

Police research priorities

Identifying areas to target new research in policing.

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Police research priorities (PRP) identifies areas where new knowledge and understanding is required to help deliver improvements in policing and better protect the public from harm.

Bringing together what we know about the perennial challenges facing policing and the gaps in our understanding about what works to tackle them, we have identified a series of specific areas where new knowledge is needed.

- [Go to further reading for more information](#)

The extent to which new evidence in these areas will help to deliver the government's [Safer Streets](#) mission has helped us to further prioritise the key questions that need answering. Answering the resulting set of research questions contained in this strategy will help to focus our national research effort on the areas and types of research of greatest interest and benefit to policing, the community safety sector and the general public as a whole.

The PRP can be used by academic institutions and research funding bodies to:

- prioritise their research agendas and those of police and academic collaborations
- select topics/questions for research and the focus of master's and PhD theses

The policing sector can use the PRP to:

- decide where to focus investment to build the evidence base
- support decision making related to academic bids for funding or studentships
- direct bursaries to tackle existing challenges

Developing the PRP

The control strategy was developed through an iterative process of evidence gathering and consensus checking to arrive at a comprehensive set of priority research questions for the sector. The main steps in the process are summarised below.

Step one: Understanding the policing problems that need answers

Step one involved reaching a collective and comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing policing and arriving at an agreed set of problem areas where what works research could be of real benefit.

The main sources used to identify the challenges were as follows.

- The College's 'perennial challenges': First developed in 2018 (refreshed in 2022), the perennial challenges are a set of recurring issues in policing that require improvement. It was built using thematic analysis of recurring national-level recommendations from [His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#) inspections and other reviews, together with qualitative sense checking in forces. Each perennial problem identifies a deep-seated systemic issue along with the underlying contributory factors that create the necessary conditions for the problem to exist. Each perennial problem is presented as an influence diagram that provides a visual map of the contributory factors throughout the layers of the system – from active failures at the sharp end to latent conditions in the upper echelons of the system. This enables more carefully targeted solutions to be developed.
- Insight provided by the National Police Chiefs' Council's (NPCC) coordination committees, on the emerging and longstanding challenges facing policing.

Using the problems identified by both the perennial challenges and insight from the NPCC, a series of 'what works' research questions have been developed. Where the problems do not lend themselves to what works questions, these have been excluded.

Step two: Understanding the existing evidence base

Step two involved a rigorous scan of the existing evidence base to understand whether and to what extent existing solutions to these problems had been implemented, tested and found to be effective. A new [policing interventions evidence gap map](#) was commissioned and used as one of the main sources to identify existing evidence alongside our own [crime reduction toolkit](#), the College [research projects map](#) and the [Youth Endowment Fund toolkit](#). The new evidence gap map (EGM) was built using the existing [Global Policing Database](#) (GPD) as the source for existing studies.

Any randomised controlled trials (RCTs) or systematic reviews published between 2006 and 2021 were extracted from the database and included in the map. This process resulted in a total of 943 studies (669 RCTs and 274 systematic reviews) being included. The resulting map identifies the most current and best available impact evidence and can be used to help identify where there are key gaps in policing research.

However, it should be noted that the policing interventions EGM does not represent the totality of the evidence base. Only RCTs and systematic reviews are included in the map and there may be other research that does not meet these criteria. For example, there may be qualitative or quasi-experimental research in areas that appear to be evidence gaps.

It is also important to note that there may be research relevant to crime reduction outcomes where the police are not directly involved. This could include, for example, studies about preventing reoffending that are undertaken in prison settings. These studies would also not be captured in the map as they do not meet the police involvement criteria of the GPD.

Step three: Identifying key gaps in the evidence base

Step three involved mapping the evidence base to the priority problems to understand key gaps. A score was applied to each problem area to help illustrate the state of the evidence base, highlighting areas where little or no evaluative evidence existed and new research investment could be of greatest benefit and should be prioritised.

The scale used is set out in the table below.

Scale	Extent of existing evaluative evidence
6	Significant relevant evidence found, including a relevant systematic review (over 10 studies)
5	Significant relevant evidence found in map – no systematic review (over 10 studies)
4	Significant evidence found in map but relevance to the specific question is unclear

Scale	Extent of existing evaluative evidence
3	Limited relevant evidence found in map (1 to 10 studies)
2	Limited evidence found in map but relevance to specific question is not clear
1	No relevant evidence found in evidence gap map (EGM)

Step four: Developing research questions to fill the gaps

Step four involved an iterative series of question development and refinement to arrive at a comprehensive set of research questions that would help to address known gaps. Based on the existing evidence base and the priority given to the policing problem, the questions have then been given a priority score.

