

# Conducting effective investigations

**Guidelines**

Consultation



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# Summary of the guidelines

These guidelines provide clear evidence-based practice guidance on how best to ensure effective investigations. An effective investigation involves:

- understanding one's role in an investigation and contribution to the process
- being open-minded, being professionally curious, and identifying and following all lines of enquiry
- being proportionate
- understanding, and being aware of, biases
- employing good interpersonal skills

These guidelines specify and detail the actions and behaviours required to support effective investigations.

These guidelines also set out the actions that chief constables and supervisors need to take to support and enable their staff to conduct effective investigations.

The guidelines consist of

- three practical guidelines for investigators
- one guideline for supervisors, which sets out the support required to enable staff to conduct effective investigations
- one guideline for chief constables, which sets out the organisational focus, structures and processes required to support and enable effective investigations

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

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

# Guidelines for investigators

## 1 Understanding the process, your role and obligations >

In carrying out an investigation, investigators **must**:

- identify and follow all reasonable lines of enquiry to gather all reasonably available material and, where a suspect is identified, investigate towards and away from the suspect
- treat victims with fairness and respect, and ensure that they are afforded their rights under the Victims' Code

In addition, investigators should:

- understand their contribution to, and role and obligations within, the criminal justice process
- be professionally curious, be willing to ask questions and employ effective communication skills
- assess the threat, risk and harms to victims, witnesses and suspects, as well as their needs, and take appropriate action
- strive to achieve best outcomes for all

### Evidence-base:

empirical evidence  
good|moderate|limited  
practitioner evidence available



## 2 Making good decisions >

**Investigators** should ensure:

- impartiality in:
  - deciding what constitutes a proportionate investigation
  - the way in which they listen to and evaluate the material provided by all victims, witnesses and suspects
  - how they gather and evaluate material
  - the assumptions they make relating to any aspect of the investigation

and should

- record all decisions in a clear and objective way with supporting rationale

This will support investigators to recognise, and take steps to mitigate, the adverse effects that a range of cognitive biases can have on the mental shortcuts that people automatically use when trying to make sense of new information, make decisions, or take action.

### Evidence-base:

empirical evidence  
good|moderate|limited  
practitioner evidence available



## 3 Taking responsibility for your professional development >

**Investigators** have a personal responsibility for their knowledge, skills, learning and experience in relation to investigations, and should:

- understand and continually reflect on what their skills are
- recognise their limitations and knowledge gaps, and understand when to seek support

### Evidence-base:

empirical evidence  
good|moderate|limited  
practitioner evidence available



# Guidelines for supervisors and chief constables

## 4 Supporting the delivery of effective investigations >

**Supervisors** should support the delivery of effective investigations by:

- being positive role models and demonstrating good investigative practice
- providing appropriate and tailored support to their staff and creating a supportive team culture
- proactively supervising and undertaking regular quality reviews of their team's investigations and providing meaningful timely feedback
- ensuring that their staff have appropriate skills to undertake the investigations they are allocated, as well as facilitating learning where they need development
- explaining and recording the rationale behind their decisions or advice to staff
- actively managing investigators' workloads, case allocation and wellbeing
- encouraging staff to take responsibility for identifying their skills and knowledge gaps, and sharing and signposting knowledge, contacts and training opportunities
- identifying, valuing and giving recognition for good investigative work
- using reviews to encourage a learning culture, innovation and the sharing of good practice within the team

### Evidence-base:

empirical evidence good|moderate|limited  
practitioner evidence available



## 5 Building investigative capability and capacity >

**Chief constables** should demonstrate that they value investigations and should ensure that there is capacity and capability to achieve effective investigations consistently within the force. They should do this by:

- ensuring that strategic decision making embeds effective investigations within force priorities
- taking steps to understand the scale and nature of current and future investigative demand, and ensuring that there are appropriate structures, governance and resources in place to meet this
- ensuring that officers and staff have the appropriate skills and training, according to their needs, to undertake the investigations they are allocated and timely access to learning opportunities where they don't
- ensuring that all officers and staff involved at any point in the process of an investigation understand:
  - that they are impartial investigators
  - their fundamental role within the criminal justice process
  - how they contribute to investigative outcomes
  - their obligations to victims of crime, and how their actions and behaviours may affect a victim's trust and confidence
- instilling a culture of learning within the force, and encouraging reflective practice during and following investigations

### Evidence-base:

empirical evidence good|moderate|limited  
practitioner evidence available



# Introduction

## What are these guidelines for?

These guidelines provide clear evidence-based guidance on conducting effective investigations. They are not intended to be a full description of the investigative process and should be read in conjunction with the Investigations Authorised Professional Practice (APP).

