

# Building investigative capability and capacity

Guideline for chief constables to support effective investigations.

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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 and performance indicators, including investigative outcomes
- 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 manage individual workloads, as well as meet demand
- 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 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 openminded to new information, generating fewer hypotheses, not pursuing all lines of enquiry and moving earlier from a deliberative to an implemental mindset (Gollwitzer PM, 1990). One study identified the impact of performance indicators on behaviour in specific circumstances.

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 [Taking responsibility for your professional development](#)).

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

### **Empirical evidence**

Moderate

### **Practitioner evidence**

Available

## **How chief constables can build capability and capacity**

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 (see the [chief constable rank profile](#) for more information)

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.

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. This includes considering investigations and investigators' capacity post-charge.

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 continuing professional development (CPD) relevant to their role. This requires investigators having professional development plans, linked to their professional development reviews (PDRs), that include core investigative skills.

Chief constables should also take steps to 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.

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 [Understanding the process, your role and obligations](#)).

## Supporting resources

- [Guiding principles for organisational leadership](#)
- [Effective supervision guidelines](#)
- [Learning the Lessons – Independent Office for Police Conduct](#)
- [Police constable 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](#)

## Reference

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.

## Tags

Investigation   Managing investigations