Step five: Developing question banks

Step five involved corralling the high priority questions into a series of question banks focused on key areas of interest. The question banks are designed to support the user to navigate the question set according to their area of research interest or current priority.

The question banks are organised around the core policing capabilities that require general improvement, as well as specific capability improvements that are required for the effective delivery of the [Safer Streets](#) mission. These capabilities are:

- [developing the workforce capability and raising standards](#)
- [making better use of resources](#)
- [crime prevention](#)
- [effective investigation](#)
- [risk identification and management](#)
- [response and victim care](#)

Improvement in these capabilities will enable policing to effectively deliver against the Safer Streets mission, areas which are as follows.

- Trust and confidence in policing.
- Violence against women and girls.
- Knife crime and serious violence.
- Anti-social behaviour.

Maintenance

The PRP has been produced based on problems identified through the problem book process in 2023/24 and the perennial problems refreshed in 2022. The priority research areas will evolve over time. This presentation of them needs to be refreshed on a regular basis to take account of future threats, changing technology and the developing evidence base of what works in policing and crime reduction.

Question banks organised around capabilities

Capability question bank one: Developing the workforce capability and raising standards

Improving core capability and raising standards across the workforce

What works to:

- improve organisational learning?
- embed and improve leadership at all levels in policing?
- embed and improve good supervision at all levels in policing?
- support supervisors to challenge unacceptable behaviour?
- ensure officers, staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to reduce crime, improve investigations, protect the public and bring offenders to justice?
- encourage officers and staff to reach their full potential and aspire to the highest ranks/grades?
- improve the quality of volume crime investigations?
- improve retention and progression at all levels?
- improve the wellbeing of police officers and staff?
- improve the capacity and capability of policing to undertake analysis?

- improve the data literacy of police officers and staff?

Improving capability and raising standards in relation to public trust and confidence

What works to:

- improve organisational culture?
- support officers and staff, including supervisors, to challenge unacceptable behaviours/attitudes?
- ensure ethical decision-making and standards of behaviour by police officers?
- improve the management of misconduct investigations?
- reduce disproportionality in the complaints and misconduct processes?
- increase the understanding of officers in relation to disparities in the lived experience of police engagement?
- ensure officer and staff behaviour improves public trust and confidence?
- improve workforce representation?
- help in using technology such as body-worn camera footage and other data to supervise and provide scrutiny of police behaviour?

Improving capability and raising standards in relation to violence against women and girls (VAWG)

What works to:

- improve organisational culture and reduce misogyny in the police and ensure the prioritisation of VAWG offences?
- ensure police powers (including protective orders) are used and managed appropriately?
- improve the quality and standards of investigations for VAWG offences including rape and serious sexual offences?
- improve outcomes for domestic abuse victims?
- improve understanding of complex crime such as child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE), female genital mutilation (FGM) and honour-based abuse?
- improve skill and knowledge acquisition in specialist CSAE roles?
- improve CSAE investigation outcomes?
- increase the successful prosecution of stalking perpetrators?
- support the wellbeing of officers working on high harm cases, for example CSAE, domestic abuse?

- prevent compassion fatigue in relation to VAWG offences?

Improving capability and raising standards in relation to knife crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)

What works to:

- ensure police powers are used appropriately to manage offenders and reduce serious violence?
- better identify areas where bias/inequality is present in the approach to young people at risk of/involved in serious violence?
- improve multi-agency/partnership working in reducing ASB?
- improve the knowledge and skills of officers and staff in the use of civil orders, protection orders and bail conditions to protect vulnerable people?

Capability question bank two: Making better use of resources

Improving use of resource across forces

What works to:

- standardise the recording of data?
- improve the use of performance management in policing?
- predict future demand?
- improve the cost benefit analysis of policing activities and interventions?
- shift resources towards primary prevention activity rather than a focus on reactive demand?
- encourage the use of data-driven analysis and evidence to inform and direct policing activity to transform efforts to cut crime, reduce demand and provide a better service to the public?
- improve data quality, including technological solutions?
- improve the analysis and processing of data, including technological solutions?
- improve the sharing of data, including technological solutions?
- harness the power of technology and innovation to secure efficiencies, improve learning and development, and free up officers and staff on the front line?
- most effectively deliver the best possible learning without compromising operational capacity?
- improve processes in police custody, including technological solutions?

