



Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The experience of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland, HC 159

Wednesday 15 September 2021

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Simon Hoare (Chair); Mr Gregory Campbell; Stephen Farry; Mr Robert Goodwill; Claire Hanna.

Questions 69 - 88

Witnesses

II: Sgt Richard Williams, Chair, Ethnic Minority Police Association; Andy George, President, National Black Police Association.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [National Black Police Association](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Richard Williams and Andy George

Q69 **Chair:** I welcome Sergeant Williams, the chair of the Ethnic Minority Police Association of Northern Ireland and Andy George, who is the President of the National Black Police Association. Gentlemen, you are very welcome. I want to kick off the questioning. How would you assess the approach today of the PSNI in responding to, tackling and seeking to avoid hate crime in Northern Ireland?

Andy George: Race hate crime has been a priority for the force for a number of years, but that has probably waned in recent years. As an association, we have had to challenge the PSNI on their approach to hate crime in general. From 2014, race hate crime in particular has been higher than sectarian hate crime. As previously spoken, that is a frightening statistic, when 2% of the population are getting more hate crime than the 98% majority.

In terms of the hate crime approach from the PSNI, the fact that the EMPA are not involved in it is probably working to the detriment of us coming out with more meaningful outcomes for victims. Some of the anecdotal evidence that we have had is that some officers are playing down incidents. In terms of the strategy itself, members of the public are saying that it is very strategic and it is not dealing with the operational grassroots issues. We had extensive engagement over the last five years with the community, and a lot of the time they were saying that they were going to conferences with white Northern Irish academics coming forward about the intricacies and academia of racism but without involving them in the process.

Chair: Yes, we have done one of those.

Andy George: Those were what a lot of the issues were. What they were really saying was that if somebody was coming forward and telling them about racism without listening to their lived experiences and involving them in that process, that was really pushing them off.

What we did was we engaged with them. We had to challenge the hate crime lead robustly at the time about the fact that it was too strategic and it was not delivering what the community said. Previously, because a lot of the hate crime leads were white Northern Irish officers and staff members, they did not understand the issues and the barriers to some people reporting it. For somebody to come forward and say that they have been a victim of a race-hate incident, it is not just about that one incident; it is probably about the racism that they have suffered over their entire life. Again, there is a gap in their knowledge around, I suppose, how traumatised those people were, how emotional they were



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and the fact it was not just about that one particular issue or that one particular incident.

The hate crime lead at that time had been trying to engage with the community. They held an event where seven or eight people turned up. We worked with them then on a different event and had over 80 people attend through the trust and confidence building that we have done. What they were saying was that they did not know the difference between a race-hate incident and a hate crime; they do not know how to report it. With the recent changes in telephone numbers, with 101 and 999, they were not sure how to report incidents. They were not sure whether they could report them online. There were a lot of gaps in that grassroots knowledge. The PPS were there as well.

In Northern Ireland, there are a lot of gaps in the legislation, which I am sure the Committee will be aware of. We work across GB and Northern Ireland and, me or Ricky, as officers from an ethnic minority, have limited options when we are racially abused as well. If we are sitting in a custody suite, which is a private area, we have no legislation to stop this, whereas our colleagues in England and Wales would have section 4, 4(a) or 5 of the Public Order Act 1986. We end up more or less having to take that abuse. The impact that has on us as individuals is striking. It has an impact on trust and confidence for external community members as well, seeing that officers in uniform cannot do anything about the hate crime. It also empowers offenders as well, because that offender has now got away with racially abusing an officer in uniform. That may well empower them to go out into the community.

The gap in legislation has definitely been one of those key drivers that we have been pushing on. We did involve ourselves in the hate crime review recently. As you said, in England and Wales 80% of hate crime is race. In Northern Ireland, it is the highest category, and yet we do not involve those who are most impacted by it in our decision-making, which does not allow us to come up with the best decisions. Even within the legislation and framework that we have at this moment in time, we are not tapping in to our own cultural resources and the community's experiences as well to make sure that we get things right. There are lots of things that we really need to be doing around hate crime to make it better.

