult conditions’

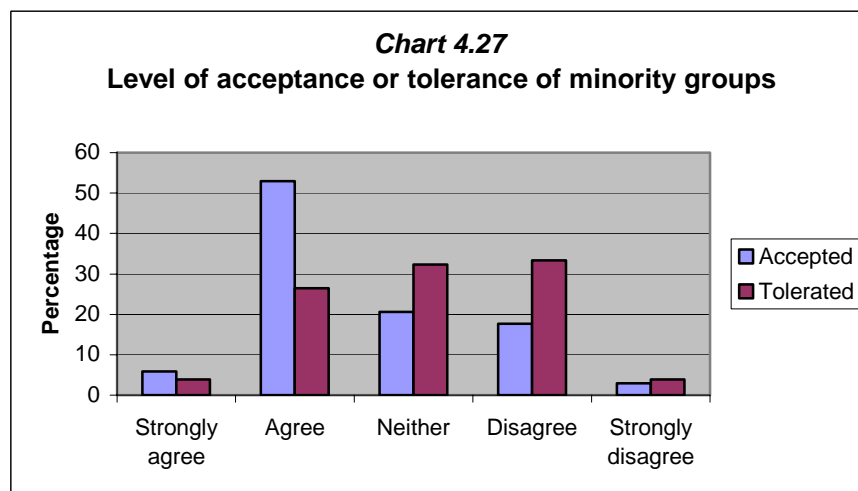


Obviously it cannot be assumed that all respondents agree with these definitions.

The first question in this section asked if respondents agreed that minority groups were accepted in the Fire Service.

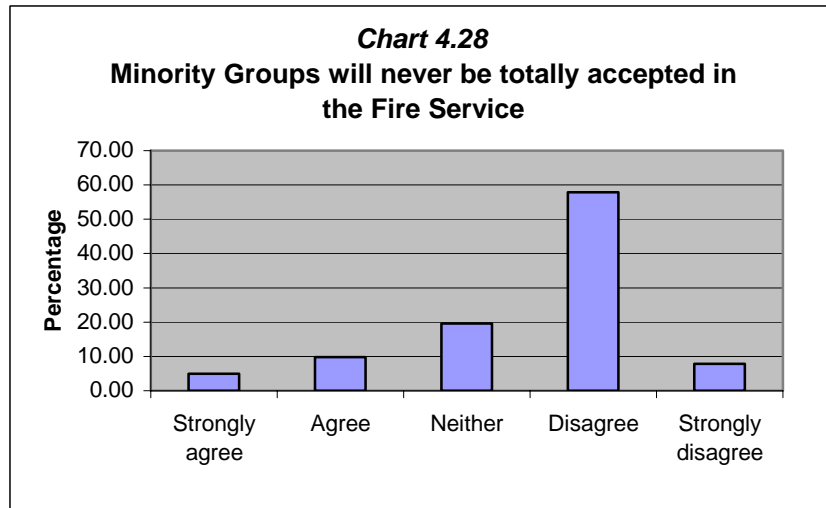
Although 58% of respondents agreed with this statement it is disturbing to note that 37% did not feel minority groups were accepted and 32% could not specify whether they agreed or disagreed. Once again when these results are broken down it shows that 41% of female firefighters did not agree with this statement, whereas only 11% of support staff disagreed. This continues to suggest, as with previous questions that there is a lack of understanding from support staff relating to the issues and problems encountered by minority personnel.

A similar question was asked about the tolerance of minority groups. I expected the results to be comparable with the question on acceptance. However the results could be interpreted in two ways. The results of the previous question have been included to display the differences.