They also provide guidance on the support that investigators need.

## Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are for individuals of all levels and roles who are involved in the investigative process. This includes – but is not limited to – call handlers, police community support officers (PCSOs), uniformed police constables and supervisors, as well as those in detective roles.

While not all these individuals will have a formal investigator title, they all seek information, look for evidence and record what they find. This activity forms an investigation, so these individuals are investigators. Although different roles require different levels and stages of involvement in the investigative process, all these individuals should consider carefully how they apply the guidelines to their practice.

Local force systems will determine the approach to assess capacity and capability in relation to the allocation of investigative resources.

There are also guidelines specifically for chief constables and supervisors in relation to the support needed to enable effective investigations.

## 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 agree and finalise the scope, consider the evidence and draft the guidelines, taking into account the views of stakeholders.

## How was the scope of the guidelines developed?

The scope of the guidelines was developed based on a wide range of sources, including research evidence, inspection reports, inquiries and consultation with practitioners. It was developed by the College and was finalised and agreed by the committee following a public consultation with practitioners, academics, members of the public and individuals from partner organisations.



The College undertook a thematic analysis of the recurring issues facing policing, to help identify where national standards could be used to drive improvement activity.

This work highlighted a number of perennial issues, one of which related to limitations in investigative capability and issues with the collection, use and disclosure of evidence. The initial scanning work for these guidelines and a review of available evidence supported this, suggesting that there were weaknesses in general investigative core skills and non-specialist investigative capability. The scope of the guidance therefore focused on how best to conduct effective investigations overall.

The initial scoping used the term ‘investigative mindset’, which is a term previously used in the Core Investigative Doctrine. This term describes the use of a disciplined approach to investigations that ensures the decisions made are appropriate to the case, are reasonable and can be explained to others. Building on this description and based on evidence, we have expanded the definition of an effective approach to investigations to also include:

- understanding one’s role in an investigation, and contribution to the process, from the outset of an incident
- being open-minded, being professionally curious, and identifying and following all reasonable lines of enquiry
- being proportionate

- understanding, and being aware of, biases
- employing good interpersonal skills

These actions and behaviours, as well as the support required for investigators to carry them out and display them, are detailed in these guidelines.

### **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). They also reflect insights from over 800 police officers and staff, as well as partner organisations. This is referred to throughout the guidelines as ‘practitioner evidence’. This was collected through a range of engagement activities, including an online survey with police officers and staff, interviews with frontline uniformed police officers and detectives, a call for practice, a workshop with the District and Crown Prosecutors, and interviews with investigators from wider law enforcement agencies.

It should be noted that much of the evidence relates to barriers to effective investigation, rather than those factors that support it. In developing the guidelines, there has been an assumption, where appropriate, that the opposite practice to an identified barrier is likely to support effective investigations.

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



## Supporting resources

We have highlighted existing products within the guidelines that we think will help forces to implement these guidelines. We are seeking feedback during the consultation stage on what additional products and support might be of most use to you.



# Guidelines for investigators

## Guideline 1:

# Understanding the process, your role and obligations

In carrying out an investigation, investigators must:

- identify and follow all reasonable lines of enquiry<sup>1</sup> to gather all reasonably available material and, where a suspect is identified, investigate towards and away from the suspect
- treat victims with fairness and respect, and ensure that they are afforded their rights under the Victims' Code

<sup>1</sup> What is reasonable in each case will depend on the particular circumstances and will depend on the stage of the investigation. It is a matter for the investigator to decide what constitutes a reasonable line of enquiry in each case. Depending on the stage of the investigation, this can be done with the assistance of the prosecutor if required.

In addition, investigators should:

- understand their contribution to, and role and obligations within, the criminal justice process
- be professionally curious, be willing to ask questions and employ effective communication skills
- assess the threat, risk and harms to victims, witnesses and suspects, as well as their needs, and take appropriate action
- strive to achieve best outcomes for all.