- improve the use of effective alternatives to custody by police practitioners to reduce reoffending and provide justice for victims?
- improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the processing of digital evidence?
- better understand the demand coming through contact management centres?
- improve the analysis of demand, including technological solutions?
- support the management of demand in contact management centres, including technological solutions?

Improving use of resources related to public trust and confidence

What works to:

- more consistently measure disproportionality systematically and centrally?
- gather reliable data on public trust and confidence at a local level?
- improve vetting, including technological solutions?
- keep victims, witnesses and suspects updated about their case effectively and efficiently?

Improving use of resources related to violence against women and girls (VAWG)

What works to:

- improve VAWG hotspot identification, including in the night-time economy?
- improve reporting of VAWG offences?
- automate aspects of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) investigations through the use of technology? improve the use of digital forensics in VAWG investigations?
- improve the identification of risk of VAWG offences?
- improve the identification of risk in VAWG offences through the use of technology?
- improve the assessment of risk of CSAE through the use of technology?
- improve sex offender risk assessment through the use of technology?
- improve victim satisfaction in VAWG cases?
- improve communication with victims about the progress of cases, including the use of technology?

Improving use of resources related to knife crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)

What works to:

- predict future knife crime hotspots?

- improve the analysis of serious violence and knife crime data to target resources better?
- improve data sharing related to serious violence?
- improve the quality of recorded police data on knife crime?
- improve risk assessments of knife crime offenders and those at risk of becoming involved in knife crime, including through the use of technology?
- predict ASB hotspots?
- support and encourage industry partners to develop security standards?
- ensure that criminal use of innovation is considered and designed out at the earliest point?
- reduce criminal exploitation of internet-enabled goods and other technological innovation?

Capability question bank three: Crime prevention

Improving core prevention capability

What works to:

- improve long-term problem solving?
- ensure appropriate analysis capacity and capability in forces to support problem-solving?
- predict future hotspots?
- improve the use of evidence-based interventions, such as restorative justice by policing?
- shift resources towards primary prevention activity rather than a reactive activity?
- aid early intervention?

Improving prevention capability related to public trust and confidence

What works to:

- make communities more cohesive and resilient?
- improve encounters between the police and children, young people and other vulnerable people?
- reduce disparities in police practices?
- improve the use of social media by policing?

Improving prevention capability related to violence against women and girls (VAWG)

What works to:

- reduce online VAWG offending?

- reduce stalking?
- reduce the sexual exploitation of children, including online exploitation?
- improve the safety of women in the night-time economy (NTE), including the use of situational and design tactics?
- improve VAWG hotspot identification, including in the NTE?
- improve organisational culture and reduce misogyny in the police?
- improve communications to increase safety in the NTE?
- improve reporting of VAWG offences?

Improving prevention capability related to knife crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)

What works to:

- improve the reporting of knife crime and serious violence?
- improve data sharing and fill evidence gaps related to serious (youth) violence?
- improve the analysis of serious violence data to target resources?
- prevent knife crime and serious violence offending and reoffending?
- understand the key elements of successful interventions to reduce knife crime?
- improve problem solving and long-term prevention activity?
- improve communication with the public around ASB and police activity?
- reduce ASB?
- reduce robberies, nuisance and fear enabled by e-scooter use?
- reduce theft of e-scooters and e-bikes?
- reduce ASB, including crime and disorder enabled by e-scooters, including design interventions?

Capability question bank four: Effective investigation

Improving core investigative capability

What works to:

- support the delivery of high-quality investigations with timely and effective outcomes?
- develop the required knowledge and skills to support and improving investigation quality?
- improve officers' use of digital forensic opportunities?
- improve the use of technologies such as ANPR in investigations?
- support the effective identification and analysis of malicious communications?

Improving investigative capability related to public trust and confidence

What works to:

- improve the management of misconduct investigations?
- reduce disproportionality in the complaints and misconduct processes?
- improve the use of body-worn camera footage and other data to supervise and provide scrutiny of police behaviour?

Improving investigative capability related to violence against women and girls (VAWG)

What works to:

- improve the quality and standards of VAWG investigations?
- improve victim support for the prosecution of domestic abuse?
- improve outcomes for victims of domestic abuse?
- improve child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) investigation outcomes?
- increase the successful prosecution of stalking perpetrators?
- improve skills and knowledge acquisition in specialist public protection, including CSEA roles?
- improve the use of digital forensics in VAWG investigations?
- automate aspects of CSAE investigations?

