

Career development guiding principles

Guidance to support good practice in career development within forces.

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About the guiding principles

These guiding principles for career development can support professional development in forces. They can be used by force leads in human resources, organisational development and learning and development to:

- create policies, procedures and practices
- understand their responsibilities in developing employees

The guiding principles include:

- high-level ideas to influence decision making across the police service about career development
- recommendations that embrace and support differences across forces
- recommendations that help to identify shareable good practice

We've also developed an [organisational diagnostic tool](#) to help forces implement the guiding principles and support continuous improvement.

Evidence base

Front Line Review

The [Home Office Front Line Review \(2019\)](#) invited police officers and staff to share their career experiences, as well as ideas for improvement and change in the service.

Key findings relating to career development included:

- 'a general feeling that frontline officers and staff feel undervalued by the wider policing system'
- 'a feeling that the front line is not afforded sufficient time or space for activities that positively impact on their wellbeing, such as training and development'

- ‘a feeling that the front line is not afforded sufficient time with line managers for support, personal development and performance reviews’
- ‘a feeling that there is a lack of awareness and transparency in the national learning and development offer for the front line’
- ‘a view that the current approach to recruiting and developing talent is not fit for purpose’

Focus groups

We hosted a series of focus groups with officers and staff. The purpose was to discuss their career development experiences and better understand the findings within the Front Line Review.

Throughout the focus groups, individuals spoke about their career development challenges and successes.

Our findings were consistent with the Front Line Review. We were told that the police service needed a more joined-up approach to career development. We were also told that police forces and the College needed to do more to help individuals achieve their career aspirations.

Creating the principles

To create and review the principles, we used:

- our evidence base from the focus groups
- findings from the [Home Office Front Line Review](#)
- research from other sectors
- anecdotal evidence from forces across England and Wales

Guiding principles for career development

The guiding principles are as follows.

We make sure:

- career advice is available to all
- career development opportunities are transparent and fair
- all forms of knowledge, skills and experience are valued

We use:

- professional development reviews (PDRs) to underpin and support career development
- our time for career development wisely

We recognise:

- every officer, staff member and volunteer role contributes to policing
- every career is different
- the importance of career path flexibility

We make sure career advice is available to all

Our research showed the following challenges in forces.

- Individuals found it difficult to get contacts or information from their line manager about how to progress into their next role. This was especially difficult for those in a different specialism.
- Line managers said they didn't have the information they needed to support individuals with career advice. This was especially difficult for those who had not worked in the same area personally. They said it normally came down to whether they had contacts around the force that they could signpost the individual to.

Forces should ensure that individuals have access to information and career advice from every force department. This could be in the form of a directory or similar resource. This approach supports line managers in signposting to career advice.

The College can also help forces by providing resources for career advice more widely in policing. This has begun through the development of [policing career pathways](#) and [police constable entry routes](#) which include opportunities for early career constables to explore specialist roles first hand.

We make sure career development opportunities are transparent and fair

Individuals are reassured when policing organisations advertise opportunities for everyone to see. These include:

- vacancies
- acting or temporary selection processes
- training courses
- other career development opportunities

Lateral development opportunities are seen as valuable progression opportunities for many individuals – even where there is no change in rank or pay. We should continue to ensure that selection processes for these roles also align with the guiding principle of transparency and fairness.

Individuals felt they performed at their best during interviews and selection processes when the assessment criteria was published ahead of time. This allowed them time to prepare.

They also felt reassured when the people assessing them for a role or opportunity were trained in making objective decisions against clear criteria.

There has been much debate about gathering endorsement from line managers for future career opportunities. We found that individuals felt processes were fair when they were sponsored by a manager or leader that knew them well. Sometimes this will not be their line manager.

We make sure all forms of knowledge, skills and experience are valued

Individuals often have skills from outside of policing, especially those who have had other careers before joining the police.

A possible barrier to career development is the absence of recognition of existing skills in areas such as first aid, cyber or digital, legal practice and investigation.

Where possible, individuals want formal recognition for learning they have undertaken. Ideally this is in the form of qualifications. However, sometimes this is not possible due to the size of the learning programme.

Individuals can be signposted to the [College's recognition of prior learning \(RPL\) process](#) to ensure they receive academic credit against any future higher education programmes they wish to undertake. Forces can also use RPL as a mechanism to recognise learning undertaken by

individuals in previous roles. For example, when individuals move from being a police community support officer (PCSO) or special constable to a constable.

Individuals spoke of their development in terms of courses and other formal learning opportunities. However, educational research tells us that 70% of what we learn happens through experience and also through teaching others.

There is a need to recognise and use these informal learning opportunities and think more creatively about how people are enabled to learn and develop.

We use professional development reviews to underpin and support career development

We found that professional development reviews (PDRs) were not regularly included as part of a job application or promotions process.

Individuals felt there was an opportunity for the work they showcased in their PDR to be used in progression and promotion opportunities. Forces that use PDRs as part of these processes see higher engagement levels with PDRs versus those that don't.

We have produced [PDR guidance](#) to help ensure PDRs are not tick box exercises. With the right investment, PDRs can be effective tools for individuals to capture their development and progress laterally or vertically within the service.

We use our time for career development wisely

From the chief constable to the newest recruit, forces should find better ways to help individuals make time for continuing professional development (CPD), performance conversations and other valuable career development activity.

Among the officers and staff we spoke to, not having enough time was cited as the biggest barrier to career progression.

Some forces have already started tackling this problem. For example, through learning budgets for individuals to develop through both courses and informal activity, such as attachments to other departments.

These initiatives are successful when forces try to ensure everyone receives equal career development opportunities – even in roles and departments that are subjected to significant peaks in demand.

Many agree that the vast majority of time that officers and staff dedicate to their CPD should be during working hours. However, police officers and staff recognised that to progress within the service, they would need to undertake professional development activities outside of their working hours.

We recognise every officer, staff member and volunteer role contributes to policing

We heard from many individuals who felt their own roles – especially operational staff roles – were sometimes not given as much recognition as roles held by police officers.

Additionally, many response officers were looking for wider recognition of the specialist skills they have acquired and the varied role they perform.

We know that when employees feel valued and are treated fairly, they are more productive and have a better relationship with the organisation.

We recognise every career is different

Many professions have a set career pathway for individuals, with a clearly defined start and end point. We recognise that this is not the case in policing. Career pathways in policing are often varied and constantly changing, especially as innovations in technology change the nature of policing roles.

There is a fundamental need for police forces to help individuals make sense of their own unique and aspirational pathways.

For individuals, knowing their force's plans for the future can also help them plan their CPD, prepare for their next role, or change their plans if they are no longer possible.

We recognise the importance of career path flexibility

Like any organisation, a force will be limited by how many individuals can progress into higher ranks or specialist roles.

Career advice has traditionally stemmed from phrases such as 'follow your dreams'. [An article in the Harvard Business Review](#) discusses some of the myths behind traditional career advice and how individuals can thrive outside of their comfort zone. Indeed, many of our focus group participants spoke about how they never imagined themselves in their current role.

However, career planning is vital for individuals to have a realistic picture of their career prospects. This planning process should be consultative and agile, with options and contingencies built in.

Organisational diagnostic tool for career development

The organisational diagnostic tool can help forces measure how effectively they are using the guiding principles for career development. It was developed for force leads in human resources, organisational development and learning and development.

The tool can help forces to:

- identify strengths and gaps in processes and practices
- develop a consistent approach to career development

To access the tool, please email professionaldevelopment@college.police.uk

Tags

Career pathways Leadership development