### Evidence-base:



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



Practitioner evidence: **available**

## Evidence summary

Overall, there is moderate evidence supporting this guideline. The evidence review found good evidence that open-mindedness helps ensure that investigations are run effectively and helps to protect investigators from confirmation bias. Open-mindedness is a key part of professional curiosity, the importance of which is also supported by evidence from the [vulnerability-related risk guidelines REA](#).

There was some evidence that understanding the court process supports effective investigations. However, research evidence on the importance of investigators understanding their contribution to – and their role and obligations within – the criminal justice process was limited. Practitioner evidence did suggest that having an understanding of the court process, the points to prove, and considering evidential issues and the bigger picture were essential to an effective investigation. Evidence suggests that frontline officers often do not consider themselves as investigators and this was also found in our practice evidence review. However, there was strong committee consensus that everyone in policing should recognise their role in the investigative process. This was supported by practitioner evidence. Practitioners emphasised the importance of following all lines of enquiry as a key component of an effective investigation.

There is good evidence on the importance of effective communication and the use of questions for an effective

investigation. This is summarised in [vulnerability-related risk, obtaining initial accounts, conflict management](#) and [neighbourhood policing guidelines](#). Practice evidence also supported the importance of asking questions and employing effective communication for an effective investigation.

There is strong evidence that victim satisfaction is associated with how a victim is treated during the criminal justice process and not necessarily by the outcome alone. There is also strong evidence that alternative criminal justice outcomes to prosecution (for example, restorative justice) can be effective.

## Understanding the criminal justice process and your obligations

The main obligations for investigators are set out in [the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 \(CPIA\)](#) and the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#). Investigators should ensure they have a good understanding of these, as well as criminal justice processes and their purpose, seeking support where necessary<sup>2</sup>. Considering the bigger picture also requires a knowledge of national and force policies and procedures. Investigators should ensure they have an awareness of these.

### Professional curiosity

The exercise of professional curiosity was considered crucial by the committee to ensuring that investigation is maximised to gather the best evidence. By being professionally curious, investigators fulfill the legal obligation to pursue all reasonable lines of enquiry. It is also important when forming hypotheses to inform lines of enquiry. Professional curiosity involves maintaining an open mind, by having the capacity and willingness to explore a situation and alternative views and explanations. The need to be open-minded is also set out in the [Competency and Values Framework \(CVF\)](#).

Professional curiosity can include:

- exploring and understanding what is happening by asking questions
- not accepting things at face value

- enquiring more deeply and challenging one's own assumptions
- thinking outside the box and being prepared to challenge conventional thinking
- being alert to relevant material or information
- looking for, and considering, alternative explanations
- considering a situation holistically, identifying gaps in knowledge or understanding and seeking to fill them
- recognising that victims of certain crimes may be unwilling to give a full account or may minimise the seriousness of an incident
- thinking beyond past experiences
- seeking input from others
- seeking corroboration and testing material
- being open to change – for example, in relation to who is the victim and who is the suspect

Exercising professional curiosity has been translated in the following ways:

- applying the 5 Ws and H framework: who, where, what, when, why and how
- applying the ABC approach to material and evidence to ensure the collection of best evidence: assume nothing, believe nothing, challenge everything

<sup>2</sup> See [guidelines 3](#) and [4](#).

Reflective practice and seeking input from others, such as supervisors and colleagues, may help in exercising professional curiosity. Investigators may find it useful to use frameworks for reflective practice (see [guideline 2](#)). Practical advice on encouraging professional curiosity is contained in the [Risk and vulnerability guidelines](#). These guidelines also outline how to recognise and respond to risk.

Employing good communication skills is important in the exercise of professional curiosity. Key communication skills include building rapport, active listening, using a procedurally just approach (being open, respectful and transparent) and minimising judgment. Practical advice on verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as asking questions, can be found in the Initial accounts guidelines and the Risk and vulnerability guidelines.

### **Achieving best outcomes**

A component of an effective investigation is striving to achieve the best or most suitable outcome for victims and suspects in an incident and considering the most appropriate disposal for each case. This involves thinking holistically and considering all possible outcomes. Investigators should consider the best outcomes for victims and suspects, and should consider the most appropriate disposal for each case. This includes considering risk and safeguarding. Where appropriate, they should consider alternative evidence-based criminal justice outcomes, such as restorative justice, and should ensure due consideration is given to the appropriateness of prosecution. There are circumstances

where it may not always be appropriate to prosecute, such as in certain modern slavery cases or county lines cases, where issues of exploitation and vulnerability need to be taken into account. Nonetheless, public safety issues should also be considered.

