'Second-class citizens': professional inequity in UK policing

This research seeks to explore the unique experience of law enforcement culture by UK police staff employees.

Key details

Lead institution	Liverpool John Moores University
Principal researcher(s)	Naomi Davis-Crane n.a.daviscrane@ljmu.ac.uk
Police region	North West
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	December 2025
Date due for completion	September 2026

Research context

The present research addresses challenges associated with professional inequity in UK law enforcement. The police workforce in England and Wales comprises around 236,000 full time employees, of which 37.9% are police staff, individuals who do not hold the warranted powers of their police officer colleagues. However, police staff are underrepresented in senior and executive leadership roles and disproportionately adversely affected by financial constraints. Police staff are also habitually neglected by policing scholars when compared to their officer colleagues, though previous research has identified resentment of civilian professionals among officers and the challenges policing cultures present to effective integration. Consequently, the present research seeks to explore the unique experience of law enforcement culture by UK police staff employees, with the potential for this broad scoping enquiry to inform future concentrated empirical work.

Accordingly, the research draws upon a broad range of theoretical constructs in exploring and explaining this unique organisational behaviour. These include those relating to the complex nature of policing cultures as simultaneously organisational and occupational, and their potential implications for organisational justice, workplace motivation, equity and individual and group identity. The role of formal and informal leadership in shaping culture is also considered, including the importance of professional representativeness and opportunity across the leadership structure in a policing organisation. Finally, intersectionality theory is drawn upon in examining some of the unique challenges within the policing habitus experienced by civilian employees.

Research methodology

The research comprised 32 semi-structured interviews with individuals in senior police staff roles from 23 policing organisations in the UK. The interviews were conducted via video-conferencing between December 2025 and March 2026, and the resulting transcripts thematically analysed to identify prominent themes within participants' experiences and perspectives.