

An exploration into how frontline uniform police officers in the UK make decisions

Investigating the relationship between the ability to reflect and the quality of decision making. Does the ability to reflect improve frontline uniform police officer decisions making?

Key details

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| Police region | North West |
| Level of research | PhD |
| Project start date | January 2022 |
| Date due for completion | December 2026 |

Research context

This research aims to improve current understanding of how frontline uniform police officers make decisions, and whether the development of reflective practice (RP) can improve those decisions.

RP is an area of research with significant traction in non-policing professions, such as healthcare and education, with evidence of how decision making (DM) is enhanced.

Background

- Initial responders have a disproportionate impact upon incident outcomes and the trust and confidence felt by the public.

- There is a significant volume of decisions in frontline uniform policing, with comparatively low levels of preparation and development for critical decision-makers compared to other specialist policing roles.
- The current College of Policing review of the [Code of Ethics](#) (CoE) recognises that the CoE is not embedded in police DM as it should be.
- DM in policing has not been exhaustively researched and RP has yet to be examined within the context of policing.
- Policing culture can inhibit independent and critical thinking and this research will examine what factors could encourage and preserve its development.
- Policing is built upon good reasoning and judgement which requires a high degree of reflexivity. A formalised approach to RP in policing could support the resolution of those multi-layered, highly contextualised challenges that are faced by police officers every day.

Anticipated output and impact

- Enhanced understanding of DM among frontline uniform officers.
- Development of higher intellectual processes associated with RP.
- Enhanced engagement with the Code of Ethics.
- Development of a low-cost, effective training intervention for enhanced DM.

Research methodology

This research will be conducted in four phases:

1. Examination of the literature in relation to DM and RP.
2. An anonymous survey will collect information from serving police officers in frontline uniform roles and those in specialist areas, that will enable an audit and a comparison of approaches to DM.
3. An analysis of current policing DM practices and the contribution of experts from the fields of policing, DM, RP and ethics to create a training intervention, designed to enhance individual

DM.

4. Test the impact of the RP training intervention upon the DM of uniform frontline police officers in controlled circumstances.

Research participation

- Any serving police officers in any role willing to respond to a survey to investigate their approach to decision making and their practice of reflection within their professional role.
- Any police officer in a frontline uniform operational role who would be willing to participate in a test of the application of reflective practice techniques upon their decision making.

For further information please [email the researcher](#).