

## Rachael Etebar, United Kingdom

## Women in British Transport Police

**Director of People & Culture, British Transport Police**

*Rachael Etebar (FCIPD) joined the BTP in August 2018 as the Director of People and Culture and is responsible for people, health, safety, wellbeing, diversity and inclusion. She was previously Group HR Director for the Department for Transport and has held a number of senior HR roles within the Civil Service and the private sector.*

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**Can you tell me a bit about your background and how you came to work in the British Transport Police?**

So, I'm an HR professional and have been for over 30 years. I joined the Civil Service 12 or 13 years ago as a knee jerk reaction to the unethical practices I was seeing and experiencing in the private sector, and I ended up being the HR Director for the Department for Transport. Then, later, I moved into the BTP, which is an arm of the DfT, as its first-ever HR Director. The BTP polices the entire passenger and freight rail network, including the stations and their entire footprint.

**What sort of areas are you currently working on and improving in the gender diversity balance?**

We have three groups of staff in our organization. We have police staff, so the traditional administration roles, where we have very good

gender representation, just slightly under 50%, but quite a lot of senior people, including a female chief constable, as well as seven people on what's called the chief operating group, which is the equivalent of the executive committee, who are female, and lots of department heads too. Then, we have police officers where we have very poor representation. In fact, we've got the worst representation out of all 46 forces in the UK, with just 21.7% of female officers when the average is 33%. Part of our problem is because of the national and geographic footprint we police. There is an awful lot of travel involved and it involves shifts.

Plus, our training centre is in London, so women are not very open to coming to London for 20 weeks to train if they have caring responsibilities.

And our third group of staff are what's called Police Community officers where we have a

slightly better representation. It's in the mid 20s, though this is still very low.

We have made improvements since I started. For example, all the images on our recruitment table when I joined were people in uniform with guns and with dogs. All the language was about chasing the bad guys down and the whole approach was really masculine.

And it gave a false representation of what we actually do, because most police forces spend 80% of their time on bread-and-butter crime. 80% of our time is spent on vulnerability. If you want to run away you go to a train station, if you're homeless, you often go to a train station because it's warm and it's dry. We get a lot of drunkenness with football matches which brings opportunistic crime and rape. And we also get a lot of trafficking of humans on trains and a lot of what's called county lines, which is using young children to carry drugs around.

So, we've done a lot of changing our advertising material to focus on protecting lives, protecting you when you go to a social event, or on your daily commute.

And we try and emphasize this kind of messages in our recruitment. We're in the middle of putting together the first ever part-time police officer recruitment campaign and we just upped our maternity leave so it's now 26 weeks full and 26 weeks half pay.

We are trying to improve this so we can focus on family friendly and we are doing a lot of work at the moment on senior role models and female role models, like the new Chief Constable talking about balancing work and life, and the fact that she leaves when it's her child's school sports day to try and make it more personable.

There are ethical dilemmas, which include tackling sexual harassment. That "boys' club" kind of behavior was rife when I came in. I got patronized myself by people. There was really inappropriate behavior, about sexual relationships, bullying, and harassment. So, we've done a campaign about harassment at work, and we have had a huge rise in complaints, but that's good because I think we're flushing it out. We've

had some high-profile dismissals and we publish who's been dismissed and why they've been dismissed which causes shockwaves. So, it's challenging all these really old stereotypes and old behaviors that kind of have been there systemically for a very long time.

Nowadays, the millennials have very different views about what is gender, what is sexuality and everything else and are not prepared to be treated differently. And there's a real clash of culture between our long-serving normally male officers and these millennials who just won't tolerate it.

We've got our first ever transgender police officer now, who is open and proud to be trans. We've also got our first non-binary police officer and we had a massive debate about uniforms because uniforms are genderised. Men wear a tie, women wear cravats, and men wear the big hat and women wear a bowler hat. So, we've now changed our uniform policies as a result of this person coming in, so people can choose which clothes they want to wear.

I also get questioned as to why we want to gather gender data? Bus users are bus users. I find it very hard to understand where they're coming from, why they don't think we need anything, but I'm trying to say that if you're a transport operator, these data will improve your passenger numbers. It will improve the numbers of people who want to come forward and use your service. It will improve safety.

