

Command structure and role profiles

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 23 October 2013 Updated 8 June 2023

Written by College of Policing

21 mins read

Command team

Forces should ensure that appropriately trained and accredited public order public safety (POPS) commanders and public order public safety advisers (POPSAs) are deployed to manage spontaneous and pre-planned POPS events and operations. POPS commanders should regard themselves as part of the overall POPS command team when deployed to an event.

In the context of events or operations, the term 'command team' includes the:

- gold (strategic) commander
- silver (tactical) commander
- bronze (operational) commander
- POPSAs

Where forces have loggists supporting the command team at a POPS event or operation, they are also considered part of the command team.

Training

Force strategic leads for POPS – officers of at least the rank of assistant chief constable or equivalent, such as Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) commander rank – should ensure that POPS trained staff fully satisfy the training and accreditation or reaccreditation requirements for the POPS roles. Police forces are required to have robust systems in place to monitor compliance and to ensure that POPS staff are sufficiently experienced in policing a variety of events.

POPS commanders and POPSAs must attend their initial training at a College of Policing licensed POPS command centre. They should receive support and mentoring from their force prior to attending the relevant courses, during their operational assessment phase and during their

subsequent annual reaccreditation.

Further information is also contained in the [standards, training, equipment and resources on College Learn](#) (you will need to log in).

Portfolios and assessor standards

National POPS command portfolios and POPS assessor standards can be found through the following on College Learn (you will need to log in).

- [Gold \(strategic\) POPS command portfolio](#)
- [Silver \(tactical\) POPS command portfolio](#)
- [Bronze \(operational\) POPS command portfolio](#)
- [POPSA portfolio](#)
- [POPS assessor and internal verifier standards](#)

Structure

All POPS commanders must consider the use of POPSAs and seek their specialist advice at every phase of the POPS event or operation. Where POPSA advice is not required or is not readily available, the POPS commander should document their rationale as to why they did not, or were unable to, access the POPSAs' advice.

The POPS event or operation command structure should be appropriate and resilient to meet the requirements of the event. This may require the addition of other command roles, such as investigation, community, custody or media. Where included in the command structure, their role should be clearly outlined as well as who they report to.

When determining a POPS command structure, consideration should be given to where POPS commanders and POPSAs will be located during the event. Gold, silver and bronze commanders should not be located together while performing their relevant command roles other than for the purposes of briefing and/or debriefing.

POPS commanders must be able to maintain and perform their specific command role during an event or operation (strategic, tactical and operational). There are potential risks of locating POPS commanders in the same venue, which need to be considered and catered for during the

operations planning phase.

Consideration should also be given to the location of POPS commanders for the duration of the event. Where possible, POPS commanders should not be located together in the event control room, as there is a risk of losing command and control if that location is compromised (for example, as a result of the venue having to be evacuated). The planning process should include maintaining suitable space and distance between the relevant POPS commanders.

If a force wishes to deviate from the relevant national POPS standards, that decision and the associated risk should be underwritten by the force chief officer or assistant chief officer. The chief officer then indirectly accepts the associated risk on behalf of their force.

The role of a POPS commander can be found in the role profiles section. Further information should be read in conjunction with the [Operations APP](#).

Role profiles

All POPS positions and roles have specific role profiles assigned to them. Police forces should ensure they have enough officers trained and accredited at each role to fulfil their specific policing requirements, including the ability to mobilise suitably trained and accredited staff.

Deployment of POPS resources should be in line with the relevant POPS role profiles to allow forces to police the event or operation, and to prevent the identified risks and threats of the event or operation.

The National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC) provides [national guidance on the specific role profiles associated with POPS events and operations](#) (you will need to log in to College Learn). The guidance covers:

- gold (strategic) POPS commander
- silver (tactical) POPS commander
- bronze (operational) POPS commander
- POPSA
- police support unit (PSU) commander
- Level 3 trained officer
- Level 2 trained officer
- Level 2 (Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)) trained officer

- PSU carrier driver
- police liaison team (PLT) officer
- forward intelligence team (FIT) officer
- evidence gathering team (EGT) officer
- protestor removal trained (PRT) officer
- attenuating energy projectile operator
- mounted officer
- dog handler
- national police public order tactical trainer
- POPS planner
- dedicated football officer (DFO)
- operational football officer (OFO)

Roles of POPS commanders and POPSAs

Gold POPS commanders

The gold strategy is the foundation on which all subsequent planning and deployment rely. The gold commander's leadership ability and strategic oversight are, therefore, critical to the successful planning and deployment of an operation.

Role and responsibilities

The gold POPS commander:

- is responsible and accountable for the policing of the event or operation
- determines and sets the strategic objectives
- retains strategic oversight and overall command responsibility throughout the operation
- sets the tactical parameters of the operation but does not manage tactical decision making – this is the silver commander's responsibility
- sets, reviews, communicates and updates the strategy based on the threat assessment and available intelligence
- in response to a spontaneous incident, develops a working strategy into a formal strategy
- consults stakeholders when determining the strategy, including partner agencies and community groups as appropriate

- writes the strategy for the incident or operation and ensures that it is documented to provide a clear audit trail, which includes any changes to that strategy
- chairs the strategic coordinating group (SCG) where there is a multi-agency response to an incident or operation, although this responsibility may be delegated to another agency, depending on the nature of the operation
- ensures that, where appropriate, POPS command protocols are set, agreed and understood by all relevant parties
- considers consulting a POPSA
- considers setting tactical parameters for the police response, which may include outcomes (preferred, acceptable, unacceptable)
- should not be drawn into making tactical-level decisions
- has, within the command structure, overall responsibility for health and safety, diversity, equality and human rights compliance and ensures that relevant impact assessments are completed
- identifies the level of support needed to resolve the incident or operation and resources the police response
- is responsible for the development of a media plan

