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Leading Lights

An inspection of the police service's arrangements for the selection and development of chief officers

August 2019

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Contents

Foreword	3
Summary	5
Recommendations	14
1. Introduction	17
2. Getting to the assessment centre	23
3. The Senior Police National Assessment Centre	31
4. The Strategic Command Course	36
5. Continuous professional development	45
6. The selection processes for chief officer appointments	49
7. Mobility and relocation	53
8. Wellbeing and tenure	59
9. Diversity in the workforce	63
Annex A – Methodology	67
Annex B – Competency and Values Framework	69
Annex C – Strategic Command Course 2020 outline	70

Foreword

This inspection arose partly because of concern that the numbers of applications for chief officer posts and length of appointments were declining, as was the wellbeing of those officers. We asked the question: “How well does the police service select and develop candidates for chief officer roles?”. The answer is “not as well as it should”. This is despite valiant efforts by the College of Policing (the College) at encouraging and supporting the police to professionalise the selection arrangements and adopt a stronger culture of continuous professional development.

There is evidence that potential candidates’ relationships with chief constables can matter more than their ability. Some candidates get effective coaching, paid for by their forces, to help them pass the Senior Police National Assessment Centre; others don’t get it, or it is not paid for. This makes the playing field unlevel and unfair. These and other things put people off applying for promotion.

Development for aspiring chief officers includes attending the College’s Strategic Command Course (SCC). We have some concerns about the content of the SCC, but these cannot be fully addressed until the police (as opposed to the College) take the concept of continuous professional development more seriously. In the meantime, the SCC is filling the void by trying to be all things to all people.

At the top, policing looks uncomfortably parochial, with some chief officers having served in only one force. It is also pressurised; as many as one in ten chief officers report critical levels of anxiety. So, we have made nine recommendations to:

- establish greater consistency;
- transparency and fairness in selection;
- a framework of continuous professional development; and
- improved mobility among chief officers.

These are linked through our proposal to create a national ‘guiding hand’ function across policing. This would help officers make the right career and development choices and help forces to attract and select the right candidates. It would work in the best interests of individuals and of policing. We consider that some of the ills of the current arrangements are sufficiently serious to warrant regulation.

In producing this report, we have worked very closely with the College. I am extremely grateful for its help. Indeed, many of our recommendations are consistent with its views and work it has in train. While most of our recommendations are for the College, if the benefits we envisage are to be realised, it is for forces themselves to implement the changes fully and at pace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Parr', followed by a long horizontal line that tapers to the right.

Matt Parr CB
Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

Summary

Introduction

In policing, chief officers are those at the highest ranks. They set the police service's direction and have a profound effect on the forces they lead. Concerns have been raised about a reduced number of applications for chief officer posts, the wellbeing of post holders and the length of their appointments.

Terms of reference

Our terms of reference were to answer the question: how well does the police service select and develop candidates for chief officer roles?

Scope

We looked at the Senior Police National Assessment Centre (SPNAC) and the Strategic Command Course (SCC), which the College of Policing (the College) facilitates for the police.

We have no powers or obligation to inspect the College. We are grateful to the College for supporting and advising us throughout the inspection. Eight of the nine recommendations we make in this report are in its gift to implement. We understand they are consistent with the College's view of what needs to change.

The selection processes used by police and crime commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales to appoint chief constables, and by chief constables to appoint their assistant and deputy chief constables, were not in scope. The selection processes used by the Scottish Police Authority to appoint chief officers in Scotland were also not in scope. However, because we were inundated with adverse comments on the processes in England and Wales, we have included those comments and our views.

Matters concerning pension and tax arrangements, which we know to be of serious and justified concern to many senior police officers, were also out of scope.

Methodology

This inspection took place between January and May 2019. It included a review of documents and data, an online survey and interviews with chief officers, chief superintendents, superintendents from Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales, together with other interested parties. Our fieldwork also included observation of part of the SCC. We are grateful to all those who assisted us.

Getting to the assessment centre

We examined how forces identify and support those with the potential to become chief officers. We looked at how chief constables decide to endorse candidates for SPNAC and what candidates considered when deciding whether to apply.

We found that the College provides guidance to forces on the criteria candidates should meet. But it doesn't stipulate what a force should do to select talented individuals and there are wide variations in the processes forces use.

Not all forces understand how to apply the criteria. For instance, it clearly says superintendents are eligible to apply, yet some forces only recommend chief superintendents. Assessors told us that a number of inexperienced candidates are nominated prematurely for SPNAC. There is a lack of consistency, fairness and transparency in the endorsement process.