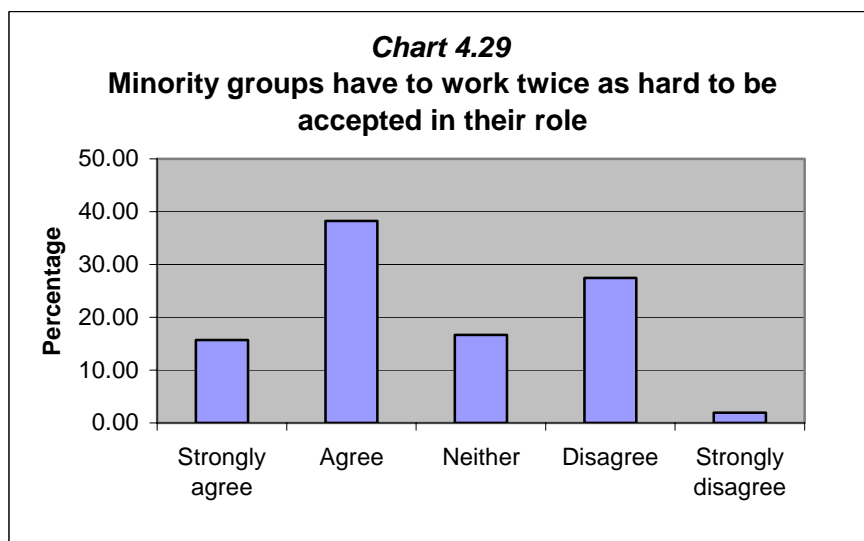


As the graph shows far fewer people felt that minority groups were tolerated in comparison to accepted. This could suggest that the respondents' view of tolerance is different to the definition used in this study and therefore the result is a negative response. It could however suggest that respondents disagreed with statement as they actually felt that minority groups were accepted.

On a more positive note, the next question asked respondents if they thought minority groups would never be accepted in the Fire Service. It is heartening to see that 66% of respondents disagreed that minority groups would never be accepted. This still suggests that there are still barriers preventing the integration of minority groups in the service.



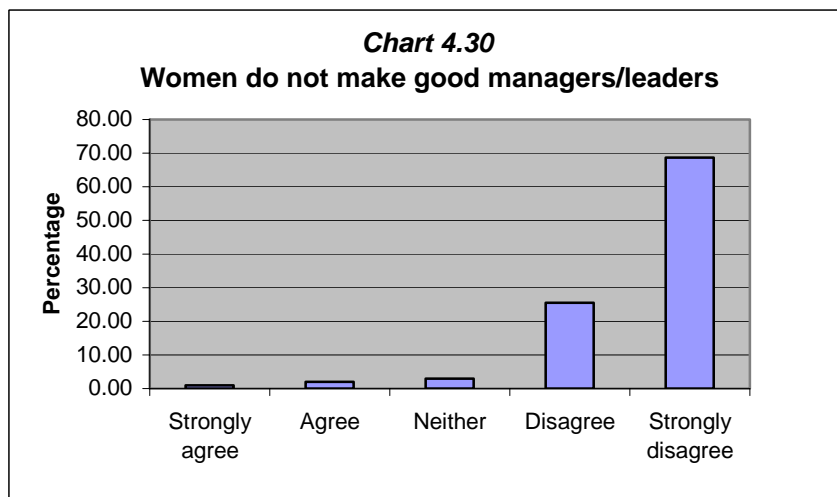
When asked if minority groups had to work twice as hard to be accepted in their role, over half (54%) respondents agreed with the statement. Of the 16% that replied neither agree or disagree one person stated that she could not comment as she was not a minority in her role within the support staff.



Once again the majority (92%) of women agreed with this statement whereas the other groups responses were spread across the range of responses.

This response may suggest that women and other minority groups feel personally that they have to prove themselves or it could suggest they are made to feel that way by their peers.

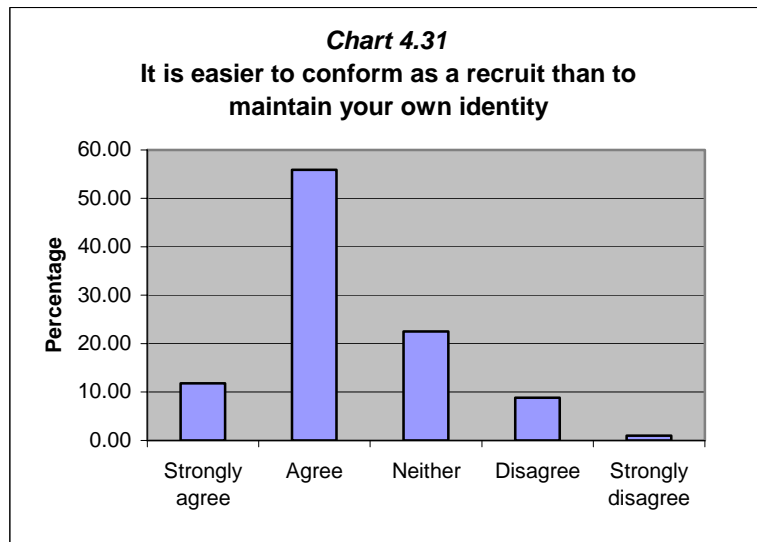
The next question asked if people felt women made good leaders/managers. 94% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women make good managers. Only 3 respondents did not agree. On closer analysis these individuals were all white males, one being white male firefighter, one white male control room operator and one white male support staff. It would have been interesting to see if these results would have changed had the question asked about operational women managers/officers.



