Police
Leadership
Commission

Professionalism and performance

Police leadership for the future

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Foreword

1. The challenges facing all public services are immense: rising public demand and expectations; pressure on resources; attracting and retaining talent; and learning to exploit and manage the technology revolution. But the police service faces challenges that are particularly acute and, in many respects, unique: how to rebuild public trust and ensure that they deliver the service the public rightly expects; maintaining neutrality and policing by consent in an increasingly polarised society; and dealing with serious failures of standards and conduct that have undermined confidence.

2. All of this argues for a particular focus on ensuring that police leaders are selected and equipped to meet these challenges, and that is why the Police Leadership Commission was established. From the outset, we were determined to listen to what the service and others were telling us, to confront the issues and be ready to recommend any necessary change. Our stark conclusion is uncomfortable, and we do not make it lightly: that despite overall reductions in crime and many examples of outstanding leadership in the service, the overall quality of police leadership is inconsistent and fails to provide the policing that the public deserves.

3. The Commission therefore calls for a fundamental overhaul of how policing attracts, recruits, develops, appoints and supports its leaders at all levels, addressing the current inadequate and inconsistent approaches to the leadership development of everyone in the service.

4. The overriding problem that we have identified is a collective failure – of the service and successive governments – to invest sufficient time, resources and priority towards the development of police leaders. This problem is not new. For decades there has been a lack of leadership development that has left police leaders unprepared for the complex and demanding roles they must undertake.

5. Strong leadership is needed at every rank in policing, from the trainee constable who must make good decisions on the front line to the chief constables who lead forces, undertaking a management responsibility that today far exceeds the simpler role of the past. There are issues of concern at the most senior level, with a narrow pipeline and insufficient competition for top roles, but the failure to invest in leadership is particularly serious in relation to the first-line leaders, the more than 22,000 sergeants who have vital responsibility for supervision of constables and yet who receive inadequate training and support for such a critical role. This failure to select and develop effective first-line leaders is not only a waste of talent: it has long-term consequences for the whole service.

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6. The specific reforms we propose include a new rank of senior constable, reforms to promotion processes and a new leadership fast stream – the largest talent scheme ever introduced into policing – to attract and prepare the brightest and best to become police leaders of the future. These changes will require greater investment by the service and by government, together with a recognition that improving the quality and depth of leadership must now be a priority.

7. These proposals go with the grain of the wider reforms to policing which the Government has already set out, with an underlying theme of stronger central grip, greater consistency and higher standards across the service. Today's system in which important training programmes can either be provided poorly, or even not at all, under the mantra that 'we do things differently here' can no longer be tolerated when it is failing to deliver for the public.

8. The Commission recognises that police officers and staff are frequently hampered by resource scarcity, and disempowered by excessive paperwork and problematic conduct processes. If we are to reduce bureaucracy and move to a system which is less prescriptive and more trusting of the exercise of sound judgement – the essence of the British policing model – we must ensure that every officer is trained to the highest standard, can show the necessary leadership, and are themselves well led.

9. Policing is in the public and media eye like no other service, and discourse about the police is too often corrosively negative. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why leadership in policing is so demanding today and why, concerningly, the top roles are too often not attractive to the potential leaders of the future.

10. It would be wrong to highlight only the problems we have identified while failing to acknowledge what we have also seen: the many examples of outstanding police leadership which deliver for the public every day. This report is in no way a criticism of the officers and staff who do so much to keep us all safe. Rather, it is a recognition that they need and deserve a better system that invests in their future.

11. Fundamentally, this is about ensuring that the public receives the quality of policing to which they are entitled. Our reforms are intended to prepare the service for the challenges of the future, and to reset police leadership culture towards high performance around what matters most: cutting crime and keeping people safe.

12. We would like to thank the Secretariat, the team at the College of Policing and our own staff for their support and tireless work. We are grateful to the thousands of police officers and staff – serving and retired – and to the many others who have engaged with the Commission. For those who took time out of their important work to share their views, aspirations and concerns, we hope that this report will provide a route map

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towards the excellent police leadership that they, the whole service and the public want to see.

Rt Hon Lord Blunkett
Co-chair

Rt Hon Lord Herbert of South Downs CBE
Co-chair

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Executive summary

13. The Police Leadership Commission has undertaken the most comprehensive examination of police leadership in England and Wales in a generation. The independent Commission was set up by the College of Policing with the support of the Home Office in October 2025.

14. Bringing together expertise from across policing, the private sector, academia, the military and politics, we have heard from thousands of officers, staff and members of the public through our force visits, call for evidence, survey work, roundtables and focus groups. Our work has covered the entirety of the policing workforce, including officers, staff and volunteers working at all levels.

15. We have seen outstanding examples of leadership and delivery across policing, often in the most challenging circumstances.

16. We have also identified systemic causes for concern about the consistency, capability and culture of leadership across the service. Put simply, leadership in policing is not consistently of a high enough standard to provide confidence and trust in the attainment of the service which the public deserves.

17. As we set out in our case for change, today's officers and staff are frequently hampered by resource scarcity, disempowered by excessive paperwork and conduct processes and insufficiently focused on delivering outcomes for the public.

18. These two facts reflect a service that continues to deliver remarkable work every day to protect the public, but which is not consistently equipped, developed or supported to deliver excellent leadership across the sector.

19. As the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has highlighted, 15 years after leaving Sandhurst, a colonel in charge of 1,500 people will have undertaken 72 weeks of leadership development. By comparison, chief superintendents in the MPS who have had comparable progression are likely to have had two or three weeks.

20. We are proposing a fundamental overhaul of how policing attracts, recruits, develops, appoints and supports its leaders at all levels, in all ranks, grades and roles to:

    i. Reset police leadership culture towards high performance, cutting crime and keeping people safe.

    ii. Prepare for the challenges of the future as rapid changes to society fundamentally alter the nature of crime and crime fighting.

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iii. Address inadequate and inconsistent approaches to the leadership development of everyone in policing.

21. This overhaul is anchored in the Government's police reform white paper **'From local to national: a new model for policing'** which sets out the Government's ambition to boost neighbourhood policing, create a stronger policing system, drive higher standards and deliver modern capabilities.

22. Our recommendations (which are set out in full below) sit firmly within those ambitions to deliver greater grip, consistency and policy solutions to meet the challenges of the future.

23. Our proposals are summarised below.

Defining police leadership

24. We offer a working definition of leadership to provide a shared understanding of what is meant by good police leadership. This lays a foundation for further detailed work by the proposed National Academy of Police Leadership (set out in **chapter 12**) in creating a clear and agreed approach to leadership for the future.

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Workforce strategy, data and evaluation

25. We agree with the Government's commitment to design a national workforce strategy for policing. There is an urgent need for a workforce strategy which provides a clear plan to address existing critical and future leadership skills gaps. We also make the case for the proposed National Police Service (NPS) to deliver strategic workforce planning in the long term so that policing can take ownership of its own workforce planning.

Representation and ethics

26. Radical change to the way we train, develop, promote and support all leaders is required to ensure talented leaders in policing are recognised and rewarded, irrespective of background or characteristics, and foster a culture where fairness is experienced and not just advocated. Taken together, our recommendations should help to address representation within the police workforce and support better policing of all communities and groups.

27. We also propose the NPS should take a lead role in promoting ethical and inclusive policing and be responsible for building a community of practice across the country. The NPS should lay out a clearer national landscape for ethics forums. This may require the establishment of a national ethics capability within the NPS itself.

Police constable recruitment and training

28. We call for forces to offer a range of police constable training programmes to cater for people with different skills, experiences and learning preferences. Bespoke advice should support successful applicants to choose the best programme for them. Advice on training and development should continue to be available as part of the support framework for leaders at all ranks.

29. Almost two thirds of new police constables were trained through the unaccredited Police Constable Entry Programme (PCEP) in 2025/26[1]. Forces should have a formal arrangement which supports recruits trained through PCEP to gain accreditation of the learning they completed during their initial training. Recruits trained through PCEP should also have the option to top up their accreditation and gain an equivalent qualification to the police constable degree apprenticeship. There should be a robust approach to ensuring that all PCEP recruits have reached the necessary standard.

Career long learning

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30. Through the annual performance review process, professionals and line managers should be able to set continuing professional development goals, understand their leadership competency and map their career path. Records of each review should eventually be included in a complete professional digital passport that gives every police professional a central record of their development, training, qualifications, conduct and performance. The NPS should hold a national database of these digital passports and this database should support the delivery of a licence to practise for police officers.

Police leadership fast stream

31. The introduction of a new police leadership fast stream would support the development of all those with talent and ambition to be senior police officers. The fast stream would provide structured development for up to ten years to ensure participants achieve rapid promotion. The most talented and experienced participants should aim to hold the rank of superintendent when they graduate. The police leadership fast stream would be the largest talent scheme ever introduced into policing.

32. The fast stream should be open to existing police officers up to the rank of inspector, allied police professionals and volunteers as well as those joining policing externally.

[1] NPCC Management Information, accessed June 2026, unpublished. This figure includes PCEP, DCEP, and Police Now entrants, who undertake PCEP training.

The scheme would be designed and managed from the centre but delivered in partnership with forces. All forces should participate in the fast stream to guarantee sustained investment and ensure large annual cohorts.

33. Policing should aim to recruit at least 400 people a year onto the police leadership fast stream, the equivalent of around 5 per cent of annual police constable joiners and more than twice the average number of annual promotions to superintendent[2].

Frontline leadership

34. Given that around three quarters of all warranted officers are constables, we recommend that the rank of senior constable should be created to recognise experience and effective leadership on the front line.

35. Senior constable should be a formal rank (with a level of seniority), but it should not be necessary to have been a senior constable to gain promotion to sergeant. Expectations for this role should include mentoring and coaching responsibilities, role-modelling professional standards, and supporting frontline supervision.

36. Over three quarters of the sergeants responding to our survey reported acting up before substantive promotion and over half had done so for 13 months or longer. Promotion processes to sergeant and inspector are broken[3]. They rely on an out-of-date exam that only half of prospective sergeants and just over a third of prospective inspectors pass. The entire process should also be reformed to equip these ranks with the knowledge and confidence to lead teams and serve the public, use frontline leadership talent to the full, and support the talent pipeline. The reforms should build on the new sergeant and inspector promotion process currently being tested and the new process should be rolled out nationally as soon as possible.

An open profession

37. The creation of the NPS presents an opportunity for increasingly varied development experiences. Secondments to the NPS should be a key feature of development for those seeking to reach the very top of policing.

38. The service should continue to bring in experienced professionals at the level where their skills are most needed, while holding them to the same standards as anyone else. A targeted direct entry scheme should bring proven leaders from professions that are adjacent to policing into senior and executive police officer roles. This programme

[2] Data on police constable joiners is taken from: **Police workforce England and Wales statistics – GOV.UK**. Data on annual number of promotions is in **Police workforce open data tables – GOV.UK**.
[3] Police Leadership Commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished.

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should recruit people who have proven operational experience keeping the public safe and working with victims and offenders.

39. The new targeted direct entry scheme should be supported by the National Academy of Police Leadership and its senior workforce planning function (described in **recommendations 24** and **22** of this report).

40. **Police staff make up over a third of the police workforce** and yet still do not have the recognition they deserve as important police leaders. Police staff structures should also be aligned to officer ranks and police staff should have equal access to all leadership development opportunities.

Quality leadership development

41. More than a fifth of new sergeants and inspectors responding to our survey said they received no formal leadership training more than two years into their role[4]. Leadership programmes should be delivered nationally and regionally and be established at all levels to build national capability by enabling police leaders to learn with counterparts in other forces and to create consistency and economies of scale.

42. Leadership development networks should be established at every level of policing connected to public sector partners. Officers and allied professionals should be given protected time to participate in network activities.

43. All chief officers, including chief constables, should be expected to complete an annual performance review to provide supportive professional development and an up-to-date assessment of performance. The Government should identify the best mechanisms to conduct annual performance reviews for chief constables through its work reforming force structures and accountability arrangements.

Senior promotions and appointments

44. A new standardised approach to promotion to chief inspector, superintendent and chief superintendent should be introduced. These processes should include the same features as reformed processes at sergeant and inspector level so there is a consistent approach to promotion at every rank. The senior workforce planning function promised in the **Government's police reform white paper** should be established as a matter of urgency.

45. The central appointments panel for chief constable appointments should be established to ensure that candidates shortlisted for chief constable roles meet

[4] Police Leadership Commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished.

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required standards. The panel should ensure candidates shortlisted for chief constable positions have varied experience, including experience of policing in different types of places and/or working in more than one organisation.

46. There were fewer than three applicants on average per chief constable role and many posts are eventually filled by an internal candidate. The National Academy of Police Leadership should host the senior workforce planning function and the central appointments panel (described in **recommendations 22** and **23**) so that these entities can work effectively together.

Delivering a new approach to police leadership

47. Our radical blueprint should be delivered through the creation of a National Academy of Police Leadership, the restoration of central funding, and the establishment of an implementation group.

48. A National Academy of Police Leadership should be created with the necessary governance and funding to become a clear system owner for police leadership, delivering at the centre and influencing at, and learning from, the local level. The academy should have its own dedicated building that provides an inspirational learning environment for all police leaders.

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49. Spending on leadership development at the centre is only about 0.02 per cent of total police funding[5]. The Government and the Home Office should restore funding to the centre so it can better prioritise national leadership development spend.

50. The Home Office should establish an implementation group to take forward our recommendations. The group should ensure that the recommendations and detailed analysis in this report are not delayed and it should be connected to the police reform programme to use the synergies and opportunities this presents. The group should be led by the Home Office and the new NPS.

51. There is much to do to produce the improvements we all want to see. Our proposals are an important step to deliver real change and their quick implementation will be vital to achieving that.

[5] £4m a year is the equivalent of around 0.02 per cent of **total police funding in 2026/27**.

List of recommendations

The case for change

Recommendation 1: There should be a root and branch modernisation of police recruitment, training and development, promotion, monitoring and appraisal.

Definition of police leadership

Recommendation 2: The police service should adopt a clear definition and set of principles of leadership which reflect both present and future policing challenges. We therefore lay out a working definition which can be built on over time by the National Academy of Police Leadership which we propose in **chapter 12** of the report.

Workforce, data and evaluation

Recommendation 3: Work to deliver the comprehensive workforce strategy promised in the Government's police reform white paper should commence immediately.

This strategy is essential to ensuring that the service can recruit and train for a rapidly changing landscape. It will ensure that there is capacity in the service to deliver the basic, effective, preventive and protective policing on the ground with the emerging challenge of online criminality.

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Recommendation 4: The proposed National Police Service should take the lead in creating a comprehensive workforce strategy.

The NPS should ensure that workforce strategy is cognisant of local needs and flexible enough to support local workforce planning across England and Wales.

A dedicated senior workforce planning function should be housed within the NPS' National Academy of Police Leadership. This is described in more detail in **chapters 11** and **12 recommendations 22** and **24**.

Recommendation 5: A complete rethink of how police workforce data is collected, collated and analysed, and applied in real time, is required.

This is fundamental to determining priorities and applying consistency of approach to the use of resources and assessment of outcomes.

Recommendation 6: A systematic, centrally supported evaluation framework and programme for analysing the value and effectiveness of leadership training and development across policing should be established.

A radical shakeup of training and development should be embedded in every stage of career development and promotion, including evaluation, performance and recognition of on-the-job delivery, outcomes and competency. This would be intended to facilitate robust longer-term measures to assess impact on leadership behaviour, organisational performance, and public outcomes.

Evaluation should be owned by the National Academy of Police Leadership so that it can be considered in the design and delivery of all leadership development across the system.

Representation and ethics

Recommendation 7: The National Police Service should take a lead role in promoting ethical and inclusive policing and be responsible for building a community of practice across the country.

The NPS should lay out a clearer national landscape for ethics forums. This may require the establishment of a national ethics capability within the NPS itself.

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Police constable recruitment and training

Recommendation 8: Police constable recruits trained through the police constable entry programme (PCEP) should gain accreditation and recognition of their learning.

Forces should have a formal arrangement which supports recruits trained through PCEP to gain accreditation of the learning they completed during their initial training. This can be delivered through partnership with the National Academy of Police Leadership (described in **chapter 12** of this report), a higher-education institution or another awarding organisation. Recruits trained through PCEP should also have the option to top up their accreditation and gain an equivalent qualification to the police constable degree apprenticeship.

There should be a robust approach to ensuring that all PCEP recruits have reached the necessary standard, Evidence that they have met the required standards should be included in their professional digital passport (as described in **chapter 6** of this report).

Recommendation 9: Police forces should support officer recruits to choose the most appropriate training programme for them.

Forces should offer a range of police constable training programmes which cater for people with different skills, experiences and learning preferences.

Recruits should not be locked into the training programme they choose when they apply. Instead, bespoke advice should support successful applicants to choose the best police constable training programme for them. Tailored careers advice on training and development should continue to be available as part of the support framework for leaders at all ranks.

Career long learning

Recommendation 10: A mandatory and standardised approach to annual performance reviews should be introduced to provide national consistency for appraisal.

Annual performance reviews should be benchmarked and distributed so that police professionals have an accurate understanding of their performance and progress. Through the annual performance review process professionals and line managers should be able to set continuing professional development goals, understand their leadership competency and map their career path.

Records of each annual performance review should eventually be included in a complete professional digital passport that gives each police professional a central record of their development, training, qualifications, conduct and performance.

The NPS should hold a national database of these digital passports. The national database should support the delivery of a licence to practise for police officers, providing a light touch non-bureaucratic way of achieving the Government's stated aim.

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Recommendation 11: Everyone in policing should have the opportunity to gain recognition of their learning and experience within a national system.

Recognition of learning demonstrates capability in a particular work area and externally validates a person's learning and its application to work. It aids progression, exit and re-entry into policing, and movement between forces.

Recognition of learning should be through a national scheme, so that there is consistency across forces. It should apply to all new courses, from an internal certificate of completion of a course or activity through to higher education credits and qualifications.

For officers and staff who have built up experience on the job, prior learning and experience could be recognised through one of the higher education schemes.

Together with an annual performance review, this recognition structure should be included in the professional digital passport to provide a foundation for implementing the licence to practise.

A police leadership fast stream

Recommendation 12: A police leadership fast stream should be introduced to identify, develop and accelerate those with talent and ambition to be senior police officers.

The fast stream would provide structured development for between five and ten years to ensure participants achieve rapid promotion. Progress through the fast stream would always be based on merit and performance and linked to the standardised promotions processes described elsewhere in this report. The most talented and experienced participants should aim to hold the rank of superintendent when they complete the fast stream.

The fast stream would be open and widely accessible. It would be open to existing police officers up to the rank of inspector, allied police professionals and volunteers as well as those joining policing externally. A degree should not be required to qualify for the fast stream, but those on the fast stream should be expected to demonstrate a commitment to continuing learning and will have to evidence their development.

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The fast stream would be designed and managed from the centre but delivered in partnership with forces. All forces should participate in the fast stream to guarantee sustained investment and ensure large annual cohorts.

Policing should aim to recruit at least 400 people a year onto the police leadership fast stream, the equivalent of around 5 per cent of annual police constable joiners and more than twice the average number of annual promotions to superintendent[6]. Large annual cohorts will ensure that enough talented people progress quickly to superintendent, sustaining operational leadership capability at this rank and ensuring that the effective command of new local policing areas is created through reform of force structures. Large annual cohorts will also ensure that leadership capability is enhanced at first line and middle leadership levels in the process.

[6] Data on police constable joiners is taken from: **Police workforce England and Wales statistics – GOV.UK**. Data on annual number of promotions is in **Police workforce open data tables – GOV.UK**.

Frontline leadership

Recommendation 13: A new senior constable rank should be introduced to provide recognition of experience and effective leadership on the front line.

Given that around three quarters of all warranted officers are constables, we believe that it is important to provide a progression pathway, which will both help with morale and motivation, and with proper utilisation of frontline experience and capability[7].

Senior constable should be a formal rank (with a level of seniority), but it should not be necessary to have been a senior constable to gain promotion to sergeant. Expectations for this role should include mentoring and coaching responsibilities, role-modelling professional standards, and supporting frontline supervision.

Work to further develop how the rank should operate should involve consultation with staff associations. It should consider:

- The necessary fair, transparent and capability-based selection process for the rank that identifies officers who demonstrate strong judgement, integrity, communication and the ability to develop others.
- The structured training and ongoing development required proportionate to the rank.
- How to align the rank with tutor constable functions to create a nationally consistent approach to selecting, training and rewarding those who mentor new recruits.
- How the rank provides stable leadership cover in teams, reducing unnecessary reliance on extended acting-up arrangements, which are currently a feature of meeting operational need.

The Home Office and the College of Policing – and then the NPS when the College is integrated into the NPS – should introduce the rank at the earliest opportunity and identify resources that are currently used in paying substantial numbers of constables to act up as sergeant.

Recommendation 14: Promotion processes to sergeant and inspector should be reformed to equip these ranks with the knowledge and confidence to lead teams and serve the public, use frontline leadership talent to the full, and support the talent pipeline.

The reforms should build on the sergeant and inspector promotion process currently being tested in five forces and should be rolled out nationally as soon as possible, as an interim

[7] Data on composition of workforce is taken from: **Police workforce England and Wales statistics - GOV.UK**.

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measure, before a full re-engineering of the promotion process and content of leadership development materials. The new promotions process should:

- Include clear criteria at every stage based on the agreed definition of police leadership (**recommendation 2**) so that officers, line managers and force leaders can fairly and objectively identify those officers ready for promotion.
- Assess eligibility for promotion using annual performance reviews and the completion of leadership development learning. The national leadership development programmes outlined in **recommendation 18**, followed by a modernised legal exam should be required learning to gain promotion at each rank.
- Introduce probationary periods for the role and abolish the use of temporary promotions. During probationary periods newly promoted officers should be given extra support and supervision to ensure they can continue to hold rank.
- Promotion should be overseen centrally so that there is transparency around decision making at every stage and independent assurance of fairness.

An open profession

Recommendation 15: Secondments to other forces, public sector partners, the voluntary sector and private industry should be made more routine, and accessible to all in policing and senior officers should be expected to undertake them as part of leadership development.

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Secondments should be managed through annual performance reviews to ensure that they are purposefully targeted at individual development needs to broaden leadership experience throughout the ranks.

The creation of the NPS presents an opportunity for increasingly varied development experiences. Secondments to the NPS should be a key feature of development for those seeking to reach executive level leadership. This would not only strengthen individual skills and relationships, but would also strengthen relationships between forces and the NPS. This would effectively create the NPS as policing's staff college – preparing leaders in a similar manner to the long-established approach adopted by the military.

Recommendation 16: Policing should recruit proven leaders with transferable skills to senior and executive policing roles. This should include the recruitment of individuals from outside policing as senior officers through a new targeted direct entry scheme.

This would be an adaptive talent model that allows individuals with equivalent professional maturity and leadership experience to enter policing at an appropriate level of responsibility. Many already do, particularly in allied professional police staff roles.

The service should continue to pursue bringing in experienced professionals at the level where their skills are most needed, while holding them to the same standards as anyone else. In addition, a targeted direct entry scheme should bring proven leaders from professions that could be considered adjacent to policing into senior and executive police officer roles. This programme should recruit people who have proven operational experience in adjacent security services, risk management and high-harm public protection.

The new targeted direct entry scheme should be supported by the National Academy of Police Leadership (described in **recommendation 24** of this report), and its senior workforce planning function. The academy should work with forces to identify skills gaps and eligible vacancies and conduct targeted recruitment campaigns to hire people with the necessary skills and experience. The academy should support forces to provide tailored on-the-job training and development to ensure that the new recruits are able to demonstrate their operational competence and meet the required standards for their rank.

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Recommendation 17: Police staff structures should be aligned to officer ranks, and police staff should have equal access to all leadership development opportunities.

Quality leadership development

Recommendation 18: National leadership development programmes should be available to everyone in policing.

Programmes should be delivered nationally and regionally and be established at all levels to build national capability by enabling police leaders to learn with counterparts in other forces and to create consistency and economies of scale.

National leadership development programmes would ensure fair and equal access to leadership training and development; and demonstrate a robust and evidence-informed approach to course design, teaching and learning. They would increase and improve the number and scale of benefits for individual police officers and staff, and for the police service as a whole.

Recommendation 19: Leadership development networks should be established at every level of policing connected to public sector partners.

Leadership development networks should enable people to share and learn from each other through formal and informal opportunities including peer review, networking and workshops. Leadership development networks should strengthen existing community safety partnerships by deepening local collaboration to tackle crime and public safety at the local level.

Officers and allied professionals should be given protected time to participate in network activities. Participation in their network should be essential to progression; it should be recorded through their annual performance reviews.

Senior promotions and appointments

Recommendation 20: Chief officers should participate in ongoing meaningful professional development.

All chief officers, including chief constables, should be expected to complete an annual performance review to provide supportive professional development and an up-to-date assessment of performance. The Government should identify the best mechanisms to conduct annual performance reviews for chief constables through its work reforming force structures and accountability arrangements.

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The leadership development network should ensure that executive leaders have real time support to manage major issues and a structured approach to their continuing professional development.

Executive leaders should also be supported by a non-executive board with independent non-executive directors with relevant experience and insight (similar to the board recently established in the Metropolitan Police).

Recommendation 21: A new standardised approach to promotion to chief inspector, superintendent and chief superintendent should be introduced.

These processes should include the same features as reformed processes at sergeant and inspector level so that there is a consistent approach to promotion at every rank. They should:

- Include clear criteria at every stage based on the agreed definition of police leadership described in **chapter 2** of this report.

- Assess eligibility for promotion using annual performance reviews and the completion of leadership development learning. The national leadership development programmes described in **chapter 10** should be required learning to gain promotion at each rank.
- Be overseen centrally so there is transparency around decision making at every stage and independent assurance of fairness.

Recommendation 22: The senior workforce planning function promised in the Government's police reform white paper should be established as a matter of urgency.

A dedicated senior workforce planning function is required to monitor talent and recruitment across the service and ensure that the service is recruiting and developing enough people with the necessary skills and experience.

The National Academy of Police Leadership described in **chapter 12** (**recommendation 24**) should host the senior workforce planning function and the central appointments panel so that these entities can work effectively together.

Recommendation 23: The central appointments panel for chief constable appointments, described in the Government's police reform white paper, should be established as quickly as possible to ensure that candidates shortlisted for chief constable roles meet required standards.

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The panel should ensure that candidates shortlisted for chief constable positions have varied experience, including experience of policing in different types of places and/or working in more than one force. The national panel should also be engaged wherever it is proposed to extend the term of office of a chief constable.

The panel should include system leaders and external voices including His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. They should provide important independent advice with direct reference to the definition of effective leadership, together with mandatory appraisal of the most up-to-date performance review.

The Home Office should develop a clear structure at local level, following the abolition of police and crime commissioners, to ensure appropriate input to the interview panels candidates will undertake once shortlisted.

Delivering a new approach to police leadership

Recommendation 24: A National Academy of Police Leadership should be established. The academy should stand as an essential entity of the National Police Service and an enduring partnership between policing and higher education.

The academy should be responsible for:

- Owning, maintaining and developing the definition and principles of effective police leadership.
- Designing and delivering the police leadership fast stream.
- Setting the standards for, and central oversight of, the new promotions processes described in **recommendations 14** and **21**.
- Managing the targeted direct entry programme.
- Facilitating the senior secondments.
- Hosting the leadership development networks.
- Designing and delivering national leadership development programmes.
- Providing a secretariat for the senior appointments panel.
- Delivering senior workforce planning.
- Undertaking research, in conjunction with academics and practitioners, in order to ensure that decisions about leadership and leadership development are based on the best available evidence.

