

Effective supervision

Guidelines



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Contents

Chair’s foreword	1
Summary of the guidelines	3
Guidelines for chief constables	4
Guidelines for supervisors	5
Introduction	7
What are these guidelines for?	7
Who are these guidelines for?	7
Who developed these guidelines?	7
What do we mean by supervision?	7
What types of supervision do the guidelines focus on?	8
How evidence-based are these guidelines?	8
Supervisor leadership styles	8
Supporting resources	8
Guidelines for chief constables	9
Guideline 1: Culture and capacity	9
Evidence summary	9



Guideline 2: Capability	11	Guideline 6: Communicating effectively	21
Evidence summary	11	Evidence summary	21
Development	12	Guideline 7: Demonstrating fairness and respect	23
Recruitment and promotion	12	Evidence summary	23
Guideline 3: Organisational support and processes	14	Guideline 8: Supporting wellbeing	26
Evidence summary	14	Evidence summary	26
Guidelines for supervisors	16	Guideline 9: Supporting the delivery of good service	28
Guideline 4: Acting as a role model	16	Evidence summary	28
Evidence summary	17	Performance conversations	29
Guideline 5: Building effective relationships	19	Reflective supervision	29
Evidence summary	19	Guideline 10: Supporting professional discretion in decision making	30
		Evidence summary	30

Chair's foreword

Whatever your role in policing, be it a constable on the front line, member of police staff, volunteer or senior manager, the relationship you have with your supervisor is crucial to your performance, development and wellbeing. We can all recount that great (or poor) supervisor who directly affected these areas of our career, as well as our wider life.

It is no surprise that being a supervisor can be difficult, given the constant challenge of balancing supervisory responsibility and individual workloads. This is especially true in policing, where the operational demands and associated risk magnify the importance of the supervisory role in being able to manage competing responsibilities.

These guidelines have been developed to focus specifically on the skills and organisational support needed to be a good supervisor. Implementing them will provide greater consistency in the way that we supervise staff and will benefit us all, including the public who we serve.

The guidelines are based on the best available evidence, following an extensive review of studies and current practice, which included reviewing feedback from over 2,500 people working in policing. A Guideline Committee of frontline staff, subject matter experts and academics subsequently worked

with the College of Policing to distil the findings into a set of guidelines. Although the content of the individual guidelines is not new, taken together they provide a framework that all forces and supervisors should now aspire to deliver – whether that is a chief constable looking to provide the necessary support required by guidelines 1-3, or a supervisor endeavouring to support their staff using guidelines 4-10.

A key challenge in implementing these guidelines will be creating the time for meaningful and effective dialogue with staff. Sometimes urgent operational requirements must take precedence, but prioritising time for supervisors to focus on the wellbeing and development of their staff is an essential investment that will support them in providing the best service to the public. I do not underestimate the challenge this presents. However, it is incumbent on chief constables, as laid out in these guidelines, to review current practices and seek innovative ways to create capacity and prioritise these important interactions.

These guidelines form part of an ongoing portfolio of products and services being provided by the College to support those in supervisory roles, particularly in light of the requirements of the Police Uplift Programme. With that in mind, I'm not advocating that, as supervisors, you look to



implement all of the guidelines straight away. Take time to review and understand them, familiarise yourself with the supporting materials, and look to incorporate them into your supervisory activities over a period of time.

I'm also conscious that the evidence underpinning these guidelines is limited in some areas, and I would encourage the service and universities to undertake research to help develop the evidence base further. The College will launch a further call for practice to coincide with the release of these guidelines, where they will seek to identify and share examples of good practice, particularly in the area of 'making time'.

Staff have told us that they want more time with their line managers for performance reviews and personal development. These guidelines provide the framework to do so, as well as being a great opportunity for the service to focus on the benefits that effective supervision can bring.

ACC Nick Bailey
Chair of the Guideline Committee



Summary of the guidelines

These guidelines provide clear, evidence-based practice guidance on effective supervision, to support the wellbeing, learning and performance of everyone working and volunteering in the police service. They specify the actions that supervisors need to take to support their staff, as well as the behaviours they need to display to be effective in their role. They also set out the actions that chief constables need to take to support supervisors.

Unless otherwise stated, references to supervisors, staff or employees in this document are all-inclusive and cover police officers, police staff, special constables and police support volunteers.

The guidelines consist of:

- three guidelines for chief constables, which set out the organisational structures and processes required to support effective supervision
- seven practical guidelines for supervisors

The type and strength of the evidence underpinning each guideline is shown as follows.



Overall strength of the empirical evidence (good, moderate or limited)



Practitioner evidence available

Information about these different types of evidence is included in [how evidence-based are these guidelines?](#)

The supporting information that follows each guideline includes a brief summary of the evidence and what the guideline might mean in practice.

The guidelines can also be used as part of a suite of products that are being developed by our National Centre for Police Leadership to support the development of leadership capability in policing. These include:

- [new national standards](#) and [associated learning programmes](#) (you will need to log in) for effective leadership performance
- [Leadership expectations](#) including a [diagnostic tool](#) for individuals to identify areas of strength and for improvement

Guidelines for chief constables

The evidence is clear on the effect that supervisors can have on individual performance, learning and wellbeing. The evidence on how organisations can support this effective supervision is less specific, but is consistent in terms of the conditions that chief officers need to foster.