### **Supporting resources**

to help with identifying reasonable lines of enquiry, criminal justice processes and the investigator's role:

[↗ Professionalising Investigation Programme \(PIP\) and College training programmes](#)

[↗ The Attorney General's Guidelines on Disclosure 2020](#)

to help with decision making:

[↗ National decision model](#)

[↗ Code of Ethics](#)

to help with communication, maintaining an open mind and being professionally curious:

[↗ Risk and vulnerability guidelines](#)

[↗ Initial accounts guidelines](#)

[↗ Conflict management guidelines](#)



to help with reflective practice:

➤ [Resources for reflective practice](#)

to help with achieving best outcomes

➤ [Restorative justice: Evidence briefing](#)

➤ [Victims' Code for policing | College of Policing](#)

➤ [Violence against women and girls toolkit](#)

➤ [What works in supporting victims of crime: A rapid evidence assessment](#)

## Related APP

➤ [Prosecution and case management APP](#)

➤ [Victim and witness care APP](#)

# Guideline 2: Making good decisions

Investigators should ensure:

- impartiality in:
  - deciding what constitutes a proportionate investigation
  - the way in which they listen to and evaluate the material provided by all victims, witnesses and suspects
  - how they gather and evaluate material
  - the assumptions they make relating to any aspect of the investigation

and should:

- record all decisions in a clear and objective way with supporting rationale

This will support investigators to recognise, and take steps to mitigate, the adverse effects that a range of cognitive biases can have on the mental shortcuts that people automatically use when trying to make sense of new information, make decisions, or take action.

## Evidence-base:



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



Practitioner evidence: **available**



## Evidence summary

There was good evidence that biases (unconscious or conscious) can influence an investigation. There is consistent evidence that an initial hypothesis or initial belief in a suspect's guilt significantly affects interpretation of further evidence and can lead to the seeking of evidence to confirm a hypothesis.

There is also evidence to suggest that officers' perceptions of victim credibility and suspect blame may affect how they treat the victim and investigate the crime. Examples of this include having an impact on allocating resource to the case, the likelihood of arrest and pursuing all lines of enquiry. The majority of the evidence supporting this guideline is taken from research into crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls, notably rape and domestic abuse. The evidence was limited on ways to tackle bias and there was mixed evidence on the impact of training on bias.

The committee felt that clearly recording decisions was critical to an effective investigation. The practice evidence supports this.

Investigators should use the National Decision Model and the Code of Ethics to help with decision making. In relation to the investigative process, officers have discretion at many decision-making points throughout the course of the investigation and they should feel empowered to make decisions.

Being impartial, mitigating one's biases and recording decisions will support making justifiable, effective decisions that are proportionate, lawful, accountable, necessary and ethical. Different types of bias can have an impact on investigators' decision making. Unconscious bias affects everybody's decision making. It happens when we make quick decisions in ambiguous situations that, without us realising, may disadvantage particular groups of people. Our biases are influenced by our background, culture and personal experiences. Confirmation bias is the tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with one's hypothesis or initial beliefs. Investigators should strive to be aware of, and to minimise, their own unconscious biases.

Ways to mitigate against biases include reflective practice and effective supervision. Practitioners from other organisations felt strongly that effective supervisory review and oversight (see [guideline 4](#)) was crucial to mitigate the impact of biases on decision making and to ensure that investigators remain impartial in investigations.

### Hints and tips - remaining impartial

Impartiality and mitigating biases can be enhanced by:

- collaboration and supervision, so practitioners can work together to explore their decisions and the actions they take in investigations
- using reflective practice on a regular basis, and capturing or recording reflections – reflective practice is the ability to reflect on one's actions and decisions, and improve practice as a result
- using reflective practice frameworks, such as the Betari Box framework and Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, or using the CVF
- sense checking decisions with colleagues and supervisors
- recording and reviewing decisions

Systematic review evidence on the ability of unconscious bias training to effectively change behaviour is limited, and the majority of studies do not use valid measures of behaviour change. Nonetheless, evidence shows that unconscious bias training has the potential to increase awareness of biases when it is followed by a debrief or more advanced training designs, such as interactive workshops or longer-term programmes to reflectively reduce biases. There is no available evidence that training can eliminate unconscious bias. There is some evidence from clinical and educational settings to suggest that empathy training or interventions have the potential to mitigate bias.