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Recommendation 25: The National Academy should have an inspirational physical central location, a digital footprint and presence in forces and policing organisations throughout England and Wales.

The academy should have its own dedicated building. This may be an existing building or be purpose built.

The sale of existing estates could recover some costs but the purchase and development of a new home for police leadership development would require capital investment.

This would facilitate a global offer of police training and development which could yield not only a substantial income but also the development of soft power and partnership arrangements across the world.

Recommendation 26: Leadership development in policing should be properly funded to ensure sustained investment in the capacity and capability of police leaders at all levels.

The Government and the Home Office should restore central funding so the centre can better prioritise leadership development spend on a national basis, and to bring support for training in line with other major frontline organisations, including the military and the NHS.

The College of Policing – and then the NPS when the College is integrated into the NPS – should monitor local leadership development spend to identify efficiencies and ensure it supports national priorities.

Recommendation 27: The Home Office should establish an implementation group to take forward the Commission's recommendations. The group should ensure that the recommendations and detailed analysis in this report do not experience long delay in action.

The implementation group should be connected to the Government's **police reform programme** to use the synergies and opportunities this presents. The group should be led by the Home Office and the new NPS. It should involve people from across the policing sector and people from outside policing who can bring their expertise in leadership, training and change management. The group should be led by someone of appropriate seniority to bring people together and drive the work forward.

Involving people from outside policing in the implementation group will bring outside expertise and provide critical distance from police workforce reforms of the past.

The implementation group should establish a clear timeline for the delivery of the Commission's recommendations with defined milestones. It should prioritise the following in this financial year 2026/27:

- Finalising and promoting the Commission's definition of effective leadership described in **recommendation 2**.
- The delivery of the profession's first comprehensive workforce strategy and the data reform described in **recommendations 3 to 5**.
- Setting a mandatory and standardised process for annual performance reviews described in **recommendation 10**.
- Following appropriate consultation, draft amendments to police regulations to create the senior constable rank described in **recommendation 13**.
- Outline the delivery of the fair, transparent and trusted processes for promotion at every rank described in **recommendations 14** and **21**.
- Establishing a senior workforce planning function described in **recommendation 22**.
- The establishment of the National Academy of Police Leadership as described in **recommendations 24** and **25**. This will enable the academy to be moved into the NPS as a priority when the new body is created in legislation.

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Chapter 1: The case for change

52. High-performing organisations need excellent leaders who empower their people to innovate, challenge and learn from their mistakes. This helps them to reach their potential and the whole organisation to deliver better outcomes. But the policing profession has not consistently had the excellent leadership it needs. On top of being frequently hampered by resource scarcity and disempowered by excessive paperwork and conduct processes, today's police officers and staff are demotivated by negative leadership cultures that are overly risk averse, obsessed with time served and operational experience over all other skillsets, and insufficiently focused on delivering outcomes for the public.

53. Leadership in policing is exercised at all ranks and in all parts of the force. Police leadership is far from easy: indeed, it is a uniquely challenging form of public leadership. From the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and the chief constable of every police force in England and Wales to the police and community support officers patrolling our high streets, every police officer, member of staff and volunteer must demonstrate effective leadership to perform well and serve the public. The police frequently put themselves in harm's way to protect the public. They deal with the kind of traumatic situations most people will never see, while officers must give up some of their personal freedoms and employment rights to do so. Leaders across policing deserve public and political support. Chief officers – the most senior leaders – occupy one of the most challenging, complex and stressful executive roles anywhere in the public sector. Like other public figures, police officers have been increasingly subject to abuse and harassment as their actions and decision-making are scrutinised in today's increasingly polarised climate. Where else would your words and actions be captured by a bodycam, providing both necessary transparency but also intense scrutiny?

54. In this context, we can forget that British policing is still rightly admired across the world for how it leads a workforce which polices by consent and constantly innovates to build evidence-based approaches to tackling crime. There are many outstanding leaders working in British policing. We have met inspiring and dedicated leaders throughout the course of our work. But two apparently contradictory perceptions can be true at the same time; there can be both outstanding examples of delivery and major causes for concern. We have concluded that police leadership in England and Wales is not consistently effective enough and excellent leadership is neither adequately identified, supported nor invested in.

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55. There are significant causes for concern. We have encountered a service where inspections, inquiries and reviews too frequently find leadership implicated in service failings, where people do not feel well led or managed, and one in which the public are losing trust and confidence. This has serious implications for the future of the police and must be addressed if the Government is to achieve the ambitious **reform agenda** it has outlined. A fundamental overhaul of how the police attracts, recruits, develops, appoints and supports its leaders at all levels, in all ranks, grades and roles is now required to:

    i. **Reset police leadership culture towards high performance, cutting crime and keeping people safe.** High-performing organisations are led by people with a breadth of skills, behaviours and experiences who create systems and cultures that empower those they lead to reach their potential and achieve shared goals. Senior police leaders can too often share a narrow set of experiences and values, partly as a product of a traditional and restrictive career pathway. They are not always open to challenge and new ideas, or prepared to take considered risks that could improve services. Those they lead are burdened with excessive regulation and many feel access to supportive supervision, leadership development and progression is neither fair nor adequate.

    ii. **Prepare for unprecedented future challenges as rapid social and technological changes are fundamentally altering the nature of crime and crime fighting.** The **police reform programme** aims to set up the service for the challenges of the future. New kinds of police leadership are required to maximise the opportunities presented by reform and continue to deliver effective and trusted policing into the future. The technology revolution is accelerating and bringing with it new ways of working, new public expectations, and a diverse range of new security threats that policing must be able to meet.

    iii. **Address inadequate and inconsistent approaches to the leadership development for everyone in policing.** Outstanding leadership development supports leaders to thrive in challenging environments, but approaches to identifying, developing and supporting leadership talent in policing are inconsistent and frequently deficient. Ultimately, the overall quality of leadership reflects how the service prioritises its people. For too long there has been an inadequate approach to leadership capability across all ranks, grades and roles. This has meant that the service has either failed to spot future leadership talent, or has neglected such individuals so that they have either under-performed when it mattered, or have opted to leave policing prematurely.

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Recommendation 1: There should be a root and branch modernisation of police recruitment, training and development, promotion, monitoring and appraisal.

The quality of police leadership today

56. In spite of the important work done every day, the quality of police leadership today is not consistently effective enough, and is undermining the ability of the whole workforce to meet public expectations. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) graded two forces as inadequate, thirteen – nearly a third – as requiring improvement and not one force as outstanding for **leadership and force management during its 2023-2025 rolling inspection regime**. These rolling inspections assessed many different aspects of leadership, including how visible leaders were in their organisations and how well they managed performance. HMICFRS found some examples of visible leadership and strong performance management, involving high levels of accountability and clear and consistent messaging. But in other forces poor performance management was the result of leaders lacking capacity and having a poor understanding of how performance should be measured and managed to support strategic aims.

57. The Inspectorate's findings reflect how the workforce feels about the quality of its leadership. Just 25 per cent of the police workforce respondents to the **National Police Wellbeing Survey 2025** agreed that they worked in a "well led and managed organisation". Officers on the front line were the least likely group of respondents to agree with this statement. Just 13 per cent of the constables and 17 per cent of the sergeants who responded to the survey agreed they worked in a "well led and managed organisation". While many large organisations are likely to have comparable percentages, there is clearly substantial room for improvement. Words chosen by officers who attended our focus groups to describe the leadership they experienced included: "varied", "inconsistent", "struggle", "chaotic", "hit and miss" and "misunderstood". Frontline police officers, and the staff who are critical to forces' performance, deserve better.

> At present, very little is working well in police leadership to deliver trusted and effective policing. Persistent problems in sickness, retention, organisational culture and public confidence all stem from leadership shortcomings.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

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58. High profile and numerous instances of police leaders failing to meet expected standards of integrity, honesty and professionalism highlight the most acute leadership failings. The Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) has received 107 referrals involving chief officers since it was established in 2018, leading to 78 investigations. 47 investigations relate to chief constables (or equivalent); 10 relate to deputy chief constables (or equivalent); and 21 relate to assistant chief constables (or equivalent)[8]. Several officers feature in more than one case. The referrals involve many different factors, but the IOPC tells us that common themes in their investigations involve cronyism, nepotism, abuse of position for a sexual purpose and corruption. Eight chief constables or former chief constables are either currently under investigation or are awaiting disciplinary proceedings. One **former chief constable has been charged with misconduct in public office and fraud in November 2025**. These issues are not isolated to executive leaders. The **October 2025 BBC Panorama exposé** of the behaviour of officers at Charing Cross Police Station demonstrated egregious leadership failings at the front line.

59. Repeated news stories about the behaviour of officers and staff falling short of expected standards serve to damage public trust in policing at a time when public confidence in many public institutions is declining. According to the **Crime Survey for England and Wales**, 49 per cent of people thought that their local police were doing a good or excellent job in March 2025, down from 62 per cent in March 2015. Evidence appears to show that the public have less faith in senior police leaders than they do in other officers. 62 per cent of respondents to a recent **YouGov survey** said they trusted “ordinary officers” whereas just 48 per cent said the same of “senior officers”. The impact of negative news stories involving poor leadership was also a common theme in public focus groups carried out on behalf of the Commission.

> You always think about the things that go wrong ... it's all stuff they did wrong that you hear about, it doesn't fill you with much confidence when they're constantly apologising and [saying] lessons have been learned ... But have they though?
>
> **Public focus group participant**

60. There is talented leadership within policing, but frequently it is not identified early enough, and when leaders are promoted, they fail to receive the investment and training needed to excel in those new roles. The service can address this. Those working in the service, as well as those relying upon it, are crying out for excellent leaders at every level. Achieving this goal will transform morale, restore trust and

[8] IOPC supplied data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

provide a foundation for partnership working in bringing safety and security across England and Wales.

A reset to focus on cutting crime and keeping the public safe

61. Preventing and reducing crime, keeping people safe and delivering justice are fundamental to police performance. Yet in many ways these vital outcomes are not driving police leaders' behaviours, decisions and actions day-to-day. Instead, too many police leaders have lost sight of the core deliverables that make for successful police organisations that command public confidence. Radical change is needed to ensure that police leaders are trained and equipped with the skills, behaviours and knowledge needed to lead high-performing policing organisations.

> There are too many people not doing police work. There is utter dysfunction with basic policing.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

62. The principal job of the police is to prevent crime. The **Crime Survey for England and Wales** found that incidents of crime were 16 per cent lower in 2025 than in 2017. Certain crime types have seen particular falls. The number of incidents of violence (with or without injury) was 36 per cent lower in the year to December 2025 than it was a decade before and the homicide rate has fallen from 9 per 1 million people in the year to December 2015 to 8.1 per 1 million people in the year to December 2025. However, other types of crime are increasing. Bank and credit card fraud rose 15 per cent in 2025 compared to the previous year and police recorded sexual offences and rape both rose 5 per cent. The police are also not performing well on some other fundamental metrics. Their investigations rarely result in a criminal justice outcome. Just 7.3 per cent of crimes recorded in England and Wales resulted in a charge or summons in the year to March 2025, down from 15.5 per cent in the year to March 2015. Victim satisfaction is also falling. 51 per cent of people who had been a victim of crime in the year to March 2025 said they were very or fairly satisfied with the police, down from 70 per cent in the year to March 2015.

63. The current context creates difficult conditions for high-performing policing organisations to flourish. The workforce is coping with increasingly complex demand and resource constraints. Financial pressures in the 2010s led to recruitment freezes which saw the police workforce shrink by 18 per cent between 2010 and 2018, and even bigger reductions in civilian staff over the same period in most forces. Whilst officer numbers have recovered through the police uplift programme (a police officer recruitment drive between 2019 and 2023) the total police workforce is still smaller

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than it was in 2010 relative to population. There were 379 full time equivalent police workforce members per 100,000 resident population in England and Wales in March 2025, down almost 14 per cent from 440 in March 2010.

64. The workforce is not only relatively smaller, but also experiencing higher levels of officer and staff turnover, particularly at the more junior ranks. Among sergeants, **voluntary resignations have more than doubled**, rising from around one in ten leavers in 2011/2012 to almost one in four in 2024/25. Voluntary resignations among constables have increased even more sharply over the same period, rising from around 1 in 5 in 2011/12 to more than 1 in 2 in 2024/25. These are clear signs of an organisation that is struggling to retain talent. Officer recruitment drives and higher rates of turnover have created a more inexperienced officer workforce. In March 2025, almost a third (32 per cent) of police officers had less than five years' experience, up from 14 per cent from March 2016 and almost all these less experienced officers are police constables (98 per cent)[9].

> I'm finding people coming in on my team now, about six new officers resigned in the last three to six months, and most of them were like "I didn't know I was going to work nights", and "I didn't know I was going to have to deal with aggressive people".
>
> **Focus group participant**

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65. High officer turnover reflects a growing wellbeing crisis in policing. Police officers and staff report seriously concerning levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout. 45 per cent of the respondents to the **National Police Wellbeing Survey 2025** reported often feeling burnt out, 55 per cent said they experience persistent physical fatigue and 60 per cent said they find it difficult to take enough breaks. We heard first-hand of the physical and emotional toll operating in policing today is taking on officers and staff. Many officers and staff reported being overstretched, pulled in different directions and unsupported. High workloads, process-heavy working environments and resource scarcity impede supervisors and leaders from effectively supporting and developing their staff.

> We just find that supervisors are absolutely drowning in administration and need the time to be given to properly supervise teams.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

[9] NPCC Management Information, accessed May 2026, unpublished.

66. Pressure on the front line and on supervisors is compounded by the tendency to create more processes, forms and paperwork for police professionals when things go wrong. Successive inspections, inquiries and reviews related to policing have resulted in recommendations for prescriptive policies, procedures and training. This has bred a compliance culture in police forces which is making the service more risk-averse at all levels and eroding the ability of police personnel to exercise their discretion. The danger is that ticking boxes in compliance with procedure replaces doing the right thing. In parallel, officers and staff are largely dissatisfied with their training and development and are not confident they have the skills to carry out their role. Most of the sergeants responding to our survey[10] said their training prepared them "not at all" (38 per cent) or to only a "slight extent" (34 per cent) for their promotion**.** Leaders who feel constrained and ill-equipped are likely to avoid decisions and be reluctant to try new things. This is not solely about training (important as that is), but also about motivation, the personal commitment of officers, empathy and pride in the job.

> The current training for new leaders is far too theoretical … it fails to equip a new sergeant or inspector in very basic but crucial skills.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

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67. During its roundtables, the Commission heard from many who felt that policing culture is increasingly becoming risk averse. Many felt that senior officers were the most risk averse. Some felt that this was because they had more to lose being so close to retirement.

> I'm going to say something which may or may not be controversial. I think the service is pitifully risk averse. Pitifully. And the higher up you go, the more risk averse it becomes.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

68. This culture of risk aversion is perhaps at its most destructive when leaders and managers escalate matters to the formal conduct system that could be dealt with through good performance management. Our expert reference group was clear that performance management is often bypassed, and issues escalated too quickly to conduct processes. They said that this happens because police leaders feel safer managing things through formal conduct processes rather than through constructive performance conversations and because many said they had no training or guidance

[10] The Commission tasked the Police Foundation to design and carry out an online questionnaire with sergeants and inspectors. The survey was distributed by the Police Federation of England and Wales to 14,363 sergeants and 4,338 inspectors on 5 May 2025. Further information is provided at **Appendix 1**.

in having difficult conversations. Relying on the conduct system to deal with poor performance completely undermines effective supervision and provides little room for people to learn from their mistakes. It makes people reluctant to admit that they need help or call out bad behaviours of others, allowing problems to fester and grow.

> I just think there are too many weak managers in the police that are afraid of conflict. They are afraid of what people think of them. They are afraid of complaints. They're afraid of what the public will think. I think that sergeants particularly, don't feel like they have top cover, so they also avoid conversations.
>
> **Focus group participant**

69. We have encountered overwhelming evidence that police personnel at all levels, even people in senior positions, do not feel able to speak up against failures and misconduct for fear of negative repercussions. This was a dominant theme of the submissions to our call for evidence and a key issue for our expert reference group. We also see this in the **National Police Wellbeing Survey 2025** data. Only 16 per cent of the police constables who responded said that they felt confident to speak up against the actions or decisions of senior leaders. Senior officers reported more confidence to speak up, but the figure reached just 55 per cent at superintendent level. This means that almost half of superintendents responding to the survey did not feel able to challenge their superiors.

70. This is not a new finding. Baroness Casey identified that speaking up was not welcome during her **review of culture in the Metropolitan Police**. She said that those who speak up "learn the hard way that there are adverse consequences for themselves, their careers and for their teams." Lady Angiolini similarly found that "many on the receiving end of poor behaviour never reach a point where they feel confident to report it" in **the first report of her inquiry**. Lady Angiolini said that "merely contemplating how such a complaint could play out may be a sufficient deterrent". Gillian Fairfield's follow-up report on the culture in the Metropolitan Police is due to report in the Autumn. Lady Angiolini's part two report on police culture is expected to be published in early 2027.

71. This inability which people feel to speak up is symptomatic of a wider lack of organisational fairness and procedural justice in police forces. We have heard a near unanimous strength of feeling in the service that formal processes for performance, promotion, conduct and complaints are unfair and insufficiently focused on

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performance and learning. More than half the sergeants responding to our survey[11] disagreed (59 per cent) when asked if the promotion process was open and transparent. The lack of internal trust in these systems and processes is often rooted in a belief that they have been designed to serve the interests of the leaders who control them, rather than to support the organisation to deliver better outcomes for the public. This can be reinforced when they reward leaders who look and behave in similar ways. This is not just about visible differences, but for some, visible similarities between police leaders do serve to reinforce it. Data on the demographics of police staff are not collected by seniority so we cannot report on the overall diversity of senior and executive leaders in policing, but we do know that senior and executive police officers tend to be white men who have served in policing for much of their working lives. In April 2026, 68 per cent of officers at chief inspector rank and above were men, 89 per cent identified as white, 88 per cent were between the age of 41 and 55 and 92 per cent had more than 15 years' policing experience[12].

> The leaders selected at senior levels are all the same. If your face doesn't fit, then you don't progress. There is little public service mentality. They are more concerned with reputational risk than doing the right thing.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

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72. Taken together, this compliance culture, risk aversion, resistance to new ideas and ways of working, and a perceived lack of organisational fairness is undermining police performance. High-performing organisations look after their people, welcome different ideas, and create safe spaces for people to challenge and take considered risks. Many people in policing do not feel they work in such organisations.

Preparing for the future

73. The future will require frontline leaders with the skills and capacity to handle complex issues on the street and online. It will require senior and executive leaders with resilience, empathy and tact to lead their people and communities through the challenges of today and tomorrow. Senior leaders will need to:

    i. Manage large complex organisations through periods of significant change, managing resource constraints and financial challenges.

[11] Police Leadership Commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished.
[12] College of Policing internal data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

ii. Be excellent public communicators who can connect to more disparate and isolated communities in a complex political environment with an increasing focus on issues of crime and justice on one hand and fairness and equality on the other.

iii. Inspire and motivate their officers and staff who are facing a fractured working environment.

iv. Demonstrate technological agility to transform how policing does its work, by adopting new technologies to respond to new forms of criminality and better target resources.

Yet, these are the very skills and competencies we were told most frequently were lacking in police leadership today. Policing faces a challenging future, behind the curve, with leadership that is not adequately prepared.

> We need more training and inputs around business acumen. Exec leaders are and remain police officers yet are managing finance, HR, change programmes inherently by osmosis.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

> Political acumen is improving but needs to be a continued focus for development [as it is a] … challenge that many leaders are not well enough prepared for.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

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74. The Government has already recognised that fundamental reform is required to meet these future challenges and opportunities. Its **white paper** lays out an ambitious programme of reform to deliver the structures, technologies and capabilities that will support police leaders to take the service forward. We are in no doubt of the need to deliver this reform. Policing services must be transformed to deliver greater consistency and put neighbourhood policing – connected to communities – at the heart of service delivery, whilst also taking a national and resilient approach to serious and organised and international crime. The Government's commitment to create a new national police force, the National Police Service (NPS), and to review local police force structures, is designed to help meet these challenges. The creation of new organisations also presents opportunities to create the conditions for inspirational and accountable police leaders of tomorrow to thrive by embedding new, fair and trusted approaches to leadership development and progression. But getting there will not be easy. It will involve the greatest changes to policing's systems, structures and processes since at least the 1960s. The ability for policing leaders to inspire, explain

and deliver this change in ways that bring the public and the workforce with them will be crucial.

> I think the opportunity for policing in that white paper is to … really build that understanding of the leadership requirements and the workforce requirements of a modern police service that we can then nurture within our workforce.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

Addressing inadequate and inconsistent leadership development

75. Leadership development in policing is primarily designed and delivered by learning and development professionals working in local police forces. The College of Policing, the body responsible for professional standards in policing, delivers some national leadership development programmes centrally, but the scale of this provision is tiny. Only around 550 officers and allied professionals will start a centrally delivered national leadership development programme this year: about 0.2 per cent of the total police workforce or equivalent to roughly half the number of superintendents currently serving nationally[13]. The College sets standards from the centre to encourage quality and consistency of what is delivered locally. It has powers to work with the Home Secretary to mandate these standards in regulations and statutory guidance. But its formal powers have rarely been used. The College uses guidance, curriculum, resources and implementation support to encourage best and promising practice and enable local flexibility, but it simply lacks the resources to have the footprint in forces directly to deliver leadership training itself or even fully to subsidise what it does deliver centrally.

76. The College's core funding, Home Office grant-in-aid (GIA) has almost halved in real terms since 2012/13 while the scope of its activities has increased. GIA funding has reduced from £47m in 2012/13 to £35m in 2025/26[14]**.** Given the continuing financial pressures, the College has said that it has now reached the point where it faces no other choice but to work with the Home Office and chief constables to agree significant decreases in the central subsidies it provides for leadership development programmes, increasing the cost to forces. For example, from 2026/27, the cost for

[13] Data on police constable joiners is taken from: **Police workforce England and Wales statistics – GOV.UK**. Data on annual number of promotions is in **Police workforce open data tables – GOV.UK**.
[14] College of Policing internal data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

forces to send one delegate to the College's flagship executive leadership programme will increase by 354 per cent from around £7,000 to around £25,000[15].

77. The decision to reduce the central subsidy has given forces even more ownership over leadership development investment, access and prioritisation and made spending even more vulnerable to local budgetary and operational pressures. We have heard from chiefs who are now reluctant to send people with leadership potential to national leadership programmes delivered by the College because their perception is they will not get a great enough return on the local investment required. This will damage the individual leadership development of those who may be denied relevant opportunities, but it also completely undermines the centre's ability to grip leadership development and capability on a national basis.

78. We travelled throughout England and Wales visiting forces and the College's national training centre in Ryton. We met professionals delivering leadership development locally and nationally. They are dedicated and passionate about leadership but largely working in isolation. Forces had different schemes for identifying leadership talent and no clear view on what worked well in other places. The College currently lacks the capacity and influence to oversee and standardise the leadership development in this way. This has created a postcode lottery of leadership development provision for officers and staff. As a result, our expert reference group concluded that there was "no clear system owner" for police leadership. The group described the College's programmes as a "partial" rather than an "end-to-end" offering and noted that local forces retain autonomy for their leadership development. A complete redefinition of the relationship between the centre and local is needed to improve the quality and consistency of police leadership development and deliver the leaders that will carry English and Welsh policing into the future.

79. The College finds itself repeatedly seeking the agreement and consent of all local chief constables and police and crime commissioners (PCCs) when it wants to implement reform on a national basis. This is an issue highlighted in the **Government's police reform white paper** and one the reform programme is trying to address. The College works closely with national bodies representing chief constables and PCCs to try and reach consensus, but the process is slow and arduous. It can easily be undermined by influential individuals dissenting and cultural resistance. Even when consensus is reached, it is vulnerable to personnel changes breaking it down. The ongoing attempt to reform the promotions processes for sergeants and inspectors is a good example of this. The service first identified that the processes were not fit for purpose in 2020. Since then, there has been a formal review, two service-wide

[15] College of Policing internal data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

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consultations and two discussions at Chief Constables' Council. All this engagement and consultation has resulted in an ongoing test phase of a new process involving just five volunteer forces and early indications suggest there is considerable variability in the approach to these promotions even under this revised arrangement. The evaluation of the test phase is due to report in December 2026, after which there will need to be urgent appraisal of existing evidence, analysis of additional findings, and an immediate timetable for implementing improvements.

> To get workforce reform in policing, you have to get 43 chiefs and 43 PCCs to agree to every inch of detail. Reform is at a snail's pace …
>
> When I said four or five years ago that we needed promotion reform, everybody agreed. But we've got four or five forces that are taking part in that pilot … It's a snail's pace, but everybody knows promotion isn't fit for purpose.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

80. We need to strengthen governance, decision making and investment for leadership development at the centre to deliver quality and consistent leadership development in policing. With boldness, clarity, evidence and ambition, along with rebalancing of where resources lie and where decisions are made, the police service can be ready for the challenges which lie ahead.

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Chapter 2: Definition of police leadership

The value of having a shared definition of leadership

81. The most consistent theme across the submissions to the Commission's call for evidence was that policing lacked understanding of what good police leadership looks like. As a result, the police approach to reward and progression, talent identification and leadership development is often subjective, inconsistent and shaped in the image of the leaders who are responsible for them at a local level.

> [There's a need] to convince some of the key people in our organisations that there's not nepotism and individual senior leaders picking people in their own image.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

82. Currently there is no agreed view of what constitutes effective leadership. This means that there are multiple different assumptions, behaviours and practices that co-exist, contributing to inconsistencies across forces and a lack of shared understanding across the workforce. This does not serve the public well.

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83. Without an agreed view of leadership, the approach taken by individual chief officers has a disproportionate influence on leadership opportunities. A change in a chief officer can mean a substantial change in leadership approach within that force. We heard from officers on force visits and in workshops who felt their careers were thriving under one chief constable but then stifled following a change at the top because of a changed concept and style of leadership. This can lead to a culture of a person's face fitting or not and it undermines diversity of thought and challenge. Inconsistency and instability in the approach to leadership are not conducive to high performance.

> I'm really fortunate … I've had really good sponsorship from our chief constable in a really tangible way over the last couple of years. But we'll probably have another new chief constable in the next couple of years. And will that endure beyond that particular tenure?
>
> **Workshop participant**

84. Other services and sectors have grappled with a shared understanding of what constitutes effective leadership. The British Army found that the lack of a shared concept of leadership had hampered its effectiveness and endangered its reputation.

In 2015, it undertook a major literature and practice review and established the **Centre for Army Leadership** in order to develop leadership that applies both in peacetime and theatres of war. It first clarified and codified key values and standards in order to develop leadership doctrine which is used to guide the activities and conversations of both leaders and followers, given that leadership is a core function of the army.

85. The NHS Leadership Academy also recognised the value of a shared understanding of leadership and created **six principles for leadership** across all health professions, enabling conversations and practices which aim to encourage improvement in the service, change the culture of the NHS, be compassionate and inclusive, and challenge inappropriate behaviours among staff.

86. Many private sector companies also use key leadership values and principles to reinforce consistency of shared expectations about values, skills and behaviours. These are then linked to performance assessment and succession planning. These are particularly visible in organisations with strongly stated purpose and positive culture.

87. The College understood the importance of having consistency in the police leadership approach by setting **leadership standards** in 2023, along with a **competency and values framework**. However, the College recognises that the standards need review and a refresh. The standards also did not gain traction in the service, with high variability in whether or how they were embedded in different forces leading to inconsistency in application and practice.