Training is one thing that we need to be doing. We need to bring community members in and upskill our workforce on the intricacies of racism and hate crime. We also need to be working better around the online stuff. It is particularly concerning, because our Deputy Chief Constable is actually the NPCC lead for hate crime. It is disappointing for us. I do work nationally with Mr Hamilton around some of the issues. There is definitely a framework where the people who are most impacted are not involved in that. For me, the entire approach, the legislation, is not fit for purpose at this time.



Q70 **Chair:** Thank you for that. It is a worrying answer, but thank you for it. Let us imagine that you are a black or ethnic minority police officer in Avon and Somerset, the Met or Manchester. If you were to be subjected to or a victim of hate crime, racial abuse or a racial attack, would we be correct to describe the experience one has in Northern Ireland in comparison to those areas that I have mentioned—and that list of areas is not exhaustive—as both substandard and suboptimal?

Andy George: No, definitely. In England and Wales, they are able to charge that person with a racially aggravated section 5 public order offence. On the charge sheet, it also then goes before the magistrates' court as a racially aggravated public order offence.

Q71 **Chair:** In terms of the—it is a much-used phrase—level playing field of acceptability and standards and so on and so forth, it sounds to me as if the learning, the collective corporate knowledge, the understanding, the sympathy or the empathy, call it what you will, collectively held by the PSNI would not be acceptable in a constabulary in GB.

Andy George: That would be correct.

Q72 **Chair:** My colleagues are going to get fed up with me asking this question of all of our witnesses, but the hardest thing to break, is it not, is the green and orange prism by which policy, strategy, tactics, education, funding and everything else is divided? If one can balance between the two sides and broadly each side is getting a relatively equal size of the cake, everybody is happy. Then you have this small but significant and growing community in the middle with no strong political voice and very little integration into the decision-making process, and they are too easily overlooked. Is that a fair assessment?

Andy George: It would be indeed. Again, I can give an example of one of the hate crimes. As a duty sergeant in Dungannon around about two years ago, I had a sectarian hate crime reported to me. It was reported through a local councillor, who also sat on the policing and community safety partnership, which is one of the legal frameworks that we have for accountability at a local level. That councillor was able to ring the superintendent directly, who then rang me as duty sergeant. There was accountability around that particular hate crime. I then tasked a constable out, and they were taken off the ground to deal with that one particular incident. Because I had to report back to the superintendent, I then made sure that they had it done robustly. He came back to me. I let the superintendent know, who let the councillor know before it went before the PCSP. It was also spoken about at the next morning meeting as well. You had that local accountability framework and, as you said, those people in those positions of power.

For some of the hate crimes that we hear from ourselves or from members of ethnic minority communities, they do not have anybody. Lilian is the only councillor from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background in Northern Ireland. They do not always have somebody to



speak up on their behalf or to advocate or push on their behalf in those kinds of positions of power and authority.

Q73 Chair: If we are not right, please tell us, but might we be right to presume that, given the substandard and suboptimal resourcing and understanding of the issues both within broader policy formulation and, as you have intimated, within the police service itself, there is an under-reporting of these sorts of crimes and attacks principally because of a lack of trust? "They get nowhere. Why should we draw attention to it? Let us keep our heads down and hope it goes away".

Andy George: Definitely, yes. There is a lack of trust in coming forward. Even if police officers cannot do anything, having that empathy and being able to understand those people's positions is quite key. Where we lack the legislation to come out with a criminal justice outcome is where the trust in the process goes. When you speak to ethnic minority communities, they say they have got to a point where they think, "What's the point in reporting it?" because they are not going to get an outcome. They may have their experiences denied by some officers who do not really understand it. Again, it could be as simple as, "That's just somebody who does not represent the community as a whole. It's just one person. Don't worry about it", which does not take into account the discrimination and issues that they have faced their entire life.

