

Roundtable meetings

An overview of the police leadership commission roundtables.

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Roundtables provide a forum for the commission to hear evidence which will inform its final report and recommendations.

Roundtables will usually consist of an opening presentation to introduce the topic, followed by panel discussions involving invited experts and practitioners.

Six roundtables are scheduled throughout the duration of the commission.

Wednesday 18 March

Theme

The sixth roundtable involved two panel discussions, focused on:

- senior and executive leadership
- direct entry and accelerated promotion routes into policing

Summary

Inconsistency in promotion and leadership pathways

The first panel discussion began with a question about senior promotions. The process for promotion to superintending ranks was described as fragmented across forces, inconsistent and lacking in national standardisation.

The panel noted the impact that a force's size or budget may have on promotion success, which can create inequity of opportunity for aspiring senior leaders.

Capacity and demand pressures

The panel discussed the demand pressures and operational environment senior leaders work in, which can act as a barrier to meaningful leadership development.

Cultural barriers: risk aversion and lack of organisational justice

The theme of risk aversion has been a prevalent topic in the commission's roundtable discussions. In the context of senior and executive leaders, high levels of external scrutiny were identified as contributing towards a risk-averse culture.

National leadership accreditation: competency passport

There was general support for a structured, accreditation model that mirrors other high-risk professions. The panel discussed how defining and measuring national leadership competencies and retaining these in a career passport could support and enhance progression in a role.

Direct entry and fast-track

There was strong support during the second panel discussion for some form of direct entry or accelerated leadership pathway, driven by the need for new skills, broader experience, and greater diversity of thinking in policing. The panel was clear that the main barrier to success was cultural resistance, not capability. But there were differing views on the priorities for such schemes.

Areas of agreement

The panel agreed that all the skills policing needs are not necessarily being developed through traditional leadership pathways. There was some agreement that direct entrants could support policing in areas like:

- digital transformation
- data and cyber
- large-scale organisational change
- partnerships
- systems leadership
- risk management

There was agreement that those entering policing at senior police officer roles must be committed to policing's mission and respect frontline experience.

There was also agreement that those entering policing in police officer roles should be operationally competent, as senior officers are expected to be able to command and make decisions in areas like:

- public order and firearms

- critical incidents
- covert authorities
- community and neighbourhood policing

There was some acknowledgement that previous experience in related organisations can provide this operational competence.

The panel agreed that the receiving culture can be resistant to direct entrants and this can make joining policing through this kind of pathway very challenging. This resistance was attributed to officers feeling that their own sacrifice and professional identity are being undervalued.

There was some agreement around the successful elements of a direct entry or accelerated promotion scheme. Panel members agreed that any scheme should include:

- extended time in force
- high quality national training
- structured mentoring or coaching from chief officers
- clear standards and accreditation

Areas where views differed

Some of the panel felt that the focus should be on attracting people from adjacent professions (NCA, intelligence community, public protection) where risk-led decision-making is proven. Whilst other panel members suggested policing should remain open to broader backgrounds (such as complex private-sector operations) to maximise diversity of thinking.

Some of the panel members argued that many senior roles do not need a warrant card and therefore, the focus should not be on attracting and training people to be police officers. But others felt senior operational leadership must remain predominantly warranted.

Future considerations

The panel discussed how a future National Police Service could offer more strategic, centralised functions that can support a more porous workforce model, including by facilitating lateral entry, mixed warranted/staff leadership teams and career breaks and return pathways. The panel discussed how clear strategic workforce planning is needed to articulate the capabilities policing requires, where direct entrants fit and which roles need warranted powers.

Wednesday 11 March 2026

Theme

The fifth roundtable involved two panel discussions, focused on:

- first line and middle leadership
- the leadership of police staff and volunteers

Summary

First and middle leadership

The panel discussed why first-line and middle leaders feel disconnected from senior leadership, referencing:

- areas of trust
- communication
- a safe space to make mistakes

Further themes included work/life balance in middle leadership roles, with sergeants and inspectors often taking leadership roles at a time when family commitments may be significant, with fewer roles that can accommodate this.

A recurring theme was the volume of bureaucratic processes, particularly around case files, disclosure, safeguarding paperwork, and duplicated reporting, which are part of first-line and middle management roles. Further areas discussed included the disempowerment that working in an administrative environment can create, with reduced autonomy for first-line and middle leaders. It was felt that the emphasis had shifted from decision-making and problem-solving to ensuring administrative management.

Communication

Communication was a prevalent and recurring topic, specifically around a lack of listening to first-line and middle leaders.