88. We offer a working definition to provide a shared understanding of what is meant by leadership.

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Recommendation 2: The police service should adopt a clear definition and set of principles of leadership which reflect both present and future policing challenges. We therefore lay out a working definition which can be built on over time by the National Academy of Police Leadership which we propose in **chapter 12** of this report.

A working definition of police leadership

89. Effective police leadership incorporates the best ingredients of leadership in public and private organisations, here and across the world. This definition reflects evidence gathered by the Commission, including the call for evidence, roundtables and practitioner engagement, together with lessons from policing, the military, health service, wider public service and private sector organisations.

90. Our working definition of effective police leadership is:

> The exercise of positive influence over others, with the key aim of providing high-quality public service through cutting crime and keeping people safe. Leadership aims to harness the efforts of those involved and generate consent about what needs to be done and the ways in which tasks are carried out, but where necessary to enforce decisions using legal powers.
>
> Action requires a situational leadership style which aims to generate trust and confidence in the decisions of the police service, which should be provided without fear or favour.
>
> Police leadership is distinctive because it involves the exercise of powers on behalf of the state, operates within a democratic and legal framework and depends upon legitimacy, accountability, fairness and public trust. Leadership must therefore combine operational effectiveness with ethical judgement and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, risks and public expectations.
>
> Many organisations find it important to have leadership principles (already noted for British Army and the NHS) and these are expressed here in terms of what effective police leaders should be, know and do – the values, knowledge and actions they must deploy.
>
> Effective police leaders must hold particular values of public service: selflessness, integrity, moral courage, impartiality and fairness, taking responsibility and being accountable.
>
> Effective police leaders should have particular knowledge: be self-aware of their own strengths and weaknesses; and should have appropriate knowledge of those they work with. They must have professional and technical knowledge and knowledge of how the external context may shape strategic, operational and tactical choices. They have sound judgement and use critical thinking skills. They know how to lead and manage to achieve identified priorities, how to make decisions and when to delay a decision pending further information. They know how to communicate.
>
> Effective police leaders take action: strive for high and ethical performance and achievement of goals; take fair decisions informed by

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the best evidence they have available; they exercise judgement in complex situations; are visible and accessible; they inspire confidence and respect from those they work with; they build teams and foster a culture of values and standards; they challenge inappropriate behaviour in the workplace; they act as role models for those they lead; they empower and develop their team and the individuals in it; they take account of the wellbeing of themselves and those they work with; they encourage curiosity and seek out opportunities for innovation and improvement; they encourage learning from mistakes; they consult those with relevant expertise within and outside their organisation; they operate within the policies set for the police service.

A dynamic approach to the definition

91. The Commission considers effective leadership to require capability across six broad domains: strategic leadership, operational delivery, people leadership, change and learning, personal effectiveness and political astuteness. Leadership is required at all levels of policing, from more dependent and supervised environments through to independent and highly interdependent leadership in complex partnership and system settings. These principles should inform future standards, promotion frameworks, talent development and leadership programmes developed by the National Academy of Police Leadership.

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92. This working definition lays a foundation for further detailed work by the proposed National Academy of Police Leadership (set out in **chapter 12**) in creating a clear and agreed approach to leadership for the future.

93. This should then be used to refine leadership principles and to identify key capabilities for leadership at different levels in the police service. The Commission heard from contributors about capabilities of strategic and systems thinking, of managing large complex organisations, of working in a democratic context at the political interface with politicians, of managing change, innovation and improvement. This work can be used to design and evaluate future leadership courses and professional development, to shape promotion criteria, to performance manage and support officers and staff, and to talent spot and support those who have leadership potential.

Chapter 3: Workforce strategy, data and evaluation

94. The Government has recognised the need for a strategic workforce plan for policing that helps the service make the most of the skills of warranted and non-warranted professionals, prioritises recruitment of people with crucial specialist skills and improves retention of the skilled professionals already working in policing.
The Government expects the proposed National Police Service (NPS) to provide a "single home for the development of a strategic approach to workforce planning". In the meantime, it says the Home Office will design a "national workforce strategy for policing" in collaboration with system partners. We agree with this approach. In this chapter we set out:

    i. The **urgent need for a workforce strategy** which provides a clear plan for addressing existing critical and future leadership skills gaps.

    ii. The case for the **NPS to deliver strategic workforce planning** in the long term so that policing can take ownership of its own workforce planning.

    iii. How much better central grip of **workforce data** will enable policing to truly understand its leadership capability and skills gaps.

    iv. How a **continuous and systematic approach to the evaluation of leadership development interventions** can support policing to understand how its training and support is improving leadership capability and enabling policing to cut crime and keep people safe.

95. It is only with this comprehensive approach to workforce strategy, data and evaluation that we can ensure that we have the police workforce with the skills to meet current and future demands.

The urgent need for a workforce strategy

96. Policing requires a plan now to address the fact that there is no clear understanding of the skills that currently exist in policing and what skills it will need in the future. Without this understanding, there is also no clear plan to recruit or develop people with the skills needed now and in future.

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Recommendation 3: Work to deliver the comprehensive workforce strategy promised in the Government's police reform white paper should commence immediately.

This strategy is essential to ensuring that the service can recruit and train for a rapidly changing landscape. It will ensure that there is capacity in the service to deliver the basic, effective, preventive and protective policing on the ground with the emerging challenge of online criminality.

97. As explained in our case for change, there is a widespread belief that police leadership lacks skills critical for the future. Multiple people have told us that there are not enough police leaders with skills relating to being politically astute while remaining politically neutral, technologically agile and financially resilient. We are in no doubt that these are developmental needs for many police leaders, but without a comprehensive workforce plan there is no clear and common understanding of these critical skills gaps, let alone a coordinated approach to addressing them.

> The service has no thought as to what skills are needed in 10 years' time…Police forces are not currently being led to meet these challenges and expertise from outside of policing is needed to assist.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

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98. Workforce planning remains largely devolved to individual forces. The result is a system in which local flexibility is preserved, but without the infrastructure required to support coordinated national planning. The system cannot consistently understand the distribution of skills and capability across the workforce, track patterns of progression, or identify where leadership pipelines are weakening. Nor can it reliably plan for future workforce requirements in a systematic and evidence-led way.

99. A comprehensive workforce strategy should provide a clear, system-wide framework for understanding current and future workforce needs. The strategy should reposition workforce planning as a core strategic function rather than a locally determined administrative activity. A coherent, system-wide approach would not remove local flexibility, but would ensure that local decisions are informed by shared data, aligned to national priorities and capable of delivering long-term leadership capability across policing.

> There's a lot of talent within [policing], as well as externally, and recognising that and having an understanding of that is really important.
>
> **Roundtable participant**

100. But this is not just about planning to ensure that policing has leaders with the skills needed for the future. There are critical gaps in leadership skills now. One of the most visible results of weak workforce planning is the widespread use of acting up and temporary promotions.

101. The terms acting up and temporary promotion are often used interchangeably in policing, but they can mean different things. Spending time on temporary promotion as a sergeant and inspector is currently an accepted part in the promotion process for these ranks. At more senior levels, temporary appointments are commonly used to fill gaps created by sudden departures or longer periods of absence, like long-term sickness, family leave, suspensions or secondments. Later in **chapter 8** of this report, we explain why probationary periods should replace temporary promotion in frontline leadership roles. In **chapter 11** we discuss how weak senior workforce planning has led to concerning levels of temporary postholders in the most senior positions and our recommendation to strengthen senior workforce planning to address this.

102. Acting up is the term often used to describe when people are working above their rank to fill short-term resourcing needs on the front line. During our force visits and in our other engagement with officers we encountered widespread use of acting up to meet resourcing demands. Policing does not currently monitor acting up on the front line so there are no comprehensive statistics. Our survey[16] provides the most comprehensive data available. It indicates that acting up is commonplace for sergeants and inspectors and that many have acted up for long periods. 75 per cent of the inspectors and 85 per cent of sergeants reported having acted up before they were substantively promoted, with around half doing so for more than 13 months. 21 per cent of these inspectors and 15 per cent of these sergeants had acted up for more than two years.

> Good people are often in acting positions for years, who cannot get promoted substantively, but are allowed to continue acting in that higher rank/post. They should either be moved on or developed.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

103. Officers may need to act up in exceptional circumstances out of operational necessity. But local levels of acting up on the front line should be monitored as part of workforce planning. Forces overusing acting up or keeping people in acting positions for long periods should be supported to ensure that officers have access to the leadership development they need and that those meeting the required standards are given the opportunity to be formally assessed for promotion as quickly as possible.

[16] Police Leadership Commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished.

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The role of the National Police Service

104. The creation of the NPS will finally provide the system with a sufficiently strong central capability to integrate workforce data, undertake system-level analysis and monitor leadership talent across policing. In design decisions for the new national forces, the Home Office should ensure that workforce and strategic skills planning for the entire service is housed within the NPS and led by a senior leader at the management level.

Recommendation 4: The proposed National Police Service should take the lead in creating a comprehensive workforce strategy.

The NPS should ensure that workforce strategy is cognisant of local needs and flexible enough to support local workforce planning across England and Wales.

A dedicated senior workforce planning function should be housed within the NPS' National Academy of Police Leadership. This is described in more detail in **chapters 11** and **12 recommendations 22** and **24**.

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105. Later, in **chapter 11** of this report, we will describe why senior workforce planning needs specific attention. We believe this should be owned within the NPS by the new National Academy of Police Leadership. A senior workforce planning function, within the National Academy, will play a critical role in strengthening the leadership pipeline and providing a clear view of capability and future demand.

106. It is essential that the NPS' national workforce strategy and senior workforce planning retains some local flexibility. Stronger central workforce planning should provide the infrastructure needed to ensure that local decisions are informed by national insight and aligned to system-wide priorities. Without a strengthened central capability, workforce planning will remain fragmented and reactive. With it, policing can move towards a more strategic, coordinated and sustainable approach.

Workforce data

107. Policing does not yet have a sufficiently clear central picture of its own workforce to understand the make-up, capability and future potential of police leaders. Without this any strategic workforce plan will be limited in its usefulness. While some data exists across forces and national bodies, it remains fragmented, inconsistent and not routinely integrated into a single, coherent national picture capable of supporting end-to-end workforce planning.

Recommendation 5: A complete rethink of how police workforce data is collected, collated and analysed, and applied in real time is required.

This is fundamental to determining priorities and applying consistency of approach to the use of resources and assessment of outcomes.

108. There are national datasets which provide some insight into the police workforce. The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) has established a national workforce data tracker which brings together data on the police workforce at an individual level. This is providing a richer picture by linking up data on things like demographics, initial training, promotions and conduct. But concerningly, resource constraints appear to be putting even the continued collation of this data at risk. As we understand it, unless resourcing priorities change, the College will not have the capacity to link its data on national promotions processes at sergeant and inspector to the tracker from 2026/27. This will significantly reduce the usefulness of the tracker, which currently only offers a partial view. The data held on the national workforce data tracker only describes officers and thus provides no insight into the third of the police workforce who do not hold the office of constable. Similarly, wellbeing data currently collected by the National Police Wellbeing Survey provides a structured mechanism for capturing the views of the workforce and, where data is available, offers valuable evidence on leadership confidence, morale and organisational culture. Drawing this data together with other aspects of workforce data would strengthen central grip of the issues and understanding of their cumulative impact, rather than looking at issues in isolation.

109. The data the College holds on officers and staff engaged in its leadership development offer is poorly managed and is not connected to any wider datasets. Different individuals and teams in the College hold data in different ways with no overall approach and little to no data cleansing. As a result, the College could not easily answer the most basic of our data queries and held no coherent data about the onward careers of the officers and staff who had attended its leadership development or talent programmes. The College lacks the resource and the capability to provide central data monitoring of leadership talent across the service because it has not been set up to do so. It has neither the funding nor the authority to provide this function. As a result, the data strand of its current **national talent development strategy** relies on forces to collect "talent analytics" locally.

110. Data reform is not simply about improving data systems. It is about transforming how policing understands and manages its workforce, ensuring that data becomes a

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central tool for strategic leadership rather than a fragmented by-product of administrative processes.

Evaluation

111. Policing lacks a systematic and consistent approach to evaluating leadership development. Expansive training and development activity takes place across the service but there is limited evidence on its effectiveness or impact. During our force visits programme, we encountered a learning and development department (in Norfolk and Suffolk) with a comprehensive evaluation of its leadership development offer to sergeants and inspectors. This has helped the force demonstrate that its first-line leaders training had delivered improvements helping its officers and staff to manage resources, monitor performance, develop their teams and identify opportunities for change and innovation. But typically, data on participation, outcomes and progression is not consistently captured, linked or fed back to the centre. As a result, the system cannot reliably assess whether leadership development programmes are improving leadership capability, contributing to organisational performance, or delivering value for money.

Recommendation 6: A systematic, centrally supported evaluation framework and programme for analysing the value and effectiveness of leadership training and development across policing should be established.

A radical shakeup of training and development should be embedded in every stage of career development and promotion, including evaluation, performance and recognition of on-the-job delivery, outcomes and competency. This would be intended to facilitate robust longer-term measures to assess impact on leadership behaviour, organisational performance, and public outcomes.

Evaluation should be owned by the National Academy of Police Leadership so that it can be considered in the design and delivery of all leadership development across the system.

112. This limitation is closely connected to the wider issues with workforce data. Without integrated datasets, it is not possible to track the long-term impact of development programmes on individuals or the system as a whole. The Commission therefore considers that evaluation must be embedded from the outset of programme design and delivery. A systematic, centrally supported framework should combine real-time feedback with longer-term impact assessment, ensuring that both formative and summative evaluation are integral to leadership development. This should include mechanisms to capture participant insight, facilitate reflection and behavioural change

during programme delivery, alongside robust measures of longer-term impact on leadership behaviour, organisational performance and public outcomes.

113. Central coordination will be essential to ensure consistency and comparability across the system. A national approach will enable policing to build a cumulative evidence base on leadership development, identifying what works and ensuring that investment is targeted effectively. As policing develops new leadership schemes and national programmes, it must be able to evaluate their effectiveness and adapt them accordingly. Without this, the system risks continuing to invest in development activity without a clear understanding of its impact. This is why it is important for evaluation to be led by the National Academy of Police Leadership.

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Chapter 4: Representation and ethics

114. In recent years policing in England and Wales has been accused of applying the law unfairly and treating incidents, protests and crimes differently based on the background or social group of those involved. The background or identity of any perpetrator or victim of crime should have absolutely no bearing on the quality of treatment or respect which is given to them by the police service. We agree wholeheartedly with the **words of the Home Secretary on 2 June 2026**:

> The police in this country have a sacred duty to police without fear or favour. Everyone in this country is equal before the law; it is the promise upon which our whole justice system rests. The equality of every citizen is the foundation on which the openness, tolerance and generosity of this country rests.
>
> **The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP, Secretary of State for the Home Office**

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115. At the same time as some accuse police leaders of preferencing certain groups, others criticise them for doing too little to address racism, misogyny and discrimination within their organisations and in the way they police. Individual police leaders have been labelled as “woke” or “anti-woke” and repeatedly invited to take sides in the so-called “culture wars”. The pendulum of public, or rather, the most vocal, perception, has swung from one side to the other. Police leaders should be resolute in refusing to take sides, or to be diverted from the course of focusing entirely on the prevention, detection and prosecution of crime. Police leaders should uphold the core values of the British police service, the **Peelian principles of policing**. Fundamental to these principles is the notion that police authority is derived from the public’s consent. Consent is gained not only by acting without fear or favour, but also by maintaining the confidence of the public they serve. Police leaders today need to represent and understand all the communities they serve in an increasingly diverse society and exercise good judgement, demonstrating their impartiality in respect of everyone they encounter.

Representative public service policing

116. Our case for change laid out our concerns that the lack of diversity of skills, experience and background amongst senior police officers is undermining high performance in police forces. We are in no doubt that high-performing organisations

thrive through diversity of thought and that this is supported by having an inclusive workforce. An inclusive workforce also helps to police increasingly multicultural communities effectively. We need a police service that truly reflects the communities it serves. To do so, the internal processes of training and promotion, recognition of talent and competency should demonstrate a leadership style which rejects discrimination of any kind and upholds decency, respect and common sense.

117. In 1829 the first Metropolitan Police officers were issued general instructions by which to carry out their duties, what we now typically refer to as the Peelian principles of policing. Almost 200 years later, England and Wales are diverse in ways perhaps unimaginable to the officers receiving the general instructions in 1829. But instruction seven holds truer than ever for today's police officers:

> To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.

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118. Representation of women in the police has considerably improved. Proportionally, there are more female officers at senior or executive level than first line leaders. In **March 2025**, 38 per cent of constables, 29 per cent sergeants, 28 per cent of inspectors, 30 per cent of superintendents, and 38 per cent of chief superintendents were female. People from an ethnic minority background are still significantly underrepresented. As of April 2026, only 9 per cent of police officers identified from an ethnic minority background. Minority ethnic representation is lowest among chief officers. In April 2026, only 9 of the 258 chief officers in England and Wales identified from a minority ethnic background (4 per cent)[17].

119. The Commission has engaged with officers and staff from a variety of under-represented and minority groups. Many spoke of their experience of discrimination and harassment at work and having to work harder than other colleagues to be seen as good enough. Data from the **National Police Wellbeing Survey 2025** reinforces this. 20 per cent of black and minority ethnic respondents, 16 per cent of female respondents, 21 per cent of respondents with a disability and between 18 per cent and 21 per cent of LGBTQ respondents reported experiencing discrimination within their organisation in the past year**.** Several senior officers told us that their experience of discrimination got worse as they rose up the ranks.

[17] NPCC Management Information, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

> As soon as it was released that I got through the promotion process, suddenly numerous anonymous messages went into PSD around some perceived integrity [issue] of mine, which was just complete lies. And that's why they do it, because it's anonymous and it doesn't come back to them.
>
> **Black female police officer, workshop participant**

120. It is not surprising therefore that officers from underrepresented groups are more likely to leave policing before retirement than white male officers. In 2025/26 officers who identified from an ethnic minority left through voluntary resignation at a rate of 43 per 1,000, compared with 30.4 per 1,000 for white officers[18]. Poor retention and progression outcomes make it extremely difficult to address representation of ethnic minority groups at senior ranks. Current strategies to overcome this largely rely on local accountability, mentorship and sponsorship. We have heard of positive examples of mentorship supporting talented officers and staff from underrepresented groups to succeed. We believe that to avoid erroneous perceptions of compensatory bias, the emphasis should be on the best possible leadership and management competency which recognises and rewards talent, irrespective of background or characteristic, and fosters a culture where fairness is experienced and not just advocated.
121. Excellent leadership and highly professional and competent management would foster inclusive working environments and ensure that unacceptable behaviour and discrimination within the service – or in delivering the service – is rooted out, and the kind of unacceptable leadership highlighted by what happened at Charing Cross police station is seen to be unacceptable and eliminated. Taken together, our recommendations should help to address representation within the police workforce and support the better policing of all communities and groups.

Ethical police leadership

122. Our case for change also recognised that policing decisions are increasingly complex and contested in today's increasingly polarised climate. We are calling for a radical overhaul of the approach to learning and development in policing to ensure that police leaders have all the skills they need to operate in the 21st century, including those which help them to be politically adept whilst maintaining political neutrality. This investment needs to be complemented with a clear ethical framework in which police leaders can operate.

[18] NPCC Management Information, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

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Recommendation 7: The National Police Service should take a lead role in promoting ethical and inclusive policing and be responsible for building a community of practice across the country.

The NPS should lay out a clearer national landscape for ethics forums. This may require the establishment of a national ethics capability within the NPS itself.

123. We have reflected on how the commitment to act without fear or favour is reflected in the fifth Peelian principle of policing:

    - To seek and preserve public favour, not by pandering to public opinion; but by constantly demonstrating absolutely impartial service to law, in complete independence of policy, and without regard to the justice or injustice of the substance of individual laws, by ready offering of individual service and friendship to all members of the public without regard to their wealth or social standing, by ready exercise of courtesy and friendly good humour; and by ready offering of individual sacrifice in protecting and preserving life.

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124. Policing ethics committees also have a broader role in helping forces to assess and respond to evolving scientific and technological developments, particularly in areas such as AI-driven surveillance and data-led policing. A recent **House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee report** described a "Wild West, in which new technologies are developing at a pace that public awareness, government and legislation have not kept up with". **PoliceAI** – a new national centre dedicated to the responsible development, piloting and scaling of artificial intelligence in policing – will help to deliver new AI tools that work for policing and steer the use of AI in policing nationally. Local force-level ethics committees also provide an important forum to scrutinise emerging tools, question their evidential basis, and advise on how they should be introduced or adapted as capabilities develop. This reflects an important dimension of ethical leadership in policing – ensuring that new tools are not only operationally effective, but also transparent, accountable and introduced with appropriate caution and ongoing oversight. But local ethics committees need to work within a national framework so that we can bring consistency of decision making.

Chapter 5: Police constable recruitment and training

125. Police constables are asked to show leadership in many ways. We ask them to show leadership when they respond to dynamic, complex, critical and confrontational situations; by engaging with victims, witnesses and suspects with respect and without bias; and by working constructively with their colleagues, partners and communities to prevent crime. And we ask them to be effective investigators, securing evidence on arrival at the scene of a crime and handling and analysing information and intelligence from a variety of sources. Everything we ask of police constables makes it one of the most complex frontline jobs in the public sector. There can be huge consequences for the individuals and wider society if it is done badly. Constables operating in this environment need quality training and support to ensure they can carry out their difficult roles effectively. But at present, the landscape for police constable recruitment and training is confusing for prospective officers and inconsistently delivered, with little national assurance of effectiveness. This situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Ensuring that all recruits receive quality training

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126. The service and the Government recognise that the complexity of the police constable role requires officers to have degree-level critical thinking and communication skills. Prospective police constables are not required to be graduates: the police service is open to everyone with the integrity, commitment to public service and passion for keeping the public safe. Police constable training should provide new entrants with the necessary skills and knowledge. But since 2024, policing has embraced a new training programme, the police constable entry programme (PCEP), that is primarily delivered locally with very little oversight or quality assurance and is not designed to give recruits recognition of their learning. New police constables need and deserve the highest quality initial training that equips them for their challenging role. Policing and the public also deserve to know that every constable working to keep our communities safe has been trained to the required standard.

Recommendation 8: Police constable recruits trained through the police constable entry programme (PCEP) should gain accreditation and recognition of their learning.

Forces should have a formal arrangement which supports recruits trained through PCEP to gain accreditation of the learning they completed during their initial training. This can be delivered through partnership with the National Academy of Police Leadership (described in **chapter 12** of this report), a higher-education institution or another awarding organisation. Recruits trained through PCEP should also have the option to top up their accreditation and gain an equivalent qualification to the police constable degree apprenticeship.

There should be a robust approach to ensuring that all PCEP recruits have reached the necessary standard, Evidence that they have met the required standards should be included in their professional digital passport (as described in **chapter 6** of this report).

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127. PCEP was **introduced in 2024** to provide a route that neither required recruits to have a degree nor gain one through their police training. PCEP was designed to provide more flexibility for both forces and recruits by providing a programme that complemented, not replaced, training linked to formal graduate level qualifications. In reality, the data shows that policing is prioritising PCEP and it is fast becoming the default training programme for police constable recruits. 63 per cent of all new joiners were trained through PCEP in 2025/26[19]. At least seven forces are currently only training recruits through PCEP and the College expects 12 forces to be doing so by the end of 2026/27[20]. Some policing leaders have told us that PCEP is preferable because it allows them to deploy new recruits operationally quicker and at less expense, but this is not true.

128. However, the typical costs of training a recruit through the police constable degree apprenticeship (PCDA) – a training programme for new recruits that leads to a graduate level degree apprenticeship – are similar or cheaper than training them through PCEP[21]. PCEP does involve a different number of off-the-job learning days to PCDA, 144 compared to 190. The fewer training days reflect that PCEP does not include all the essential learning and development incorporated into the other training programmes. It is designed to develop recruits to the equivalent of a level five

[19] NPCC Management Information, accessed June 2026, unpublished. This figure includes PCEP, DCEP, and Police Now entrants, who undertake PCEP training.
[20] College of Policing internal data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.
[21] Forces benefit from not having to pay employer national insurance contributions for recruits below the age of 25 studying for the PCDA. It costs them £35,156 to train these recruits through PCEP and £19,500 to train them through PCDA. The total cost of training a recruit in England through PCDA when national insurance contributions are applied is £34,306.

standard (equivalent to a foundation degree) not level six (equivalent to a bachelor's degree) like the other training programmes (including PCDA and bespoke programmes for degree holders).

129. There are clear assurances that recruits trained through degree-linked routes have met the required level six learning outcomes because they gain recognised qualifications proving they have done so. There is no such assurance for the vast majority of PCEP recruits because most forces deliver the PCEP entirely in-house, PCEP recruits gain no formal qualification and it is currently left to forces to assure themselves their recruits have met the required level six standard. The College has neither the capability, resource nor the remit to provide national oversight of PCEP training. Its assurance regime amounts to checking that forces understand the core requirements of the PCEP curriculum and that they are committed to delivering them. Later, in **chapter 12**, we explain why the creation of a National Academy of Police Leadership with adequate resourcing is essential to provide appropriate oversight and to concentrate force recruitment and training on key outcomes, not tick box targets.

130. We need national accreditation and oversight of all police constable training programmes. There is already an option for forces to work with universities to accredit PCEP learning. When a force partners with a higher education institution or another awarding body, PCEP recruits can gain a level five diploma in professional policing practice worth 240 university credits. There is also potential for PCEP recruits to attain a level six qualification, through their post programme development. As of April 2026, seven forces had secured level five accreditation for PCEP, and one had level six accreditation arrangements in place[22].

131. As noted in **chapter 12**, some in policing are reluctant to partner with higher education institutions citing poor experiences of procurement and suboptimal delivery of the past. This should not hold policing back from raising the standards of PCEP training today. The College and other supporting organisations have been, and continue to, work with forces to address these challenges. There should be proper evaluation of all police constable training. This would give clear evidence of return on investment, support better recruitment and training decisions that meet the future needs of the police force and inform quality partnerships with higher-education, identifying best and promising practices which have impact.

[22] College of Policing internal data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

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Simplifying police constable recruitment

Recommendation 9: Police forces should support officer recruits to choose the most appropriate training programme for them.

Forces should offer a range of police constable training programmes which cater for people with different skills, experiences and learning preferences.

Recruits should not be locked into the training programme they choose when they apply. Instead, bespoke advice should support successful applicants to choose the best police constable training programme for them. Tailored careers advice on training and development should continue to be available as part of the support framework for leaders at all ranks.

132. The College encourages forces to offer a range of training programmes. Doing so ensures forces benefit from the expertise, resources and programme oversight that partnering with higher education provides. The limited data available also suggests that offering different routes attracts applicants with diverse backgrounds, skills and experiences. Most forces do offer more than one training programme. In April 2026, 25 police forces in England and Wales were actively recruiting police officers, 15 of which were offering at least two different training programmes. But 10 hiring forces were only offering one programme and seven of those were only offering the PCEP[23]. Delivering only one police constable training programme to all new recruits is not an effective approach. Forces who are doing so should open new training programmes as soon as possible.

133. Forces offering multiple training programmes typically advertise this to prospective candidates and require them to choose their preferred one on application. An applicant therefore needs to find both a hiring police force and a training programme that suits them and hope these two things align. This puts the onus on the applicant to understand the training that is right for them within a complicated landscape. The College has produced a **guide to joining the police service**. It is admirably clear given the complexities, but it is still 14 pages long and by its very nature can only provide limited bespoke information to individuals.