The next question asked if respondents felt that women brought different qualities to the Fire Service. Only one person gave a negative response to this question, strangely this was a female firefighter. This response suggests that people agree women are different, it now necessary to identify these differences in a positive light which will enhance the Fire Service.

The final question in this section asked if it is easier to conform as a recruit than to maintain your own identity. Only 10 respondents (9%) disagreed with this statement, 22% responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed, most of who were support staff. Of the respondents who disagreed it was surprising to note that 5 of the 10

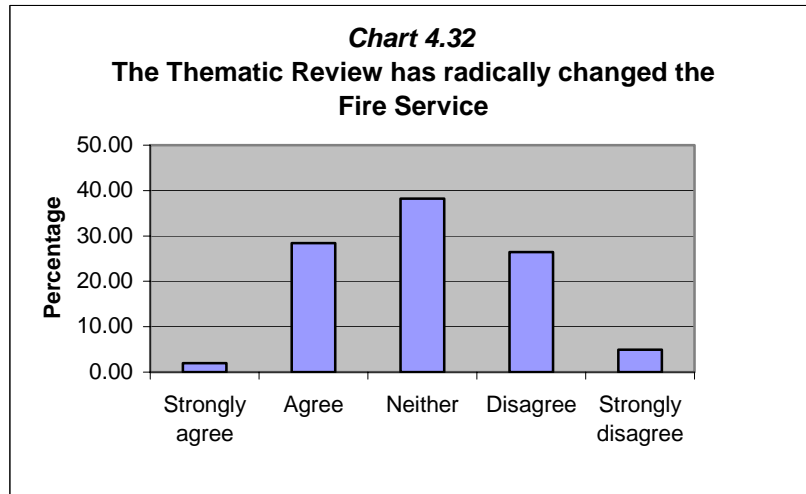
respondents were female firefighters. It is hoped that these individuals are so strong in character and personality that they have not felt pressured to change. Unfortunately the result of those who agree with the statement 67% suggests that it is easier to conform to the behavioural ‘norms’ so entrenched in the Fire Service culture.



#### 4.8 *Thematic Review*

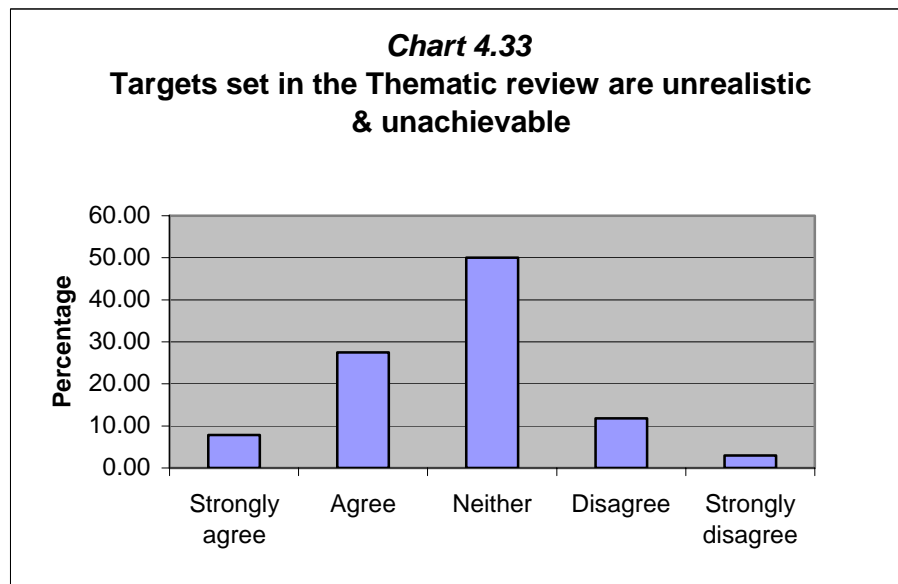
This final section asked the views on the targets set by the Government as a result of the Thematic Review mentioned earlier in this report. One of the most surprising outcomes of this section was that many people had not heard of the document and therefore the subsequent targets were neither understood nor even considered by personnel.