Q74 Chair: There has been a big and welcome drive from the PSNI in recent years to recruit officers and other PSNI staff from the nationalist and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland. What if any recruiting outreach is undertaken by the PSNI into the black and ethnic minority population within Northern Ireland to join the PSNI?

Andy George: Up until recent years, there was none. We sit at 0.5% of the workforce. There are 41 officers from an ethnic minority background and around about 25 police staff members. That is out of 7,000 officers and 2,200 police staff members. Again, it is just the fact that we get left to the side. It is 0.5% with 1.8% of the population at the last census being from an ethnic minority background. The estimates for this year are between 3% and 3.5%. Looking nationally, that leaves us 78 times under-represented for ethnic minority officers. For us, that would be going from around 41 officers to around 260. If they come from visible ethnic minority backgrounds as well, that would have a big footprint across our 11 districts.

They may well also go into positions of power. It is not just about the recruitment. We have to attract those officers or potential officers as well. Recruitment and retention are always issues as well. If we do not have the culture quite right for them, then even if we do recruit them they are going to leave. That is what is happening in England and Wales at this moment in time. In the last six months, I do know that there has been more outreach. Since the Black Lives Matter protests, there has been a recognition that we need to do more as a police service to reach out to those communities.



Q75 Chair: Again, we have heard—this is a theme that came through in our earlier session—that too much of this is in reaction to something rather than proactively setting out a strategy and grappling with an issue. You have given us some figures with regard to data, and that is very helpful. If you were listening to the earlier session and indeed the stuff that we heard last week, there is a lack of drilled-down Northern Ireland data. Do you find that unhelpful, from a policing point of view, in both setting strategy in terms of manpower and financial resource and potential recruitment and engagement?

Andy George: No, definitely. We are not able to take a proactive approach on anything. As you said, we have had a Gender Equality Strategy; we have had a community background outreach programme; but we have not had anything on race. Under the Good Friday Agreement, while we were dealing with Patten reforms here in Northern Ireland, the rest of the GB forces were dealing with Macpherson. That has not really touched across to Northern Ireland. That for me has been a big issue.

Q76 Chair: Just so we get it as a Committee—I think we have, and I think you have said it—I am just going to ask you to say very clearly whether something is the case. If you were to transpose in this area of policing what the PSNI does within its jurisdiction and overlay it to a force in GB, it would not be acceptable under prevailing standards within Great Britain. Is that correct?

Andy George: It would definitely be different to what my counterparts and many chairs of our black police associations would be doing and some of the equality strategies that they have. I am working with the uplift programme at the Home Office at the minute, and a lot of the work we are doing is trying to bring back some of that learning to PSNI. Being President of the NBPA is allowing me to push for that change, but, in absence of that, I would be fearful that we probably would not have the same kind of push that we maybe have had since BLM.

Q77 Chair: You used the word “different”. Lots of things are different and, as we know, there are lots of things about Northern Ireland that are different that require a different approach. That much is self-evident. If you were to do a comparison, given that racial abuse and hate crime is the same whether it is taking place in Bristol or Belfast, is what the PSNI offers of standard, above standard or below standard, if you take a median comparator?

Andy George: In relation to how they deal with hate crime for the public or their own officers?

Chair: Yes, and in terms of how, as a constabulary, it deals with the issue internally and how it looks out in a proactive way rather than just reacting to stuff.



Andy George: Racism is not the same priority that it is for GB forces. In GB forces there is a real focus on race, whereas in Northern Ireland there is not the same focus.

Chair: I am grateful to you for that.

Q78 **Mr Goodwill:** Thank you very much indeed to our witnesses. Could I ask a question about the culture within the PSNI in so far as racial equality, diversity and inclusion is concerned—specifically, how it affects officers from a black or ethnic minority background working in the force, but also the way that officers deal with members of the public who may be from that community? Has that improved over recent years or, indeed, is there room for further improvement? Perhaps Sergeant Williams could start us off.