134. Prospective candidates need proper advice to make informed decisions about their training. They should not be required to choose or stay on a training programme

[23] Some forces open and close applications for different routes at different times. So whilst some forces may be showing as only recruiting through one route in April 2026 this may not be reflective of the totality of its police constable recruit training.

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without it. Clearly understood and consistent training options are not only right for the individual officer, but are absolutely crucial in terms of movement within, and between, police forces. Other front-line professionals, such as teachers and doctors, all expect to have a foundation which is recognised and relevant wherever they work.

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Chapter 6: Career long learning

135. Many officers and staff have no meaningful appraisals, no clear path to identify development needs, and no recognition of learning they can carry with them as they move between roles and forces. Together, a standardised approach to annual performance reviews and a nationally consistent approach to recognising learning and experience would provide a stronger foundation for performance, leadership and career progression across the service. Together, these proposals would make career long learning a central part of professional development, with leadership as a core element. A consistent national process for annual reviews would strengthen fairness, accountability and leadership. A national system for recognising learning and experience would give officers and staff clear evidence of what they can do – evidence they can carry with them as they move between different roles and forces. Embedding both within a professional digital passport would make development, progression and movement across the service far more coherent, and lay the groundwork for the licence to practise model the **Government's police reform white paper** proposes.

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Annual performance reviews

136. Supporting and monitoring performance and development is a basic requirement in any workplace to help nurture a competent and effective workforce. In policing, individual performance is supposed to be supported and monitored through a professional development review (PDR). The College published new **guidance on PDRs** in September 2025. The new guidance sets an expectation that everyone in policing takes part in a PDR conversation with their manager. Police officers must have a complete PDR, meet mandatory training requirements and not be under any sort of performance process to receive the incremental pay award. Despite the new guidance and rules, the current approach in policing is inconsistent, does not give sufficient oversight of workforce capability and by extension leadership capability. The **National Police Wellbeing Survey 2025** reported that only 65 per cent of the police workforce had a PDR in the last year. This leaves a substantial minority of officers and staff without a reliable way to review performance, identify development needs and record continuing professional development.

Recommendation 10: A mandatory and standardised approach to annual performance reviews should be introduced to provide national consistency for appraisal.

Annual performance reviews should be benchmarked and distributed so that police professionals have an accurate understanding of their performance and progress. Through the annual performance review process professionals and line managers should be able to set continuing professional development goals, understand their leadership competency and map their career path.

Records of each annual performance review should eventually be included in a complete professional digital passport that gives each police professional a central record of their development, training, qualifications, conduct and performance.

The NPS should hold a national database of these digital passports. The national database should support the delivery of a licence to practise for police officers, providing a light touch non-bureaucratic way of achieving the Government's stated aim.

137. We heard that even when PDRs are completed, they are not consistently regarded as meaningful. Focus groups and roundtable contributors also pointed to the absence of career-long performance records that acknowledge their achievements and moved with them across roles and forces. Too often, PDRs, where they are in place, are experienced as a box-ticking exercise that gets disregarded rather than a credible professional tool that supports progression, capability and accountability across a career.

138. The **new PDR guidance** identifies several important features for effective performance and development conversations. It emphasises wellbeing, skills development, recognition of achievement, career aspirations, and regular dialogue between line managers and individuals. But it does not place sufficient weight on leadership as a central feature of professional capability. Leadership is often treated as far less important than operational ability, and individual performance in it is rarely checked.

> As an accredited strategic firearms commander or public gold commander … I've got very, very strict and set accreditation CPD that I need to do every single year. If I don't do it, I do not maintain my operational accreditation. We do not take the same approach for leadership and whilst there are good courses offered by the College, they are not mandated. There's no check and balance.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

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139. The health sector offers a well-established, nationally recognised framework for career progression across PDRs, CPD and revalidation of licences. Its **four pillars of practice model** organises development around professional practice, leadership and management, education and the facilitation of learning, and research and evidence. It gives clear, consistent expectations at every level and treats leadership as central rather than optional. Adopting a comparable approach in policing would strengthen annual performance reviews and embed leadership as a core professional capability in its own right.

140. Officers and staff who spoke to us do not feel they get enough time or investment in their development. Leaders at all levels described development outside formal training as limited and ad hoc, and in an operational environment defined by demand pressure, these conversations are easily deprioritised. Where this happens, policing loses the chance to support performance early, build confidence in role and develop capability for the future. A system applied inconsistently cannot provide a level playing field for recognising achievement, identifying talent or succession planning. It risks making development contingent on local force capacity, line-manager discretion or informal support, rather than on a fair and visible professional framework.

141. A consistent and standardised process would give policing an early, clear view of leadership potential, securing a pipeline of effective leaders. We heard that progression too readily depends on who steps into acting roles or navigates promotion processes, rather than on a sustained record of development, judgement and behaviour. A career-long record of performance would help policing identify intentional leaders rather than accidental ones. Taken across the workforce, that same record gives forces a clearer picture of overall capability and where the gaps and development needs lie, turning individual reviews into a strategic view of organisational capability.

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Creating consistency and a career-long record of development

142. A mandatory and standardised annual review process should address these problems by creating a nationally consistent foundation for performance, development, and career progression. It should apply across the entire policing workforce, including at executive level, so that all police professionals have a formal annual opportunity to review performance, reflect on behaviours and identify development needs.

143. The process should assess not only what has been delivered, but how, encouraging reflective practice. Competence should be embedded as an explicit, measurable outcome of the annual review, which should include a professional development plan,

so that performance and development are considered together rather than as separate processes.

144. Annual performance reviews should be captured within a complete professional digital passport: a central record of each professional's development, training, qualifications, conduct and performance that moves with them across roles and forces. This would support stronger workforce planning and more consistent oversight across the service. Once established, the National Police Service (NPS) should host the national database for professional digital passports and oversee the recording of annual performance reviews across forces. This would improve oversight and consistency, strengthen the evidence base on workforce development, and still allow forces reasonable flexibility within the national framework.

145. The **Government's police reform white paper** points towards a stronger national framework for professional development. Its proposed licence to practise is intended to support learning and development, raise standards and embed a culture of continuous professional development. The **white paper** is explicit that such an approach should be underpinned by regular and consistent wellbeing and development checks, clear career pathways and a reliable way of recording development over time. Together, a standardised approach to annual performance reviews and the introduction of professional digital passports provide a practical route to begin building that system now.

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146. Contributors to the call for evidence emphasised that a nationally supported system for annual performance reviews succeeds when underpinned by proper training, implementation and accountability. Consistent, high-quality performance reviews depend on capable, well-supported line managers, so implementation should equip them with clear expectations alongside practical tools, training and quality assurance. With these conditions in place, the process becomes a reliable mechanism for development and performance management rather than an administrative activity.

Recognition of learning and experience

147. Recognition of learning varies widely across forces. Lack of a national system creates confusion, inconsistency and without a system for recognising learning and development, it makes inter-force transfers riskier where leadership standards are concerned. Some officers and staff can earn qualifications, or credits towards them, while others cannot. For example, some front-line leadership courses have partnered with universities or training institutes to provide accreditation; in other forces this isn't possible. This inconsistency is hard to justify.

Recommendation 11: Everyone in policing should have the opportunity to gain recognition of their learning and experience within a national system.

Recognition of learning demonstrates capability in a particular work area and externally validates a person's learning and its application to work. It aids progression, exit and re-entry into policing, and movement between forces.

Recognition of learning should be through a national scheme, so that there is consistency across forces. It should apply to all new courses, from an internal certificate of completion of a course or activity through to higher education credits and qualifications.

For officers and staff who have built up experience on the job, prior learning and experience could be recognised through one of the higher education schemes.

Together with an annual performance review, this recognition structure should be included in the professional digital passport to provide a foundation for implementing the licence to practise.

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148. Police work is complex, demanding skills and knowledge that deserve proper recognition. Leadership demands the same, along with sound judgement, where the focus is on problem-solving in complex situations that rarely have a single right answer, just options to weigh up. Other comparable sectors, notably nursing, paramedicine, and the military have formal recognised qualifications or provide training and education which includes transferable credits towards a formal qualification.

149. Officers and staff who have built real leadership experience often cannot evidence it with recognised qualifications. They should be able to carry recognition of those capabilities with them throughout their careers.

> I've been a sergeant for many years, and I have nothing to explain my skills.
>
> **Sergeant at force visit**

Recognition can occur across a spectrum of options

150. A national system, with a spectrum of options to recognise learning, should be established[24]. This is not about pushing policing towards more academic qualifications; it is about recognising the learning that already takes place, through training courses, continuing professional development or work-based projects and assessments. This would move policing training and development towards a capability-based approach where all learning should be accepted as credible.

151. The National Academy of Police Leadership described in **chapter 12**, in consultation with forces, should develop a national structure for the recognition of learning along with recognition of prior experience and learning which will address the knowledge, skills, behaviours and judgements of established leaders in police. Police officers and staff deserve recognition for their acquired skills, knowledge and judgement they use in their work.

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[24] A spectrum of options for recognising learning (including from work-based projects and on the job experience) across the workforce is set out in the appendices of this report.

Chapter 7: A leadership fast stream

152. Ascending ranks in the traditional career path for many police officers takes too long. It fails to attract and retain enough talented leaders to meet the operational demands of today or provide enough potential future executive leaders. As of March 2025, the median length of service for officers gaining promotion to superintendent was 22 years, and 93 per cent of superintendents were aged 41 and over[25]. It makes sense for senior people in policing to be on average older and more experienced, but it is unusual in how correlated age, experience and seniority are in policing. **Institute for Government analysis of civil service grades** shows that 34 per cent of civil servants working in roles roughly equivalent in seniority to superintendents (those at the civil service grades six and seven) were below the age of 40. Over 6 per cent of these civil servants were in their 20s. Those given responsibility earlier in their careers can disrupt out-dated and inefficient ways of working. Rapid progression also gives talented people enough time to deliver impact and build their experience towards executive roles.

153. The Government has already recognised that policing needs new approaches to attracting and promoting senior leaders. Its **police reform white paper** committed to exploring a new direct entry programme to bring people into policing as inspectors and fast-tracking them to superintendent roles. We agree that a better mechanism is needed to fast track the most talented officers to senior roles, but we believe that accelerated promotion should be available to everyone with aptitude and ambition, including those already serving in policing. We are recommending the introduction of a police leadership fast stream to support the development of all those with talent and ambition to be senior police officers. This would be the largest talent scheme in policing ever introduced since policing first began talent schemes in the 1960s.

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Recommendation 12: A police leadership fast stream should be introduced to identify, develop and accelerate those with talent and ambition to be senior police officers.

The fast stream would provide structured development for between five and ten years to ensure participants achieve rapid promotion. Progress through the fast stream would always be based on merit and performance and linked to the standardised promotions processes described elsewhere in this report. The most talented and experienced

[25] NPCC Management Information, 2025, accessed March 2026, unpublished.

participants should aim to hold the rank of superintendent when they complete the fast stream.

The fast stream would be open and widely accessible. It would be open to existing police officers up to the rank of inspector, allied police professionals and volunteers as well as those joining policing externally. A degree should not be required to qualify for the fast stream, but those on the fast stream should be expected to demonstrate a commitment to continuing learning and will have to evidence their development.

The fast stream would be designed and managed from the centre but delivered in partnership with forces. All forces should participate in the fast stream to guarantee sustained investment and ensure large annual cohorts.

Policing should aim to recruit at least 400 people a year onto the police leadership fast stream, the equivalent of around 5 per cent of annual police constable joiners and more than twice the average number of annual promotions to superintendent[26]. Large annual cohorts will ensure that enough talented people progress quickly to superintendent, sustaining operational leadership capability at this rank and ensuring that the effective command of new local policing areas is being created through reform of force structures. Large annual cohorts will also ensure that leadership capability is enhanced at first line and middle leadership levels in the process.

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Talent development in policing

154. There are two national fast track schemes which provide a route to accelerated promotion for existing officers: **fast track constable to inspector** and a **fast track inspector to superintendent**. Policing also has a graduate recruitment scheme Police Now which attracts graduates into frontline policing roles and supports them with bespoke structured professional development.

155. The **UK graduate career survey** 2026 shows that the police officer salary is competitive in the graduate job market but other factors like unsociable hours create challenges for attracting graduates into police officer roles. The survey indicates that policing is one of the least common graduate sector career choices in 2026, accounting for less than 2 per cent of applications made by those interviewed. The survey indicates that graduates want careers that help them give back to society and are still attracted by structured graduate schemes. Programmes like Police Now are

[26] Data on police constable joiners is taken from: **Police workforce England and Wales statistics – GOV.UK**. Data on annual number of promotions is in **Police workforce open data tables – GOV.UK**.

therefore still very important to attracting top graduates into policing, especially for those for whom a policing career via the regular entry route would not be attractive.

> Police Now was quite an attractive way to join the police in terms of entry routes, because they offered you quite a lot of other continuing professional development.
>
> **Focus group participant**

156. Focused development also supports people to progress quickly once they are in the service. The data available on development schemes is very limited but indicates that a substantial number of the most senior officers have been supported by some form of scheme. We estimate that roughly 30 per cent of those who have recently qualified to be chief officers by passing the executive leadership programme have participated in a past or present national talent development scheme[27]. Police Now and fast track officers also tend to be more diverse. 21 per cent of **Police Now participants recruited between March 2024 and April 2025,** were from an ethnic minority background and 60 per cent were female. 42 per cent of those who graduated from fast track to inspector between 2015 and 2025 were women and 13 per cent identified as from an ethnic minority background[28].

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157. We have met several brilliant police leaders who have been supported by the current schemes, but their impact is limited by restrictive eligibility and small operating scale. Both schemes rely on forces to opt in. 37 forces are partnered with Police Now, but not all chose to recruit through them every year. Police Now recruited 368 people in 2025/26, equating to around 5 per cent of all new police constable recruits that year[29]. The fast track schemes are operating on a similarly small scale. Only around 100 officers are involved in the schemes at any one time (around 70 people are on fast track constable to inspector and 30 on fast track inspector to superintendent) and they are only open to new applicants every other year. Most forces (31) do participate in the fast track constable to inspector scheme but just 11 participate in the fast track inspector to superintendent[30]. There are doubtless talented people both inside and outside policing who have been shut out of these schemes because they do not meet the restrictive criteria or work in a participating force.

> We have done the best with the funding that we have, but we are in a very different place than we were a decade ago in terms of investing in national

[27] College of Policing internal data, accessed May 2026, unpublished.
[28] College of Policing 2026.
[29] NPCC management data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.
[30] There are seven forces participating in neither fast track scheme.

> talent to progress through the service. The fast track programmes are poor relations compared to their predecessors.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

158. The impact of the schemes is also hampered by a lack of coordination. There is no formal link between Police Now and the fast track schemes. We have met some officers who had participated in both schemes, but this is not by design. Policing is therefore lacking an end-to-end coordinated approach to recruiting, identifying and developing talent. The fast track schemes are run entirely on the goodwill of local chief constables who can choose to remove their support at any time. This gives participants no guarantee of progression, even if they meet requirements. We were made aware of fast track participants being pulled from the scheme very close to the end of their programme when a newly appointed chief constable withdrew their force. This is clearly counterproductive and not conducive to retaining talented people.

Supporting the operational requirements of today and tomorrow

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159. The Government is committed to restructuring English and Welsh policing to create new larger police forces made up of smaller local policing areas delivering operational policing to communities. It is likely that, as with the command structures in today's police forces, these local policing areas will be led by superintendents and a chief superintendent. As of April 2026, there are around 115 chief superintendents and 237 superintendents working in local policing command[31], around 25 per cent of the total. 309 superintendents and chief superintendents work in other operational roles connected to these command structures[32] (32 per cent). The **Government's police reform white paper** says the new local policing areas will be "generally at the level of towns, boroughs and cities" which will potentially create many local policing areas. **House of Commons Library analysis** classifies 32 London boroughs, 34 cities outside of London, 116 large towns, 271 medium towns and 165 small towns and villages in England and Wales. There will need to be enough operationally competent superintendents and chief superintendents to lead the local policing areas and carry out the other critical local and national operational roles in the future. The new national scheme should support the service to meet these operational demands by developing

[31] Including Investigations Command Teams, Public Protection Command Teams and Operational Support Teams.
[32] NPCC Management Information, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

senior officers quickly who have the necessary experience to lead credibly and with competence.

160. Past direct-entry programmes suffered from a cultural perception that they enabled people without the necessary skills and experience to lead in critical operational roles. In fact, many direct entrants did have connections to policing and relevant experience, especially those on the direct entry superintendent scheme. Despite their relevant experience, the programmes required them to demonstrate operational competence through one-size-fits-all centrally delivered training and assessment. This proved incredibly expensive. The total cost of the direct-entry superintendent programme, including marketing and the cost of paying cohort member salaries during their training, was almost £10 million[33]. Only 33 people graduated from the scheme which puts the cost per graduate at around £342,000[34]. Later in **chapter 9** of this report, we outline a new targeted direct entry programme to bring people from adjacent sectors into senior operational roles which match their experience. The new national scheme will support those with talent but less experience to build their operational capability and progress rapidly.

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The new police leadership fast stream in operation

161. The Commission proposes that the new national leadership scheme should operate in four key stages:

i. Talented and ambitious leaders are identified as candidates for the fast stream.

ii. Regional assessment centres select the best candidates to participate in the fast stream.

iii. Participants take part in structured development to support them to progress quickly up the ranks.

iv. Onward monitoring and intervention to ensure success.

Identifying talent

162. The police leadership fast stream should be open to the widest possible range of people. The most talented people should be identified, no matter their previous experience or education. It should be open to existing police officers up to the rank of inspector, allied police professionals and volunteers and those seeking to join policing from outside the service. Officers joining the scheme would enter at their substantive

[33] College of Policing internal data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.
[34] College of Policing 2026.

rank, everyone else would start as a constable. A degree should not be necessary to qualify for the fast stream. It would provide structured development catered to those with the talent, ambition and aptitude for senior police leadership, regardless of whether they are university graduates.

163. Forces should be able to nominate talented people to the fast stream. Both those already working in policing (regardless of their workforce status) and those joining as constables. There should be clear, consistent and fair criteria on which to base these nominations. The criteria should be applied through annual performance reviews (described in **chapter 6** and **recommendation 10** of this report) and the existing national end-to-end approach to police constable recruitment. The National Academy should provide oversight and external input to ensure local nominations are objective and fair. Local nominations should be complemented by an open national application scheme that enables anyone working in policing to apply directly to the scheme.

Developing talent

164. Those joining the fast stream would become part of a national cohort with access to structured development opportunities, including additional learning and development, managed external secondments, coaching and mentoring and peer-to-peer support. Their careers will be supported to ensure they gain the operational experience they need to enable accelerated promotion. But an important principle of the fast stream participants would be adherence to national promotion processes. Participants should be assessed for promotion on the same basis as everyone else.

165. Graduation from the scheme would occur when participants and those managing them are satisfied that the scheme has met their developmental needs. This may happen at any point, but we expect participants to spend at least five years on the fast stream. Participants should not stay on the fast stream indefinitely. They would be graduated off the fast stream after ten years, irrespective of the substantive rank they have reached. The fast stream should aim to progress participants quickly to superintendent but also recognise that everyone's career journey is different. The ambitions and circumstances of some participants will doubtless change as they progress. Some participants are likely to graduate in specialist roles at lower ranks. The fast stream's scale will enable people to land at different ranks, raising leadership capability at all levels, whilst ensuring that enough people graduate as superintendents. In this way it will support the service to meet a range of its operational needs.

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Onward monitoring

166. The National Academy of Police Leadership should monitor data on fast stream participants and graduates to ensure it is successfully raising leadership capability at all levels and graduating enough superintendents. This monitoring should be linked to senior workforce planning described in **chapter 11** and **recommendation 22**. In this way, the fast stream will not only secure the leadership talent required of operational command roles now but also support the development of a national talent pool for officers capable of occupying the most senior positions in English and Welsh policing.

167. The National Academy should also provide continuous evaluation of the fast stream, in line with the principles outlined in **chapter 3** and **recommendation 6**. This should ensure the fast stream continues to meet its strategic aim and is taking the most effective approach to the structured development of its participants. Evaluation will also support the academy to ensure that the fast stream delivers value for money to the service and the public.

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Chapter 8: Frontline leadership

168. Frontline leaders – sergeants, inspectors and other supervisors – occupy the most critical leadership roles in policing. As of **March 2025**, around 97 per cent of all officers are frontline leaders holding the rank of constable, sergeant or inspector. Constables alone make up 77 per cent of all officers. This means that sergeants, and other first-line supervisors, are directly supervising over three-quarters of the officer workforce. This gives them considerable influence and responsibilities. They set the culture within their teams, care for the welfare of their officers and staff, quality assure their practice and make day-to-day decisions that are critical to how the public experience policing.

169. There is huge leadership capacity and potential not being maximised at frontline level, just waiting to be unleashed. The crucial role played by frontline leaders to the delivery of effective police services is not reflected in the approach taken to promotion or supervision at this level. There is an inconsistent approach to rewarding and recognising experienced and effective constables who mentor and supervise their less experienced colleagues. Promotion processes at this level are broken and are not adequately supporting officers to develop or providing appropriate internal and external assurance of leadership skills and knowledge. We must not overlook frontline leaders. These issues must be addressed and frontline leadership celebrated as the bedrock of British policing.

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Senior constables

170. Skilled, experienced constables are an essential leadership asset that the current rank structure in England and Wales offers limited opportunity to deploy or recognise. Once police constables reach the top of the pay scale, the only way to earn more base salary is to seek promotion to sergeant. The **Police Renumeration Review Body** reports that around 53 per cent of officers (over 77,000) are already at the top of their pay scale and therefore receive no incremental pay progression. Some of the most experienced frontline supervisors are long-serving constables with no desire to promote to the next rank. The current rank structure has no way to recognise and reward this cohort, and this means talent goes unacknowledged, and the organisation loses the opportunity to build leadership from the ground up.

Often teams will have 1 or 2 senior constables who hold the majority of the organisational knowledge. These are key to keeping teams working, but yet they are often not recognised.

Call for evidence submission

171. Police services in other countries, like Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Germany and the Netherlands, have established senior constables. In these countries, senior constables fulfil an important role in the rank structure, providing active supervision and role modelling on the front line. The Commission believes that a senior constable rank should be introduced in England and Wales. Once established, we envisage a role of senior constable will be attractive to many constables with years of frontline experience, who do not wish to leave frontline policing.

Recommendation 13: A new senior constable rank should be introduced to provide recognition of experience and effective leadership on the front line.

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Given that around three quarters of all warranted officers are constables, we believe it is important to provide a progression pathway, which will both help with morale and motivation, and with proper utilisation of frontline experience and capability.

Senior constable should be a formal rank (with a level of seniority), but it should not be necessary to have been a senior constable to gain promotion to sergeant. Expectations for this role should include mentoring and coaching responsibilities, role-modelling professional standards, and supporting frontline supervision.

Work to further develop how the rank should operate should involve consultation with staff associations. It should consider:

- The necessary fair, transparent and capability-based selection process for the rank that identifies officers who demonstrate strong judgement, integrity, communication and the ability to develop others.
- The structured training and ongoing development required proportionate to the rank.
- How to align the rank with tutor constable functions to create a nationally consistent approach to selecting, training and rewarding those who mentor new recruits.
- How the rank provides stable leadership cover in teams, reducing unnecessary reliance on extended acting-up arrangements, which are currently a feature of meeting operational need.

Ahead of the creation of the NPS, the Home Office and the College of Policing should introduce the rank at the earliest opportunity and identify resources that are currently used in paying substantial numbers of constables to act up as sergeant.

172. The gap between constable and sergeant is currently too large to provide a credible first-line leadership level that supports effective supervision and nurtures leadership skills. They are responsible for the behaviour and professional development of constables, alongside significant operational and administrative demands. The Commission heard repeatedly that these demands reduce the time available for supervision, coaching, professional development and early performance intervention – core ingredients of effective first-line leadership. The sergeants who responded to our survey[35] identified high workloads (53 per cent) and inefficient systems or processes (51 per cent) as the most common factors that make it difficult for them to be an effective leader.

> There is a significant concern over the challenges of balancing day-to-day demands as well as supervising the response to incidents, as well as the performance requirements that exist, and then set that against the ongoing requirements to develop and look after your staff and yourself.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

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173. The pressures created by this gap are intensified by supervision ratios. On average, there are around 5 constables for every sergeant, compared to 2.4 sergeants per officer at the inspecting ranks (June 2025). These ratios vary widely for different teams – for neighbourhood policing it is 5.2 constables to 1 sergeant and in teams responding to 999 calls, it is 8 constables to 1 sergeant[36]. This imbalance is compounded by an increasingly inexperienced workforce and the loss of experienced officers through both natural and systemic attrition. Where the number of direct reports is too high, effective supervision becomes difficult to deliver in practice.

174. As discussed in **chapter 3** of our report, in many forces, acting-up arrangements have emerged as a default response to resourcing gaps on the front line. We have heard that acting up is among the toughest roles: authority is challenged, credibility with peers is hard to establish, and influence is difficult without role stability. Acting up also carries cost implications because officers are entitled to extra pay. Officers receive extra pay for acting up at higher ranks after 10 days. There is a need for a more stable

[35] Police Leadership Commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished.
[36] NPCC Management Information, accessed June 2025, unpublished.

and cost-effective resourcing model than relying on extended acting-up arrangements to meet routine frontline needs.

> Acting supervisors, who either don't understand the role, are not supported or are just trying to hold steady, creates a real challenge.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

175. Tutor constables have traditionally provided an important form of informal leadership, including leadership within neighbourhood teams, with guidance and support to police and community support officers. The post of tutor constable was established to help develop new officers by mentoring them. There have been concerns that the approach to selecting and training tutor constables is inconsistent and ineffective. The College has developed a non-compulsory **tutor constable learning programme** which forces can use to develop tutor constables. In 2021, the Police Federation conducted a **force survey of tutor constables** involving 28 forces. Most forces responding to the survey did not require tutor constables to go through any formal selection process (22 forces) and many had no formal selection criteria (18 forces). The majority delivered training to new tutor constables (24), but this varied considerably in terms of content and time given – ranging from less than one day's input to a six-day course – and most forces carried out no follow-up refresher training (20). There is also no national allowance for those working as tutor constables. Just 13 of the forces that responded to the same survey said they provided some kind of financial incentive to tutor constables. This inconsistency risks uneven early-career development and misses an opportunity to professionalise mentoring as part of a broader leadership pathway.

> Since austerity and Covid standards are slipping, training is poor, tutors around here have been forced into being tutors and are unwilling and basics have just been forgotten.
>
> **Call for evidence respondent**

176. The Commission's engagement with Australian jurisdictions identified considerable benefit from senior constables, especially to retention, with staff feeling valued and recognised for their experience and skill. In Australia, the rank enables broader distribution of responsibility, reducing pressure on sergeants, and strengthening overall team structure. The rank offers Australian constables an attainable career milestone within a realistic timeframe, backed by a pay increase.

177. A new senior constable rank would provide the same benefits in England and Wales. It would give recognition of excellent leadership, alongside enabling resilience and consistency in delivery of supervision on the front line. This new rank should include a

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pay increment. Senior constables would hold supervisory responsibilities and incorporate the role of tutor constable, creating a consistent national structure to mentoring new and early career officers. By strengthening the leadership capacity within frontline teams, the role would relieve pressure on sergeants and help ensure that professional development, wellbeing support and standards are reinforced consistently.

178. The rank would not be a compulsory step for promotion to sergeant but would offer a meaningful opportunity to develop leadership skills. It would offer a supported and recognised step for officers with leadership ambitions, while equally valuing and recognising those who choose to remain in frontline roles as outstanding practitioners who strengthen team performance and capability.

