Learning the lessons

Using the best available research to identify patterns, understand the risks to safety, identify learning needs and assess training delivery.

First published 1 August 2020

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5 mins read

Guideline - learning the lessons

Chief constables should ensure forces take an evidence-based approach to developing and maintaining officer and staff skills in the non-physical aspects of conflict management, use of force and personal safety.

Existing data should be used where available. These may include:

- data on use of force, assaults against the police, and police/public injuries
- root cause analysis
- post-incident debriefs.

Evidence summary

The evidence review found limited empirical evidence. Officers and staff said, however, there was room to improve personal safety training. They felt insufficient time was spent training non-physical skills. They were also concerned about reductions in the amount of time spent on physical skills, how often personal safety was taught and its perceived inconsistency. The guideline committee also highlighted existing data sources that forces could use to identify areas for skill development and to help ensure training was fit for purpose.

Evidence base

Empirical evidence

Limited

Practitioner evidence

Available

Analysing data

By carrying out exploratory analysis of their data to identify patterns, forces should be better placed to understand the risks to safety, identify learning needs and assess training delivery. Routine analysis like this will help forces to make better use of limited training time, prioritise the most important training content and improve training delivery.

Data analysis may also help forces to identify the officers and staff who are at the greatest risk of being assaulted, using force or causing injury, so that support can be better targeted and help improve the police response to these issues.

Evidence-based approach

Evidence-based policing is an approach in which officers and staff use the best available evidence to inform and challenge policing policy and practice.

- **See more on evidence-based policing on the What Works Centre**
- In the context of managing conflict, this approach might involve forces using formal post-incident debriefs and root-cause analysis systematically to identify and learn lessons from incidents and near-misses. And analysing their data on use of force incidents, assaults against the police and police/public injuries to understand better the risks to officers, staff and the public

Data on use of force, assaults against the police, and police/public injuries

Forces have been collecting data on the police use of force for several years, but not in a consistent way. Following a call for greater transparency by the Home Secretary in 2014, the National Police Chiefs' Council carried out a review of forces' recording practices and proposed a nationally consistent approach. This resulted, from April 2017, in forces agreeing to collect and publish the same data on the use of force. The agreed dataset includes, for example, details on injuries to officers/staff and citizens sustained during use of force incidents. In addition, forces may also gather other data on assaults against officers and staff. These data on use of force, assaults and police/public injuries should enable forces and their partners to assess the use and impact of different use of force techniques, and develop a stronger evidence base on the effectiveness of

training, tactics and equipment. Forces may develop a more rounded assessment of these issues by looking at other data (eg, from complaints and post-incident procedures following death and serious injury).

Root-cause analysis

It is important for forces to learn lessons from adverse events or near-misses if they are to prevent similar things happening again. **Root-cause analysis** is a formal process used in the NHS to identify the factors that contributed to an incident in which patient safety was compromised.

- **See the root-cause analysis process from the NHS**

The aim is to identify ways to improve rather than hold anyone to account for what they did or did not do. This type of approach is intended to be:

- open and transparent
- preventative of recurrences
- objective
- focused on weaknesses in the system
- proportionate to the incident
- timely and responsive
- collaborative

Post-incident debriefs

Formal debriefs after incidents or near-misses can help to identify notable practice and areas for improvement by allowing officers and staff to reflect on what happened during those incidents and any learning from them. Debriefs can be used to:

- highlight issues regarding operational performance of a team or individual officers/staff members
- help understand what happened, why and what could have been done differently
- prevent mistakes recurring
- identify issues with stress and wellbeing among officers and staff
- help officers and staff share intelligence and other information, and to raise any concerns.

Tags

Evidence-based policing   Knowledge sharing   Conflict management