Many respondents answered in a non-committal way and many made various comments stating they had never heard of it. The majority of these people were support staff. 31% of respondents disagreed that the review had radically changed the service. Of those who felt it had affected the service 33% of female firefighters agreed with the statement, however whether they felt it was in a positive or negative way was not asked.



The final question asked if respondents felt the targets set by Government were unrealistic and unachievable. Once again the non-committal responses (50%) generally were due to the lack of knowledge or awareness about the targets and the thematic review.

Only 14% thought the targets were achievable but the greater number of respondents felt they were unrealistic and unachievable.



This document is less than 5 years old and seems to have been forgotten, in fact it suggests that perhaps the vast majority of people do not know where or why the

targets were set. It is therefore unlikely that the need to embrace diversity is even understood.



## **5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The previous chapter has summarised the results of the questionnaire and given the reader a clear understanding, of the views and feelings of a number of employees of the British Fire Service in their different roles.

This chapter will provide a summary for the reader of the key facts and findings of the study. This summary will be based on evidence obtained from the academic literature used during the research phase, but will primarily focus on the results of the questionnaire and their overall strategic implications for the Fire Service. It will identify the limitations to the research and also propose future research study.

The aim of this study was to critically evaluate the effects of the targets for the recruitment of women into the Fire Service, set by Government in Fire Service Circular 6/1999. The circular was produced as direct result of the Thematic Review of Equality & Fairness in the Fire Service.

The questionnaire for this study was designed to understand the thoughts and feelings of a cross section of Fire Service personnel from around the Country. By including people from non-minority backgrounds it has enabled a balanced and objective analysis of the results. It has also allowed a comparison between the different roles within the service.

In order to achieve the overall aim of the study, three objectives were set to ensure the study area remained focused.

The issue of remaining focused is one with which I have fought throughout this study. The wealth of information that has flooded in as a result of the questionnaire and informal meetings has tempted me on many occasions to investigate the very many different issues relating to the topic chosen.

The main one is the close linkage between the different minority groups such as black minority ethnic colleagues and the gay and lesbian colleagues. All of these have similar yet unique issues in their working lives.

The main limitation of this study is the fact that it is a snap shot in time, it is likely that many of the respondents will change their views over time. This may be as the result of changing a place of work, suffering harassment or bullying for the first time or possibly just changing due to maturity or a change in personal circumstances.

It would have been interesting to have tracked these individuals longitudinally over a period of 5-10 years to monitor their views.

Future research is still a possibility, as I am fortunate to have been provided with contact details of many of the respondents.

### **5.1 Objective One**

The first objective was to identify barriers to minority groups in particular women for joining the Fire Service.

It became apparent during my research that there are many barriers for women to overcome to join the Fire Service, but also there are many barriers for the Fire Service to overcome to encourage more women.

The first issue, which perhaps needs to be accepted, is the fact that only a small percentage of women will ever consider or pursue a career in the Fire Service. As evidence in the literature review showed, only one of female student, of school leaving age, from 118 surveyed, stated that she would consider the Fire Service as a career.

*‘Not many girls even think about becoming a firefighter. I believe we should target the adults of the future, not wait until they are young adults.’*

Female Leading Firefighter 6-10 years service

Positive action events are held at career fairs; industry days and other public events are directed, generally at young adults (16+). Certainly the pro-active measures taken



by Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service has, as previously mentioned increased the number of female applicants substantially (136% increase in 2001/02).

This in itself should have been seen as a highly successful result and a credit to the people involved in the positive action events. Unfortunately the service was measured purely on how many minorities were recruited and not how many applicants there had been.

These increases suggest that more women are considering the profession of firefighter. It may also identify that the women who do apply are not fully aware of the required skills and competencies to pass the job related tasks.

Greater analysis of the reasons for women and other minorities failing the tests should be analysed to ensure that the selection tests are not discriminating indirectly against applicants.