We also have concerns about the purpose and impact of externally provided coaching. Some candidates receive it, others don't. Some assessors considered that it was so effective that there were candidates who passed SPNAC as a result, despite not having sufficient experience or leadership skill. Their comments suggest that coaching is undermining the efficacy of the assessment.

Recent positive action by the College to encourage more applicants from minority groups has led some to feel that there is unequal access to information and support, though we did not find evidence of this.

We concluded that the lack of consistency, fairness and transparency is having a detrimental effect on police forces' ability to identify and support those with the most potential to become chief officers. The evidence we collected did not allow us to confidently conclude that all the most able candidates find their way into the SPNAC process. There should be a more coherent and stringent approach to identifying, developing and selecting potential candidates. We consider that the approach, to carry sufficient weight for consistent implementation across the police service, should be made compulsory by regulations.

The Senior Police National Assessment Centre

SPNAC needs a clear understanding of what attributes are sought and why they are necessary in policing, to select and develop the best candidates.

We interviewed, surveyed and reviewed:

- successful and unsuccessful candidates;
- candidates' managers; and

- briefings at the College (given to us by those responsible for the SPNAC experience, including by several assessors).

The College has defined a set of nationally recognised values and behaviours for policing in its competency and values framework. Some chief officers were confident that the framework is a sound basis for selection and development; others considered it unhelpful. We found that the framework:

- reflects accepted, professional HR practice; and
- covers all behaviours for policing, divided into three levels of competency.

There was a similar split in opinion on assessments. Some chief constables and SPNAC assessors felt they were an excellent readiness test for chief officer roles while others regarded them as unnecessary. Some recent attendees said that they did not consider that the assessments enabled them to demonstrate readiness for chief officer roles.

There was criticism that not all tests are relevant to all police forces. Many are based on Home Office local force arrangements (in part, to test political awareness), which puts candidates from other policing organisations – for example, the National Crime Agency – at a disadvantage. It also lessens the opportunity to test / explore issues facing the national forces in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

There was also a unanimous view from police staff attendees (i.e., non-warranted officers) that they should sit the same SPNAC assessments as their police colleagues. (They currently sit the Senior Police Staff Assessment Centre (SPSAC), which is a truncated version of SPNAC.)

The evidence we collected suggests a need for a national assessment to ensure there is a high standard of skills and experience in all those eligible for chief officer roles; however, we consider that SPNAC needs a fresh look.

We believe the College should enhance the independent and professional oversight of SPNAC to ensure that it is fit for purpose. This could be done in two ways:

1. The first relates to membership of the professional reference group that advises the College on SPNAC (and the SCC). At present, this group's members are exclusively from policing. We concluded that the group's contribution would be enhanced by widening the membership. A wider group could include individuals with a professional background in assessment and leadership development in other sectors, and those with an academic and research background, perhaps including experts with an international perspective.

2. The second, which could be done instead of the first – or, preferably, in addition to it – would be to commission an independent evaluation of the SPNAC on a routine basis.

The Strategic Command Course

We are grateful to the College for allowing us access to a session of the SCC. This, together with our survey and interviews, has enabled us to examine how it fits with the wider arrangements for selection and development.

The College describes the SCC as “policing’s most senior leadership development programme”. It is open to police officers at superintendent and chief superintendent rank, as well as staff at equivalent grades who have shown the potential to progress their careers.

Changing the shape of the course and its content

We found that the SCC has changed frequently over the last 20 years, most recently in 2015. Changes to improve accessibility have been welcomed by many. Recent changes to the course – a result of student criticism – show the College responding well to fresh insight.

The course is reviewed annually by the College and its professional reference group. Although the group includes police and crime commissioners, all its members are directly involved in United Kingdom policing. This is something of a missed opportunity – there is a great deal that, in our view, could be learned from outside both the United Kingdom and police service. For example, organisational leadership or trends in society that may affect policing.

There were mixed opinions on the value of the SCC, much like SPNAC. This related to what is taught and how. However, there was a consistently positive view that it gave students the opportunity to build lifelong, supportive professional networks.

Students come to the SCC with a range of operational and organisational experience – the two pillars of the course – and from different areas of policing. We are concerned that teaching classes of mixed experience (and ability) does not let the SCC explore topics in sufficient depth to prepare them for chief officer roles in all forces.

There was also debate about the balance of operational and organisational leadership skills content on the course. We see both as essential, but flag a risk that time is spent making sure that all participants achieve a pass rather than being more fully developed in both areas.