1 Culture and capacity >

Chief constables should ensure that the role of supervisors in supporting staff is understood, valued and delivered consistently. This includes:

- actively seeking ways to enable supervisors to give regular dedicated time to their staff
- ensuring that strategic decisions take account of, and do not negatively affect, supervisors' capacity to support their staff
- promoting a culture that values the importance of supervision and recognises the role that supervisors play in demonstrating and delivering a visible commitment to diversity and to treating staff fairly

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited

practitioner evidence available



2 Capability >

Chief constables should ensure that supervisors are equipped with the skills needed to support staff. This includes:

- ensuring that all staff receive appropriate and timely development to support them when starting in supervisory roles
- adopting a fair and transparent organisation-wide approach to recruiting, selecting, posting and developing supervisors, ensuring that opportunities are available for all
- implementing recruitment and promotion processes that assess the skills and behaviours required

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited

practitioner evidence available



3 Organisational support and processes >

Chief constables should ensure that supervisors are provided with, and are able to easily access, effective and appropriate advice and support in relation to supervising staff. This includes:

- the provision of policies, guidance and advice
- access to professional internal and external support
- access to support and advice from peers and more experienced supervisors

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited

practitioner evidence available



Guidelines for supervisors

4 Acting as a role model >

Supervisors **must** consistently demonstrate high standards of professional behaviour and should understand the importance of their position in being a role model for their staff. This includes:

- demonstrating reflective thinking, an openness to personal feedback, and a willingness to learn and develop, including a commitment to self-development
- demonstrating an openness to new ideas and ways of working
- actively promoting and demonstrating an inclusive approach to diversity
- challenging colleagues whose behaviour falls below the public's and the service's expectations

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited

practitioner evidence available



5 Building effective relationships >

Supervisors should build effective and trusting working relationships by:

- getting to know their staff
- understanding and responding to their staff's individual needs, motivations and aspirations
- dedicating time to be with their staff individually and on a regular basis (the time made available should be based on individual need)
- being accessible and approachable to their staff, and being clear about when and how they can be reached
- building trust between team members and helping to build cohesive teams

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited

practitioner evidence available



6 Communicating effectively >

Supervisors should communicate effectively by:

- demonstrating open, honest two-way communication with their staff, using active listening skills and making use of technology where appropriate
- facilitating two-way communication between their staff and the rest of the organisation, helping them to understand organisational priorities and processes, and supporting them in expressing their views and ideas and influencing decisions

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited

practitioner evidence available



7 Demonstrating fairness and respect >

Supervisors **must** treat all members of staff with fairness and respect. This includes:

- being fair, consistent, transparent and inclusive in all interactions with staff
- valuing diversity, building inclusive teams, and taking into account the perspectives and lived experiences of people from a wide range of backgrounds
- recognising difference and the associated differing needs of staff
- actively seeking out the views of staff and adopting an open approach when responding to their views, concerns, needs and aspirations
- providing information, honest feedback and clear reasons for actions and decisions

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited



practitioner evidence available



8 Supporting wellbeing >

Supervisors should proactively support the wellbeing of their staff by:

- identifying, understanding and responding to their staff's health and emotional needs, as well as their own
- being aware of the internal and external support available
- signposting staff to the most appropriate support and helping them to access it
- ensuring that reasonable adjustments are put in place when required, to enable their staff to work safely

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited



practitioner evidence available



9 Supporting the delivery of good service >

Supervisors should support staff to deliver a good service by:

- being clear about what is expected of staff in their specific roles and their contributions to wider organisational objectives
- providing clear direction, support and assistance to help staff do their work
- identifying, enabling and encouraging staff to take up opportunities for professional learning and development that support their individual career plans
- having honest and open conversations, and using reflective practice to encourage staff to consider their own performance, learning and how to improve
- providing timely, specific and constructive feedback, acknowledging good work, discussing areas for development and addressing shortfalls in performance

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited



practitioner evidence available



10 Supporting professional discretion in decision making >

Supervisors should encourage their staff to recognise where they can use their professional judgement and explore new and different ways of working by:

- supporting staff to develop the skills to improve their decision making
- helping staff to reflect on, and learn from, experience
- encouraging staff to be innovative and use discretion where appropriate

Evidence-base:

empirical evidence
good|moderate|limited



practitioner evidence available



Introduction

What are these guidelines for?

These guidelines provide clear evidence-based guidance on effective supervision, to support the wellbeing, learning and performance of everyone working in the police service. They specify the actions that supervisors need to take to support their staff, as well as the behaviours they need to display to be effective in their role. They also set out the actions that chief constables need to take to support supervisors. The guidelines have a particular focus on supervision and supervisory practice, as opposed to strategic leadership.

Unless otherwise stated, references to supervisors, staff or employees in this document are all-inclusive and cover police officers, police staff, special constables and police support volunteers.

Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are for anyone who manages staff on a temporary or permanent basis, or might do so in the future. This document also includes guidelines that are specifically intended for chief constables, in relation to the organisational support needed to enable effective supervisory practice.

Officers, staff, special constables and police support volunteers can also use the guidelines to understand the support they should expect from their supervisors.

Who developed these guidelines?

These guidelines were developed collaboratively by a College development team and a College Guideline Committee, which consisted of frontline practitioners, subject matter experts and academics. The role of the Guideline Committee was to consider the evidence and draft the guidelines, taking into account the views of stakeholders.

What do we mean by supervision?

For the purpose of these guidelines, a supervisor is defined as anyone who has management responsibility for one or more members of staff. Supervision responsibilities consist the following two components, which are equally important and, in most cases, carried out at the same time.

- **Operational** or **professional** supervision – the supervision of people doing the practical aspects of their work.
- **Personal** supervision – supporting, developing and leading individuals and teams.



What types of supervision do the guidelines focus on?

These guidelines focus on personal supervision to enable and support staff wellbeing, learning and performance, where supervisory practice should be broadly consistent, regardless of job role or seniority. The accompanying guideline scope gives more detail about the selection of this area of focus.

How evidence-based are these guidelines?

The guidelines and supporting information draw on an extensive review of the relevant social research, in the form of a rapid evidence assessment (REA). A [report on this REA](#) accompanies these guidelines. The guidelines also reflect insights on current practice from police officers, staff and special constables, as well as from other sectors, both public and private. This was gathered through a range of engagement activities with officers, police staff, specials and subject matter experts, including one-to-one interviews, online events and discussion forums. We also reviewed material published by the College and other organisations, including the findings from workshops carried out as part of the Front Line Review of policing. This is referred to throughout the guidelines as ‘practitioner evidence’. A full [report on methodology and findings](#) accompanies these guidelines.