The committee emphasised the importance of recording decisions clearly and objectively to support effective decision making. They felt that this helps investigators recognise the choices they make at each stage of an investigation and reflect on practice.

Having an investigation plan may support the recording of decisions and provide an auditable record of activity. Investigators may also consider consistently using body-worn video (BWV) to assist with this. BWV could be used to record spontaneous decision making at the scene and may help emphasise the need to articulate thought processes throughout an investigation. Footage from BWV could also be used to review investigators' decisions and the actions

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<sup>3</sup> Grossmith L and others. (2015). [Police, camera, evidence: London's cluster randomised controlled trial of body worn video](#) [internet]. [Accessed June 2022]

they take, to facilitate organisational learning and the sharing of good practice<sup>3</sup>.

## Supporting resources

[↗ Code of Ethics](#)

[↗ National Decision Model](#)

[↗ Competency and Values Framework](#)



# Guideline 3: Taking responsibility for your professional development

**Investigators** have a personal responsibility for their knowledge, skills, learning and experience in relation to investigations and should:

- understand and continually reflect on what their skills are
- recognise their limitations and knowledge gaps, and understand when to seek support

## Evidence-base:



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



Practitioner evidence: **available**

## Evidence summary

The research evidence supporting this guideline is moderate. Research indicates there are specific skills needed for an effective investigation. These skills and attributes include:

- good communication
- motivation and commitment
- good decision making
- tenacity
- thoroughness and attention to detail
- good teamwork

Experience was found to have positive effects on investigations. In some studies, it was found that investigators with more experience conducted more effective investigations. Studies found that more experienced investigators:

- remain more open-minded than less experienced investigators over the course of an investigation
- consider more hypotheses and sources of evidence
- are more flexible in the strategies they use in triage decision making of complex cases
- derive more inferences from crime scenes

Some research suggests that greater experience is associated with a greater scepticism of the reliability of all forms of evidence. Practitioner evidence supported the value of experience in conducting effective

investigations. However, it also emphasised the importance of training.

Research evidence also suggested that training is important for effective investigations. Some research suggested that investigators with significant investigative training may often outperform investigators with lower levels of investigative training, generating more investigative hypotheses and investigative actions. This includes those with considerable experience. There is mixed evidence on the effectiveness of specialised training aimed at changing officers' attitudes in relation to rape investigations. Evidence suggests that some types of training may be more effective than others.

Investigators have a responsibility towards their continuing professional development (CPD). Reflecting on one's knowledge, skills, learning and experience can highlight limitations and knowledge gaps, and can help investigators recognise where they need support.

Knowledge, skills and experience can be maintained and developed in a number of ways. These include through:

- formal learning and development programmes, such as the PIP
- forces' investigative awareness training
- specialist training programmes, such as the Serious Sexual Assault Investigator Development Programme (SSAIDP) or Serious Child Abuse Investigator Development Programme (SCAIDP)

- online training resources found on [College Learn](#), such as [Operation Modify](#)

Increasing one's investigative skill set and knowledge can also be done in other ways, such as:

- working with, and seeking support from, colleagues and peers to overcome inexperience more quickly
- secondments (in specialist units or in other departments involved in the investigation process)
- receiving mentoring
- formal academic education, which exposes investigators to academic evidence, facilitating approaches to evidence-based policing
- [reviewing APP](#)

The responsibility for the CPD of investigators is shared between the individual, their force and the College. As such, the College also provides a number of resources and tools to help with this. These include:

- [College Learn](#)
- [The Knowledge Hub](#)
- [The CPD toolkit](#) and [Professional Development Platform](#)
- [The What Works Centre for crime reduction](#)
- [The National Police Library](#)
- [Access to knowledge sharing events and peer support](#)



Investigators should also consider engaging with research relating to conducting investigations to develop their knowledge. Engaging with research may also assist investigators to develop innovative approaches to investigations (where appropriate). College resources that may assist with this include resources on the [What Works Centre for crime reduction](#) and the [National Police Library](#).

Professional development reviews (PDRs) can be used as an opportunity for investigators to reflect on their skills, strengths and weaknesses. The [National PDR principles and process expectations](#) is a useful tool for this.