Responsibilities to the silver commander

The gold commander:

- remains available to the silver commander and suitably located to maintain effective strategic command by ensuring that appropriate communication mechanisms exist
- reviews and ensures the resilience and effectiveness of the command team, identifies the force requirement for mutual aid support, and ensures the effectiveness of the silver commander
- approves the silver commander's tactical plan and ensures that it meets the strategic objective for the incident or operation on an ongoing basis
- decides whether the incident or operation should be declared as a critical incident (declaration and management responsibility fall to the silver commander)

National coordination

When there are large-scale operations that span multiple force areas, there may be a requirement for coordination of response at a national level. While each separate force operation will have its

own force-level gold commander, a national coordinator may be appointed to ensure consistency of approach at the national level and between the force gold commanders.

The national coordinator:

- will enable improved situational awareness
- will enable the alignment of forces and national functions
- will ensure effective engagement with relevant central government departments
- may set a bespoke national strategy for a collective response to an incident or event
- may oversee mutual aid and the activation of any relevant national contingency plans

The national coordinator will be supported by the National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC).

The appointment of a national coordinator does not remove responsibilities from a force gold commander, who will retain responsibility for local command and response, in accordance with the Operations APP.

Silver POPS commander

The silver POPS commander develops, commands and coordinates the overall tactical response of an operation, in accordance with the strategic objectives set by the gold commander.

Role and responsibilities

The silver commander:

- establishes a command structure that is appropriate to the circumstances and sufficiently resilient and robust to achieve the strategy
- provides the pivotal command chain link between bronze commanders and the gold commander
- assesses the available information and intelligence to properly evaluate the threat, vulnerabilities and risk
- remains suitably located to maintain effective tactical command of the incident or operation
- ensures that all decisions and rationale are documented in the command log
- ensures that, where appropriate, all staff involved in the operation are briefed and debriefed
- considers the wider community, public safety and evidential implications of using certain tactics
- manages and coordinates, where required, multi-agency resources and activities
- ensures that any deployment is proportionate with the level of threat faced

- ensures that threat and risk, and impact assessment(s) are completed where appropriate
- consults a POPSA, throughout all phases of the operation (including initial planning phases) or as soon as practicable, and remains responsible for any decisions made following consultation with the adviser
- considers the assignment of adequate medical support
- considers the need for operational parameters
- considers control room requirements and the communications structure for the event
- coordinates the operational plans of bronze commanders

Links between bronze commanders and gold commander

The silver POPS commander works closely with the gold commander and bronze commander(s) and:

- develops reviews and coordinates the tactical plan to achieve the gold commander's strategy within any tactical parameters set
- tests the gold commander's strategy to ensure it is achievable and proportionate to the threat faced
- tasks and coordinates the bronze commander(s) in accordance with the tactical plan
- ensures that any changes to the tactical plan are communicated to the bronze commander(s) and, where appropriate, the gold commander
- ensures that the tactics employed by the bronze commander(s) meet the strategic intention and tactical plan
- where appropriate and in communication with the gold commander, declares and manages the operation as a critical incident
- sets the working strategy, including any appropriate tactical parameters, where a gold commander is not yet in place
- maintains objectivity so as not to become drawn into bronze decision making

Bronze POPS commander

Role and responsibilities

The bronze commander:

- possesses clear understanding of the gold commander's strategy, the silver commander's tactical plan and their own role within it
- tests the silver commander's tactical plan to ensure it is achievable and proportionate to the threat faced
- implements the relevant part of the silver commander's plan by using appropriate tactics within their geographical/functional area of responsibility
- develops a deployment plan relevant to the geographical or functional role
- makes decisions within their agreed level of responsibility, which includes seeking approval for any variation in agreed tactics
- where circumstances change, tests the silver commander's tactical plan to ensure it is achievable and proportionate
- ensures staff within their area of responsibility are briefed and understand their role, responsibilities and limits
- updates the silver commander on any changes, including any variation in agreed tactics within their geographical/functional area of responsibility
- remains suitably located to maintain effective operational command of their area of responsibility and remains available to those under their command. Bronze commanders should, however, ensure that those carrying out tasks have sufficient independence to conduct their specific role in accordance with the strategy and tactical plan
- communicates and coordinates with other bronze commanders as appropriate
- ensures that all operational decisions made are documented in a command log, to ensure that a clear audit trail exist
- ensures deployments of PSUs are aligned to the deployment plan and overarching tactical plan
- maximises opportunities to delegate areas of responsibility to unit commanders in line with their deployments, providing they are able and competent to do so

POPSA

POPSAs are nationally trained and accredited to provide advice based on the role performed by POPS commanders. POPSAs are trained and accredited to work with the full range of the POPS command structure, including gold. The decision and rationale for not using a POPSA during the planning and operational phase should be recorded.

Although decision making rests with the commander, POPSA's are responsible for providing appropriate, valid and reasonable advice.

Key functions

POPSA's provide knowledge on a wide range of issues relating to POPS tactics and associated considerations (including legislative considerations) and the potential outcomes. Key functions of the POPSA include providing:

- advice, including theoretical outcomes, to support command decision making
- up-to-date knowledge on POPS legislation, national/regional policy and standards for operational practice
- advice on contingency planning, and ensuring Bronze commanders have up-to-date information on gold and silver decision making
- support with risk assessments

Where there is a multi-agency event, POPS commanders and planners should adopt the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\) Joint Doctrine](#).

Tags

Public order