Richard Williams: Yes, that is a very interesting question in terms of the organisational culture over time. The Chair encapsulated this when he mentioned at the beginning that the emphasis in the organisation is and has been for quite some time on the Catholic-Protestant issue rather than looking a lot wider across the board. The organisational culture really rests with that predominant paradigm, the white Anglo-Saxon male Protestant paradigm as opposed to an inclusive paradigm. The organisation needs to move more towards that inclusivity. That really is evidenced in many of the policies that come out. When you read through the policy, it is obvious that the emphasis is really on the binary issue rather than the wider issue.

It is really left to the Ethnic Minority Police Association and through the National Black Police Association to push the organisation constantly in terms of looking at wider communities. There are more communities here than just the Catholic and Protestant ones; they are growing communities, as we have heard, yet the emphasis is back on the Catholic-Protestant issue as opposed to spreading the net wider. We have to keep referring to the fact there are wider communities in Northern Ireland, not just those two.

We heard from Ronnie that he was stopped and searched and asked about his immigration status. It still is the case in Northern Ireland that you are three times more likely to be stopped if you are black and 30 times more likely if you are from the Traveller community. An email came out in relation to questioning people who are described as foreign nationals in terms of immigration. There seems to be more of an emphasis on that rather than on hate crime. As Andy said, the Ethnic Minority Police Association has been driving some of the issues forward in respect of hate crime. We really took the lead rather than the organisation. The organisation's emphasis, as we have seen, was more on that immigration thing.

Again, we had to address that, and I wrote to the Chief Constable in relation to the fact that there was a policy or an email in relation to stopping people because of their ethnicity and checking their immigration



status rather than any other issue. That has a chilling effect on hate crime. If I am from an ethnic minority community and I report a hate crime and I think and believe that the police are going to check my immigration status when I report that as a victim of crime, that has a big chilling effect on me reporting the hate crime. We have to challenge the organisation in relation to that and ensure that the emphasis is on protecting ethnic minority communities and encouraging them to report crime rather than checking their immigration status when they do report a crime.

By and large, the organisation has normalised hate crime to ethnic minority communities to an extent. When Brexit happened and the dockworkers down at Larne suffered harassment and intimidation from certain members of the community, a big police operation swung into action to ensure that those people were protected. By contrast, at the same time I looked through all the hate crime incidents being reported, which are vastly greater. It has become sort of intimidation, but the police response was not of the same magnitude or did not have the same emphasis as the police response to the dockworkers in Larne.

The police have normalised it, and it is still not really in their mindset when they are making policies and procedures. The ethnic minority community is not really part of that thought process in terms of that recognition. I would probably describe it more as an unconscious bias. The organisation is not cognisant of the wider community, but it is cognisant of that Catholic-Protestant thing. That seems to be where most things seem to sit in terms of policies and procedures and the way they do their business.

Q79 Mr Goodwill: If an officer was, say, subjected to intimidation or abuse as part of a demonstration or something and that officer was a black officer, is it the case that the person might be more likely to be arrested because it could then be seen as a race hate crime as opposed to a white guy swearing at a white guy who happened to be a police officer?

Richard Williams: I have been subject to racial abuse as a police officer, though thankfully not as much as I probably thought I would be when I joined the organisation. The legislation is probably one of the biggest keys here, because the legislation is so weak. If someone were to racially abuse me politely, if you like, at a demonstration, there is very little that I could do about it. I could possibly rely on harassment legislation, but I would not be able to if it was a one-off, I asked them to stop and they did. If they continued, I could go down the harassment route.

The legislation is very weak. If they were to politely racially abuse me with no disorderly behaviour or anything else that I could rely on, that would be seen, legislatively, as perfectly acceptable. As Andy said, I was a custody sergeant in a custody suite and I suffered racial abuse. There is nothing I could do about it, because we are not in a public place. I just have to accept it. That is not acceptable. There are politicians sitting around this table. They need to urgently address the matter, urgently



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respond to the abuse that ethnic minority people are facing and give us some sort of protection in respect of that.