### **Do you get many issues from the women who work within the service about their safety? What concerns do they have?**

Not huge amounts, because obviously we put them through personal safety training. They are trained to keep themselves safe. We also teach them diffusion techniques to talk people down, but we do get women assaulted and we get on average 15 to 20 officers a week assaulted, of which a proportion are women. But there's not a differential in the numbers of women, so we're not seeing women targeted as such.

**Thinking about women as the passengers then, are there any specifics that your staff are trained to look for or be more mindful of with women passengers?**

Absolutely, even though I work for BTP, if I'm on a train late at night, I always let my husband know which train I'm getting.

I would never get in a carriage just on my own or at the ends of the train. I'd be in the middle with other people, and I always worry if I'm going to the station I normally go to which is a little village. I might go to the nearest town because it will be busier, because I don't want to be getting off on my own in a deserted place. I worry if I have to walk to the car park. I worry if it's not well lit. I carry keys in my hand.

I had a conversation about this with my chief constable who said she feels very different when she's going home in a uniform as it feels safe. So, when she goes home in civilian clothes, she's a normal woman with all those fears.

We've got a big campaign going at the moment with the train operating companies about violence against women and girls, we're seeing an increase in rape and sexual harassment, particularly during COVID with the trains less occupied and people travelling at different times of the day compared to their normal commute.

This is a concern, but we have one of the best levels of resolving rape compared to other forces, but it is still only about 28%, which is absolutely shocking.

It's a systemic societal thing. And this is just one of the symptoms of it. Similarly, we get pretty high incidences of domestic abuse on trains often again involving alcohol.

So, our officers are trying to spot and intervene where they can and we've done quite a lot in safeguarding vulnerable women who've been trafficked. East European gangs seem to like to take the women that they're trafficking into prostitution onto trains to move them between areas. It's surprising the things that happen on trains.

So, what would you say then has been the biggest breakthrough in terms of gender and diversity in the workforce? Where would you say you've broken down these barriers?

In us. I think it's the appointment of a female Chief Constable for the first time in our history. We've been established for well over 100 years. But it is a very traditional old-fashioned force. I think the first appointments that the Chief Constable has made have been two women. So, I think that is a real strong signal. And actually, I've been surprised about how many women in the organization have said wow! If the Chief Constable can do it, so can I. Because I think that, if you have worked in a force for a long time which is very old fashioned and very male, you don't have those role models, and it's really meant something to our people, so that's really important.

Now, instead of bringing everyone to London, we're going to try and deliver a load of our content digitally and only do things you absolutely have to have face to face like personal safety training in London, and I'm hoping that will make a real difference to our recruitment. A part of the business case for investing in this new learning development approach was that 30% of candidates drop out. Female candidates drop out of the process once they realize they have to come to London for training. So, if we can turn that round and turn those that want to be police constables into recruits that will have a really big difference on the bottom line.

**So where do you want to go next then? What big idea do you have now after you've been making all these changes?**

I'm basically refreshing all the basics. I've just got a consultant in to go through recruitment top to bottom with the diversity lens about where else we can make changes and nudge things along and make a difference whether for women, ethnic minorities or others.

And we're just about to roll out a new leadership

program, which includes a whole module on diversity and inclusion. I've also completely changed our recruitment processes for senior leaders, which is something I've been wanting to do since I got here. The one I was doing today was chief superintendents, where we made them answer questions about what they've done on diversity and inclusion, what they have done on building stakeholder partnerships, what they've done about creating links with communities. Before, all their questions would have been about the operational things they've done.

I think that kind of softer approach gives level ground for women, because women tend to be better than men at these kind of collaboration approaches, like diversity.

But there's a lot more to do, and not just for us, but in the rail industry in general. I had a survey done last year about why women don't apply to be police officers with the BTP and the whole thing about policing, about am I physically strong enough, about will I get hurt and will I have to work at night came through. However, the whole perception that railways are a dirty dangerous environment also came through really strongly. So, we feel like we're dealing with the stereotyped image of policing and then we're dealing with the image of railways as well.

**So, basically you are trying to change a culture.**

Yes, but it takes years. It really does take years and it takes a concerted effort. I think with the Chief constable on board with it and now the fact that all the Chief Officer group has come into the fold means it suddenly feels like we are all pushing in the same direction.



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