The evidence review identified more evidence in relation to the supervisor’s role in supporting wellbeing and performance, and less evidence on the supervisor’s role in supporting development of staff. As a result, guidelines in this area have been developed drawing on practitioner evidence

and practice in other sectors. Much of the evidence relates to barriers to good supervision, rather than those factors that improve supervision. In developing the guidelines, there has been an assumption that the ‘opposite’ practice to an identified barrier supports effective supervision.

Criteria for assessing the standard of evidence as good, moderate or limited are set out in the REA report.

Supervisor leadership styles

The REA identified a wide range of leadership approaches and behaviours that, when demonstrated by supervisors, were associated with a range of positive outcomes for staff and organisations. These styles are reflected in these guidelines and can be broadly categorised as follows.

- **Supportive leadership** – supportive leaders are characterised as open, honest, fair, and focused on the wellbeing, development and empowerment of their people.
- **Transformational leadership** – similar to supportive leadership, but also includes role modelling high standards, going beyond self-interest, fostering collective values, and acting as a coach and mentor.

Supporting resources

The guidelines include links to resources that will support chief constables and supervisors to implement these guidelines. The College will continue to develop these resources and other forms of support.



Guidelines for chief constables

The evidence is clear on the effect that supervisors can have on individual performance, learning and wellbeing. The evidence on how organisations can support this effective supervision is less specific, but is consistent in terms of the conditions that chief officers need to foster.

Guideline 1: Culture and capacity

Chief constables should ensure that the role of supervisors in supporting staff is understood, valued and delivered consistently. This includes:

- actively seeking ways to enable supervisors to give regular dedicated time to their staff
- ensuring that strategic decisions take account of, and do not negatively affect, supervisors' capacity to support their staff
- promoting a culture that values the importance of supervision and recognises the role that supervisors play in demonstrating and delivering a visible commitment to diversity and to treating staff fairly

Evidence-base:



Empirical evidence: **good** | moderate | limited



Practitioner evidence: **available**



Evidence summary

There was a good level of research evidence on organisational culture that could enable or support effective supervision. This included creating a shared vision, engendering organisational commitment, demonstrating care for subordinates, driving change rather than managing the status quo, and complex problem solving. Research and practitioner evidence suggests that the role of supervisors in supporting staff wellbeing, learning and performance is not necessarily understood universally or delivered consistently in policing. The evidence also suggests that material circumstances, such as limited resources and time for learning, are a barrier to developing supervisors' skills and behaviours. Practitioner evidence suggested an inability to protect time for supervisors to spend with their staff was a barrier to effective supervision.

There is evidence that aspects of existing police culture, particularly resistance to change and a belief in the value of hierarchical traditional leadership, present challenges for changing supervisor practices and approaches. Discrepancies between what senior, lower and middle managers see as important in good management is a further barrier.

Staff perceptions of fairness and support from the wider organisation and from senior management are associated with positive outcomes regarding staff wellbeing, learning and performance. One study found that employee engagement is more strongly associated with perceptions of support from their organisation than support from their direct supervisor.

The chief constable has overall responsibility for:

- leading their force
- creating a vision
- setting and role modelling a culture that promotes wellbeing and facilitates impactful professional development and performance management¹

The Guideline Committee acknowledged the challenge of managing high levels of operational demand. Developing and supporting staff to respond effectively to this demand will help them to provide high levels of service to the public. Finding ways to enable supervisors to spend time with their staff to achieve this should be considered as an essential investment. Chief constables could consider how the processes used to provide protected time for training might also be used to provide protected time for supervision. Practical suggestions drawn from the practitioner evidence included:

- dedicated time for staff wellbeing, development and performance factored into shifts
- shift patterns that maximise the time when supervisors and their staff are on duty together
- time for one-to-ones protected by control rooms, unless interruption is absolutely necessary

No evidence was found that suggested the ideal number of individuals that a supervisor should manage. These

¹ [Police Professional Profile - Chief Constable](#)

ratios are dependent on many factors, which are likely to differ between forces, roles and individuals. These factors include the size and culture of an organisation, the exact nature of the job, and the skills and experience of individuals.

Many forces have formal processes in place to record the impacts of strategic decisions on finance, human rights, and equality and diversity. Chief constables could consider the introduction of similar formal auditable processes to record impacts on the capacity of supervisors to support their staff.

To promote diversity and inclusion within policing, research and practitioner evidence has identified a need for support from senior-level role models and a visible organisational commitment to diversity at all levels. Chief constables should promote an inclusive organisational culture where all staff expect to be recognised as individuals and treated fairly, regardless of their role or demographic characteristics.

Supporting resources

[↗ Police Professional Profile - Chief Constable](#)

[↗ Competency and Values Framework](#)

[↗ NPCC Diversity, Equality & Inclusion Strategy](#)



Guideline 2: Capability

Chief constables should ensure that supervisors are equipped with the skills needed to support staff.

This includes:

- ensuring that all staff receive appropriate and timely development to support them when starting in supervisory roles
- adopting a fair and transparent organisation-wide approach to recruiting, selecting, posting and developing supervisors, ensuring that opportunities are available for all
- implementing recruitment and promotion processes that assess the skills and behaviours required

Evidence-base:



Empirical evidence: **good**|moderate|limited



Practitioner evidence: **available**

Evidence summary

There is good evidence in relation to recruitment, promotion and professional development of supervisors, although most of the policing evidence focused on barriers to effective practice. There is evidence that supervision quality can be improved by organisations offering a programme of ‘education, experience, and mentorship’ to new and existing supervisors. There is also evidence that management and leadership development programmes can improve organisational and individual performance. However, policing studies highlighted a perceived absence of formal support, training and preparation for supervisory roles, as well as an association between poor management skills and behaviours and lower commitment levels from staff.