Other areas of concern with which we concur include:

- a need for greater attention to information communication technology (ICT) and investigative skills;
- criticism that the course is too Anglo-centric (much like SPNAC); and
- that it focused on working under police and crime commissioners, and not exploring policing more widely (for example, working at a regional or national level, or with national governments).

The College is addressing some of these concerns as part of its ongoing review process.

The relationship between the SCC and continuous professional development

On its website, the College puts the SCC in the context of other development offers, under an umbrella of continuous professional development (CPD).

We agree that the SCC should be considered as part of a coherent development process. Further, based on findings from this inspection, we believe that a better balance needs to be struck between the SCC syllabus and a comprehensive CPD framework to ensure that the SCC is not overloaded.

Where, when and how to run the course

We considered whether the timing, setting and teaching methods of the SCC support its aims. These are the responsibility of the College, but in our interviews, we gathered a variety of suggestions for change. These include:

- greater diversity of training methods; and
- more time to reflect, discuss and consolidate learning to provide a better balance.

Timing was, for some, also a consideration – the SCC immediately precedes selection processes for chief officer posts. Some suggested that it made them preoccupied with finding a job rather than focusing on their studies.

Some interviewees suggested that it would be better to attend the SCC when you have been selected for a post. But that would deprive applicants of the benefit of having attended the course when applying for jobs. We consider that this issue warrants further thought.

We conclude that, while many aspects of the course are valuable and worthwhile, there are too many question marks over the SCC. We consider that it needs a rethink.

The balance between optimum content and structure is not one we can settle. It cannot be isolated from the wider issue of professional development. In the absence of a coherent approach to development that is understood and valued by the police service, we feel that the expectations resting on the SCC are unrealistic.

We conclude that a process of reflection and change should be led by a newly-constituted professional reference group, supported by professional, independent and possibly international evaluation of the SCC. Moreover, its future development should lead to a course which meets the needs of policing and is set clearly in a framework of CPD that needs to be understood and valued by the police.

Continuous professional development

CPD is defined by one source as “the intentional maintenance and development of the knowledge and skills needed to perform in a professional context”.

We interviewed representatives of the College and current serving chief officers about what was available for police officers and staff. We looked for gaps, good practice and the extent to which CPD complements the SCC.

There was universal acknowledgement that CPD in policing is not sufficiently comprehensive or coherent compared with other professions. It is strongest in functional, operational skills – such as the use of firearms or public order – where there are clear expectations and a lifespan of accreditation.

Outside the functional arena, CPD is fragmented. The SCC asks all graduates to produce personal development plans to support their careers. However, there is no formal framework to help officers or their forces put plans into practice and develop careers that benefit them, or policing. This cannot be right.

Like so much else in this inspection, opinion split on development – some chief officers organised their own study, coaching and mentoring while others felt they had been cut adrift (on graduating from the SCC) with little time to devote to what was currently available.

We also found that opportunities for external development and leadership training are declining. Secondments to Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), national policing bodies or external organisations were once seen as useful opportunities. However, most interviewees told us that time outside the force was not valued and could be a disadvantage.

The evidence suggests that the police service needs to fully implement a more comprehensive, coherent, accredited system of CPD [for officers and staff of all ranks]. This should include the SCC – for consistency and to ensure that its syllabus isn’t overloaded. Whilst it is for the College and the National Police Chiefs’

Council (NPCC) to design, success depends on active involvement of the police service in both design and co-operation in implementation.

Selection processes for chief officer appointments

This area was not within the scope of this inspection. However, we gathered information that we consider important and share in the public interest.

We found that:

- some forces use criteria based on the competency and values framework, while others develop their own;
- the process of applying for assistant chief constable and deputy chief constable positions at the end of the SCC is chaotic;
- there is a lack of impartial guidance for graduates – many will be advised by their local force, whose interests may not match the individual or the broader police service; and
- the information and processes used to select candidates are not consistent in the United Kingdom.

By contrast, we were told that Scotland has a robust system for selecting applicants that typically includes assessment centres and psychometric tests.

We found that the lack of consistency, together with concern that appointments have already been decided in favour of local candidates, is putting potential applicants off. There is a clear case for greater consistency and professionalism in the processes used to select chief officers.

The College offers valuable support and guidance that we found only a few forces had taken up. We urge more to do so.

Mobility and relocation

There has never been a greater need for the police service to function as part of a single law enforcement system, yet we found that an increasing number of officers have only ever served in one force. Many do not move forces at any point in their career.