Promotion to sergeant and inspector

179. Promotions at the sergeant and inspector level are perhaps the most challenging jumps a police leader will make in their career. Not only does it bring considerable responsibilities, but it also involves supervising people who are often not just colleagues but also friends. We heard repeatedly from sergeants about the stressful experience of being promoted. Sergeants and inspectors told us they felt ill prepared with little to no access to training before their promotion. This gave them little confidence that they had access to the knowledge and skills they needed to lead and manage a team.

> I'm supposed to be on an inspector skills training next month. I've been an inspector for seven years, and now they're trying to send me on this course. It just seems ridiculous.
>
> **Focus group participant**

180. In **chapter 10** of this report, we set out a new approach to quality training and development to provide all frontline leaders with the skills, knowledge and behaviours to be effective leaders. Here we deal with what has been long and widely acknowledged within the service, the broken process for promotion at sergeant and inspector. 78 per cent of the sergeants and 64 per cent of the inspectors responding to our survey[37] disagreed that the processes identified officers who go onto be effective in the role. And yet the service has not been able to deliver reforms. Our case for change spoke of the difficulty the College has had trying over the last six years to reform these processes. Partially down to the resistance the College has

[37] Police Leadership Commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished.

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faced, the reforms currently being piloted do not provide the re-engineering of the promotion process that is desperately needed. Urgent and fundamental reform of the promotions process at sergeant and inspector level is required to provide sergeants and inspectors with the development and support they need be effective leaders on the front line.

181. The College has produced a curriculum for first-line leadership (for both officers and staff) but it is up to each force to use that curriculum to create its own learning design, learning outcomes and learning materials. Some forces undertake this very well, while others are less effective. In any case, this is wasteful of police resources to reinvent the course wheel 43 times, and it introduces wide variability in learning inputs and achievements. Later we set out statistics showing how little the content of courses is seen by sergeants and inspectors to contribute to their development. Some forces undertake evaluation while others have staff who lack the skills, confidence or motivation to do this. So, there is no systematic data on how well or how badly learning outcomes are achieved and no nationwide overview of experience and impact of leadership training at these ranks.

Recommendation 14: Promotion processes to sergeant and inspector should be reformed to equip these ranks with the knowledge and confidence to lead teams and serve the public, use frontline leadership talent to the full, and support the talent pipeline.

The reforms should build on the sergeant and inspector promotion process currently being tested in five forces and should be rolled out nationally as soon as possible, as an interim measure, before a full re-engineering of the promotion process and content of leadership development materials. The new promotions process should:

- Include clear criteria at every stage based on the agreed definition of police leadership (**recommendation 2**) so that officers, line managers and force leaders can fairly and objectively identify those officers ready for promotion.
- Assess eligibility for promotion using annual performance reviews and the completion of leadership development learning. The national leadership development programmes outlined in **recommendation 18** followed by a modernised legal exam should be required learning to gain promotion at each rank.
- Introduce probationary periods for the role and abolish the use of temporary promotions. During probationary periods newly promoted officers should be given extra support and supervision to ensure they can continue to hold rank.

- Promotion should be overseen centrally so there is transparency around decision making at every stage and independent assurance of fairness.

Legal exams

182. Under the current unreformed national promotion process, eligibility for promotion to sergeant and inspector is determined by two factors: an individual's perceived competence in the current rank and the passing of a multiple-choice legal exam. As we explained in **chapter 2**, a lack of common understanding of what effective leadership looks like has led to inconsistent approaches to talent identification in policing. Talent identification is often subjective and shaped in the image of local senior leaders. Multiple people told us that only those whose "face fit" got access to promotion and that promotion was insufficiently based on performance and leadership capabilities. Our recommendation for a clearer definition of police leadership (**recommendation 2**) coupled with the consistent and standardised approach annual performance reviews we discussed in **chapter 6** (**recommendation 10**) should guide people in future to identify those ready for promotion. The legal exam needs specific reform.

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183. At present, officers can sit the legal exam twice a year and as many times as they like. A pass is valid for five years, after which they must take the exam again to gain re-eligibility for promotion. The exam currently dominates how officers experience and perceive the promotion processes to sergeant and inspector. Officers told us of the stress they felt preparing for and taking the exams. Some forces provide study leave and resources to help officers, but many officers study in their own time and at their own expense. The pass rates for the exams reflect how difficult officers find them. The average National Police Promotions Framework (NPPF) exam pass rate between March 2024 and October 2025 was around 54 per cent for the sergeant's exam and 31 per cent of the inspector's exam[38]. We also understand that pass rates vary widely between forces, reflecting the different approach at the local level to preparing and supporting candidates.

> To start to be a leader you pass the sergeants exam. Being able to pass an exam does not make you a leader.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

184. There have been longstanding concerns that too much emphasis is placed on the legal exam given that it is widely acknowledged that it is a poor indicator of someone's

[38] College of Policing data, accessed February 2026, unpublished.

leadership competence. As a result, the reformed promotions process being piloted in five forces involves a new shorter more focused exam (albeit that it is based on the same curriculum). The reformed process also includes a portfolio assessment which tries to place more emphasis on performance to assess eligibility. This goes some way to balancing the weight placed on legal knowledge to gain eligibility for promotion but does not go far enough. The legal exam should come later in the promotion process so that leadership capability is the primary determinant of a candidate's eligibility for promotion. Officers should only be able to take the legal exam once they've passed a leadership development course and been assessed as suitable for promotion to the next rank.

185. The exam curriculum in the non-reformed process requires officers to remember information relating to driving offences, the licensing of alcohol, specific police powers relating to roads and sporting events and many other topics. This makes little sense in today's operational reality. New specific policing **AI assistants** are already being tested and evaluated, which help officers on the front line with quick and trusted answers to their questions. The legal exam curriculum needs to be re-assessed with these technologies in mind. The legal exam should test a candidate's knowledge of the essential law they will use regularly in their new rank and how to find and understand other law that they may need using AI and other modern technologies.

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Temporary promotions

186. Temporary promotion is an accepted step on the promotion process for sergeants and inspectors. The unreformed national promotion process requires that officers spend at least 12 months on temporary promotion after they've passed a local selection process and been matched to a vacancy. After 12 months on temporary promotion, they are assessed again and must pass a promotion board before being made substantive in rank. The reforms being piloted in five forces have introduced some flexibility to this by allowing officers to take their first promotion board between 6 and 18 months, but it still enforces people to spend time temporarily in post before their promotion is made substantive.

187. Temporary promotion at this level is creating dysfunction in the current promotions system. We have heard many examples of officers failing their promotion boards multiple times and spending long periods of time on temporary promotion. Up to a fifth of the sergeants and inspectors responding to our survey[39] reported acting up or being on temporary promotion for more than two years (12 per cent of inspectors and 21 per cent of sergeants). This puts these officers in an untenable situation, occupying

[39] Police Leadership Commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished.

leadership positions when they have not been formally assessed as capable. This undermines the authority and credibility of these leaders and the whole promotion process. It is also frustrating and stressful for those continuing to lead but without formal recognition.

> My last experience of myself going for promotion ... I failed it by half a mark because they averaged the mark. That whole thing just stung me. Two promotion processes in a year and I just lost all faith in the whole process.
>
> **Focus group participant**

188. Temporary promotion should be abolished so that officers are no longer in leadership roles without clear and formal recognition of their competence. Instead, probationary periods should provide the necessary extra support and supervision for those newly promoted and enable forces to reverse promotions in rare cases where officers have been assessed as competent but do not meet the required leadership capability.

Embargoed

Chapter 9: An open profession

189. Policing is always evolving the way it recruits and develops people to ensure that it has the necessary skills. Its approach to the workforce is more flexible than it was in the past. There are more experts working in allied police staff roles at all levels who provide specialist skills in areas like digital forensics, victim support and business management. In **March 2025**, around 35 per cent of the total police workforce were not police officers but allied professionals working in police staff roles. In some forces, police staff make up almost half the workforce[40].

190. There are also new established pathways for officers to join directly as detectives, which are helping the service gain and retain investigative skills. Despite this progress, policing's approach to recruitment and skills matching is still strikingly similar to the last major programme of police reform in the 1960s. Police officers still occupy most senior and executive leadership positions, regardless of whether these roles require operational expertise. They are almost all still recruited, whether detectives or otherwise, as constables and they have limited opportunities to gain experience outside policing as they progress up the ranks. There is no route for proven leaders from adjacent services to move laterally into senior police officer roles and the skills and experience of allied police staff professionals are still massively underutilised.

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191. Our case for change is clear that a lack of specialist skills in areas like finance, political handling, digital and data and partnership engagement has made police leadership ill-prepared for the future challenges it is likely to face. Policing needs to become a truly open profession where different skills and experience are respected and celebrated. There is a need for:

    i. A systematic approach to seconding officers out of the service to ensure that senior officers gain experience of working in other organisations as they progress up the ranks.

    ii. A targeted direct entry scheme to recruit proven leaders with relevant skills and experience to critical operational roles.

    iii. A transformation in how the leadership of allied professionals working in police staff roles is recognised to maximise their skills, experience and professionalism at all levels and especially those working in senior and executive teams.

[40] NPCC Management Information, accessed June 2025, unpublished.

Secondments

192. Leadership in policing is built on operational expertise and organisational knowledge. Senior leaders that follow the traditional career path will typically reach senior roles with at least two decades of policing experience. This can help them establish trust and credibility with their workforce. But it means that most senior leaders will have limited exposure to workplaces, sectors or organisational cultures outside policing by the time they reach senior positions. They may lack understanding of key sectors, including technology, Government, finance, public services and the voluntary sector. This can make them less effective organisational leaders. Senior police leaders should be able to temporarily pause their policing career to work in an adjacent sector, affording them valuable experience to bring back to policing.

Recommendation 15: Secondments to other forces, public sector partners, the voluntary sector and private industry should be made more routine and accessible to all in policing, and senior officers should be expected to undertake them as part of leadership development.

Secondments should be managed through annual performance reviews to ensure they are purposefully targeted at individual development needs to broaden leadership experience throughout the ranks.

The creation of the National Police Service (NPS) presents an opportunity for increasingly varied development experiences. Secondments to the NPS should be a key feature of development for those seeking to reach executive level leadership. This would not only strengthen individual skills and relationships, but it would also strengthen relationships between forces and the NPS. This would effectively create the NPS as policing's staff college – preparing leaders in a similar manner to the long-established approach adopted by the military.

Embargoed

193. Secondments are not new to policing. Officers and staff already undertake secondments within the policing system, including to the NPCC, the College of Policing and other national bodies. There are also specific routes that support some police officers to be seconded overseas. These opportunities are important for officers to share skills from their operational role with these national organisations, and to develop skills that they otherwise would not be able to at a force level. These opportunities, however, remain limited, are unevenly available and are too often dependent on local appetite, rather than being treated as a normal part of leadership development. The challenge is therefore not simply that policing is failing to identify

the potential value of secondments. It is that the existing arrangements do not make secondments consistently routine, accessible or purposeful.

194. **Guidance and regulations** already provide clear mechanisms to enable secondments but these can be complex to operate in practice. Forces must agree detailed arrangements covering pay, pensions, liability, workforce planning and return-to-force processes, requiring careful consideration and coordination between organisations. These administrative demands may make forces more cautious about releasing officers and create perceived barriers. These barriers are reinforced by a cultural resistance in parts of policing to time spent outside the service, which can still be seen as a diversion from operational credibility rather than a means of strengthening it. National policing bodies should clarify the routes through which secondments can be agreed, and support forces to manage issues such as backfill and return arrangements. Without this, secondments will continue to be seen as desirable in principle but difficult to deliver in practice.

195. The case for secondments is particularly strong in relation to technology. The significance of technological innovation for society and the economy has great implications for policing. Senior police leaders will increasingly have to decide how new technologies are governed and used ethically across forces. They will be required to understand both the opportunities and risks that come with automation, artificial intelligence and digital transformation. Whilst training in technology, data and basic statistics will remain important throughout a career in policing, senior leaders would benefit from being immersed in the technology sector, enabling them to understand the complexities of that industry and its impact on policing and security. Similarly, financial skills are key to effective leadership at a senior level. Forces operate on a multi-million-pound scale, so experience within the private sector would broaden expertise and capability in managing complex resourcing issues and the need to deliver quality policing services within tight budgets.

196. Broader public sector secondments are equally valuable. Experience in local authorities, Government departments, the voluntary sector and wider public service settings would strengthen leaders' grasp of how policy is developed, money allocated, how accountability operates and where cross-system working can succeed and fail beyond policing. Both New Zealand and Australia have examples of secondments at senior policing levels within Government and other public sector organisations. Senior policing leaders from both jurisdictions told us that these secondments were vital to create diversity of thought through bringing in "people who challenged the traditional police thinking and brought new ideas to the table." An additional benefit cited was the maturing of partnerships and better understanding of challenges external to policing.

Embargoed

197. Secondments should not be treated as optional extras or isolated career opportunities, and they should not be limited to senior level alone. They should be encouraged at all levels and opportunities should be available to enable this. Broadening experience earlier in a career can help build confidence, expand ambition and expose officers and staff to different ways of leading and working. But the expectation should be strongest at senior level, where the consequences of narrow experience are greatest and where the need for broader organisational leadership capability is most acute. They should become a deliberate part of leadership development in policing, and there should be a clear expectation that senior leaders will have undertaken a period of secondment within or outside policing to broaden their experience. This would not replace operational development or internal leadership pathways. It would strengthen them by ensuring that those who reach the most senior ranks do so with a broader field of experience, stronger external awareness and greater confidence in leading complex organisations.

198. The creation of the NPS presents a particular opportunity to embed this more firmly. Secondments to the NPS should become a critical feature of development for those seeking to reach the most senior ranks. This would effectively create the NPS as policing's staff college – preparing leaders in a similar manner to the long-established approach adopted by the military. This would strengthen individual capability, but it would also help develop the relationships, understanding and system coherence that policing will need in a more nationally connected operating model. A more varied development offer through the NPS would also show that broadening experience is not a diversion from police leadership, but part of what modern police leadership requires.

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Targeted direct entry

199. Policing experimented with recruiting new officers directly into senior ranks in the late 2010s. Direct entry programmes recruited into the inspector and superintendent ranks. The Government is now committed to exploring new forms of direct entry. As already discussed in **chapter 7**, its **police reform white paper** says it will explore a new direct entry to inspector programme, linked to a fast track route to superintendent. In **chapter 7**, we set out our vision for a new national leadership scheme to provide access to accelerated promotion to those working in policing as well as those joining from outside. The Government also has an ambition for new "multi-route specialist pathways" to recruit people with "transferable specialist skills" into more senior ranks. We agree that police officer roles should be open to people with relevant skills and experience. We believe a new form of targeted direct entry can provide a cost-effective way for the service to recruit these people and deploy them operationally.

Recommendation 16: Policing should recruit proven leaders with transferable skills to senior and executive policing roles. This should include the recruitment of individuals from outside policing as senior officers through a new targeted direct entry scheme.

This would be an adaptive talent model that allows individuals with equivalent professional maturity and leadership experience to enter policing at an appropriate level of responsibility. Many already do, particularly in allied professional police staff roles.

The service should continue to pursue bringing in experienced professionals at the level where their skills are most needed, while holding them to the same standards as anyone else. In addition, a targeted direct entry scheme should bring proven leaders from professions that could be considered adjacent to policing into senior and executive police officer roles. This programme should recruit people who have proven operational experience in adjacent security services, risk management and high-harm public protection.

The new targeted direct entry scheme should be supported by the National Academy of Police Leadership and its senior workforce planning function (described in **recommendation 24** of this report). The academy should work with forces to identify skills gaps and eligible vacancies and conduct targeted recruitment campaigns to hire people with the necessary skills and experience. The academy should support forces to provide tailored on-the-job training and development to ensure that the new recruits are able to demonstrate their operational competence and meet the required standards for their rank.

Embargoed

200. We held a workshop with ten graduates of the old direct entry superintendent programme. These officers were all still working in policing and were dedicated and passionate about public service. Eight of these officers had either been promoted at least once or had been or were currently temporarily promoted. All ten were making a considerable contribution to English and Welsh policing, leading in a variety of operational and strategic commands, having amassed considerable operational experience in the more than a decade they had been in policing. They described deploying relevant skills from their previous jobs to benefit policing. Many had previous careers in adjacent sectors like local government, community safety partnerships, the prison service and security services. Some were applying different experiences in IT services and research and development to the police.

201. The direct entry superintendent programme has clearly delivered considerable benefits to policing. A **five-year evaluation (2014–2019) of the programme** found that direct entrants introduced a collaborative, inclusive leadership style, positively influencing team morale and culture. The evaluation also highlighted examples of direct entrants applying prior skills in strategic projects and partnership work. But the

impact of the programme was limited by its small scale and short lifespan. The superintendent programme ran between 2015 and 2021 and graduated just 33 officers[41]. The inspector programme ran between 2016 and 2022 and graduated 58 officers[42]. The programmes were paused indefinitely due to low force participation which made the costs of delivering the necessary training centrally inviable.

202. Many in policing are sceptical that direct entrants from non-adjacent sectors could lead credibly in police forces on the same terms as those who rose up the ranks more traditionally. They contest that without relevant operational experience, no amount of talent or training can match the operational credibility gained through time served as a police officer. Indeed, the importance of operational credibility came up time and time again in our force visits, workshops, focus groups, call for evidence and amongst some that gave evidence at our roundtable panel discussions. But policing is not the only profession where people use operational and investigative skills to protect the public and solve crime. There are professionals working in adjacent services supporting victims, managing high-risk offenders and making crucial decisions for our national security. This includes people working in security services, high-risk offender management, immigration enforcement and financial investigations. These sectors are so relevant to policing that retired and former police officers can be found working in them, applying the operational skills and knowledge they gained as police officers to their own second careers.

> My previous career definitely helped. My understanding of risk was already honed, and that translated directly into operational decision making … I'd been doing authorities for three years … In my old job I did 50 a week and now I only do 5.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

203. People with experience in adjacent sectors would bring new ideas, ways of working and a breadth of experiences to policing. A more flexible approach to recruiting people from adjacent sectors would also improve collaboration between policing and these partners, supporting today's policing priorities. There are people with the skills and experience policing needs to lead its efforts to halve violence against women and girls, restore community policing and tackle cybercrime working outside policing today. Targeting direct entry recruitment would bring these people into policing. As they have specialist skills matched to their job role, there would not be the need for an expensive centrally delivered training programme. Instead, those joining policing through

[41] College of Policing internal data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.
[42] College of Policing 2026.

Embargoed

targeted direct entry would build on their existing knowledge through structured on-the-job training which helps them develop any extra necessary skills. In this way the targeted scheme would provide a cost-effective way for policing to meet demands for skills and experience in senior positions.

Police staff as allied police professionals

204. Police staff have long played a vital role in enabling functions in areas like digital, human resources, finance, legal services and estates. Allied professionals are now also increasingly important to operational policing – particularly in contact centres where police staff answering 999 calls make complex and often life-saving decisions about vulnerability and risk every day. The Government has already committed to helping chief constables create a more flexible workforce by creating "stronger career pathways" for allied police professionals and by removing past officer maintenance payments which incentivised forces to fill non-operational roles with police officers. We believe we should go further to truly foster a one-team approach by aligning police staff structures to officer ranks and giving police staff equal access to leadership development.

Recommendation 17: Police staff structures should be aligned to officer ranks, and police staff should have equal access to all leadership development opportunities.

205. We engaged with a variety of police staff during our work. The police staff we engaged with were unanimous in their feeling of being underappreciated, overlooked and even marginalised within the service. They told us of occasions their expertise was not listened to which they felt demonstrated that their operational colleagues do not always fully understand or recognise their skills and expertise. Staff spoke to us of the frustration they felt not having a clear career pathway. This inhibited their career development making it difficult for them to gain new experiences and build their skills and knowledge. A lack of a clear career pathway makes even moving between forces on a lateral basis a struggle for police staff.

> We always have to bring it back to the officer equivalent … It's really difficult to function if you're in a room of people that … don't realise where you fit in. It makes it doubly difficult. You have to fight that bit first before you are even listened to."
>
> **Police staff workshop participant**

206. Policing needs to transform radically the way it sees police staff within the service, and it needs organisational structures that support this. At present, there are no agreed grades or pay structure for police staff. Most forces use the **police staff council (PSC) pay spine** to set the pay for police staff, but six forces are using their own arrangements. The pay spine is not a grading system. There are 42 spine points and even these do not go high enough to cover the salaries of senior and executive police staff leaders. Forces must construct their own pay points above the PSC pay spine when they promote police staff to senior positions. As there is no agreed grading structure for police staff, data about the seniority of police staff cannot be collected consistently. At present, various pieces of legislation require chief constables to appoint chief officers to their executive teams who have the authority to make critical operational decisions including to authorise covert policing, accelerate misconduct proceedings and lead the force when they are away or incapacitated. However, executive teams can and should involve non-warranted individuals. Policing needs a variety of skills at the executive level to succeed and unnecessary barriers to putting a breadth of skills in executive teams should be removed.

207. We also heard that police staff do not always have access to leadership development on the same basis as police officers. There is little data on the leadership development that staff have had access to or take part in. The College does record how many police staff attend its flagship executive leaders programme**.** Since its launch in 2023, just 16 allied police staff professionals have attended the programme, 10 per cent of all attendees[43]. We have heard that on occasions police staff were given access to leadership development on the same terms as police officers, it enabled them to improve their skills and encouraged better collaboration between allied professionals and officer colleagues. Quality leadership development needs to be available to everyone in policing on a fair and equal basis, including police staff. In the next chapter of this report, we set out our vision for a new national approach to leadership development open to everyone.

[43] College of Policing internal data, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

Embargoed

> We've rolled out first line leaders, midline leaders, the new College programmes, fully integrated officer and staff programmes, exactly as you say, getting great feedback on it, content's good, curriculum's good from the College, materials are good, they're enjoying it, doing it together.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

208. Policing needs leadership structures and approaches to leadership development that truly recognise the centrality of the contributions of staff. Enabling staff expertise and leadership to shine through in both operational and organisational context will increase productivity and help avoid mistakes through overlooking staff expertise. There needs to be a clear and consistent grading structure for police staff that is aligned to officer ranks to encourage unity of purpose. This will recognise the skills and expertise of staff and enable the service to collect data that can help it better understand its capacity and capability in non-operational areas. There also needs to be fair and equal access to leadership development for all professionals in policing.

Embargoed

Chapter 10: Quality leadership development

209. Access to leadership development programmes and continuing professional development opportunities are vital if the police service is to cultivate effective leadership. At present there is a postcode lottery of access to formal leadership development programmes and very limited opportunities for any continuing professional development. These issues must be addressed.

National leadership development programmes

210. In **chapter 1**, the case for change, we described how without a clear system owner for police leadership, leadership development delivery is fragmented between the College of Policing at the centre and forces at the local level. This has led to a post-code lottery of leadership development across England and Wales which can no longer be allowed to continue. There must be fair and equal access to quality leadership development programmes for everyone in policing. Not least because the **Government's police reform white paper** already committed to making "national leadership development programmes a requirement to access selection and promotion opportunities at each rank". National and regional programmes should be delivered at scale to meet this commitment in a way that is cost-effective and fair.

Embargoed

Recommendation 18: National leadership development programmes should be available to everyone in policing.

Programmes should be delivered nationally and regionally and be established at all levels to build national capability by enabling police leaders to learn with counterparts in other forces and to create consistency and economies of scale.

National leadership development programmes would ensure fair and equal access to leadership training and development, and demonstrate a robust and evidence-informed approach to course design, teaching and learning. They would increase and improve the number and scale of benefits for individual police officers and staff, and for the police service as a whole.

211. Concerns about inconsistency in provision was a constant theme in the roundtable discussions, with our reference group and on our force visits.

> When you look at what's going on in each of the 43 forces, you may be slightly dismayed about the lack of consistency. Each, in their own time, is doing a lot of very good stuff, but it's not joined up from a national perspective.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

212. This inconsistency is resulting in scarce and poor-quality provision. The results of our sergeants and inspectors survey show that many sergeants and inspectors have either had no access to training or do not feel the training they have had has helped them in their role. In **chapter 8** we discussed how many sergeants and inspectors felt ill-prepared for their promotion. Just 12 per cent of the sergeants and 22 per cent of the inspectors responding to our survey[44] had received formal leadership training. Only 11 per cent of sergeants and 16 per cent of inspectors had received training before they were promoted and a sizeable minority felt their general training and development had not prepared them at all for their promotion (38 per cent of sergeants and 39 per cent of inspectors surveyed). Most survey respondents felt training and development only improved key leadership skills like adapting to changing demands, supporting and coaching others and managing conflict to a slight or moderate extent. Senior leaders are also underserved by current provision. As the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has highlighted, 15 years after leaving Sandhurst, a colonel in charge of 1,500 people will have undertaken 72 weeks of leadership development. By comparison, chief superintendents in the MPS who have had comparable progression are likely to have had two or three weeks.

213. Scarcity was also contributing to a perception in the service that there is a lack of fairness and transparency around who gets access to leadership development. Getting onto a course was often described as a matter of who you know, rather than what you know, what you have done, or your leadership potential. The gatekeepers were the line manager or the senior leadership team: a line manager might act on their own perception or bias of a candidate's suitability, without drawing on the views of peers or subordinates, and favouritism was felt to put unsuitable candidates forward in some cases. Access was also reported to depend on whether the senior team rated a particular course, and on the size of the force budget. Having a national programme for leadership at all levels would help to avoid the gatekeepers being the only voice in access decisions.

[44] Police Leadership Commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished.

Embargoed

> We are so short staffed and chronically overwhelmed so we cannot attend training. It always seems like those whose face fits are promoted and put forward for plum training and those who do not, aren't.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

214. Centrally designed programmes delivered at scale would address the issue of scarcity and provide consistently good quality training for all.

Building police service capacity

215. Nationwide programmes build institutional capacity across the whole of policing. This has been part of their attraction in other sectors and services. Other public services, such as the NHS, run nation-wide **first line and other leadership programmes** at scale in order to address leadership deficits rapidly and to add a further mechanism to achieve organisational and cultural change.

216. Cross-force leadership training enables police leaders to learn together and from one another, which has been successful in the executive leadership programme and earlier talent pathways. This shared learning supports cultural change by encouraging participants to examine different assumptions about effective policing and leadership, while also establishing peer networks that provide ongoing support, challenge and reflective practice across forces. Evidence from previous programmes, including the High Potential Development Scheme and fast track routes, shows these networks strengthen both individual capability and overall leadership capacity within policing. National development programmes should be linked to the leadership development networks (**recommendation 19**), ensuring structured and ongoing peer support is formally built into learning and development.

Embargoed

Course design and learning design for national and regional capacity and capabilities

217. While a nationally designed suite of programmes can achieve consistency and economies of scale and other benefits, there is no point in having national or regional programmes of leadership training and development unless high quality is assured. The national leadership development programme should be designed in dialogue with local forces and with leadership and education experts to ensure high quality content and delivery, based on a clear definition and principles of learning (**recommendation 2**).

218. To ensure cost efficiency and accessibility, delivery should adopt a blended learning approach that combines targeted residential elements with high-quality online

provision based on best practice in learning design, with suitable alternatives to residential attendance available for participants with caring responsibilities.