Evidence from policing suggests that unconscious bias in promotion processes is a barrier to improving leadership in policing. The practitioner evidence identified that people with protected characteristics felt that opportunities for promotion and development were less available to them. Police staff and special constables also felt that these opportunities were less available to them than for police officers.

Practitioner evidence also found some strong perceptions that recruitment practices prioritised operational skills over the ability to manage and lead people.



Development

Supervisors need development based on what forces collectively and individually need from them. This requires a structured and timely approach to supervisor development that ensures opportunities are made available fairly and consistently to supervisors and potential supervisors across all roles, resource types and demographic characteristics. Forces should understand the development required by new supervisors, including those in temporary roles, and ensure that this is undertaken in a timely way, either at or before the point of appointment. This learning should be supplemented with a programme of ongoing development for supervisors to further develop skills and competence. This continuous professional development approach requires a joint commitment. The individual develops their own skills through independent learning, while forces provide opportunities and time for such development.

Development programmes should encompass a broad range of operational, leadership and supervisory skills, including support to develop practical knowledge and skills, such as resilience training, mental health awareness, workload management and managing absence. Chief constables should consider a range of ways to deliver development for supervisors, including formal training, mentoring, coaching and shadowing. Formal handovers from the previous post holder should also be considered.

Recruitment and promotion

National recruitment and promotion processes for police officers and some Special Constabulary roles are developed by the College of Policing and supplemented by local selection arrangements. Processes for recruitment and selection into other roles are developed by individual forces. These should follow the principles of merit, fairness and openness, as summarised in **Figure 1**.

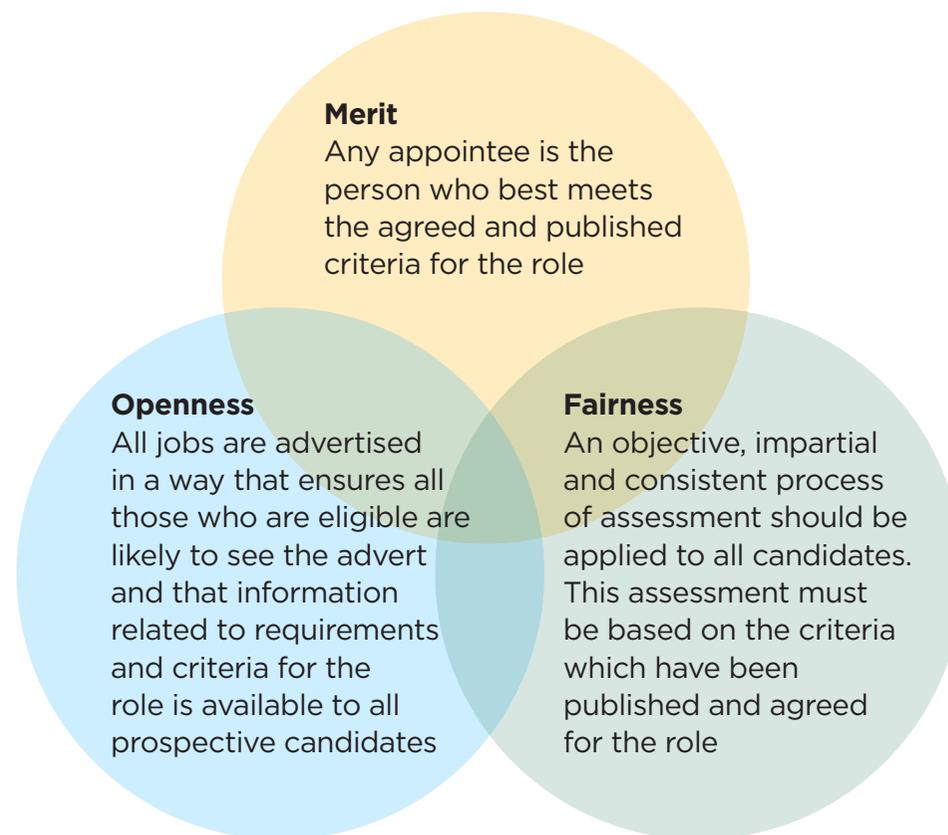


Figure 1. Principles of recruitment and selection, as described in the College of Policing Competencies and Values Framework for Policing

The careful establishment of the appropriate criteria for a role is an essential part of any appointment process. For supervisory roles, it is important that the criteria place at least as much emphasis on the skills required to support staff wellbeing, learning and performance as they do on the operational aspects of the role. The College of Policing's **Competency and Values Framework** sets out nationally recognised behaviours and values, which should be used in devising recruitment, promotion and development processes.

Chief constables should consider the use of specific interventions that might reduce unconscious bias² in relation to recruiting, selecting, posting and developing those with protected characteristics. These might include:

- priming in pre-test communications
- interactive sessions on unconscious bias, including practical training on techniques to tackle it
- anonymising the application process
- monitoring selection and promotion processes for signs of bias in decision making

Chief constables should also consider the use of positive action to support those with protected characteristics and the development of clear career pathways for police staff roles.

² Unconscious bias affects everybody's decision making. It happens when we make quick decisions in ambiguous situations that, without us realising, disadvantage particular groups of people. Our biases are influenced by our background, culture and personal experiences.