You talked about a demonstration. If ethnic minority members of the public are there and they see a black officer being racially abused and not able to do anything about it, that does not help to send a good message in terms of law and order and the ability of the police to protect ethnic minority communities if they cannot even protect their own officers from racial abuse. The legislation is probably one of the biggest issues that needs to be fixed, but the internal culture of the organisation also needs to change to be more inclusive. If that legislation, which I hope will be addressed urgently, becomes part of Northern Ireland's legislation, they will need to proactively enforce that legislation to protect the ethnic minority community.

Q80 Mr Goodwill: Thank you. That is very helpful. Mr George, do you have anything to add in terms of the culture within the force and its outward-looking stance?

Andy George: No. The only thing I would add is that when we changed from the RUC to PSNI there were fundamental changes to the culture, with that large influx of officers from different backgrounds. That has not been extended across for ethnic minority communities. Again, there are some sectarian terms that we may have heard in our early careers. I joined in 1999. I was in the second-last RUC squad. I know that Richard joined about 1994 or 1995. We have not really brought that culture forward.

There have never been any positive action measures internally for ethnic minority officers or staff members. There have been for gender; there have been for community background. The culture is almost a culture that forgets about the ethnic minority community's issues or sees this in terms of, "We will deal with the majority community first and then look beyond that".

The email that Ricky mentioned was a little bit more insidious than what he was saying. It was actually named "Irish eyes are smiling" and it was actually pushing officers and staff to go beyond what was agreed by the National Police Chiefs' Council. They were pushing everybody who was a foreign national and basically who did not look Irish or Northern Irish to be checked as to whether they were a suspect, a victim or a witness. It was in my role as President of the NBPA that I was able to check that out. That was not in keeping with every other police force in GB.

Culture-wise, we really do need to push things on. We need to make sure that it is not just for Protestant-Catholic and gender. We need to do something around ethnic minority issues as well. Otherwise, as you said, as we deliver our services externally, we are going to continue to forget about those marginalised ethnic minority communities.

Q81 Claire Hanna: Thank you very much to both of our witnesses. BLM has



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been mentioned a couple of times this morning, and I wanted to ask briefly about the impact of the policing of the Black Lives Matter protest last year. We talk a lot about confidence in Nationalism and Unionism in policing. In terms of both the policing and the political responses, there was a perception that maybe that same sensitivity and kid gloves were not applied in the context of that protest. Can you comment briefly on the impact that it had within the force and within the black and minority ethnic communities that you are policing? Could you pick up on that first, Sergeant Williams?

Richard Williams: If I am honest, the way the police responded in relation to Black Lives Matter was really quite shocking. It was quite a contrast. I was very pleased with the fact that the Northern Irish people came out to protest and show their support with respect to Black Lives Matter. I did not really expect that to happen. I felt encouraged that it had happened. I felt really part of the community, and I was very pleased to see that.

The police response was, to me, pretty shocking, particularly when you compare it with the Cenotaph protest that followed in terms of the handing out of tickets and the general harassment of ethnic minority people. Again, in terms of the internal impact—I know my other ethnic minority colleagues would support this viewpoint—we wondered what we were doing in this organisation. We did not feel that the organisation represented us and its actions were a catastrophe, I suppose, in terms of the trust of the community.

I have been working very hard for a long time. We set up the Ethnic Minority Police Association in around 2003 or 2004 to try to encourage people who looked like me, who were from an ethnic minority background or a more Eastern European background, people with different nationalities and ethnicities, into the organisation. In one fell swoop, the organisation—this was in 2021, as well—damaged a lot of that trust and that confidence. It made me personally feel like I did not really belong in this organisation. One of my colleagues was in tears in relation to the response of the police.