It also essential to the credibility of current serving fire-fighters, particularly those from minority groups that the selection tests are not lowered unnecessarily to recruit more minority groups. This not only undermines the level at which serving firefighters joined the profession but also if people are allowed to join the Fire Service without, for example sufficient upper body strength, it is likely that the individual will struggle throughout the recruit course phase. This often leads to rumour and gossip about an individual and their ability. This results in increased scrutiny from colleagues when the recruit firefighter is assigned to a station.

The review by the Government rightly identified issues preventing women from joining the service, but did not take into account that, to the majority of women the Fire Service has not been and never will be a consideration.

It is apparent that the balance of gender and the perceived roles of women within society are still very much an influencing factor here. Many women are still fighting for equal pay to men whilst employed to carry out the same job.

More time should have been spent ensuring that the few women who did want to join the service were accepted as individuals and supported in a positive manner by their peers and managers.

The imposition of targets on the Fire Service was not about to reverse the social culture and genderisation of the female gender. Its greatest achievement was possibly to potentially alienate the women already in the service by not quashing rumours that the only way targets could be achieved would be by the lowering of standards to allow women to join.

The thought of lowering selection tests is clearly and strongly opposed by serving female firefighters, 93% of female respondents to the questionnaire did not believe that the selection criteria should be lowered to increase the number of minority applicants.

The results also show that other Fire Service personnel feel that standards have been lowered not only for recruitment but also the promotion of minority groups, only 27% of respondents disagreeing that minority groups are promoted to reach targets. These responses are a sad reflection of the feelings towards minority groups within the service.

They also provide a means of identifying a way forward. Fire Services need to be transparent in the way they recruit. The main issues are to educate existing operational personnel in the terminology relating to minority groups recruitment. The difference between *positive action* and *positive discrimination* and *targets* and *quotas* would be a good starting point for all ranks and roles within any organisation.

Effective equality training is essential in the modern Fire Service; it needs to be delivered by managers/trainers who genuinely believe in equality and fairness for all. It is essential for training to include the opportunity for topic discussion and those delivering the training must have the confidence, ability and authority to challenge unacceptable comments, beliefs and behaviours. The Fire Service must stop turning its back on bullying and harassment and deal with it in the right way at the right time. Behaviour, which contravenes service policy, should be challenged every time. It is

not possible to change what people believe outside of work but it must be made clear that whilst at work it will not be tolerated.

The new Integrated Personnel Development system should, if not corrupted, weed out those who previously learnt equality statements for interview and yet had no desire or understanding of what it meant or how to implement it. This has to be a positive step forward for the service.

## **5.2 Objective Two**

The second aim of this study was to ‘explore relevant cultural behaviour and how it affects the acceptance/tolerance of minority groups within the service’.

The results of the questionnaire concluded without a doubt that the culture of the Fire Service and the subsequent behaviours which have evolved, have changed little if at all, certainly during my 12 years of service.

*‘There are ingrained cultures and behaviours that have continually been reinforced and unofficially celebrated for many years’.*

Support staff 1-5 years

Bullying and harassment is still widely reported by all Fire Service personnel across the country to some degree or another.

The staggering and saddening result of 74% of female respondents reporting to have been bullied or harassed, most of whom have served 5 or less years or less proves that this issue is still current and showing little sign of improvement.

It is of no wonder that female firefighters and other minority employees are reluctant to volunteer as positive role models for positive action events. Participating in such events is likely to bring unwanted attention to the individual by their stepping outside the boundary of the closed watch culture and offering themselves up as ‘something special’, ‘token’ or ‘management puppet’.

It is easier to conform to the watch behaviour therefore reducing the chance of being subject to any adverse comments or treatment from colleagues. The fact that 69% of respondents replied that they felt it was easier to conform as a recruit shows the deep need or desire to be accepted by ‘the watch’. This is a not just minority groups it is all new firefighters.

If the British Fire Service is to modernise and reflect its diverse community it must provide working conditions, which allow people to maintain and be proud of their own identity. This can only be achieved through strong leadership, ready to challenge on a daily basis the current watch culture. It is also through the empowerment of individuals who will rightly, as with any job, seek acceptance from their colleagues but should be able to be themselves for this to be achieved and not by becoming an ‘honorary male’.