Supporting resources

[↗ Competency and Values Framework](#)

[↗ National Police Promotion Framework](#)

[↗ Tackling unconscious bias in recruitment, selection and promotion processes: A rapid evidence assessment: Executive summary](#)

[↗ Career pathways](#)

[↗ Positive action guidance](#)

[↗ Aspire programme](#)

[↗ Continuous Professional Development – definition and principles](#)



Guideline 3:

Organisational support and processes

Chief constables should ensure that supervisors are provided with, and are able to easily access, effective and appropriate advice and support in relation to supervising staff. This includes:

- the provision of policies, guidance and advice
- access to professional internal and external support
- access to support and advice from peers and more experienced supervisors

Evidence-base:

 Empirical evidence: good|**moderate**|limited

 Practitioner evidence: **available**

Evidence summary

There is moderate research evidence on the importance of organisations supporting supervisors by developing clear policies relating to employees. Support and information on human resources processes, on using systems in a supervisory capacity and on carrying out performance development reviews was also identified as being a necessary requirement.

Practitioner evidence identified a strong perception that supervisors needed much greater and more easily accessible support and advice to carry out their day-to-day supervisory role. Practitioners considered there to be inconsistent provision of welfare, occupational and support services in forces. There were frequent requests from practitioners for access to practical tools and information.

Practitioner evidence also identified a desire for more personal support and advice from peers and previous post holders. Evidence from police research studies suggested that there may be positive links between coaching, mentoring and shadowing opportunities for current and developing supervisors, and supervisors' subsequent behaviours and attitudes (see [Guideline 2](#)).

Chief constables are responsible for developing processes within their force to ensure effective decision making and appropriate action at all levels of the organisation.³ This should include processes to provide effective support and advice to supervisors.

Chief constables should ensure that supervisors are able to easily access effective support from appropriate professional occupational health, wellbeing, human resources, and learning and development services when it is needed. This can be provided by internal staff or by external support services.

Support and advice should also be provided through a range of other readily accessible means. The following sources of support were suggested through the practitioner evidence:

- detailed self-service step-by-step and
- 'how to' guides
- templates and checklists
- online and interactive tools
- mentoring, coaching and other one-to-one support

Guidelines for supervisors

These guidelines are organised as follows:

- **Guidelines 4 to 7** are core building blocks required to develop effective relationships with staff.
- **Guidelines 8 to 10** build on the earlier guidelines by focusing on specific aspects of supervision that are designed to enable wellbeing and support staff to deliver improved service and make better decisions.
- It is advised that supervisors familiarise themselves with all the guidelines and incorporate all activities over a period of time. Supervisors may also wish to focus on the activities in specific guidelines to reflect the individual needs of their staff.

Guideline 4: **Acting as a role model**

Supervisors **must** consistently demonstrate high standards of professional behaviour and should understand the importance of their position in being a role model for their staff. This includes:

- demonstrating reflective thinking, an openness to personal feedback, and a willingness to learn and develop, including a commitment to self-development
- demonstrating an openness to new ideas and ways of working
- actively promoting and demonstrating an inclusive approach to diversity
- challenging colleagues whose behaviour falls below the public's and the service's expectations

Evidence-base:

 Empirical evidence: **good**|moderate|limited

 Practitioner evidence: **available**

Evidence summary

Role modelling involves a supervisor demonstrating the behaviour that they would like their team members to display.

There is good evidence that suggests there is an association between role modelling and positive team member behaviours, across a range of areas. These areas include:

- ethics and integrity
- conducting proactive crime investigations
- challenging mental health stereotypes
- helping officers understand the specific skills and attitudes required for effective policing in particular settings

There is also evidence that a supervisor's influence and role-modelled behaviour can make a difference to whether specific groups of staff feel included and valued in the police workplace. Role modelling has also been identified as a component of transformational leadership (see [Introduction](#)), which evidence suggests is associated with positive outcomes relating to job satisfaction and motivation. There is some evidence that role modelling may be more effective at influencing behaviour than relying too heavily on other transformational leadership approaches, such as inspirational motivation. Evidence from one study

suggested that supervisor role modelling (in the form of well-timed visibility, providing an exemplary model and dealing with problem behaviour in a timely way) could help officers understand the specific skills and attitudes required for effective policing.

The evidence reviewed on role modelling did not specifically focus on demonstrating reflective thinking or openness to new ideas, although limited evidence suggests that these are perceived to be qualities and behaviours demonstrated by good sergeants.

Supervisors should demonstrate the behaviours set out in the Competency and Values Framework, which is summarised in the diagram below. This framework is underpinned by the Code of Ethics and emphasises the importance of supervisors acting as role models to others.