It was very impactful on us as ethnic minority officers. The wider picture around the trust and confidence, as Lilian has discussed, of the wider community, was absolutely shattered. It still resonates as well, if I am honest. I know that apologies have been made, but there is still a lingering resonance. After so many years, after so much challenge, thinking that the organisation was moving in the direction of being more inclusive, for Black Lives Matter to have happened certainly changed my perception. I found the police response shocking in respect of how they reacted to that.

Then to add insult to injury, for the demonstrations and funerals that followed there was not a single ticket handed out. No cognisance was paid to people's right to protest and the police also aggressively pursued some of the organisers of the Black Lives Matter protest in order to



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prosecute them for other offences. For me, the whole picture was not a good one. It damaged trust and confidence, and my trust and confidence, in the organisation. It was something that really should not have happened.

Q82 Claire Hanna: Thank you for being so open with us about that. Andy, do you have anything to add on that topic?

Andy George: No, Richard has covered the bit around the impact. As he said, the impact was definitely there for all to see. Having one of our colleagues crying when we were having a meeting with the Chief Constable between the Black Lives Matter protest on 6 June and the Cenotaph Protection Group on the 13th was key.

Again, being president and engaging with a number of other police forces in GB, we were the only police force that policed the Covid legislation that day. We did actually warn the police. We warned the Chief Constable. I texted him on the Thursday and had a conversation with him, and he recognised this. I thought the messaging was not right leading up to it. We were very much around, "Do not go to the protest or we are going to enforce the legislation", rather than the empathetic approach of, "We understand how the impact of this could be. Could you find other ways of protesting?" The Chief actually asked for us to be in the Gold Room on the Saturday as well, but that was turned down by the Gold Commander.

The key bit is, for me, that the reason it happened was because there was no kick-back; there were no consequences or perceived consequences by those making the decisions on the day. If that had been for one of our more traditional communities, there probably would have been a delegation of politicians arriving at police headquarters. There may well have been large-scale public disorder and a number of other consequences that would have been higher up in the hierarchy of the police's thought process. That for us was the concerning bit. We did warn them about it; we tried to work with them around this. I had done extensive engagement with community groups afterwards as well. I was on the phone until 11 or 12 at night and at different times, trying to make sure they used this as an opportunity to try to make things right.

As I said, in terms of the Cenotaph Protection Group, we did speak to the Gold Commander on the Friday, and we said, "It needs to be consistent". Being fair and consistent was what we wanted across the board, but, again, because of the demographics of some of those protesters, there was not the same approach. There was not one ticket given out just a week later. It was probably a low point in my career, a low point for where we were in general, and hopefully it is something that will be a catalyst for change in some way.

Q83 Claire Hanna: I hope you are right. You have noted longstanding concerns about the slow pace of change and the lack of review and progress in relation to the Executive's Racial Equality Strategy. Can you expand on those concerns a little bit?



Andy George: It is something that we deal with all the time nationally. We have these policies in place, but, whenever we look at policy in practice and the actions that are being delivered, just because we have a policy does not mean it is working in practice for those it is impacting. What we would like to see is it being fully implemented, working with the communities. As I said, it is about making sure that those who are most impacted are involved in the development and in relation to the review of it to make sure it is delivering what it is meant to. We need to make sure that there are checks and measures at every point in that as well and make sure that we understand that. As I said, a lot of it has not been delivered. There is no real accountability around it just because it is not impacting those who are sitting in those positions of power.

Q84 **Claire Hanna:** You are right to say that we make so many decisions in Northern Ireland based on who is going to cause the most trouble if we do not take an action. Have the PSNI made representations to the relevant departments in the Executive Office about their concerns over the delay of that strategy? Do you know?

Andy George: PSNI-wise, I do not think they have. EMPA-wise and NBPA-wise, it is something we would definitely like to be doing a bit more of. I do a lot of work with Government Departments across GB and Scotland. It is about giving that information and intelligence that may just be the difference between us getting it right and getting it wrong. If we do not factor in the minority viewpoint, that is why we are always prone to get it wrong. We often put our own majority perspectives on the others. That, for me, is probably why we are failing to deliver.