219. The programmes should use learning theory and best educational practice, taking account of the learning needs of adults working professionally while learning. Trainers could be encouraged to gain qualifications in teaching and/or training as well as having experience of working with the police so that the participants benefit from optimal learning conditions. Courses could include a work-based improvement project as part of the course (as other public service national programmes tend to). It also helps to cement the link between knowledge and application and builds reflective practice and critical thinking. This will foster innovation and improvement organisationally. Such improvement projects are widely used in other public service leadership programmes.

Continuing professional development

220. Introducing leadership development networks would create a more mature, sustainable model of continuing professional development in policing – one that recognises leadership capability is built over time through reflection, challenge and peer learning, not isolated courses alone. Done well, these communities would strengthen leadership at every level and signal a wider cultural shift: from treating development as discretionary to treating it as a core condition of effective police leadership.

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Recommendation 19: Leadership development networks should be established at every level of policing connected to public sector partners.

Leadership development networks should enable people to share and learn from each other through formal and informal opportunities including peer review, networking and workshops. Leadership development networks should strengthen existing community safety partnerships by deepening local collaboration to tackle crime and public safety at the local level.

Officers and allied professionals should be given protected time to participate in network activities. Participation in their network should be essential to progression; it should be recorded through their PDR conversations.

221. Effective leadership must be sustained through continuing professional development that helps leaders sharpen judgement, learn from peers, adapt to new demands, and strengthen leadership of people, performance and partnerships. The current approach

to continuing professional development (CPD) in policing is intermittent, dependent on individual leaders and too readily deprioritised by operational demand. It is routinely framed as creating a resource deficit, rather than as fundamental to strengthening workforce capability. Evidence heard by us pointed to capacity as a central limitation to a culture of continuous leadership development.

222. Contributors to our evidence gathering described leaders at every level being asked to balance operational, organisational and supervisory demands, without enough protected time to learn or develop themselves or others. Development was often completed at personal cost and time or cancelled altogether because the system has no resilience to release leaders from their operational responsibilities.

> And I just think we just do not look after our leaders very well in terms of allowing time off for CPD (continuing professional development), we expect CPD to go through the College, but then people do the CPD and then they're working for weekends just to do their work.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

Embargoed

223. 73 per cent of sergeants in our survey[45] felt that formal training poorly prepared them for adapting to changing demands, problem solving and managing complexity. This was supported by focus group findings. This under-investment in structured development threatens retention and organisational capability. Roundtables and the call for evidence also found that development provision does not reflect how leadership now works across boundaries, collaborating with local government, health, probation, education, fire and the third sector. It remains too inward-looking and disconnected from the partnership environment in which many of policing's most complex challenges must now be addressed. However, **Academi Wales** already points to what can be achieved through multi-agency leadership development.

> If we had a regional policing leadership structure, we could have multidisciplinary leadership training … We've got a bit of that going on in the northwest in the ambulance service at the moment between fire, ambulance and police. It's very localised but those officers involved are finding it really valuable.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

224. We found strong support for a more collective model of CPD across the whole workforce. Call for evidence contributors mentioned the benefits of peer review,

[45] Police Leadership Commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished.

drawing on the experience of other services, and creating more regular spaces in which they can reflect, test judgement and share best practice.

225. Leadership development networks will provide a formalised structure to support shared continued development. This should include formal peer review, workshops, mentoring, networking and broader exposure to practice both in and outside policing. Participation in networks should be an integral part of progression and development and should be recorded on the professional digital passport.

226. Connecting leadership development networks to public sector partners would strengthen existing local relationships. The roundtables and call for evidence indicated that policing leaders need greater exposure to how other services think, organise and solve problems.

227. To deliver leadership development networks that are consistent and useful in practice, implementation should be guided by the following principles:

    i. Set national expectations across levels of policing, with clarity on purpose, core activity and relationship with existing development programmes.

    ii. Protect time for CPD. Networks should not depend on goodwill or be routinely displaced by operational demand.

    iii. Ensure that the model is inclusive and accessible. Unequal access to development has weakened confidence in current systems, and access to networks and associated opportunities must not be limited.

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Chief officer development

228. A consistent message emerging from our work is that the system does not currently provide chief constables with the same structured support for reflection and development that would be expected of executive leaders in other sectors. Unlike most senior roles, chief constables do not operate within a clear line management framework. As a result, opportunities for regular performance conversations and structured professional development can be inconsistent.

229. Chief constables need a more mature approach to leadership at this level that is better supported, more open to challenge, and more capable of navigating the complexity of modern policing.

Recommendation 20: Chief officers should participate in ongoing meaningful professional development.

All chief officers, including chief constables, should be expected to complete an annual performance review to provide supportive professional development and an up-to-date assessment of performance. The Government should identify the best mechanisms to conduct annual performance reviews for chief constables through its work reforming force structures and accountability arrangements.

The leadership development network should ensure that executive leaders have real-time support to manage major issues and a structured approach to their continuing professional development.

Executive leaders should also be supported by a non-executive board with independent non-executive directors with relevant experience and insight (similar to the board recently established in the Metropolitan Police).

230. The accountability arrangements mean that chief constables do not have a traditional line manager. This means that they do not necessarily have regular performance conversations or engage with continuing professional development (CPD) in the same consistent way as other executive leaders.

231. This cannot remain an accepted feature of the system. There is a need to normalise and strengthen expectations for performance and development discussions for chief constables. Importantly, these should not be framed as line management processes, but as structured and supportive assessment of performance and development. These processes should go beyond outcomes, enabling a more rounded assessment of leadership, including behaviours, ethics and the culture leaders create. Seen in this context, strengthening performance and development reviews is not about introducing bureaucracy, but about reinforcing core disciplines of leadership: reflection, accountability and continuous improvement at the most senior level.

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Creating space for development through an executive leadership community

232. Alongside this, the Commission has heard repeatedly about the difficulty chief officers face in creating space for their own development. The operating environment is characterised by sustained operational demand, with limited capacity to step back and engage in structured learning.

> The military rule of thumb is 80 per cent training, 20 per cent theatre. In policing we are 99 per cent in operational mode. We are consumed and overwhelmed with demand. Often other agencies demand too …
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

233. This is not simply a question of individual time management. It reflects a system heavily weighted towards immediate operational delivery, often at the expense of leadership development.

234. We recognise that policing is not starting from scratch. There are existing structures, networks and development offers available to chief officers. However, these are often informal, fragmented, and insufficiently robust to meet the scale of the challenge.

235. The risks associated with this are significant. Chief constables are required to make decisions of national consequence, often under pressure and with limited opportunity to test assumptions or explore wider system implications. Much of this decision-making can take place in relative isolation, drawing primarily on internal advice or informal peer networks.

236. The development of a more structured executive leadership community becomes important. Anchored within the proposed National Academy of Police Leadership, such a community would provide a more coherent and consistent offer of support, including opportunities for peer learning, shared problem-solving and ongoing professional development.

237. This also provides a mechanism to connect individual decision-making with a wider national perspective, ensuring leaders are not operating in isolation but as part of a more integrated system.

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Bringing external perspective through non-executive directors

238. We have also considered the extent to which chief officer teams are supported by the right governance and challenge. Policing organisations are now operating at a scale and level of complexity comparable to large and highly scrutinised organisations in other sectors.

239. In that context, the contribution of non-executive directors has been highlighted as an area of growing importance. Evidence presented to us suggests that non-executive directors can bring valuable independent perspective, strengthen decision-making and provide constructive challenge to chief officer teams.

> Forces operate at the scale of billion-pound organisations. They should have access to professionally informed non-executive advice.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

240. Importantly, we heard that the value of non-executive directors lies not simply in their presence, but in the role they play in shaping decision-making. This includes bringing

in external expertise from areas such as finance, commercial practice and organisational governance, and ensuring that key decisions are tested, challenged and informed by a broader range of perspectives.

241. In the Metropolitan Police Service, non-executive members of the Management Board provide both support and challenge to executive leaders, enabling external expertise to inform decision-making while leaving accountability with the Commissioner and their delegates. This form of contribution is distinct from formal oversight, which more commonly sits within democratic governance structures.

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Chapter 11: Senior promotions and appointments

242. There are simply not enough candidates, let alone quality candidates, putting themselves forward for the most senior police officer jobs in the country. In 2025 there were 9 vacancies for chief constable positions and just 23 applicants for these posts. We were provided data on 47 chief constable appointments since 2017[46].These processes involved an average[47] of two or three shortlisted candidates, but there were 13 appointments made where just one candidate was shortlisted for interview. A lack of competition is one of the reasons senior posts are frequently filled by internal candidates. Around 43 per cent of all chief officer vacancies in 2025 (posts equivalent to chief constable, deputy chief constable and assistant chief constable) were filled by an internal candidate. 5 of the 9 chief constable vacancies in 2025 were filled internally.

243. It is not surprising that so many executive leadership positions are filled by internal candidates when the policing system is currently highly fragmented. Decision making and accountability is concentrated at the local level encouraging parochialism. The Government's **police reform programme** is already seeking to address this. The abolition of police and crime commissioners, the creation of a National Police Service (NPS) and the restructuring of local police forces to create fewer force areas will significantly change the role and responsibilities for senior and executive leaders across the system. The new system will require a new national cohort of senior and executive leaders.

244. Our recommendations are intended to substantially increase the pool of talented people who can lead the service in this new system. This will increase competition for the most senior jobs and improve the quality of leadership at the most senior levels. In this chapter, we focus on the final stages of the leadership pipeline. These are critical to ensuring that the public and the workforce get the police leaders they deserve. Here we set out the need for:

    i. A standard **promotions process at chief inspector and the superintendent ranks** that are centrally overseen to ensure consistency, quality of decision making and fairness.

[46] This data was collected and provided to the Commission by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners chief executives.

[47] This average being used is the mode. The most common number of shortlisted candidates.

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ii. Creating a dedicated **senior workforce planning** function to oversee the whole leadership pipeline and ensure there are enough people with the necessary skills, experience and behaviours rising through the ranks to fill the most senior positions.

iii. Establishing central oversight of **chief constable appointments** to ensure only credible candidates are shortlisted for interview.

Promotion to chief inspector and the superintendent ranks

245. There is a requirement to pass a national leadership programme delivered by the College of Policing, the **executive leaders programme**, to qualify to be a chief officer. But at the senior ranks just below: chief superintendent, superintendent and chief inspector there is no national process and no guidance for how local processes should be run.

> Across the land, 43 forces do it 43 ways in terms of how they approach the promotion process, who is identified, who gets through for interviews and sifting. We've raised the lack of actual benchmarking of what the national standard is. We don't have a national standard for superintendents.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

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246. The **Government's police reform white paper** already acknowledges that "a lack of national consistency across forces" around promotion needs to be addressed. As discussed earlier, it is committed to making "national leadership development programmes a requirement to access selection and promotion opportunities at each rank". We agree that leadership development should be central to promotion processes. In **chapter 10** of this report, we provided our vision for national leadership development programmes at every level. These should be required learning and assessment for anyone seeking promotion. But we need to go further and provide national oversight of local promotion decisions. This will provide assurance that quality decisions are being made through a trusted process.

Recommendation 21: A new standardised approach to promotion to chief inspector, superintendent and chief superintendent should be introduced.

These processes should include the same features as reformed processes at sergeant and inspector level so there is a consistent approach to promotion at every rank. They should:

- Include clear criteria at every stage based on the agreed definition of police leadership described in **chapter 2** of this report.
- Assess eligibility for promotion using annual performance reviews and the completion of leadership development learning. The national leadership development programmes described in **chapter 10** should be required learning to gain promotion at each rank.
- Be overseen centrally so there is transparency around decision making at every stage and independent assurance of fairness.

247. Chief inspectors and those at the superintending rank occupy critical operational policing roles. They are responsible for commanding local policing areas, major investigations, public protection teams and public order situations. They also play a strategic role at the local and national level, planning for future capabilities and working to improve organisational resilience. Their jobs are complex, multifaceted and often challenging. We need to be assured that the people occupying these roles have the skills and knowledge they need to lead effectively. There needs to be clear standards which can be applied locally to support quality decision making. These standards should be based on the definition of effective police leadership discussed in **chapter 2** of this report and informed by the standardised and benchmarked annual performance reviews described in **chapter 6** and **recommendation 10**. This will ensure that decisions are informed by a rounded understanding of an officer's performance and potential.

248. There also needs to be transparency on how promotion and development decisions are made so that people can trust the process and have faith in the decision-making. In **chapter 2** of this report, we already explained how without a clear and agreed understanding of what effective police leadership looks like, talent identification and promotions decisions in policing are often shaped in the image of the leaders who are responsible for them at a local level. This has created fertile ground for nepotism and bias to influence progression and development. This is particularly acute for promotion decisions at chief inspector and the superintending ranks where there is no standard process or framework for local forces to follow. Multiple officers who took part in our

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chief inspector focus group thought promotions at this level were primarily determined by relationships and networks.

> I think from chief inspector, promotion processes are not fit for purpose ... I think it's corrupt. The process is geared towards who you know, not what you know.
>
> **Focus group participant**
>
> If you don't have a network, you're not going to get a promotion.
>
> **Focus group participant**
>
> It is very clearly nepotistic. Jobs for the boys or the girls who're mates with the right people.
>
> **Focus group participant**

249. Chief inspectors and those in the superintending ranks play too important a role to leave getting the right people to chance. It is important that quality promotions decisions are made through a trusted process. This is vital to ensuring that there are a cohort of officers at these ranks that are not only capable in their roles but also that people are promoted into these ranks that are capable of making the next jump up to executive leadership positions.

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Senior workforce planning

250. There is a concerning number of chief officers currently in post temporarily. As of February 2026, there were at least 7 chief constables, 15 deputy chief constables and 67 assistant chief constables in post on a temporary basis[48]. This is the equivalent to around 29 per cent of all chief officers in England and Wales[49]**.** Posts do sometimes need to be filled temporarily when the incumbent is on family or sickness leave, but the amount of temping at chief officer ranks cannot be explained by family leave and sickness cover alone. It reflects a deeper malaise in the management of the leadership pipeline. Some officers are temping in the chief officer ranks because they have not yet qualified to hold a chief officer rank by passing the executive leadership programme (ELP). Of 55 non-international delegates who started the current ELP programme, 19 were already acting up as either temporary assistant chief constables, deputy chief constables, or deputy commanders[50]. In other cases, the post holders

[48] College of Policing internal data, accessed February 2026, unpublished.
[49] College of Policing 2026. These statistics are administrative data collected by the College of Policing on an ad-hoc basis.
[50] College of Policing 2026.

are temporary because the incumbent is suspended from duty whilst serious allegations against them are investigated. As of the end of June 2026, there were 4 chief officers suspended[51].

251. The system lacks grip of the leadership pipeline. The Government has already recognised that the need for a senior workforce planning function to provide the necessary grip. This planning function must be established as soon as possible.

Recommendation 22: The senior workforce planning function promised in the Government's police reform white paper should be established as a matter of urgency.

A dedicated senior workforce planning function is required to monitor talent and recruitment across the service and ensure that the service is recruiting and developing enough people with the necessary skills and experience.

The National Academy of Police Leadership described in **chapter 12** (**recommendation 24**) should host the senior workforce planning function and the central appointments panel so that these entities can work effectively together.

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252. The **Government's police reform white paper** says that the senior workforce planning function will be established first in the College and then moved into the National Police Service (NPS) when the College is moved in its entirety to the new body. It is vital that the senior workforce planning function is situated within the NPS and the key functions which it is expected the NPS will own. It needs to be supported by the wider workforce strategy owned by the NPS, discussed in **chapter 3** and **recommendations 3** and **4** of this report. It will also need access to the comprehensive professional digital passports that the Commission recommends the NPS manage, described in **chapter 6** and **recommendations 10** and **11** of this report. These passports will provide the planning function with the information about the performance, professional development and conduct of those rising through the ranks. This information will allow it to spot talented individuals and target interventions to ensure they get the development they need to succeed.

253. We believe the senior workforce planning function should be a key function of the new National Academy of Police Leadership hosted within the NPS. As set out in **chapter 12** of this report, the academy should be responsible for delivering a new national leadership scheme for policing. The talent scheme will have large annual cohorts and involve officers from every single police force in England and Wales. It will therefore be a crucial way in which the service manages talent nationally. The senior workforce

[51] NPCC Management Information, accessed June 2026, unpublished.

planning function therefore needs to be closely aligned to those managing the scheme.

254. The planning function will also need to be connected to another of the **Government's police reform white paper** commitments – the central appointments panel. The Government proposes that the panel will shortlist candidates for chief constable positions and ensure that local appointments are made to consistent standards and guidance. The panel will need to draw on the information, data and knowledge of the senior workforce planning function and so the two entities must be connected.

Central appointment panel

Recommendation 23: The central appointments panel for chief constable appointments, described in the Government's police reform white paper, should be established as quickly as possible to ensure candidates shortlisted for chief constable roles meet required standards.

The panel should ensure that candidates shortlisted for chief constable positions have varied experience, including experience of policing in different types of places and/or working in more than one force. The national panel should also be engaged wherever it is proposed to extend the term of office of a chief constable.

The panel should include system leaders and external voices including His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. They should provide important independent advice with direct reference to the definition of effective leadership, together with mandatory appraisal of the most up-to-date performance review.

The Home Office should develop a clear structure at local level, following the abolition of police and crime commissioners to ensure appropriate input to the interview panels candidates will undertake once shortlisted.

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255. The central appointments panel should ensure that shortlisted chief constables are appropriately experienced. In **chapter 9** we set out our expectation that senior officers should spend some time on secondment to ensure they gain experience of working in more than one organisation. The expectation should be no different for prospective chief constables. Those who have spent their entire policing career working in one police force should not be considered eligible for chief constable positions. Those that are too immersed in an institution can struggle to see its faults clearly and admit when it has failed. It is therefore imperative that prospective chief constables have a suitable breadth of experience.

256. The panel should be connected to wider senior workforce planning, but it needs to be able to give independent and trusted advice. Otherwise, there is a risk the system loses faith in its decision making. Including key independent people like His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary on the panel will provide it with this independence. In the past the inspectorate was more involved in chief constable appointments. Before the introduction of police and crime commissioners, historic **Home Office guidance** on the recruitment and selection of chief police officers set an expectation that local decision makers would consult their lead regional inspector when a vacancy occurred and at the shortlisting stage. It is right that HMICFRS once again has a formal role in the appointment of chief constables. Inspectors have the knowledge and independence necessary to provide informed and objective advice on chief constable shortlists.

257. Ultimately, chief constables will still be appointed at a local level. The intention is that under the new accountability arrangements that replace police and crime commissioners, metro mayors or local councillors sitting on new police and crime boards will make the final decision on appointment. The Home Office should make clear who precisely is expected to be involved in this decision, how they are expected to make the decision and what external advice they are expected to consider when they do so, and to clarify these new arrangements before May 2028 when PCCs will be replaced with boards.

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Chapter 12: Delivering a new approach to police leadership

258. There needs to be a fundamental overhaul of how the police attracts, recruits, develops, appoints and supports its leaders at all ranks, grades and roles. The 23 recommendations that have been outlined in this report so far provide a blueprint for this overhaul. In this final chapter, we explain how this blueprint should be delivered through:

    i. The creation of a National Academy of Police Leadership with the necessary governance and funding to become a clear system owner for police leadership, delivering at the centre and influencing at the local level.

    ii. Raising and protecting investment in leadership development across the sector.

    iii. Establishing an implementation group to ensure the swift and coordinated delivery of all the Commission's recommendations.

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The National Academy of Police Leadership

259. The relationship between the centre and the local must be redefined so as to deliver a root-and-branch change to the approach to leadership development in policing. Decision making, system governance and investment should be shifted to the centre. The creation of the National Academy of Police Leadership would provide a central organisation capable of providing the required strategic leadership and central coordination of the police leadership development. The commitment to establish a National Police Service (NPS) provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to establish the academy with the infrastructure it needs.

Recommendation 24: A National Academy of Police Leadership should be established. The academy should stand as an essential entity of the National Police Service and an enduring partnership between policing and higher education.

The academy should be responsible for:

- Owning, maintaining and developing the definition and principles of effective police leadership.
- Designing and delivering the police leadership fast stream.

- Setting the standards for and central oversight of the new promotions processes described in **recommendations 14** and **21**.
- Managing the targeted direct entry programme.
- Facilitating the senior secondments.
- Hosting the leadership development networks.
- Designing and delivering national leadership development programmes.
- Providing a secretariat for the senior appointments panel.
- Delivering the senior workforce planning.
- Undertaking research, in conjunction with academics and practitioners, in order to ensure that decisions about leadership and leadership development are based on the best available evidence.

A critical part of the National Police Service

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> The National Police Service is a big opportunity. It's a moment. The whole white paper is actually very promising, and the National Police Service is a good opportunity to rethink the whole [approach to] leadership development all the way through the career.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

260. The Government is committed to establishing the NPS as a national police force and the lead strategic organisation for English and Welsh policing. The NPS will eventually be responsible for strategic leadership of the policing system, national standards in all areas of policing, enabling services to local forces and the national response to terrorism and serious and organised crime. The Government says the College of Policing will be brought into the NPS "in its entirety" along with the coordinating and strategic functions that currently sit in the NPCC. The NPS will therefore pool the influence, authority and capacity of these two strategic organisations and build on them through its own legal authority. This will enable the NPS to join up data and use it for strategic planning, provide clarity of decision making and better target resources across the service. Situating the National Academy of Police Leadership within the NPS will therefore be crucial. It will ensure the academy has the influence and capacity to deliver many of the Commission's recommendations.

261. The academy cannot become simply a collection of the NPS' functions relating to leadership. This would represent a missed opportunity. It would not address the lack

of a clear system owner for leadership development that we have identified. The academy should have its own designated leader, clear governance and ring-fenced funding. These features would signal the value the NPS and the wider system places on leadership development. It would also secure the academy's status as the clear system owner for leadership development. This will enable it to build trust in how it oversees and manages objective, transparent and consistent processes for leadership development and promotion across the service.

An enduring partnership between policing and higher education

262. The National Academy should be established from the beginning as an enduring partnership between policing and higher education. To achieve this, the academy should be underpinned by a formal relationship with a leading university. This will create a research function that can build an evidence base around police leadership and an institution that can provide accredited leadership development programmes.

263. British policing already collaborates with higher education in many ways. It is globally renowned for its approach to science and innovation. It was a pioneer in camera technology that became ANPR, in DNA forensics; algorithmic decision making and is now leading the world in the use of live facial recognition technology. In the current era it will be vital that training to handle cybercrime and to use artificial intelligence effectively will be part of a modernised curriculum. Police forces and other policing organisations regularly partner with universities to design and evaluate new ways of preventing and fighting crime and building robust evidence of what works to cut crime and keep people safe. Policing has also worked with higher education to support its professional development. Forces are partnered with universities to deliver some of the police constable training programmes. Nevertheless, the relationship between policing and higher education has not always been straightforward. In part, this is because of a cultural scepticism towards formal education within policing. We encountered this cultural scepticism in the submissions to our call for evidence. Policing professionals expressed concern that links to higher education preference those with academic aptitude and exclude those who thrive in other ways. However, over the last decade there has been significant successful partnering between some forces and some universities across the country, which has produced innovations in teaching and learning as well as substantial high quality and practical research into operational and organisational aspects of policing. It is possible to build on these innovations and spread the new practices so that police can draw more substantially on its higher education links.

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> Again, this [training and assessment] appears to be merely academic, which works well in some circumstances. Unfortunately, for myself with dyslexia, this is a struggle. I can talk to a person for hours [but I] cannot do tests.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

264. The Commission visited the **Centre for Army Leadership (CAL)** at the British Army's Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. The CAL is thriving as a partnership between higher education and the military by operating as a joint and co-led venture between military personnel and research professionals. The partnership enables the CAL to conduct relevant and grounded research about army leadership which can continually inform everything the British Army does: military training, strategy and engagement. The CAL shows that partnerships between academics and practitioners can successfully build leadership capability involving everyone across a sector. In line with this model, the National Academy of Police Leadership should be co-led by a senior policing professional and a senior researcher. The academy should enable police officers, allied police staff, educators and researchers to work together, utilising everyone's expertise to ensure the best available evidence about police leadership informs the design, delivery and evaluation of leadership development across policing.

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265. A partnership with a leading higher education institution will also provide a route for the academy to accredit its training and support the accreditation of leadership development training delivered by forces. At present, the College of Policing can only provide external accreditation for its programmes in very limited circumstances. This is because it is neither recognised as an awarding body within a formal professional qualifications' framework, nor does it have a partnership with a university. Its executive leadership programme is required learning under policing regulations for those who hold a chief officer rank. College programmes are delivered by experienced and highly regarded police trainers who have operational credibility and strong connections with UK policing. But as the programmes are not externally validated, we cannot accurately benchmark them against other programmes. It also means that those who attend College programmes typically do not receive external recognition of their learning.

266. Equivalent national training providers do provide accredited programmes either through a professional qualifications body, a partnership with a university or both. The College's counterpart in Scotland, the **Scottish Police College**, is an approved centre by **Qualifications Scotland** and many of its programmes carry formal credit within the **Scottish credit qualification framework (SCQF)**. The **Royal Military Academy Sandhurst** is partnered with University of Reading and Henley Business School. The FBI's national academy provides university credits through partnership

with the University of Virginia. Similarly, the Canadian Police College is partnered with the University of Ottawa.

267. All police professionals deserve recognition of their learning and that the approach to police leadership needs to be underpinned by the very best evidence of the leadership that helps to cut crime and keep people safe. The academy must be set up as an enduring partnership between higher-education and policing to deliver these principles and therefore a partnership should be developed with a leading higher education institution.

An inspirational home for police leadership

268. The academy should have a physical central home which provides an inspirational learning environment for policing professionals across England and Wales and beyond. This should be a distinct and iconic place that can become a symbol of police leadership excellence.

Recommendation 25: The National Academy should have an inspirational physical central location, a digital footprint and presence in forces and policing organisations throughout England and Wales.

The academy should have its own dedicated building. This may be an existing building or one purpose built.

The sale of existing estates could recover some costs but the purchase and development of a new home for police leadership development would require capital funding.

This would facilitate a global offer of police training and development which could yield not only a substantial income but also the development of soft power and partnership arrangements across the world.

269. Policing used to have a dedicated building just for its leadership training. From 1960 until 2015 national police leadership development was delivered at the grade one listed Bramshill House. Since its sale, national leadership development for policing has been primarily delivered at the College of Policing's multi-purpose training site in Ryton-upon-Dunsmore.

270. Many police professionals who the Commission has engaged with lament the loss of Bramshill. They argue that since its sale police leadership has missed an identifiable professional home and a symbol that provides an aspirational focus for the policing system.

> ... to have lost Bramshill – an extraordinary asset, totemic of excellence in police leadership and hugely marketable to the world policing economy – was myopic and a mistake.
>
> **Call for evidence submission**

271. Securing a new home for police leadership development and the academy will require investment. The College scoped options for developing a new home for police training in 2023. At that time, it put up-front costs associated with purchasing and renovating a building to be a dedicated home for leadership development at around £40 million. The sale of existing assets would recover some of these costs, but providing a home for the academy would likely require additional capital funding[52]. This investment should not be seen in isolation. It should be made as part of a wider estates' strategy for the NPS – which will need an estate across the country to carry out its strategic and operational functions effectively. Investment in a home for leadership development would represent a small part of total annual capital funding in policing in England and Wales, which was £123 million as of **March 2026**.

272. The investment would also enable the academy to generate some of its own income. The academy could better market its accredited courses to other public safety organisations and international partners. It is important for the academy to have some financial independence. Delivering training and services to partners throughout the world would also enable greater collaboration and external partnership with people across the world and raise the profile of UK policing internationally.