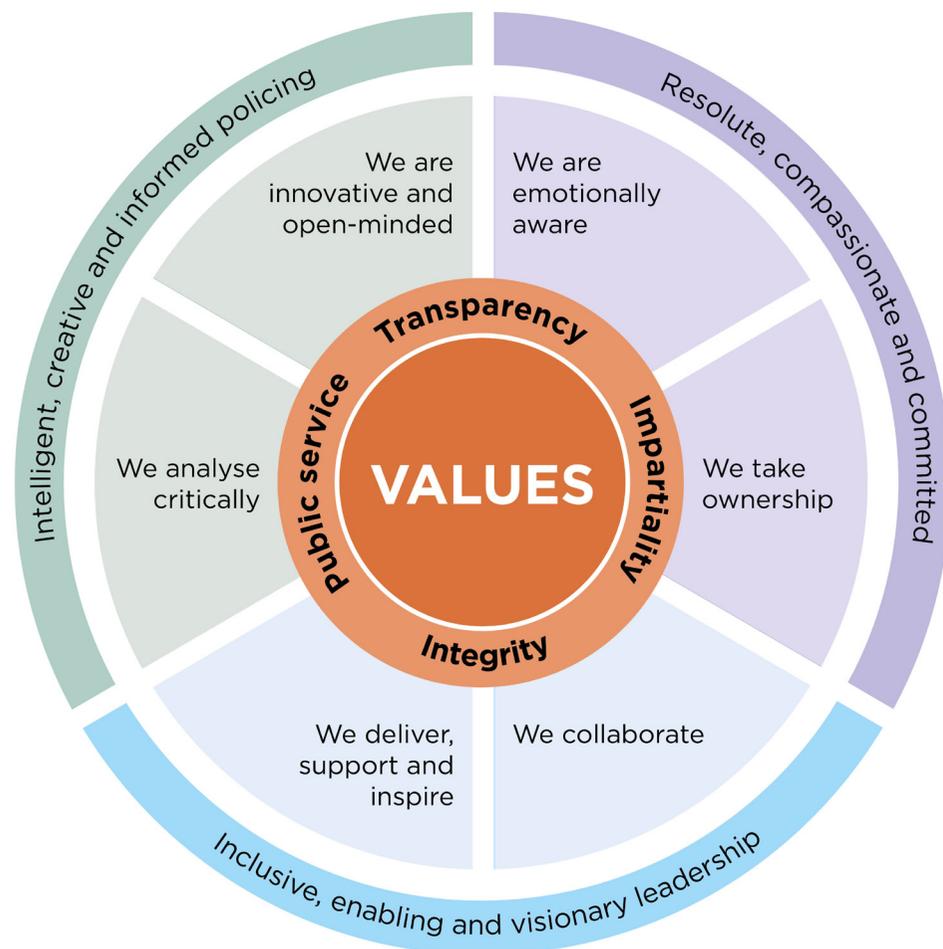


Figure 2. Behaviours set out in the College of Policing Competencies and Values Framework for policing

Supporting resources

[↗ Competency and Values Framework](#)

[↗ Code of Ethics](#)

[↗ Police \(Conduct\) Regulations 2020](#)

[↗ Police Staff Council Joint Circular No. 54](#)

[↗ Continuing Professional Development](#)

Guideline 5: Building effective relationships

Supervisors should build effective and trusting working relationships by:

- getting to know their staff
- understanding and responding to their staff's individual needs, motivations and aspirations
- dedicating time to be with their staff individually and on a regular basis (the time made available should be based on individual need)
- being accessible and approachable to their staff, and being clear about when and how they can be reached
- building trust between team members and helping to build cohesive teams

Evidence-base:

 Empirical evidence: good | **moderate** | limited

 Practitioner evidence: **available**

 Effective supervision guidelines

Evidence summary

There is moderate evidence supporting the importance of supervisors building good relationships with team members based on communication and shared expectations. This is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including greater job satisfaction, motivation, wellbeing and increased trust in – and commitment to – the organisation.

The evidence search did not find any specific research evidence related to dedicating time or being accessible and approachable to staff. However, the Guideline Committee considered lack of time to be the key factor in preventing effective supervision.

This was supported by practitioner evidence. Practitioner evidence also suggested that frequent redeployment of supervisors acted as a barrier to building trusting relationships with staff.

Building effective and trusting working relationships with staff and between team members is intrinsic to the delivery of these guidelines. Supportive practices that help build these relationships include:

- demonstrating a genuine interest in staff
- being fair
- being flexible
- recognising and valuing staff's contribution and commitment

Certain formal meetings have their place in building these relationships, such as scheduled performance development reviews (PDRs). However, supervisors should also consider more informal ways of maintaining frequent, ongoing two-way engagement with their staff, such as spending time with them in the field and the workplace, individually and as a team. Appropriate use of mobile and video communications can help to overcome reductions in physical interaction that result from increased levels of agile and remote working. It is also important that supervisors allocate adequate time to prepare for the more formal meetings with their staff and to respond to issues (see [Guideline 1](#)).

This guideline should be read in conjunction with the following guidelines, which give further information about building effective relationships in different contexts:

- [Guideline 4: Acting as a role model](#)
- [Guideline 6: Communicating effectively](#)
- [Guideline 7: Demonstrating fairness and respect](#)
- [Guideline 8: Supporting wellbeing](#)
- [Guideline 9: Supporting the delivery of good service](#)
- [Guideline 10: Supporting professional discretion in decision making](#)

Guideline 6: Communicating effectively

Supervisors should communicate effectively by:

- demonstrating open, honest two-way communication with their staff, using active listening skills and making use of technology where appropriate
- facilitating two-way communication between their staff and the rest of the organisation, helping them to understand organisational priorities and processes, and supporting them in expressing their views and ideas and influencing decisions

Evidence-base:

 Empirical evidence: good|**moderate**|limited

 Practitioner evidence: **available**

Evidence summary

There is moderate evidence highlighting the importance of effective two-way communication between supervisors and team members.

Evidence suggests that relationships built on good two-way communication between supervisors and their team members are associated with a range of positive outcomes, including job satisfaction, perceived autonomy at work, and increased trust in – and commitment to – the organisation. Clear, open and honest communication are also elements of certain leadership styles, such as supportive leadership and transformational leadership (see [Introduction](#)), which research evidence suggests are associated with a range of positive outcomes, including supporting diversity and inclusion.

Practitioner evidence identified remote and agile working and use of technology as both being a challenge to, and offering opportunities for, interaction and connection with staff. The Guideline Committee considered that supervisors should make use of technology to communicate with their staff when face-to-face meetings are not possible or practical.

There is some limited evidence relating to a manager's role in facilitating communication between their members of staff and the wider organisation. This role was considered important by Guideline Committee members.

Effective communication includes:

- setting clear direction and expectations
- providing information, feedback and clear reasons for decisions
- adjusting communication style to the individual and the situation
- showing a genuine interest in staff by actively listening to their views and concerns
- putting yourself in the position of your staff by seeking to understand their views and how they might be feeling
- adopting a non-judgemental approach when responding to staff views and needs
- creating conditions where team members feel able to ask for feedback and support
- being aware of the impact of your own body language and other non-verbal communication

There is a growing emphasis on the importance of ongoing conversation and reflective practice in the workplace (see [Guideline 9](#)). Practitioner evidence suggests that these conversations can be formal or informal, structured or unstructured, and of varying lengths. In all cases, there should be an emphasis on frequent, ongoing two-way engagement with staff.