We would love to be engaged with those Government Departments. As I say, being police officers, civil servants and Government representatives as well, we would give that community perspective. Having someone from an ethnic minority background who has been born and grown up in Northern Ireland but who also understands how systems and processes in Government and police services work in general would be really useful and beneficial.

Q85 **Stephen Farry:** I was going to ask about your views on the adequacy of the hate crime law in Northern Ireland compared to Great Britain, but you have more or less touched on that. If you do want to come back on that, feel free.

I wanted to focus on a different aspect arising from some of the things you have said. First of all, in terms of recruitment and the number of officers from ethnic minority backgrounds in Northern Ireland, since Patten there has been a very strong focus on the Protestant-Catholic angle. The first part of the question would be do you feel that this might have squeezed out the issue of ethnic minority representation? I suppose the same argument could be made around gender balance in the PSNI as well.

Probably the second part of that is, in terms of the campaigns that the



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police are running to try to address these imbalances, do you feel the Protestant-Catholic balance almost crowds out the space for running campaigns for stronger recruitment in terms of ethnic minorities?

As a third question, to wrap them all as one because I know we are tight for time, does the Northern Ireland Policing Board give enough attention to ethnic minority hate crime issues, albeit with the exception that there was a reaction to the Black Lives Matter protests last year? Outside of that reactionary context, does it give enough space to those issues in a protective or more general basis?

Richard Williams: I will start the ball rolling here. In terms of recruitment and Patten, there was a missed opportunity with Patten to be more inclusive. The focus was on getting more Catholics in, understandably, given the situation at the time. There was a missed opportunity there.

As Andy said, in terms of going forward, in the last several years—again, ethnic minority police have been the catalyst for it as opposed to it coming from an internal driver—we have been a driver in terms of the recruitment process to challenge the organisation to target ethnic minority communities in a more substantive way. The head of recruitment in particular is very sympathetic to that. He does a lot of work with us and works very well in trying to address that underrepresentation within the organisation.

It is not just a single issue. You have to look across the landscape, and Black Lives Matter would be part of that. People are not going to join an organisation unless they think that organisation is inclusive. It is not just about getting people in through the door. When people are in through the door, it is about their progression within the organisation; it is about making that a comfortable place for them to be. I have to say and put on record that I am very comfortable within the PSNI in terms of my colleagues and those people around me, but, through things like Black Lives Matter, if people feel the organisation will react in the same way as it did in that instance, it will damage that trust and confidence and people are not going to want to come into the organisation. It is not just a single issue in terms of going out and recruiting people. People have to feel comfortable to be within the organisation.

That is across the board in terms of how we do our business, how we write our policy, what our procedures are, doing immigration checks or how we look at hate crime. Even if you look at the Policing Board in terms of its strategy going forward, by and large the focus is on the two communities as opposed to stretching across all communities within Northern Ireland. We have seen recruitment of female officers and Catholic officers since the start of Patten, but we have not seen any increase in ethnic minority officers. Part of that has been the lack in the past of meaningful engagement with ethnic minority communities. A big part of that is trust and confidence.



The key to a lot of this is getting that bit right in terms of inclusion. When people look at the PSNI from outside, they need to say, "Yes, that is an organisation that I want to be part of as an ethnic minority person. I feel comfortable there because of its policies and its procedures. I am not getting stopped more than any of my white counterparts. My trust and confidence in how they deal with hate crime is paramount. I want to be part of that, and I want to go out and help keep all people safe in the community". It is not just talking about one particular area. It is holistic; it must be something across the board. Our whole way of doing business has to be an inclusive way of doing business, not focused on any particular paradigm.