Promotion, acting up and talent identification

The panel discussed periods of acting up, described as inconsistent, lengthy, and unsupported. There was a view that leadership training needs to be more practical, based on learning from experienced senior leaders. Views were also expressed about the importance of promotion processes being open, fair, and transparent.

The commission discussed the concept of a senior constable role, with increased responsibilities to give individuals the opportunity to develop. It was observed that the policing pyramid structure has a large base of constables, which potentially needs rebalancing.

Police staff and volunteers

The panel discussed experiences of being a member of the police staff. Often, police staff are excluded from the conversation of police leadership. The panel identified the benefits that police staff bring to first-line, middle and senior leadership roles, particularly the range of expertise and experience from sectors outside of policing.

The government white paper was referenced in discussions, providing opportunities for change that will include the whole police workforce, including officers, staff, and volunteers.

An example was presented of a force that has previously reached a 50/50 split between police officers and police staff, by using police staff in roles they had not previously undertaken and how police officers and staff worked in diverse ways to achieve this.

Leadership training was discussed, with an emphasis on the importance of police staff receiving training and attending training alongside officers in mixed cohorts.

The panel discussed the role of special constables in policing, including examples of who may join the special constabulary. The variety of roles that specials undertake was explored, as well as examples of what police support volunteers can do.

Wednesday 25 February 2026

Theme

The fourth roundtable involved two panel discussions, focused on:

- how police constable entry routes support effective foundational police leadership

- emerging themes from the commission's work with policing policy experts

Summary

Police constable entry routes

Discussions focused on whether existing police constable entry routes are:

- attracting the right people
- developing foundational leadership
- meeting the demands of modern policing

There are four entry routes for police constables in England and Wales supported by different training programmes.

The recently introduced police constable entry programme (PCEP) is not linked to a degree-level accreditation. Several other entry programmes are linked to a degree-level accreditation, including the police constable degree apprenticeship (PCDA) and the degree holder entry programme (DHEP).

Panel members discussed the rapid shift to PCEP. It noted that 64% of recruits joined through PCEP in the latest year of available data. It was explained that PCEP is designed to deliver the same learning outcomes as those routes linked to degrees. Some panel members raised concerns about the lack of evaluation to measure the impact of the new training.

Some panel members thought PCDA and DHEP were better at building critical thinking, ethics, research skills, and long-term leadership capability.

The complexity of multiple entry routes in England and Wales was compared with the relative simplicity of Police Scotland's single-entry model.

There was general agreement amongst the panel that no single route will produce all the leaders needed.

Leadership potential

The panel discussed whether leadership potential should be assessed at entry, developed internally, or identified after officers have experience.

There was also a debate about the advantages and disadvantages of creating a new accelerated or high-potential entry route to recruit people with potential for senior leadership.

The commission will discuss direct entry and accelerated promotion in more detail at a later roundtable.

First-line and middle leadership

The second panel spent some time discussing the pressures on sergeants and inspectors. Panel members spoke about:

- too few supervisors for the volume of staff
- supervisors overloaded with administrative burden
- middle leaders squeezed between senior command demands and frontline realities
- insufficient visibility and communication down the ranks

In general, the panel agreed that first-line and middle leaders are a crucial layer of leadership that is currently under strain.

Discussions also focused on a disconnect between frontline and senior leaders, with some concerns about trust gaps, cultural drift, and perceptions that senior leaders are distant, bureaucratic, or overly political.

Workforce modernisation and non-warranted expertise

Several contributors stressed that modern policing requires workforce reforms, including making more use of non-warranted police staff.

Panel members and the commissioners discussed the growing need for digital, cyber, economic crime and technical skills and encouraging more movement into, and out of, policing, echoing practices in medicine, teaching, and the armed forces.

The panel also covered whether younger recruits expect a different approach to workforce development, centred on:

- expectations for structured development
- investment in skills
- clear career pathways

- meaningful work
- organisational wellbeing support

Some members warned that young people would be willing to leave the service if expectations are not met.

Wednesday 11 February 2026

Theme

The third roundtable explored:

- what leadership development, training and assessment should be mandated or delivered nationally and what should remain locally designed or delivered
- how the future National Police Service (NPS) could drive consistency, excellence, and innovation in police leadership

Two panel discussions took place involving experts from a range of organisations. Discussions focused on:

- the role of the centre in ensuring high standards of leadership and development
- local delivery of leadership and development

Summary

Mandating national standards

The panel debated what role the new NPS, introduced in the government's white paper, '[From local to national: a new model for policing](#)', will play in leading national standards.

The panel broadly supported how the proposed licence to practise could potentially ensure professional standards in policing and promote professional development. There was recognition by some members of the need to retain some local flexibility.