We think this is a risk. The police service needs chief officers with a breadth of skills, experience and vision to design and operate effective local, regional and national functions.

During the inspection we gathered information about where chief officers had served and the factors they considered when deciding whether to apply for a post. We found that barriers and inhibitors to mobility include finance and removal packages.

We were also told that localism was a concern for many – for example, applying for a chief constable post where a local deputy was also applying would be “a waste of time” as it would almost certainly be a “done deal”. We were also told of the flip side to this; a negative response from an applicant’s current force to their search for promotion elsewhere.

Another issue that arose from our interviews is officers being placed on temporary promotion for long periods of time – it blocks opportunities for others to apply for a post.

Uncertainty in the local election cycle (for police and crime commissioners) was also cited as inhibiting movement. People wanted to know who they would be working for.

They were also (largely) unwilling to move home, with some telling us that, with many officers having partners with a career, coupled with caring responsibilities, relocating was less appealing. This was seen to limit the pool of candidates.

Before 2012, there was a regulation that stated an officer could not be promoted to chief constable without having served in another force or policing organisation for at least two years. We explored options for reinstating a mobility rule that takes account of those with caring responsibilities. We concluded that such a rule should be made.¹

We also found overwhelming support for better national workforce planning. Many said they would welcome a database of information about eligible candidates and current chief officer teams. The College is working to develop such a function and our recommendations build on this approach.

Wellbeing and tenure

One of the concerns that prompted this inspection was a decrease in the average period of tenure for chief constables. We found several causes, including financial disincentives relating to pension and pay, which we have explicitly excluded from this inspection because they have been explored by other organisations.

It is not clear what an ideal tenure for a chief police officer should be. It is likely to vary depending on the job and the person. Our evidence suggested that very short tenures present unsettling churn in forces. It also suggested, for different reasons, that very long tenures can be inadvisable too.

Our focus was on the wellbeing of chief officers.

¹ Within this overall UK context, we recognise that the scale of national policing challenges in Scotland under a single national force with multiple deputy chief constables exposes those chief officers to challenges and experience not available in many local forces.

Many chief officers told us they had created and use informal support networks. According to a wellbeing survey conducted by the Chief Police Officers' Staff Association, 10 percent of chief officers registered critical anxiety scores, with bullying and peer pressure cited as a factor.² We found an absence of appropriate support for them in their own force.

At the time of the inspection, the Chief Police Officers' Staff Association was developing a support framework based on its 'panel of friends' approach and the College was also developing an approach. We welcome these initiatives but recognise that more should be done to meet the apparent welfare need.

Diversity in the workforce

There continues to be debate and concern in the police service about how to make sure that policing reflects the communities it serves. This extends to the removal of barriers to entry and advancement in the service, particularly those faced by women and people from minority groups.

We examined individuals' experiences of selection and development, as well as schemes designed to enhance the representativeness of chief officers. We asked people what had been beneficial. We also considered the data held in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and in England and Wales by the Home Office.

We found that:

- The percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) officers across the police service is low. The percentage of chief officers is even lower.
- The number of female chief officers is proportionate to the number of female officers, but not at a chief constable level.

Non-warranted officers and staff improve overall representation rates. However, targeted initiatives to increase diversity and representativeness are not having a sufficiently positive effect. They also attract resentment, with some interviewees maintaining that they feel at a disadvantage when it comes to promotion.

We do not make specific recommendations on diversity in this report but emphasise that actions arising from this report should be tested in terms of their impact on equality.

We believe that improving the processes of chief officer selection and development will benefit the police and the communities they serve.

² Chief Police Officers' Staff Association members survey, 2018. 281 responses.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

By 28 February 2020, the College, after consultation with the National Police Chiefs' Council, should draft new regulations that set out the criteria chief constables in England and Wales must apply and the process they must adopt when selecting candidates for SPNAC. The regulations should:

- be based on the principles set out in the College of Policing's existing guidance on chief officer selection: merit, fairness and openness;
- emphasise that SPNAC is open to officers of superintendent rank; and
- be suitable for adoption [by order of the relevant oversight bodies] in Police Scotland, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and national policing organisations.

Recommendation 2

By 31 May 2020, the College should provide:

- clear information to all potential candidates about the nature of assessments within SPNAC;
- access to support and advice which will enable all potential candidates to prepare adequately for SPNAC; and
- improved information about the supplementary arrangements for under-represented groups.

Recommendation 3

By 28 February 2020, the College should abolish the SPSAC and instead use all SPNAC assessment exercises when assessing senior police staff, so that warranted and non-warranted candidates are judged on the same basis.