The comment *‘I just want to be one of the lads’*, which has been said by so many, including myself, needs to become a quote of the past. True equality will allow people to part of the watch in their own right.

It is unfortunate that each female or black minority ethnic firefighter still appears to have to prove her/himself, but that the general consensus is that minority groups are tolerated and not fully accepted.

*‘He referred to all women as ‘necessary evils’, no one wants them, but every station has to have one. He joined at the same time as me’*

Female Firefighter 1-5 years service

Although new selection criteria is supposed to identify those people who understand the need for a diverse workforce and these beliefs are often questioned at interview, the service is still battling against extremely strong watch cultures. Often this results in firefighters adopting and subsequently believing the views of other watch members in order to ‘fit in’ with their colleagues.

*‘A firefighter who joined this year said that at ‘his’ station a female would never fit in or take the banter etc. when I challenged him about these sexist attitudes he said he agreed but didn’t want to stick his neck out with his new colleagues’*

Support Staff 1-5 years service

### **5.3 Objective Three**

This objective looked at how the Police Force supported minority groups and how they encouraged increased minority applications.

The two greatest advantages the Police Force has, is that of a greater awareness of the Police Force from the general public and a higher number of women who consider it as a career from early in their life. This will result in higher application rate than in the Fire Service without any additional positive action.

Secondly is that the police advertise nationally and appear to have fewer financial constraints that the Fire Service has. This is evident in the number of TV advertisements about joining the Police force using well-known TV and sports celebrities.

The police seem to have taken pro-active steps to support women officers and all women employees by creating the 'Gender Agenda'. This is a National venture and is supported publicly by the most senior officers. The agenda looks at family friendly working, such as Job share, flexi time, career breaks etc. It also encourages the empowerment of women through mentoring and training to allow them to achieve promotions if they desire. Above all it provides a support network for female employees.

Once again this is easier for the Police Force as they are not constrained by restrictive watch systems. Also the fact that the Government is increasing the number of Police Officers, the number of Firefighters is only ever likely to reduce in order to achieve the modernisation agenda demanded by the Government. This currently prevents the opportunity to offer flexible working.

The Fire Brigades Union has for some time offered support to women by running women's schools. It unfortunately is still predominately headed by men and is restricted to uniformed Fire Service personnel. It is also very politically driven.

The most effective support network currently available to women in my opinion is 'Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS). This network was set up for

women, by women and is inclusive to all women who work in the Fire Service. This encourages cross understanding of roles and experiences in all references. It is also non-politically driven.

Fire Services should encourage and support financially where possible meetings or attendance at meetings between uniformed and non-uniformed personnel. Mentoring of other women, whether within the same role or not will encourage awareness of experiences and also break down the ‘them and us’ which still exists in the Service.

Consideration into cross service networking i.e. Police and Fire Service should be given, this will create a wider pool of people to offer support and independent advice to women.

It is not suggested that the Police Force has reached utopia in this field but a lot is available for senior management to share, to improve the working environment for women in the Fire Service. The formation of a partnership between the two agencies could be very effective; it would allow multi agency recruitment and would enable the sharing of costs.



## 6.0 Reflection on the process

The results of this study are at times quite disturbing and require strong planning and leadership at a strategic level to counteract the damage sustained by the setting of the targets.

I have not been surprised by the results of this study, but my confidence in the research process has been enhanced by the openness and honesty of the respondents. This aligned with my own perspective, which has been built on substantial experience, and tacit knowledge has resulted in a valid and rigorous analysis, which is open to scrutiny.

My overall view is that the Government set totally unachievable targets, which resulted in further jeopardising the already fragile position of the minority groups within the Fire Service. This in turn gave Fire Services an excuse to ‘not achieve’ in the increase of minority groups.

This report gives senior managers the opportunity to understand the feelings of a number of employees from around the Country. It gives them the understanding to deal, in a more empathetic manner with victims of harassment and bullying and also those who feel they have been branded with the title of ‘token’.

The responses have been passionate and I believe honest, without which I could not have reached the conclusions given above.

Publication of a summary this document has been requested by the ‘Fire Magazine’, which is distributed nationally and a number of requests to receive the report in full have been made by senior officers and Networking Women in the Fire Service.



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## **8.0 Appendices**

Appendix A – Blank questionnaire