Q86 Chair: I am conscious that Prime Minister's Questions will be starting shortly, and I know colleagues want to get to that. There is of course a conference over the road as well. I have one very quick and final question. How does the PSNI tackle reported threats or actual occasions from paramilitary groups targeting ethnic minorities?

Andy George: Is that threats to officers themselves or the public?

Chair: What steps do the PSNI take in terms of trying to address and take seriously those actions or threats of actions towards members of the public or communities?

Andy George: The PSNI does what it can. Ethnic minority community-wise, given how political policing in Northern Ireland can sometimes get, it is difficult for any Chief Constable or anybody within the service to push anything towards paramilitaries or towards any particular side of the community.

There is definitely an issue there which we need to tackle a bit more. The Belfast Multi-Cultural Association fire was mentioned in our submission, and it was maybe mentioned before. There was a link to some of those who were involved in paramilitarism. Unfortunately, the Police Service actually brought some of those individuals to meetings and they were pushing stuff on. Because we have had to work with community groups, community reps and, through the PCSP, a number of people who may in the past have had those connections, it is difficult for police officers to come forward.

Whenever there is hate crime and it may be attributed to some groupings, sometimes that information may well be there, but the Police Service of Northern Ireland is a little reluctant to put forward that action, although it does take the action in the background. After the Belfast Multi-Cultural Association fire, I was brought in as an advisor by the Chief Superintendent at the time. Again, there was a bit of chat at that time around maybe linking it to the Paramilitary Crime Taskforce and having the race element integrated into it. If that was done, we might well be able to tackle it in a more robust fashion, but at this time, because of the political nature, we are probably quite weak on it.



Q87 **Chair:** Quite weak. Is there a triaging of offence or triaging of threat? Are threats or occasions of harm, violence, intimidation and the like against this smaller community within Northern Ireland seen as second, third or fourth-tier stuff?

Andy George: Yes, definitely around second or third-tier stuff. We have had a number of particular areas that have had those kinds of intimidation and threats. Again, it is not just the Police Service either. The Housing Executive has not always worked fully with us on that matter as well. There has definitely been a reluctance to call that out. We probably attribute it more to individuals rather than organisations. Again, it might feed into other reasons and other political ramifications if we were to link it to those groupings.

Q88 **Chair:** Are you seeing any avenues of criminality in terms of people trafficking, gang-mastering, forced labour and so on?

Andy George: Yes, definitely. The problem is that we do not have proper links to our ethnic minority communities. After BLM, I was brought back into our Policing with the Community Branch, and we sent out a communiqué to every single district asking what their community groups were and what the feelings of ethnic minority communities were, tension-wise.

Everybody was coming back saying everything was fine, but we were getting a different message service-wide. It showed that we did not have the same kind of relationship with those communities. Sometimes I think it is because of the Policing Board and the PCSPs not being extended across ethnic minority communities. There is a responsibility on them to do crime prevention and outreach work as well. That is probably a big gap that does not quite prohibit but prevents the engagement from being quite as meaningful as it could be.

Again, with the EU exit and with the border, you chat about county lines gangs in London, which I have worked on with the Met in London and others. We have a land border with international crime gangs coming in, who are looking to exploit the community. The tragedy that was the Essex lorry deaths came as a surprise to PSNI that it was rooted in a small village in County Armagh. That is why we need to get into these communities. My fear, working nationally, is that in 10 years' time we may well have larger issues just like London does with county lines gangs if we do not get in there. If we do not fill that vacuum, organised crime groups will.

Chair: Gentlemen, thank you. Serious and sobering is how I would describe your evidence today. I know that the Committee has heard with great attention what you have had to say, with increasing concern as you have gone on to say it in the depth with which you have. Thank you very much indeed, again, for contributing to this inquiry. Thank you on behalf of the Committee for the work that you do within the Police Service in this important area and, clearly, for the great seriousness with which you



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take it. I wish you well. We will clearly be picking up on quite a lot of what you have said in the report that will flow from this inquiry in due course. Thank you again and good day to you.