273. Its physical home will be an important central location for the academy, but the academy should not be limited to delivering services in one place. It should be accessible to officers and staff wherever they are and have formal links with Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The academy should embrace digital delivery to provide modern and cost-effective leadership development. It should also have a footprint throughout England and Wales to aim to have staff permanently based in each of the smaller number of police forces that result from the Government's review of force structures. Working with and in local forces will allow the academy to absorb and better coordinate the work of local learning and development and human resources professionals to deliver leadership development activities locally.

[52] College of Policing internal data, accessed June 2026, unpublished. This is administrative data collated by the College on an ad-hoc basis.

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Investment

274. Policing does not centrally monitor how much it spends on its leadership development, so figures on leadership development spending across policing do not currently exist. We have worked with the College and four volunteer forces to try and estimate leadership investment across the sector. Our analysis indicates that the service is likely to be woefully underinvesting in its leadership development. The radical step-change in approach to police leadership the Commission is recommending cannot be delivered if there is not proper investment and grip of this spending to ensure value for money to the public.

Recommendation 26: Leadership development in policing should be properly funded to ensure sustained investment in the capacity and capability of police leaders at all levels.

The Government and the Home Office should restore central funding so the centre can better prioritise leadership development spend on a national basis, and to bring support for training in line with other major frontline organisations, including the military and the NHS.

The College of Policing – and then the NPS when the College is integrated into the NPS – should monitor local leadership development spend to identify efficiencies and ensure it supports national priorities.

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The scale of underinvestment

275. A lack of time and money were frequently cited to us as barriers to investing in leadership development. Participants at our roundtables, interviews, focus groups, reference groups and workshops repeatedly cited abstraction – a term used in policing to describe time spent away from the front line – as a reason not to prioritise leadership development.

> There is zero capacity at this minute to abstract a superintendent or certainly a chief superintendent, borough commander or district commander for three or five weeks because who's going to do the work? There's a knock-on effect. We do not have that resilience within the police service.
>
> **Roundtable contributor**

276. Seeing leadership development as an abstraction rather than an investment is holding policing back. Leadership development provides a return on investment and should not be seen in terms of cost alone. Effective leadership motivates the workforce and helps to spot and prevent emerging problems. This saves money in the long run by

avoiding mistakes, improving productivity and ensuring effective service delivery. We recognise policing is facing huge financial pressures now and in the future. But policing simply cannot afford to underinvest in its leadership development anymore.

277. The scale of the underinvestment at the centre is particularly significant. The College does not disaggregate what it spent on its leadership development offer from its other activities. It gave the Commission three different figures when we asked it to estimate the spend associated with its national centre for police leadership:

    i. The value of a legacy Home Office direct grant[53] awarded to the College for leadership deliverables – £2.65m in 2024/25.

    ii. An estimate of the total staff costs associated with the centre – circa £4.3m in 2025/26.

    iii. The value of central subsides previously provided to forces by the College for leadership courses – up to £4m per annum.

278. These numbers are tiny when compared to overall investment in policing. £4m a year is the equivalent of around 0.02 per cent of **total police funding in 2026/27**. Spend locally in forces is little better. We worked with four volunteer forces, each representing different parts of England and Wales[54], to try to understand local leadership development spending. These forces all had different ideas of what should be included in the totals. They returned vastly different figures and one could not provide estimates at all. The significant variation found across just four forces makes it almost impossible to estimate the total of what is being spent locally in England and Wales. But given the returns we estimate that forces are likely to be spending between £200 and £600 per workforce member on leadership development.

279. We are calling for greater investment in police leadership development, but this should be seen within the wider reform landscape. The Government's commitment to the consolidation of the current 43 forces into a smaller number of larger organisations, alongside the creation of a NPS, is expected to deliver system-wide efficiencies and significant economies of scale across areas such as estates, procurement and support functions. Many of our recommendations, including those concerning data capability, promotions processes and training delivery are situated in this reform context. Some of our other recommendations, such as strengthening CPD networks, expanding secondments and introducing targeted direct entry routes, can be delivered by making better use of existing resources and infrastructure across the system.

[53] This direct award has now been rolled into the College's core grant-in-aid.
[54] Four forces volunteered for the exercise: a large urban English force, a small rural English force and two forces with a mix of urban and rural areas, one English and one Welsh.

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Gripping leadership development investment

280. Central monitoring and oversight of spend would begin to address the postcode lottery in access to leadership development we identified in our case for change. We are estimating a difference of at least £400 per year per workforce member in leadership development spend between forces. This may even be an underestimate. **Value for money data** produced by HMICFRS captures overall training spend by force. This data shows a ten-fold difference between some forces on training spend. The 2025/2026 data show some forces spending as little as £560 per officer on training whilst others are spending over £5,500. It is unlikely that such a wide variation can accurately represent the different training needs of officers in different parts of the country. More than likely, it represents inefficient distribution and poorly targeted spending.

281. It is no surprise that spend is likely to be inefficient and poorly targeted when there is a lack of coordination and capacity across the system to measure it properly. The four forces we worked with struggled to provide a coherent picture of leadership development spending because they had no common understanding of what constituted leadership development or how to cost it. They did all include some core things: structured leadership development programmes, operational leadership training and promotion-linked development. But one force included additional things like apprenticeships, managing annual reviews across the force, and recruitment and selection. This force only included the direct cost of delivery, encompassing fees and licensing for externally provided services plus trainer salaries and room and material provision for internally delivered programmes. Two other forces took a narrower approach focusing on just the core activities. But these forces defined costs mostly as abstractions. One did include fees and licensing for externally provided provision but both aggregated internal delivery costs with business-as-usual spend and therefore excluded them. As explained earlier, one of the four forces could not disaggregate their leadership spend at all and were ultimately excluded from our analysis.

282. Policing budgets are likely to be tight going forwards. The service cannot afford to waste money. It will take time to address disparities in spend but the service must begin to develop a clear understanding of what it is spending on leadership development and how this is helping police leaders to more effectively cut crime and keep people safe.

Implementation

283. We urge immediate and fully committed action to implement in full the recommendations of this report. Inertia and inaction cannot be allowed to stall

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progress towards the fundamental overhaul of police leadership required. This would let down the thousands of police professionals we have met who have placed hope in our report being the catalyst for the change they are crying out for. Work to deliver the Commission's recommendations should therefore begin immediately. But this work needs to be coordinated and prioritised effectively if it is to be successfully and swiftly delivered.

Recommendation 27: The Home Office should establish an implementation group to take forward the Commission's recommendations. The group should ensure that the recommendations and detailed analysis in this report do not experience long delay in action.

The implementation group should be connected to the Government's **police reform programme** to use the synergies and opportunities this presents. The group should be led by the Home Office and the new NPS. It should involve people from across the policing sector and people from outside policing who can bring their expertise in leadership, training and change management. The group should be led by someone of appropriate seniority to bring people together and drive the work forward.

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Involving people from outside policing in the implementation group will bring outside expertise and provide critical distance from police workforce reforms of the past.

The implementation group should establish a clear timeline for the delivery of the Commission's recommendations with defined milestones. It should prioritise the following in this financial year 2026/27:

- Finalising and promoting the Commission's definition of effective leadership described in **recommendation 2**.
- The delivery of the profession's first comprehensive workforce strategy and the data reform described in **recommendations 3 to 5**.
- Setting a mandatory and standardised process for annual performance reviews described in **recommendation 10**.
- Following appropriate consultation, draft amendments to police regulations to create the senior constable rank described in **recommendation 13**.
- Outline the delivery of the fair, transparent and trusted processes for promotion at every rank described in **recommendations 14** and **21**.
- Establishing a senior workforce planning function described in **recommendation 22**.

- The establishment of the National Academy of Police Leadership as described in **recommendations 24** and **25**. This will enable the academy to be moved into the NPS as a priority when the new body is created in legislation.

284. Fundamental reform to the structures, systems and processes of policing in England and Wales, as laid out in the **Government's police reform white paper**, is long overdue. Many of our recommendations directly support commitments and ambitions included in the **white paper**. The delivery of the Commission's recommendations will be crucial to ensuring that the police workforce and its leadership capability and capacity is made central to the delivery of police reform.

285. Whilst the implementation group should be firmly rooted in the **police reform programme**, it should not close itself off to the outside. It should be a collaborative endeavour involving people from across policing and beyond. This will build on our collaborative approach. We have benefited greatly from the involvement of people with varied expertise and experience, including those from outside English and Welsh policing. The implementation group will need the same approach if it is to succeed in taking the ethos of this Commission forward.

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Appendix 1: Overview of the Police Leadership Commission and evidence gathering methodology

The Commission

The independent Police Leadership Commission was set up by the College of Policing with the support of the Home Office in October 2025. It has three principal objectives:

- To assess how leadership capabilities (knowledge, skills, abilities and judgement) are currently embedded across the whole policing sector and where gaps remain.
- To identify the barriers and opportunities to delivering and ensuring ongoing, effective and consistent leadership standards, development, progression and performance across the service.
- To recommend and prioritise solutions that build on existing approaches to leadership in order to be able to address current and future challenges. This includes ways to embed consistent leadership standards and ongoing training and development as the foundation of operational and organisational skills and capability, frontline performance, wellbeing, improved productivity and a positive culture.

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The Commission was co-chaired by Lord Blunkett and Lord Herbert of South Downs, with ten further commissioners who brought together expertise from policing, the military, academia, the public sector and the private sector.

The Commission held its first meeting on 11 November and concluded its work in July 2026. The Commission met nine times in total in addition to personally taking part in the consultation and evidence gathering activities.

Members of the Commission

Rt Hon Lord Blunkett

David Blunkett was an MP for 28 years and served in multiple New Labour cabinets including as Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1997 to 2001), Home Secretary (2001 to 2004), and finally Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (2005). Lord Blunkett was appointed to the House of Lords in 2015. He is Professor Emeritus of Politics and Practice at the University of Sheffield, Chairs the Board of the University of Law, is involved in a number of

major charitable organisations, and advises on skills and training for major infrastructure programmes.

Rt Hon Lord Herbert of South Downs CBE

Nick Herbert was a Conservative MP for nearly 15 years and served as Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice from 2010 to 2012 where he led a major programme of policing reform.

Lord Herbert of South Downs has been Chair of the College of Policing since 2021, where he and its Chief Executive, Sir Andy Marsh QPM, have refocused the College on leadership, standards and performance. He became a member of the House of Lords in 2020.

Temporary Chief Constable Maggie Blyth KPM

Maggie has worked in the criminal justice service for over 36 years, commencing her career in the probation service in the early 1990s in London and Oxford. In 1998 she set up one of the first Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) under the new national Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, going on become a senior adviser to the YJB with oversight of practice and performance of all YOTs across the UK.

Maggie worked as a senior leader in youth justice and children's services for a decade during the 2000s with continuing specialist interest in reducing youth crime, child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse and serious sexual offending.

In 2016, Maggie joined Hampshire Police as a Direct Entry Superintendent, taking up a district commander role with responsibility for Portsmouth city. After completing the Strategic Command Course in 2019, she transferred as Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) for Local Policing to Wiltshire, returning as ACC to Hampshire.

In 2021, Maggie was appointed as a deputy chief constable to lead the national policing response to violence against women and girls (VAWG), culminating in the establishment of the first National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection in 2025. She has been temporary chief constable in Gloucestershire since October 2024 and continues to lead on public protection issues for policing.

Cleared

William Bratton CBE

William J. Bratton is a respected and trusted expert in risk and security issues. During his 46-year career in law enforcement, he instituted progressive change and dramatic drops in crime while leading six police departments, including seven years as Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department and two non-consecutive terms as the Police Commissioner of New York City.

As Chief of the New York City Transit Police, the Boston Police Commissioner, and in his first term as the Commissioner of New York City Police, Commissioner Bratton revitalised morale and cut crime in all three roles, achieving the largest crime declines in New York City's history.

Additionally, Commissioner Bratton was the Police Chief in Los Angeles, a city known for its entrenched gang culture and youth violence. He brought crime to historically low levels, greatly improved race relations, and reached out to young people with a range of innovative police programmes.

Commissioner Bratton also implemented Neighbourhood Policing and Precision Policing – new philosophies that drove crime down to historic lows. He also created the strategic response group, and the critical response command unit, comprising of hundreds of highly trained officers equipped to respond to terror threats and active shooter incidents.

Commissioner Bratton formerly served as the Co-Chair for the Secretary of Homeland Security's Advisory Council.

Now, Commissioner Bratton is the Executive Chairman of Teneo Risk, where he advises clients on risk identification, prevention and response.

Peter Cheese

Peter was the CEO of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) until June 2026. He is also Chair of Engage for Success, and sits on the Board of the College of Policing. He sits on many forums linked to wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, routes in to work and skills, flexible working and corporate governance.

Peter writes and speaks widely on the development of HR, the future of work, and the key issues of leadership, culture and organisation, people and skills. His book 'The New World of Work' explores the many factors shaping work, workplaces, workforces and our

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working lives, and the principles around which we can build a future that is good for people, for business and for societies.

Prior to joining the CIPD in 2012, Peter was Chair of the Institute of Leadership and Management, an Executive Fellow at London Business School, and held a number of Board level roles. He had a long career in consulting at Accenture working with organisations around the world.

Peter is a Fellow of the CIPD, a Fellow of AHRI (the Australian HR Institute), the Royal Society of Arts, and the Academy of Social Sciences. He's also a Companion of the Institute of Leadership and Management, the Chartered Management Institute, and the British Academy of Management.

He holds honorary doctorates from Bath University, Kingston University and Birmingham City University, and is a visiting Professor at Aston University, and at Unitar University, Malaysia.

Major General Nick Cowley OBE

Major General Cowley joined the British Army in 2000 and has conducted tours of Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Major General Cowley served as the Chief of Staff of 16 Air Assault Brigade before studying for a Master's Degree in Planning and Strategy. He then worked as the Military Assistant to the Chief of the General Staff before assuming command of 16 Air Assault Brigade in 2021. As a Brigadier, he was appointed Commander of the Combat Manoeuvre Centre.

In 2024, Major General Cowley was appointed as Commandant Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, which has now merged with other training organisations to form Army Individual Training Command (AITC); an organisation which trains all new officers and soldiers across the Army. He is Director of Leadership for the British Army and advocate for the Army Multicultural Network.

Major General Cowley founded the charity, The Talent Tap, which helps underprivileged school leavers achieve their potential, and the not-for-profit, Future Forces, which aims to attract more talent and technology into defence and security.

Major General Cowley was awarded a QCVS in 2009, an MBE in 2015 and an OBE in 2019.

Emeritus Professor Jean Hartley

Jean Hartley is Emeritus Professor at the Open University. Previously, she was Professor of Public Leadership at the Open University and also the founding Academic Director of the University's Centre for Policing Research and Learning.

At the University, Jean led 80 academics working in partnership with 24 UK police forces to create and use knowledge to improve policing for the public good.

Prior to this, Jean has held academic appointments at Warwick University Business School, University of Manchester, University of Sheffield and London University (Birkbeck College). She has a first degree in psychology and a PhD in organisational psychology.

Jean has held visiting appointments including at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and at the Australian and New Zealand School of Government. She was a Fellow of the UK's Sunningdale Institute, attached to the then National School of Government which worked to improve the use of management knowledge by the civil service.

Jean's research with the police includes leadership to tackle rural crime, leadership to create public value, and the dynamics of police working with elected politicians. Her research involves working closely with policy-makers and practitioners as well as academics. She has won three national or international awards for research. She has written seven books and has many well-cited publications.

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Deputy Commissioner Matt Jukes QPM

Deputy Commissioner Matt Jukes joined policing in 1995 as a constable with South Yorkshire Police. He then worked as a detective, and in a variety of other roles, working his way up to the position of Chief Superintendent, Borough Commander.

In 2010, Matt joined South Wales Police as an Assistant Chief Constable, leading on specialist crime, and served as Deputy Chief Constable before being appointed Chief Constable in 2018. He was awarded the Queen's Police Medal (QPM) in that year's Honours.

In 2020, Matt joined the Metropolitan Police as Assistant Commissioner, leading and overseeing transformation programmes, moving to the post of Head of UK Counter

Terrorism Policing and the Met's Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations. This continued a long-standing focus on intelligence and security.

His 30-year career has been split between periods in specialist areas of policing and others at the heart of local policing, delivering for communities and supporting frontline colleagues, including a focus on their wellbeing. He is a former Chair, and now Vice Chair, of Police Sport UK, and a Patron of the Police Remembrance Trust.

Julia Mulligan

Julia holds several senior leadership roles including Chair of the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), the Senior Independent Director for the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) and Chair of the North West Ambulance Service (NWAS). In addition, she is an Independent Member of the Parole Board where she serves on the organisation's Audit and Risk Committee. Julia is also currently Chair of Trustees for IDAS, a specialist domestic and sexual abuse charity. Previously, Julia spent four years as the Chair of the Police Advisory Board for England and Wales, standing down in April 2025.

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Prior to holding these positions, between 2012 and 2021, Julia served as the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire, where she also took on governance of the county's fire and rescue service. During that time, she was a Director of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC). In that role, Julia held three national portfolios including for victims and violence against women and girls. She also sat on the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner's (IASC) advisory board.

Grace Ononiwu CBE

Grace Ononiwu was appointed to the new post of Director General Legal Delivery of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in June 2025.

Prior to her current role, Grace was appointed as Director of Legal Services within CPS in 2021, with responsibility for providing assurance to the Director of Public Prosecutions on the quality of the legal decision-making and casework progression across a number of CPS areas. She also has thematic responsibility for Legal Guidance and Development, and Head of Profession support.

Grace qualified as a solicitor in 1991 and joined a private firm of solicitors practising criminal law. She joined the CPS as a Crown Prosecutor and held a number of positions, which led to her appointment as Northamptonshire Chief Crown Prosecutor in 2005, making her the first African Caribbean to be appointed as a Chief Crown Prosecutor in the history of the CPS.

In 2009, Grace was appointed into London as Deputy Chief Prosecutor of what was then the largest CPS region, with responsibility for the London Districts. In 2012, she was appointed Chief Crown Prosecutor for the East of England region, and in 2014 appointed Chief Crown Prosecutor of the West Midlands region, making her the first woman / first black person to hold both posts.

Grace has made a significant contribution to the CPS equality and diversity agenda and was previously the Chair of the National Black Crown Prosecution Association.

Grace was awarded the OBE in 2008 in recognition for her work with the CPS and received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from the University of Hertfordshire, in recognition for her contribution to justice and the legal system. Grace is now a visiting Professor of the University and Patron of their Law Clinic.

Grace received the honorary award of Doctor of the University from Birmingham City University in recognition of exceptional service to law and order in the West Midlands.

In 2019, Grace was awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for services to Law and Order and was included in the Power List for four years running, which features 100 of the UK's most influential men and women of African, African Caribbean and African American heritage.

Grace was also the recipient of the Black Solicitor's Network – Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of her career to date and for championing diversity in the legal profession.

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Kate Steadman

Kate has extensive experience in the design and execution of organisational strategy and transformation, with more than 20 years' experience delivering change across public services and as a global leader of strategy, transformation and communications, predominantly within large, listed and international companies.

Kate has particular expertise in highly complex, regulated and government-facing organisations.

She was one of the youngest people appointed to the Executive Board of any FTSE 250 company. Prior to this, she led global strategy for the government business of a French-listed multinational with revenues of c.€23 billion. She currently works in Australia and New Zealand for an ASX-listed infrastructure company with revenues of approximately AUD $11 billion.

Driven by a commitment to improving public services, Kate began her career after graduating from the University of Cambridge, where she served as President of the Cambridge Union. She subsequently spent several years as a policy adviser to senior politicians in the fields of criminal justice, home affairs and legal affairs before moving into the private sector.

Until moving to Australia, Kate served as a Non-Executive Director of one of the UK's largest and most challenged acute healthcare trusts. She has also served as Chair of Trustees for multiple charities and continues to serve in the charitable sector.

Chief Constable Sir Stephen Watson QPM

Sir Stephen Watson is amongst the most experienced senior officers in the country having joined Lancashire Constabulary in 1988. He was appointed to Merseyside Police in 2006 on promotion to Chief Superintendent.

In 2011, he was appointed to the Metropolitan Police as Commander for the East Area, with responsibility for all aspects of operational policing across nine London boroughs. As a senior member of the 2012 Olympic Command Team, he was awarded the Commissioner's Commendation in recognition of his role, which involved the planning and delivery of all territorial policing across London throughout the Olympic and Paralympic games.

Sir Stephen returned to the north of England in 2015, having been appointed Deputy Chief Constable for Durham Constabulary. In 2016, Sir Stephen took up his appointment as Chief Constable for South Yorkshire Police, which during his tenure, became the most improved force in the country and today remains amongst the very top tier of high-performing forces.

In 2021, Sir Stephen became Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police (GMP). The force had been placed into "Special Measures" by HMICFRS given the manifold failings in the organisation at that time. Such was the extent of early progress that GMP was formally brought out of external engagement in 2022 – the most rapid recovery journey ever recorded in contemporary British policing history.

In 2023, Sir Stephen was appointed, by the Home Secretary, to be a non-executive Director on the Board of the College of Policing. He also assumed the role of Service Director for the Executive Leadership element of the UK's Police Leadership Programme.

Sir Stephen was awarded the Queens Police Medal (QPM) for distinguished service in 2019. In the King's Birthday Honours 2025, Sir Stephen was appointed a Knight Bachelor for services to policing.

Consultation and evidence gathering

The Commission consulted widely across policing and beyond. It heard from officers, staff and volunteers at different levels of seniority; chief officers and senior leaders; police staff associations and workforce networks; regulators and oversight bodies; police and crime commissioners; Government; academics; public services; private and third sector organisations; international partners; and members of the public.

Across the totality of its consultation activities, it is estimated the Commission received direct input from around 3,000 individuals. This primary evidence was considered alongside a substantial body of pre-existing research and data. To support this, each roundtable and commissioner meeting was underpinned by a programme of structured briefing material prepared by the secretariat. These briefings synthesised relevant evidence aligned to the session's themes, including findings from previous Government-commissioned reviews and inquiries, peer-reviewed academic literature, research produced by policing organisations, and the Commission's own analysis of NPCC management information and other unpublished datasets shared directly with the secretariat. This approach enabled commissioners to engage consistently with the existing evidence base throughout the process and set the new primary evidence in appropriate context. The Commission's recommendations are therefore informed by an integrated assessment of both stakeholder input and a wide range of established evidence, with the aim of strengthening leadership across the policing workforce, supporting consistent national standards and development, and improving preparedness for future demands.

The Commission appointed the College of Policing and the Police Foundation to undertake a range of evidence-gathering activities. In addition, Commissioners themselves went on force visits around England and Wales, attended workshops and conferences and conducted focus groups to hear from PCSOs, constables, sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors. These activities created multiple evidence streams and enabled triangulation across different sources of evidence which were brought together to inform the Commission's findings and recommendations. The sources of evidence were:

- A call for evidence.

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- 13 “roundtables”.
- A reference group of key stakeholders, along with 4 subgroups.
- 11 Commissioner force visits, with 21 associated focus groups.
- 4 focus groups with police officers and staff.
- 12 interviews with senior and executive officers.
- A survey of almost 19,000 sergeants and inspectors.
- 2 public focus groups.
- 2 international senior leaders focus groups.
- 5 themed workshops.
- 2 Commission visits to Leadership Centres.
- Extensive secondary evidence synthesis across multiple briefings and analysis pieces.

The call for evidence

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The Commission invited online submissions to an open call for evidence to ensure that its conclusions were grounded in the lived experience, professional insight, and organisational perspectives of those working within, alongside, or scrutinising policing. The exercise was designed to be as accessible as possible, with no restrictions on participation, and was actively promoted through targeted stakeholder communications, professional networks, and social media to maximise both reach and range of response. It was open between 8 January and 12 February 2026 and formed a central component of the Commission’s evidence base.

The call for evidence received 484 submissions from a broad cross-section of respondents, including serving police officers and staff across all ranks and roles, former practitioners, academics, oversight bodies, public and private partner organisations, and representative groups. This breadth of participation ensured that the evidence captured perspectives spanning operational, strategic, and external viewpoints, and reflected both individual experiences and system-level assessments of police leadership.

The call was structured around seven core questions, designed to elicit open-ended evidence across current practice and future challenges. These questions invited respondents to comment on:

- What is working well in police leadership in delivering trusted and effective policing
    - What is not working well?

- What is working well in training and assessment for leadership roles
    - What is not working well?
- What good police leadership looks like in practice
- The challenges police leaders will face in the future and the development required to meet them
- What knowledge or promising practice from other sectors or countries could be applied to policing

The seven questions were supported by a comprehensive set of leadership and leadership development prompts, designed around an analytical framework comprised of leadership concepts, contexts and challenges, core purposes, capabilities, culture and conduct, and leadership development systems (including cultivation, progression, and capacity). These prompts encouraged respondents to consider evidence across multiple dimensions of leadership, without constraining the scope of their submissions. Respondents could add any further comments they wished to make. Finally, respondents were asked to provide a small number of details about themselves such as their role, their connection to policing, and whether they were responding as an individual or an organisation.

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Given the volume and predominantly qualitative nature of responses, the analysis, led by the Commission research lead, adopted a structured thematic analytical approach. Responses were coded and analysed using a hybrid human-AI method, with AI supporting the identification and classification of themes under close human oversight. This approach balanced analytical rigour, transparency, and efficiency, enabling the research team to process a large and complex dataset within a compressed timeframe while retaining full control over interpretation and judgement.

The analytical process was underpinned by established Government standards, and a multi-stage quality assurance process was applied, including piloting, iterative refinement of the coding framework, and ongoing sampling checks to ensure consistency and reliability. Data were handled in accordance with strict data protection protocols, including the removal of personal identifiers and the use of de-identified analytical datasets.

Taken together, the call for evidence represents a large-scale, inclusive, and methodologically robust evidence-gathering exercise. Its structured design, breadth of participation, and transparent, quality-assured analytical approach ensured that the Commission was able to draw out consistent themes, areas of divergence, and minority views across a substantial and diverse evidence base, providing a strong foundation for its findings and recommendations.

Roundtables

The Commission convened a structured programme of 13 roundtables to gather evidence from senior stakeholders across policing and beyond. These sessions, held in London, brought together Commissioners and invited contributors to explore leadership from a system-level perspective and to test emerging findings through expert discussion. They provided a strategic, system-level view of police leadership, complementing the more experiential evidence gathered through other strands of the Commission's work.

In the roundtables, the Commission discussed leadership matters with a wide range of experts drawn from very senior leadership positions across policing and adjacent sectors, both from the national and international. These included chief officers and national policing leads, senior representatives from organisations such as the National Crime Agency, the policing national bodies, as well as senior figures from Government, oversight bodies, British and German academia, and the private and public sectors. This breadth of participation enabled the Commission to test its emerging analysis against system-level perspectives and to draw on comparative insight from other professions, and organisational and country contexts. Detailed breakdowns of each roundtable are available on the **Commission website**.

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Reference Group

The Commission established an online Reference Group comprising a broad range of senior stakeholders from across policing, Government, oversight bodies, academia, and other sectors. Membership included chief officers, national policing leads, representatives from organisations such as the NPCC, HM Inspectorate, the Home Office, and the College of Policing, alongside leaders from the private, public, and voluntary sectors. The group was designed to provide ongoing advice, challenge, and external perspective, ensuring that the Commission's work was informed by a wide range of expertise and grounded in practical experience. The reference group were invited to attend any roundtable they wished as online observers.

The Reference Group met three times over the course of the Commission, supplemented by sub-group discussions. Its role was to test emerging findings, highlight risks and unintended consequences by providing both strategic input and insight from across different parts of the policing system.