# Guidelines for supervisors

This guideline builds on the Effective supervision guidelines but relates specifically to how supervisors should support, encourage and scrutinise investigation. For supporting and additional information on supervision, please see the [Effective supervision guidelines](#).

## Guideline 4: Supporting the delivery of effective investigations

Supervisors should support the delivery of effective investigations by:

- being [positive role models](#) and demonstrating good investigative practice
- providing appropriate and [tailored support](#) to their staff and creating a supportive team culture
- proactively supervising and undertaking regular quality reviews of their team's investigations and [providing meaningful timely feedback](#)
- ensuring that their staff have appropriate skills to undertake the investigations they are allocated, as well as [facilitating learning](#) where they need development

- explaining and recording the rationale behind their [decisions](#) or advice to staff
- actively managing investigators' workloads, case allocation and [wellbeing](#)
- encouraging staff to take responsibility for identifying their skills and knowledge gaps, and sharing and [signposting knowledge, contacts and training opportunities](#)
- identifying, valuing and [giving recognition](#) for good investigative work
- using reviews to [encourage a learning culture](#), innovation and the sharing of good practice within the team

### Evidence-base:



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



Practitioner evidence: **available**

## Evidence summary

There is moderate evidence that supervision is an important factor in ensuring effective investigations. In research with experienced investigators, supervision and management were most frequently cited as the factors that stop investigations failing and were identified as being involved in decision-making tipping points, where investigators move from being open-minded to being more focused on verifying the guilt of a suspect.

Research evidence suggests that supervisors can have an impact on their staff through modelling good practice, fair treatment and praise, scrutiny of actions and work, clarity of orders and setting the direction of the unit. The evidence on modelling behaviour suggests that investigators may replicate behaviours that are modelled by their supervisors, including bad practice. One study found that while supervisor behaviours may not always be replicated, they may nonetheless have an impact on the behaviour of their subordinates.

Research suggests that investigators who are treated fairly by their supervisors are more likely to treat others fairly. Evidence shows that supervisor scrutiny can sometimes lead to stress in officers. Occupational stress, in turn, has an impact on investigators by prompting a laying-low approach, suspiciousness and crime fighter orientation as coping mechanisms.

Practice evidence also suggested that that good supervision is important for ensuring effective investigations, although there were mixed findings

regarding the quality of supervision available. Some practitioners felt that the supervision they received was supportive, while others felt that it was limited. Nonetheless, all practitioners we engaged with felt that effective supervision was crucial for conducting effective investigations. Practice evidence also strongly supported the importance of supervisors' review of their officers and staffs' investigations.

## Guidelines for chief constables

### Guideline 5:

# Building investigative capability and capacity

Chief constables should demonstrate that they value investigations and should ensure that there is capacity and capability to achieve effective investigations consistently within the force. They should do this by:

- ensuring strategic decision making embeds effective investigations within the force priorities
- taking steps to understand the scale and nature of current and future investigative demand, and ensuring that there are appropriate structures, governance and resources in place to meet this
- ensuring that officers and staff have the appropriate skills and training, according to their needs, to undertake the investigations they are allocated and timely access to learning opportunities where they don't

- ensuring that all officers and staff involved at any point in the process of an investigation understand:
  - that they are impartial investigators
  - their fundamental role within the criminal justice process
  - how they contribute to investigative outcomes
  - their obligations to victims of crime, and how their actions and behaviours may affect a victim's trust and confidence
- instilling a culture of learning within the force, and encouraging reflective practice during and following investigations

#### Evidence-base:



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



Practitioner evidence: **available**

## Evidence summary

The evidence review found limited empirical evidence on how chief constables should support effective investigations. However, there was good evidence around the organisational barriers to undertaking effective investigations and the organisational conditions that need to be in place for an effective investigation.

There is evidence that a perception of time pressure, as well as reduced resources and high workloads, affects investigators' ability to conduct an effective investigation. Some studies found that adequate resources were felt to be critical to the success of an investigation.

Other organisational factors that were found to affect behaviour included the perceived organisational pressure to move on, the norms to which investigators are exposed, and the clarity of investigators' roles and shifting priorities. These may have an influence on officers' stress levels and their behaviour – for example, by leading to more cursory processing of information, being less open-minded to new information, generating fewer hypotheses, not pursuing all lines of enquiry and moving earlier from a deliberative to an implemental mindset<sup>4</sup>. One study identified the impact of performance indicators on behaviour in specific circumstances.