Improving investigative capability related to knife crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)

What works to:

- improve the intelligence and analysis of street gangs and serious organised crime groups?
- support policing to provide high-quality investigations with timely and effective outcomes for volume crime offences?

Capability question bank five: Risk identification and management

Improving core risk identification and management

What works to:

- identify and manage risk of harm from offenders to reduce reoffending?
- support those held in police custody to reduce reoffending?
- reduce reoffending while awaiting court?
- identify young people at risk of becoming involved in more serious offending and provide early intervention?
- improve the use of technology to support assessment of risk?
- improve data sharing to develop more accurate risk assessment?
- improve the use and effectiveness of out-of-court resolutions, protective orders and bail conditions to protect vulnerable people?
- improve early intervention and reduce the number of women entering the criminal justice system?
- ensure the safety of those entering and leaving custody effectively?
- improve the risk assessment for those entering and leaving custody?
- reduce the reoffending of those leaving police custody?
- improve the accuracy of risk assessments at first point of contact?

Improving investigative capability related to public trust and confidence

What works to:

- improve the accountability and transparency of police activity to the public?
- identify and respond to hot spots of public distrust?
- ensure officers use their powers lawfully, fairly and with respect?
- identify areas where bias/inequality is present?
- reduce police wrongdoing?
- improve vetting? How can technology support vetting?
- improve the use of data to identify trends in misconduct?
- improve the management of police misconduct investigations?

Improving investigative capability related to violence against women and girls (VAWG)

What works to:

- improve the identification of risk of VAWG offences?
- identify and support those at risk of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE)?
- reduce reoffending by VAWG perpetrators?

- reduce police perpetrated VAWG offences?
- ensure police powers, including protective orders, are used and managed appropriately to reduce reoffending and protect victims?
- improve the identification of risk of individuals committing VAWG, including through the use of technology?
- improve the identification of those at risk of stalking to provide targeted support and awareness?
- improve the assessment of risk of CSAE, including the use of technology?

Improving investigative capability related to knife crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)

What works to:

- identify risk of becoming involved in serious violence/knife carrying?
- improve the identification and management of repeat vulnerability for individuals and locations?
- reduce serious violence offending or reoffending?
- identify risk in offenders managed in the community?
- improve the effectiveness of electronic monitoring and does this vary by types of offenders?
- improve risk assessments of knife crime offenders and those at risk of becoming involved in knife crime, including technological solutions?
- improve the use and effectiveness of protective orders or conditions with knife crime offenders?

Capability question bank six: Response and victim care

Improving response and victim care

What works to:

- improve the response to calls to the police?
- improve the timeliness and accuracy of risk assessments of initial calls to the police?
- improve communication with victims?
- ensure officers and staff prioritise investigation and victim care?
- ensure that all victims are provided with a high-quality service and are effectively safeguarded?
- ensure that victims receive an effective and timely response to calls to the police?
- support the management of demand in contact management centres, including through the use of technology?
- effectively obtain feedback from victims?

Improving investigative capability related to public trust and confidence

What works to:

- increase the understanding of officers in relation to disparities in the lived experience of police engagement?
- improve victim satisfaction?

Improving investigative capability related to violence against women and girls (VAWG)

What works to:

- improve victim satisfaction in VAWG cases?
- improve the use and effectiveness of protective orders and conditions in protecting vulnerable people?
- improve communication with victims about the progress of cases, including through the use of technology?
- prevent compassion fatigue in relation to VAWG offences?
- improve police culture, reduce misogyny and ensure the prioritisation of VAWG offences?
- increase public/victim awareness of electronic tracking technology?

Improving investigative capability related to knife crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)

What works to:

- improve reporting of knife crime?
- improve police data on incidents involving knives?
- improve the effectiveness of protective orders and conditions in protecting vulnerable people?
- improve community trust and relations in areas with high levels of serious violence?

Further reading

- College of Policing. (2024). A thematic analysis of perennial challenges in policing.
- National Police Chiefs' Council. (2025). Policing problem book.

Useful links

- [Crime reduction toolkit](#)

- [Office of the Police Chief Scientific Adviser policing areas of research interest](#)
- [Policing interventions evidence gap map](#)
- [Research projects map](#)
- [Youth Endowment Foundation toolkit](#)

Tags

Crime reduction