Supervisors have an important role in acting as a bridge between their staff and the wider organisation, and should ensure that they effectively communicate wider organisational expectations, priorities and changes. Supervisors should also provide support in identifying the appropriate people and processes that staff can use to get their own views and opinions heard by the wider organisation.

The following guidelines give more information on communicating in specific circumstances:

- [Guideline 5: Building effective relationships](#)
- [Guideline 8: Supporting wellbeing](#)
- [Guideline 9: Supporting the delivery of good service](#)
- [Guideline 10: Supporting professional discretion in decision making](#)

Guideline 7: Demonstrating fairness and respect

Supervisors **must** treat all members of staff with fairness and respect. This includes:

- being fair, consistent, transparent and inclusive in all interactions with staff
- valuing diversity, building inclusive teams, and taking into account the perspectives and lived experiences of people from a wide range of backgrounds
- recognising difference and the associated differing needs of staff
- actively seeking out the views of staff and adopting an open approach when responding to their views, concerns, needs and aspirations
- providing information, honest feedback and clear reasons for actions and decisions

Evidence-base:

 Empirical evidence: good|**moderate**|limited

 Practitioner evidence: **available**

Evidence summary

There is good evidence that links supervisor fairness to positive outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction, wellbeing, commitment, discretionary effort, motivation and feeling empowered. Supervisor fairness is also associated with a reduction in problem behaviours, such as destructive gossip and intentionally working slowly or obstructively. There is a large body of evidence demonstrating the importance of organisational justice, such as staff perceptions of fair decision making and respectful treatment by supervisors and senior leaders. Supportive leadership (see [Introduction](#)), of which honesty and fairness is one element, has also been associated with a range of positive outcomes.

Evidence suggests that decision making that is open to employee input may contribute to positive outcomes, such as improved wellbeing and motivation. Providing information, feedback and clear reasons for decisions has also been found to be associated with positive outcomes.

The evidence covers the importance of fairness, consistency and transparency of support in relation to diversity and inclusion. Evidence from policing has highlighted that supervisors are less likely to deal with low-level matters of conduct at the earliest opportunity and proportionally when they involve officers from ethnic minority groups. The practitioner evidence identified that officers and staff with protected characteristics, as well as those who are not in traditional police officer roles (police staff, special constables and direct entry

officers), felt that they were treated unfairly at work. This perceived unfairness encompassed a wide range of issues, including:

- contributions being less recognised
- being treated with a lack of respect
- lack of support from supervisors
- less access to professional development, specialist equipment and welfare support
- lack of structured career pathways
- direct discrimination

They reported that this affected their feelings of confidence and motivation, their trust in their supervisors and leaders, and whether they felt valued and part of a team.

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. The Public Sector Equality Duty places an additional responsibility on public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, and to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination
- advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

Supervisor fairness has a positive impact on staff attitudes and behaviour, as well as the extent to which staff identify with their force and its values. It is therefore essential that supervisors apply the principles in this guideline consistently when carrying out their work, making decisions or providing support to staff. This includes decisions and support in relation to:

- allocation of work
- agreement of leave and working hours
- access to learning, development and career opportunities
- access to information, equipment and other resources
- management of performance and conduct

Supervisors should reflect on how unconscious bias (see [Guideline 2](#)) and stereotyping might influence their treatment of staff, as well as any related decision making. They should also consider taking actions to address any imbalance of opportunity or disadvantage that an individual with a protected characteristic might face.

Further guidance on communication, supporting staff to express their views, and giving feedback that will help foster fairness and respect and will help staff feel valued regardless of their background, identity, role or circumstances is contained in:

- [Guideline 4: Acting as a role model](#)
- [Guideline 5: Building effective relationships](#)
- [Guideline 6: Communicating effectively](#)
- [Guideline 9: Supporting the delivery of good service](#)

Supporting resources

↗ [Code of Ethics](#)

↗ [Fair cop 2: Organisational justice, behaviour and ethical policing](#)



Guideline 8: Supporting wellbeing

Supervisors should proactively support the wellbeing of their staff by:

- identifying, understanding and responding to their staff's health and emotional needs, as well as their own
- being aware of the internal and external support available
- signposting staff to the most appropriate support and helping them to access it
- ensuring that reasonable adjustments are put in place when required, to enable their staff to work safely

Evidence-base:

 Empirical evidence: good|**moderate**|limited

 Practitioner evidence: **available**

Evidence summary

Overall, there is moderate evidence on the importance of supervisors supporting the wellbeing of their staff.

There is good evidence that supervisors supporting their team members' health and emotional needs is associated with the wellbeing of their staff, including improving self-esteem and reducing job stress and emotional exhaustion. The evidence suggests that a supportive attitude is particularly important in relation to mental health issues, due to cultural perceptions of the cynicism of some police leaders and the stigma of perceived weakness in policing culture. Inadequate support and insensitive responses from supervisors are perceived to damage morale, dedication and goodwill, and fail to destigmatise mental health issues.

Social support from supervisors has been associated with decreased burnout in both officers and staff, and with moderating the negative effects of violence against officers by the public. However, there was also evidence that supervisor support cannot fully mitigate against the negative effects of continually high job demands. Practitioner evidence suggested that the ability of supervisors to identify and signpost staff to other sources of support was also important.

There is limited evidence regarding the benefits associated with supervisors understanding and acting on their own health and emotional needs.

The research review identified one study that found a link between the wellbeing of a supervisor and the

wellbeing of their staff, although it was not clear how these influenced each other. The Guideline Committee felt strongly that a supervisor's ability to provide emotional and practical support to their staff was directly associated with their own health and wellbeing.

The **Health and Safety at Work Act** places a responsibility on employers to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees. It also places a responsibility on employees to take care of their own health and safety, as well as the health and safety of others who may be affected by their actions at work. These duties include taking care of both physical and mental wellbeing.