Reference Group sub-groups

The Commission agreed with the reference group to explore certain areas in more detail, so four thematic sub-groups were created, and reference group members could sign up to

however many they wished. Each was led by a commissioner and focused on one of the following themes:

- the conduct system and accountability
- cultural leadership, including support for existing and future leaders
- leadership training and development
- strategic leadership

The sub-groups were designed to provide focused challenge and detailed input on specific aspects of leadership, enabling deeper exploration than was possible through full Reference Group meetings. Across the programme, sessions engaged participants with expertise spanning operational policing, workforce and standards, inclusion, and system reform, providing both practical insight and external perspective.

Commissioner force visits

The Commission undertook a programme of in-person force visits to gather qualitative evidence directly from officers and staff (and in some cases Police and Crime Commissioners) across the policing system. In total, Commissioners conducted 11 visits to individual forces across most regions of England and Wales, during which 21 in-person focus groups with PCSOs, constables, sergeants and inspectors were undertaken. In addition, 3 virtual focus groups were held with course participants. In total, Commissioners talked with 173 participants. They also met a range of others in force, including learning and development specialists, chief constables and other executive team members and also sat in on some training. This approach enabled the Commission to engage directly with a diverse cross-section of the workforce, spanning multiple ranks, roles, and professional backgrounds, and to capture detailed insight into lived experience of leadership and leadership development.

Participants in force-based discussion groups were selected locally, with forces asked to convene groups by rank or equivalent staff role to support open and candid discussion. To mitigate potential selection bias and encourage honest contributions, consistent methodological safeguards were applied across all sessions, including the use of the Chatham House rule and clear assurances that contributions would not be attributed to individuals.

The discussion groups were designed to explore leadership experience in depth, including what was working well from their experience and what suggestions they had for improvements, including their access to development, promotion and progression, organisational culture, leadership capability, and system-level constraints.

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Further policing focus groups

The Police Foundation conducted four targeted focus groups between February and March 2026 to explore in depth the experiences and perspectives of police officers and staff across a range of ranks and entry routes. A total of 29 sergeants, inspectors, chief inspectors, and participants from the Police Now programme from across England and Wales took part. The groups were structured to ensure representation across geography, career stage, and professional background, enabling the Commission to capture a broad cross-section of leadership experience within policing.

Focus group composition

- **Focus Group 1 – Police Now:** Participants drawn from the Police Now programme.
- **Focus Group 2 – Sergeants and Inspectors, North of England:** Frontline operational leaders from forces in the north.
- **Focus Group 3 – Sergeants and Inspectors, South of England and Wales:** Frontline operational leaders from forces in the south and Wales.
- **Focus Group 4 – Chief Inspectors Nationwide:** Mid-level leaders drawn from forces across England and Wales.

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Discussions were analysed by the Police Foundation using a structured thematic approach, through which both dominant themes and divergent perspectives were identified. Care was taken to reflect the full range of views, including areas where participants disagreed. Participants also offered a range of practical suggestions for reform, which were captured separately to inform the Commission's consideration of potential recommendations.

Senior and executive leader interviews

The Police Foundation (on behalf of the Commission) conducted 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with senior leaders between March and May 2026, including superintendents, chief superintendents, and executive-level leaders. These interviews provided a senior-level perspective on how leadership is exercised in practice and the systemic factors shaping leadership across policing.

Sergeant and inspector survey

By April 2026, the Commission had heard much evidence which emphasised the importance of first and mid-line leaders, and the specific challenges these supervisory roles are subject to. In order to gain deeper insight at scale, the Commission tasked the Police Foundation to design and carry out an online questionnaire to sergeants and inspectors. The survey was distributed by the Police Federation of England and Wales to

14,363 sergeants and 4,338 inspectors on 5 May 2025 and the survey remained open for 10 days. This approach enabled the Commission to access a large, defined sample of operational leaders across England and Wales

A total of 2,056 responses were received, of which 1,720 were retained for analysis following data cleaning and the removal of incomplete or partial submissions. The final sample comprised 977 sergeants and 743 inspectors providing a substantial and broadly balanced representation of these ranks. The scale of response and targeted distribution via an established representative body support the robustness of the dataset and its relevance to the Commission's lines of inquiry. The analysis is based on sergeants and inspectors separately and key findings are reported in the body of this report.

The survey instrument combined structured questions with Likert scales with opportunities for respondents to comment on their experiences of leadership, development, and promotion. Questions covered training and development, promotion processes, leadership capability, organisational culture, workload and operational pressures, and retention.

Public focus groups

The Commission drew on public perspectives through two focus groups conducted by the Police Foundation on its behalf in Cambridgeshire and Merseyside in early 2026. Each group comprised eight participants recruited to reflect a broad range of the public, with diversity across age, gender, ethnicity, and experience of policing. The sessions were facilitated discussions covering perceptions of policing, leadership, and accountability.

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International senior leaders focus groups

The Commission drew on international comparative evidence through two senior leader online focus groups convened by the Police Foundation on its behalf in February 2026. These roundtables brought together senior policing representatives from Anglophone comparator countries with similar policing systems (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States) and the United Kingdom to explore leadership practice, development, and system challenges across different policing contexts.

Workshops and conferences on specific themes

The Commission convened a series of five online targeted workshops to explore leadership across specific groups and issues, including future senior leaders, direct entry superintendents, senior police staff, senior black officers and staff, and individuals who had left policing to pursue careers externally. Each session was chaired by two Commissioners. Across the workshops, participation ranged from 10 to 34 participants. In addition, two commissioners attended a day conference about ethnic minority officers and staff within one police force.

Commission visits to Leadership Centres

The Commission visited two “leadership centres” to complement its wider evidence base and provide direct insight into leadership development in practice. These visits were designed as a paired engagement: a policing-focused visit to the College of Policing’s National Centre for Police Leadership at Ryton, and a comparative visit to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst including its Centre for Army Leadership.

At Ryton, Commissioners engaged with senior leaders responsible for national leadership programmes, including the senior leadership programme, Executive Leadership Programme (ELP) and fast track schemes. They met ELP participants informally over lunch and met some current participants of other programmes online.

These discussions provided a detailed view of how leadership development is delivered within policing, including programme design, participant experience, and the challenges of implementation.

The Sandhurst visit provided a complementary, cross-sector perspective, enabling the Commission to examine how leadership is conceptualised, developed, and embedded in a different professional context. They met current officer recruits as well as academic and practitioner staff of the Centre for Army Leadership and the non-commissioned officer network. Commissioners explored the use of leadership doctrine, structured progression pathways for officers and non-commissioned ranks, the integration of leadership development from the earliest stages of training, and the role of embedded academic expertise and continuous evaluation in shaping leadership practice, including a strong emphasis on evidence, research, and iterative improvement.

Taken together, the two visits offered a comparative perspective on leadership and leadership development systems.

Embargoed

Appendix 2: Call for evidence

The Police Leadership Commission launched an open call for evidence to ensure that its enquiries and recommendations were grounded in the professional insight, and organisational perspectives of those working within, alongside, or scrutinising policing. The Commission sought to understand how leadership is experienced across the system; what is working well; where the most significant challenges lie; and what changes are needed to strengthen leadership capability, culture, and public confidence.

The Commission received 484 submissions from a wide range of respondents across policing and the wider system, including serving officers and staff, former officers, academics, independent practitioners, oversight bodies, partner organisations and representative organisations.

Methodology

Analytical approach

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Responses were analysed using a structured thematic approach, grouping similar ideas into themes and codes. For accessibility, this report refers to these analytical categories simply as “themes” throughout. These themes are **in bold** throughout the report and a **glossary of themes** is provided later in this appendix. Illustrative quotes are drawn directly from coded responses. They are attributed by role or respondent type (where provided) and have not been edited beyond minor punctuation adjustments.

The Commission adopted a hybrid human-AI analytical method, combining structured qualitative analysis with Microsoft Copilot operating strictly under human oversight. This approach balanced rigour, transparency, and efficiency, given the volume of free text responses and the compressed reporting timetable.

The analysis followed the **Government Social Research (GSR) Code**, the **Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard (ATRS)**, the **Data & AI Ethics Framework**, and a bespoke Analytical Quality Assurance **(AQuA)** plan. These standards ensured that the analysis was transparent, auditable, and methodologically robust.

The hybrid approach was chosen because it allowed analysts to marshal a huge volume of evidence within the Commission’s very tight timescale without compromising quality. Copilot was used to apply a coding framework which was developed by the Commission research team, structured around the Commission’s “Cs” framework, developed by Professor Jean Hartley. The Cs framework comprised: Concepts; Contexts & challenges;

Core purposes & consequences; Capabilities; Culture & conduct; Cultivating leaders; Championing leaders; Capacity.

The analysis approach was first tested through piloting. A random sample of 20 per cent of the responses to each of the eight substantive questions was drawn. The first coding run was a deductive run, which applied the coding framework to the responses. The second run was an inductive run, to surface potential themes which had not been captured prior. For each run, 10 per cent of the attributed codes were manually checked by the research team. If the analysts agreed with the coding at a rate of 80 per cent agreement or more, the code was accepted into the coding framework. If the agreement fell below 80 per cent, prompts and codes were refined and iteratively retested. A final codebook was then agreed post piloting, and used to code the full dataset, with analysts again checking 10 per cent of the codes for each question and iteratively quality assuring. Analysts retained full control over interpretation and decision making. This ensured that the analysis remained grounded in human judgement while benefiting from the speed and consistency of AI assisted processing.

Data protection

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To protect respondents, all data were exported and stored securely with restricted access. Before analysis, personal identifiers were removed manually. Demographic data were separated and replaced with high-level, non-identifiable tags such as “officer”, “staff”, or “academic”. Minimum cell sizes were applied to prevent inadvertent identification, and all quotes were checked again before inclusion.

This approach ensured that the analysis was both ethically sound and compliant with data protection requirements, while still allowing meaningful insights to be drawn from the dataset.

Respondents

Who responded

The call for evidence received 484 submissions in total, of which 476 were codeable and included in the analysis. Responses came predominantly from England (around nine in ten of those who stated their country) with smaller contributions from Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, and a small number from outside the UK.

Respondent type

Among those who indicated whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation, individuals made up the large majority – 289 individual responses compared to 96 on behalf of an organisation. The remainder did not specify their

individual/organisation status and so were excluded from the grouping analysis, but their responses were included in the overall thematic analysis. Organisational submissions came from a range of bodies including professional associations, oversight bodies, and representative groups.

Role and job type

Around seven in ten individual respondents disclosed their role or job title. Among those who did, the largest single group was police staff (57 respondents), followed by sergeants (39) and PCs (32), with further representation across the remaining ranks, former officers, academics, and those from inspection and oversight bodies. 8 respondents were chief officers or PCCs. A small number identified themselves as consultants or independent practitioners, or as being in executive leadership roles external to policing.

Connection to policing

Respondents could indicate one or more connections to policing. The largest group were people currently working in policing, representing around seven in ten of those with a stated connection. Around two in ten had previously worked in policing. Smaller numbers identified themselves as academic researchers, as part of an organisation or group with a policing connection, or as victims or survivors. Only two respondents indicated no connection to policing at all.

Embargoed

Thematic analysis: The strongest themes emerging from the evidence

Themes raised across all respondent types

Four themes emerged consistently regardless of who was responding, though different groups brought them into focus in distinctive ways. Across all respondent types, these themes were also described as systemic rather than isolated issues, contributing to critically low workforce confidence in leadership systems.

Leadership knowledge, skills, and capabilities

The **knowledge, skills, capabilities, behaviours and judgements that police leaders need** at all levels, individually and collectively, was the single most widely raised theme across the entire evidence base. Respondents were making a case for what good leadership looks and feels like across the organisation and expressing concern that this understanding is not consistently shared or applied. A recurring concern was that leaders at senior levels become increasingly disconnected from the frontline realities their colleagues face, and that promotion for operational competence alone creates leaders who lack the

broader behaviours required at more senior levels. Respondents also felt that current promotion and progression systems select on the wrong criteria, are insufficiently transparent, and are subject to undue influence.

This theme resonated across the entire workforce. Chief officers, chief superintendents, and PCCs framed it in terms of strategic capability and institutional direction – the need for leaders who can navigate complexity, communicate priorities, and sustain public legitimacy. Inspectors and Sergeants engaged with it from the perspective of day-to-day leadership practice: the behaviours, presence, and judgement they see working well or falling short around them. PCs and frontline officers raised it as strongly as any other group, pointing to the visible gap between what good leadership should look like and what they experience.

> Police leaders are removed from the front line and just do not understand what the front line is going through.
>
> **Inspector**

> Strategic thinking involves setting a clear strategy and defining priorities for a 12-, 18-, or 24-month period, then maintaining consistent focus on those priorities.
>
> **Police staff respondent**

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Professional culture, learning, and conduct

Fostering a professional culture which encourages learning and innovation and deals robustly with inappropriate conduct was raised by the majority of respondents across most role groups. Respondents pointed to a persistent gap between stated values and day-to-day practice – particularly around performance management of individual officers and staff, where problems are seen as being managed around rather than directly addressed. Nepotism, blame cultures, command-and-control behaviours, and a reluctance to challenge inappropriate conduct were described as systemic patterns rather than isolated failings.

Where cultural strengths were described, these tended to be within specific specialist or operational areas rather than across organisations as a whole. Sergeants were notably focused on the cultural conditions in which they and their people work, including weak psychological safety, the fear of speaking up, and the day-to-day experience of blame rather than learning. This reflects broader concerns about psychologically unsafe cultures and the difficulty of speaking out, particularly for middle-ranking leaders. Senior ranks engaged with culture as a strategic and reputational question; frontline officers described it as something that shapes whether they feel safe and supported.

> There is still a lack of focus on performance management – problems are "moved" rather than being addressed.
>
> **Police staff respondent**

Education, training, and professional development

A large proportion of respondents across all groups raised the provision of **education, training and professional development available to police leaders**. Taken alongside the capabilities theme, a consistent picture emerges: respondents feel they have a clear view of what leadership should look like, but feel that the infrastructure to build those capabilities is not yet adequate. National programmes are seen as having been weakened or discontinued in recent years, access is unequal, and development is too often generic, too late-stage, and insufficiently grounded in the operational reality of policing. Police Staff in specialist roles were specifically identified as underserved. This reflects wider concerns that the training and development system is not fit for purpose, with unequal access and mixed views on specific programmes such as the executive leadership programme.

Chief officers, chief superintendents and PCCs highlighted this theme in terms of programme design, evaluation, and national coordination. Superintendents' concerns centred more specifically on the executive leadership programme, the inconsistency of provision across forces, and the perceived lack of investment at their rank. Inspectors shared the frustration with development provision but focused more specifically on the quality and credibility of those delivering and overseeing training. Academics and education professionals raised this theme with the perspective of what high-quality, evidence-based development looks like and how policing might better connect with higher education.

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> Police staff leaders in specialist professions have little or no access to ongoing development relevant to their profession.
>
> **Police staff respondent**

> Assessment and training is increasingly being overseen by police staff managers, often who have very little or no policing experience.
>
> **Inspector**

> The existence of Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeships (SLMDA) was an excellent way to develop leadership capabilities across the public sector.
>
> **Academic/education respondent**

External and internal challenges

The challenges that make exercising police leadership difficult, from resource constraints and public scrutiny to internal cultural pressures, were raised by most respondents in most role groups. A recurring concern was the lack of time and space for leaders to actually lead: to develop their people, set expectations, and build relationships with their teams. Respondents also highlighted a growing external accountability burden, pointing to an expanding range of oversight mechanisms that require police leaders to justify decisions and demonstrate outcomes at increasing cost to operational capacity.

Chief officers, chief superintendents, PCCs, and former officers were particularly focused on the external dimensions of this theme: shifting public expectations, structural complexity, and the challenge of leading through major organisational change. Middle ranks and frontline officers described the internal experience more immediately: the pressure of demand, the difficulty of prioritising people over process, and the erosion of the conditions in which good leadership can actually be exercised. Police staff were less likely than officer groups to raise this theme prominently, suggesting the external accountability pressures weigh more heavily on warranted ranks.

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> Leaders in policing … don't have the time to have conversations with their team, set standards and expectations, and lead from the front.
>
> **Inspector**

> We are seeing more and more accountability across IPCO, UKAS, HMICFRS, MAPPA reviews and more that ask for justification of actions and outcomes for the public.
>
> **External executive/senior manager respondent**

Organisational respondents tended to bring a more systemic lens to these themes than individuals. They were more likely to raise **partnership working** and the structural conditions that enable or obstruct good leadership – national coordination, oversight, and the representativeness of the workforce and its leaders. Individual respondents, by contrast, drew on personal and operational experience, and were more likely to describe what these themes feel like from within – the day-to-day frustration with systems that do not work, and the personal cost of leading under pressure. Despite this difference in perspective, the underlying diagnosis is largely shared: both groups agree that meaningful change requires action at system level, not simply improved individual conduct or training.

> The statutory duty on emergency services to collaborate could be a powerful one but currently feels quite weak.
>
> **Inspection/elected official/Union respondent**

Where individuals and organisations agree – and where they differ

Individual and organisational respondents approached the evidence from different vantage points; personal and operational on one side, systemic and structural on the other, but their underlying diagnosis is largely shared.

Across both evidence strands, the strongest points of consensus concern the need for a clearly defined and consistently applied competency framework; the systemic rather than individual nature of cultural failure; and the inadequacy of current training and development infrastructure. Where perspectives differ, it is largely in framing and emphasis rather than substance: on how severe the problem is, whether the primary remedy lies in national standards or local accountability, and whether the most urgent failure is discriminatory practice or governance at chief officer level. Section 5 draws these threads together in full.

How respondents were connected to policing

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The responses were analysed in terms of how closely connected they were to current policing or were further from it (for example, retired from the service, or a service user). Perspectives were influenced by distance from current operational policing. Former officers were particularly focused on **development practices that work less well and with how leaders are assessed** – their evidence tending to reflect on what has changed, and what has been lost, compared to their own earlier experience of the service. Academic researchers were more likely than most to focus on **concepts and models of leadership** and with **partnership working**, bringing an external and comparative frame to concerns that operational respondents described from the inside. Victims and survivors focused on how policing is experienced from the outside – whether leadership adequately accounts for public trust, community impact, and the consequences of decisions for those on the receiving end of policing. They were less focused on internal development questions, reinforcing that their primary concern is outcomes, accountability, and conduct rather than the conditions in which leaders work.

Key points of consensus and divergence

Strong consensus across all respondents

The single most widely shared concern across the entire evidence base was what good police leadership looks like in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviours. There was broad

agreement that a clear, shared understanding is needed and that this is not yet consistently in place.

Professional culture was felt to be broken in specific, systemic ways. Across individual responses and organisational submissions, the gap between stated values and lived experience is described consistently, manifesting as nepotism, blame cultures, command-and-control behaviours, and reluctance to challenge inappropriate conduct.

The training and development infrastructure was felt to be inadequate. This view is shared from constable to chief officer level, and across formal organisational submissions. Specific concerns include: national programmes weakened or discontinued; unequal access for police staff, disabled officers, and those from underrepresented groups; and development that is too generic, too late-stage, and insufficiently operationally grounded.

Promotion and progression systems were felt not to be working. Respondents felt selection timescales are too long, processes are seen as unfair or subject to undue influence, and the current arrangements do not consistently identify or reward the right qualities for leadership. Workforce confidence in these systems is felt to be critically low.

Areas where perspectives differ

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On remedies: some emphasise nationally mandated standards and central oversight; others emphasise local autonomy and force-level accountability. There is stronger consensus around the need for objectivity in selection processes than around any other single structural reform.

On what the primary leadership failure is: community and stakeholder organisations focus on structural discrimination and harm to the public; oversight bodies focus on governance and accountability failures at chief officer level; individual respondents focus on the day-to-day experience of being a leader under pressure.

Emerging themes warranting further attention

Collective and informal leadership was thought to be beneficial to the service, particularly among superintendents and sergeants. Areas mentioned included the role of peer, distributed and informal leadership beyond formal rank structures.

Representative leadership at all levels, not just at chief officer rank, was felt to require sustained structural attention, including in selection, talent identification, and the design of development programmes.

Damage to the welfare and wellbeing of leaders themselves was felt to be a growing risk, particularly at middle ranks.

Glossary of themes

The following table explains the themes used in this analysis (not all were included in this report due to low frequencies but were presented in full to Commissioners). These labels were developed as part of the analytical framework applied to the call for evidence responses. Each entry describes what the theme covers in plain terms.

Theme	What it covers
Assessing leaders and evaluating development	What respondents said about how individual leaders are assessed, including promotion exams, boards, professional development reviews (PDRs), and 360 feedback, and how the effectiveness of leadership development programmes is evaluated, including whether current approaches capture the right things and whether findings are used to improve provision.
Collective and informal leadership	What respondents said about leadership that operates beyond formal rank or hierarchy - including peer leadership, dispersed leadership, and shared responsibility across teams and roles.
Concepts and models of leadership	What respondents said about specific leadership theories, frameworks, or models they consider relevant to policing - including how different models apply to the policing context and any calls to define or clarify what leadership means in policing.
Development practices that work less well	What respondents identified as leadership development approaches, programmes, or practices that are not working effectively or framed negatively - including specific concerns about training quality, promotion processes, and assessment design.
Development practices that work well	What respondents identified as leadership development approaches, programmes, or practices that are working effectively or framed positively - including specific training, supervision, and promotion practices.
Education, training and professional development	What respondents said about the formal and informal development available to police leaders - including what programmes exist, how accessible they are, and whether they are fit for purpose.

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External and internal challenges	What respondents identified as barriers that make it harder for police leaders to lead effectively - including resource pressures, bureaucracy, political interference, targets that reduce discretion, and growing accountability demands.
Leaders being representative	What respondents said about whether police leadership reflects the diversity of the communities and workforce it serves - including concerns about structural barriers facing women, ethnic minority officers and staff, disabled personnel, and Police Staff in leadership pathways.
Leadership knowledge, skills and capabilities	What respondents said about the knowledge, skills, behaviours, judgements, and values that police leaders need - across all ranks and roles, individually and collectively. This includes what good leadership looks and feels like in practice.
Major social, technological, economic and organisational changes	What respondents identified as significant external and internal shifts that police leadership must respond to - including technological change (such as AI), shifting public expectations, financial pressures, and structural changes to policing.
Partnership working	What respondents said about how police leaders work with a range of partners and stakeholders - including other public sector bodies, third-sector organisations, communities, and multi-agency partners.
Pathways to progression in leadership roles	What respondents said about the formal and informal routes into and through leadership roles - including promotion processes, time-served requirements, direct entry routes, and barriers to progression.
Professional culture, learning and conduct	What respondents said about how police leaders shape organisational culture - including whether learning and innovation are encouraged, how inappropriate conduct is handled, and whether the values policing espouses match day-to-day experience.
Public legitimacy and scrutiny	What respondents said about the challenges of maintaining public trust and confidence in policing – including how scrutiny, accountability pressures, and public perception shape the demands placed on police leaders.

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Strategies to overcome barriers	What respondents identified as approaches, actions, or reforms that could help address the challenges facing police leadership – including governance reform, local discretion, reducing unnecessary workload, and cross-sector learning.
The role of national policing organisations	What respondents said about the role of national and central policing organisations – such as the College of Policing and HMICFRS – in delivering, coordinating, and setting standards for police leadership development across England and Wales.
Welfare and wellbeing	What respondents said about how leaders support the welfare of their people, and how policing organisations support the wellbeing of leaders themselves – including the conditions that enable or undermine sustainable leadership.

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Appendix 3: Supplementary material

A spectrum of options for the recognition of learning to occur

- **An internal certificate of completion.** Awarded for completion of an in-force internal course, signed by a senior officer. This recognises attendance and completion, but not necessarily demonstration of learning outcomes.
- **An internal certificate of achievement.** Awarded for successful completion of an internal course where the learner has demonstrated achievement of the stated learning outcomes.
- **External certificates of achievement**. Awarded where the learner has demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes as recognised by an external body, for example, College of Policing, the Chartered Management Institute, or Skills for Justice.
- **A badged open course (BOC).** A jointly badged course delivered in partnership with a university or other recognised provider, typically showing the subject studied and hours of learning / application.
- **Accredited award at level 3**. A regulated or formally accredited course resulting in certification at level 3 (broadly equivalent to A-level standard).
- **Accredited award at level 4**. A regulated or formally accredited course resulting in certification at level 4 (broadly equivalent to the first year of undergraduate study).
- **Accredited award at level 5.** A regulated or formally accredited course resulting in certification at level 5 (broadly equivalent to the second year of undergraduate study).
- **Micro-credential.** A recognised higher education certificate carrying academic credit at a specified level. Micro-credentials may sit at different academic levels depending on the course and can be accumulated over time towards larger qualifications. They can also be recognised as standalone certificates of achievement.
- **Substantial credits at level 6**. A substantial body of academic credit at level 6 (university degree level), recognised by universities and capable of contributing towards a full degree qualification.
- **Bachelor's degree / degree apprenticeship.** A full undergraduate degree, including where achieved through the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA) or another recognised degree route.

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- **Post-graduate award or degree.** A qualification at postgraduate level, including a Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma, or full postgraduate degree, achieved through additional study and assessment.

Some officers and staff may feel it is unfair that new recruits and those selected for courses receive national recognition for their learning while the existing workforce, despite years of operational experience, does not. To address this, the police service should adopt the three nationally regulated systems that universities use to recognise prior learning, ensuring the process is robust, transparent, consistent with academic standards, and transferable between organisations.

i. **Recognition of prior learning (RPL).** This covers previous certificated study: where someone holds a qualification from an accredited institution, its learning outcomes are matched to the proposed programme through documentation and academic judgement rather than full reassessment.

ii. **Accreditation or recognition of prior experiential learning (APEL/RPEL).** This covers learning gained through work and professional experience, with universities increasingly using structured frameworks to make equivalency judgements clearer and more consistent.

iii. **The "precedent award model".** This sees the academic institution review a specific professional development intervention, its learning outcomes, assessment, quality assurance, and curriculum, against its own standards. Once approved, any officer or member of staff who provides verified evidence of completing that intervention automatically receives the associated credit.

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The police leadership fast stream compared to existing talent schemes

Scheme	Scale	Length	Eligibility	Link to rapid promotion	Development
Police leadership fast stream	400 joiners a year. 43 participating forces.	5-10 years but flexible based on skills, experience and performance.	Existing police officers up to the rank of inspector, allied police professionals and volunteers as well as those joining policing externally.	The most talented and experienced fast stream participants will hold the rank of superintendent when they graduate.	Structured development opportunities, including additional learning and development, managed external secondments, coaching and mentoring and peer-to-peer support. Career management to ensure breadth of operational experience.
Police Now	368 joiners in 2025/26. 37 participating forces (since inception).	2 years.	External applicants with a 2:2 degree (or higher).	No link to rapid promotion.	Delivers the police constable entry programme curricular. Participants supported with personal coaching. Specialist tracks for neighbourhood, detectives, counter terrorism and economic crime.
Fast track constable to inspector	79 delegates currently enrolled. 31 participating forces.	2 years.	Existing constables. Applicants are nominated by their local force and must pass a national assessment centre.	Forces are expected to promote delegates to substantive inspector within a year of them graduating the programme.	Classroom learning, force supervised work-based assessments, attachment to a custody team and the delivery of a community project.
Fast track inspector to superintendent	33 delegates currently enrolled. 11 participating forces.	2 years.	Existing inspectors. Applicants are nominated by their local force and must pass a national assessment centre.	Forces are expected to promote delegates to substantive superintendent within a year of them graduating the programme.	Blend of both mandatory and optional national core learning products appropriate to rank and in line with the national curriculum and leadership standards for senior leaders.

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