Strategic workforce planning

Many panel members were supportive of the NPS playing a central role in workforce planning in the future, identifying future workforce requirements and supporting and developing future talent.

Quality assurance

There was an acknowledgement that, currently, there is little quality assurance of local or national delivery of leadership training and development. The panel discussed different ways to ensure the quality of learning, including the involvement of academia.

Talent management

Some panel members were supportive of replicating the military model where individual career development is carefully managed at an organisational level using standard review processes.

There was an acknowledgement that the inconsistent use of professional development reviews (PDRs) across policing makes this approach challenging. There was some caution around the implications of pre-selecting individuals for senior roles early in their careers.

The commission highlighted the value of diversity of experience in developing senior careers, including the use of secondments and career breaks.

Cross-sector local or regional delivery and peer review

The benefits of local policing working alongside other public services to deliver leadership development were discussed. There was support for policing being involved in multi-disciplinary peer support and peer review with other public services.

The panel and the commission also discussed the merits of policing taking part in formal multidisciplinary training and how that could be achieved through a regional delivery model.

There was also support for a regional delivery model for leadership training. This was felt to be compatible with the direction of police reform with fewer forces.

Wednesday 14 January 2026

Theme

The second roundtable explored how effective police leadership should be defined.

Two panel discussions took place involving the commission and invited panel members. These were:

- examining effective police leadership
- comparing leadership concepts in policing with those in other sectors

Discussions focused on:

- the qualities and styles of police leadership
- challenges and systemic barriers
- the role of academia in policing
- areas for further exploration

Summary

Core qualities of effective police leadership

Panel members identified key qualities of effective police leadership, including the importance of vision, ethics, competence, and leadership at all levels. The panel explored how these qualities compare with those of leaders in other sectors, both public and private.

Public trust and organisational performance

There was clear agreement that leadership must align with public expectations while running an effective and motivated organisation. Police leaders have a responsibility to build both public trust and internal trust within their force.

Leadership standards and talent investment

Panel members suggested that fragmentation across forces may have weakened consistency in applying leadership standards. Members discussed the practical experience of implementing national leadership standards.

Many felt that investment in talent starts with first-line leadership and represents an investment in future senior leadership and a way to identify talent. The importance of developing senior and executive leadership was also acknowledged.

Cultural and systemic barriers

The panel explored the culture surrounding police leadership and possible barriers to a consistent approach. Members referenced historical in-person leadership training delivered in a centralised location.

A key insight was the need to distinguish between developing individual leaders and cultivating leadership development as a broader organisational system. Leadership is inseparable from the culture and context in which it is exercised.

The commissioners explored leadership concepts in other sectors, what is transferable, and identified some of the systemic barriers within other organisations.

Academia and evidence-based practice

There was recognition that policing needs strong integration with academic research, applied evidence and external expertise.

Discussion focused on understanding current barriers and resistance within forces to introducing a more consistent approach.

Areas for further exploration

The commissioners and panel members identified areas for future exploration, including:

- how to introduce consistency across the system
- the distribution of resources
- how leadership development could be funded

Thursday 11 December 2025

Theme

Setting the scene for the commission by examining police leadership and its current challenges.

What's working well?

Participants acknowledged several successes including:

- increased numbers of women in policing at senior levels
- improved training for newly promoted sergeants and inspectors
- stronger national strategic collaboration on workforce reform between the College and the NPCC

What needs to improve?

Panel members discussed if there is currently a strong enough collective understanding of what good leadership looks like, with some feeling it should be focussed on what leaders deliver in terms of outcomes and performance.

There was recognition that police leaders at all levels must balance multiple operational, performance and team demand and do not always have adequate support to do so.

The scrutiny senior officers in particular face was considered to contribute to the lack of attractiveness for promotion and progression.

Survey data showing low confidence in senior leadership amongst frontline officers was highlighted as requiring further consideration.

Discussion also focussed on the potential for inconsistencies in the provision and delivery of leadership programmes, and the lack of a national promotion process for certain ranks.

What barriers exist?

Systemic and structural barriers were debated, including valuing operational experience versus enabling talented officers to progress quickly through the ranks.

The slow pace of achieving national consensus was also recognised as a challenge to reform, as well as a lack of funding nationally and locally.

Suggested solutions

The panel explored solutions including:

- diversifying entry routes
- expanding the use of professional registration

Discussions on how to vary experience at senior levels prompted ideas around:

- leaders gaining experience in different organisations
- bringing in external expertise at senior levels
- using police staff effectively

The commission identified key areas for further exploration, with particular focus on strengthening the support and development for front line leaders, given the key role they have.

Key national workforce statistics were also presented and suggestions made for what further data the commission needed for its review.

Tags

Leadership development