4 Gollwitzer PM. (1990). 'Action phases and mindsets'. In: Higgins ET and Sorrentino RM, eds. 'Handbook of motivation and cognition: Foundations of social behavior'. New York: Guilford Press, pp 53–92. Gollwitzer suggested that a deliberative mindset leads to a relatively accurate and impartial analysis of information about the feasibility and desirability of possible goals, whereas the implemental mindset promotes an optimistic and partial analysis of such information.

The finding that organisational factors affect officers' behaviours in investigations was supported by the practice evidence. Practitioners identified caseload, shift patterns, evidence recovery and time to pursue follow-up investigations as having an impact on the ability to carry out effective investigations. Practitioner evidence also suggested that relatively high numbers of investigators were likely to have conducted investigations above their level of training (for evidence on training, see [guideline 3](#)).

Evidence from other sectors indicates that leadership is important for encouraging both a learning culture and reflective practice.

The chief constable holds:

- direct accountability for the operational delivery of policing services, including the delivery of effective investigations
- overall responsibility for creating a vision and setting a direction and culture that enable the delivery of a professional, effective and efficient policing service
- responsibility for setting and ensuring the implementation of organisational and operational strategy for the force, in order to provide a policing service that meets current and future policing demands<sup>5</sup>

The Guideline Committee recognised the challenge of operational complexity and high demand, which was highlighted through the practice evidence collection. Nonetheless, the committee felt strongly that chief constables should recognise the centrality and importance of investigations when setting the direction for their force and leading cultural change in relation to investigations. There is evidence from outside of policing that supports this and suggests that leadership support is critical for implementation success and for organisational change. The Police Uplift Programme may be an important opportunity to do this, as it is intended to increase capacity and capability in key roles.

Furthermore, chief constables should ensure that priorities and strategic decisions take account of, and do not negatively affect, investigators' capacity to conduct thorough and effective investigations. Ensuring that there is adequate resourcing to meet demand is essential to the implementation of these guidelines. Chief constables should also ensure that investigators have the capability to conduct the investigations they are allocated. They should ensure that investigators receive the appropriate learning and development and level of training, as well as time to do refresher training if necessary and time for CPD relevant to their role. This requires investigators having professional development plans, linked to their PDRs, that include core investigative skills. Chief constables should also ensure that appropriate support, tools, guidance, information and subject matter advice from peers are easily identifiable and accessible. Practitioner evidence suggested that investigators found attachments to other areas of the organisation to be beneficial. Chief constables should ensure that opportunities to develop skills and knowledge in relation to fast-moving areas, such as digital intelligence and investigative techniques, are regularly reviewed. Reasonable adjustments should be made where necessary, to enable better use of skills and retention of individuals in investigative roles.

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<sup>5</sup> See the College of Policing [Chief Constable](#) rank profile for more information.

Chief constables should create a supportive environment that promotes a culture of learning and reflective practice in investigations. This, in turn, is likely to improve decision-making in, and outcomes of, investigations. The Independent Office for Police Conduct's [Learning the Lessons](#) reports may be useful to chief constables, as they highlight key factors of where investigations failed and how these can be improved. The committee also felt that positive messages, success stories and lessons should drive improvements. A greater emphasis on learning rather than blame was considered important for this, as were effective feedback loops. Chief constables should also ensure performance approaches don't drive perverse incentives. The committee emphasised the importance of chief constables supporting their force to adopt more qualitative measures of success. They also felt it was important for investigators to be assessed on the best outcomes for the individual case, not just on whether cases go to court or result in a conviction (see [guideline 1](#)).

## Supporting resources

- [↗ Guiding principles for organisational leadership](#)
- [↗ Strategic Command Course](#)
- [↗ Police Uplift Programme - All Together Better | Uplift Hub](#)
- [↗ Learning the Lessons | Independent Office for Police Conduct](#)
- [↗ PEQF initial entry routes, in particular the Detective Degree-Holder Entry Programme](#)
- [↗ Professionalising Investigations Programme](#)
- [↗ Positive action guidance](#)
- [↗ Policing in England and Wales: Future operating environment 2040](#)
- [↗ Discovery report into workplace adjustments](#)

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## 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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