The Equality Act 2010 also requires employers to make **reasonable adjustments** to make sure that staff with disabilities, or with physical or mental health conditions, are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs. All employees also have the legal right to request flexible working arrangements and for any requests to be reasonably considered.

Evidence suggests that staff who have supervisors who adopt a supportive style are likely to have better wellbeing in a range of ways, both at work and home. Support can be provided by:

- showing a genuine interest in staff and how they might be feeling
- showing unselfish concern for the welfare of others

- talking and actively listening to staff about their wellbeing
- being caring and supportive when dealing with personal or work issues
- being flexible
- taking practical steps to help manage workload
- providing advice
- supporting staff to access professional or third-party advice and support

Staff wellbeing is also supported by the supervisory practices detailed in:

- **Guideline 5: Building effective relationships**
- **Guideline 6: Communicating effectively**
- **Guideline 7: Demonstrating fairness and respect**
- **Guideline 9: Supporting the delivery of good service**
- **Guideline 10: Supporting professional discretion in decision making**

Supporting resources

[↗ Oscar Kilo](#)

[↗ Mind Blue Light Programme](#)



Guideline 9: Supporting the delivery of good service

Supervisors should support staff to deliver a good service by:

- being clear about what is expected of staff in their specific roles and their contributions to wider organisational objectives
- providing clear direction, support and assistance to help staff do their work
- identifying, enabling and encouraging staff to take up opportunities for professional learning and development that support their individual career plans
- having honest and open conversations, and using reflective practice to encourage staff to consider their own performance, learning and how to improve
- providing timely, specific and constructive feedback, acknowledging good work, discussing areas for development and addressing shortfalls in performance

Evidence-base:

 Empirical evidence: good | **moderate** | limited

 Practitioner evidence: **available**

 Effective supervision guidelines

Evidence summary

There was moderate evidence on the importance of supervisors providing support and assistance to staff to help them do their work (see [Guideline 5](#)), which was associated with a range of positive outcomes, including increased employee job satisfaction, wellbeing, organisational commitment and improved performance. Evidence also identified a link between supportive and transformational leadership approaches by supervisors (see [Introduction](#)) and positive employee performance outcomes, including generating extra effort, conscientiousness, motivation and engagement.

There is moderate evidence that has linked supervisory feedback with positive performance outcomes, with higher-quality feedback linked to higher organisational commitment. A combined perception of supervisor support and adequate feedback on performance has also been linked with better morale in police support volunteers.

Although there was limited supporting evidence in relation to some of these guidelines' areas of focus, particularly learning and development (see [Guideline 2](#)), the Guideline Committee considered all aspects to be essential components of effective supervision. There were also substantial amounts of practitioner evidence around the perceived importance of supervisor–staff conversations to support wellbeing, learning and performance, as well as the ability to have difficult conversations with staff when necessary.

Performance conversations

Supervisors should carry out a formal PDR with each member of their staff at least once a year, where objectives are set and performance is reviewed. Supervisors are also expected to have regular conversations with their staff about their performance, development and wellbeing. These conversations might be carried out through a range of different methods, on a one-to-one basis and/or in a team setting, and both formally and informally. Skilled supervisors can also use coaching conversations to support staff to think about their own development. The emphasis should be on frequent ongoing two-way engagement with staff.

Reflective supervision

The use and benefits of reflective supervision are well established in clinical, social care and victim support services. Formal reflective supervision is provided for some specialist staff in forces, most often those working in high-stress environments to support their wellbeing, development and performance. It is also a requirement of the Reflective Practice Review Process, as set out in the [Police \(Conduct\) Regulations 2020](#). Its purpose is to support staff to reflect on and discuss their work and their personal and professional responses.

Supervisors should consider adopting some of these approaches in their discussions with staff. Typically, a reflective supervision session will support staff to:

- engage in critical self-examination and reflect on their skills, performance and personal responses

- identify performance issues and consider a range of approaches
- develop skills and expand knowledge through discussion, review and positive challenge
- consider future training and development needs
- discuss home life, personal issues and wellbeing, where these have an impact on performance or vice versa

Supporting resources

[↗ Resources for reflective practice](#)

[↗ Professional Development Review](#)

[↗ Continuing Professional Development](#)

[↗ Career Pathways](#)



Guideline 10: Supporting professional discretion in decision making

Supervisors should encourage their staff to recognise where they can use their professional judgement and explore new and different ways of working by:

- supporting staff to develop the skills to improve their decision making
- helping staff to reflect on, and learn from, experience
- encouraging staff to be innovative and use discretion where appropriate

Evidence-base:

 Empirical evidence: good|**moderate**|limited

 Practitioner evidence: **available**

Evidence summary

There was good research evidence suggesting a positive association between allowing discretion and staff wellbeing, job satisfaction and commitment. Research from other sectors also identified a link between influencing decisions at work and lower risk of burnout.

Enabling empowerment of team members is a feature of supportive leadership (see [Introduction](#)), which is associated with a range of positive staff outcomes, including higher levels of wellbeing, ethical behaviour, discretionary effort, engagement, emotional energy and job satisfaction. Empowering approaches, such as supporting, recognising, delegating and consulting, are also shown to be positively associated with wellbeing, job satisfaction, commitment, performance, conscientiousness and employees feeling able to give constructive ideas and opinions.

Practice evidence suggested that staff wanted to be creative and try new ways of working, but often felt restrained from doing so by the organisational culture.

Supervisors should support their staff to use the [national decision model](#) to enable them to make informed and ethical decisions. Supervisors should also use the model to review decisions and actions with their staff, and to promote learning. Supervisors should also consider the use of reflective practice to support staff to reflect on and learn from their own experiences (see [Guideline 9](#)). The [Police \(Conduct\) Regulations 2020](#) encourage a culture of continuous self-reflection and learning.

Supporting resources

[↗ Code of Ethics](#)

[↗ The Seven Principles of Public Life](#)

[↗ Knowledge Hub](#)

About the College

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

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