Recommendation 4

By 31 December 2019, the College should widen the membership of the professional reference group to include individuals with professional backgrounds in leadership development in other sectors, and experts with an academic and research background, including those who can provide an international perspective.

Recommendation 5

By 31 March 2020, the College should commission a truly independent evaluation of SPNAC, to be carried out on a routine basis.

Recommendation 6

When reconstituted, the professional reference group should commission a thorough and truly independent review of the SCC. The College should use the outcome to redesign the course as part of a wider programme of continuous professional development. The redesign process should also address the points raised in this inspection report.

Recommendation 7

By 1 September 2020, the College and the National Police Chiefs' Council should design and operate a new, comprehensive continuous professional development framework for chief police officers and staff that reflects the range of chief officer roles across the United Kingdom and encompasses development opportunities within and beyond policing. It should include specified standards of accreditation and timelines for completion and be supported by a guiding hand to help officers make the best development and career choices.

Recommendation 8

By 31 July 2020, the College, with support from the National Police Chiefs' Council, HMICFRS, HMICS and police forces, should establish and begin operation of a national workforce planning function for all chief officer posts in the United Kingdom. The function should, as a minimum, include:

- the maintenance of a skills, competencies and career-history database on eligible candidates;
- the maintenance of similar information about the current membership of chief officer teams;
- the creation of lists of candidates who fit specific vacancies;
- an executive search function to advise forces on candidates who would best complement their existing teams; and
- a career support facility to advise candidates on roles and other development opportunities that would help meet their career aspirations.

Recommendation 9

By 1 September 2020, the Home Secretary, Scottish Ministers³ and the Northern Ireland Policing Board should make regulations / directions:

- requiring that an officer would be eligible to apply for a chief constable position only if they had served for at least two years in another organisation at chief officer or equivalent level; and
- limiting the period of time for which a chief officer post can be filled on a temporary basis to a maximum of 12 months.

³ In recognition of the scale of the single national police service in Scotland and command structures involving multiple deputy chief constables, regulations on eligibility for appointment as the Chief Constable of Police Scotland should be determined solely by Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Police Authority.

1. Introduction

About our inspection

This inspection was conducted by HMICFRS and HMICS.

HMICFRS independently assesses and reports on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in the public interest. HMICS has a similar role in Scotland. In this report, “we” means HMICFRS and HMICS.

Background

In policing, chief officers are those at the highest ranks. They set the police service’s direction and have a profound effect on the forces they lead.

Concerns have been raised (in the police service and elsewhere) about:

- a reduced number of applications for chief officer posts;
- the wellbeing of post holders; and
- the length of their appointments.

This inspection builds on work by others to address these concerns, including [work by the NPCC](#). That work was our starting point; we explored it further in our terms of reference, below.

Terms of reference

Our terms of reference were to answer the question: How well does the police service select and develop candidates for chief officer roles? Specifically:

- **Selection:** are the selection processes employed by police forces and the College effective? Do they encourage and support diversity while selecting the best candidates for advancement?
- **Development:** does the SCC and development in forces equip participants to lead police forces and respond to the challenges and demands of modern policing?

Scope

The College acts on behalf of police forces across the United Kingdom to facilitate important aspects of the selection and development of those who become chief officers. We have no powers or obligation to inspect the College.⁴ However, we and the College have a shared interest in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of policing. [This was formally recognised in a concordat signed in 2014.](#)

Focus of our recommendations

Eight of the nine recommendations we make in this report are in the College's gift to implement. We make them in the spirit of our shared interest, to help make sure that the police's selection and development arrangements are effective and coherent. We understand our recommendations are consistent with the College's view of what needs to change. However, there is shared responsibility on the part of forces to implement them. In relation to development of chief officers, forces have a complementary role to both support their local officers and to implement arrangements which are made by the College in the interests of policing.

In scope

We considered whether the selection processes and development arrangements meet the needs of modern policing.

For selection arrangements, we examined the processes to identify and put candidates forward for SPNAC. This included an assessment of the service provided by SPNAC to candidates and forces.

For to development arrangements, we looked at what was available to aspiring and current chief officers, particularly the SCC provided by the College.

Out of scope

The selection processes used by PCCs in England and Wales to appoint chief constables, and by chief constables to appoint their assistant and deputy chief constables, were not in scope. Neither were the selection processes used by the Scottish Police Authority to appoint chief officers in Scotland.

However, we were inundated with comments on the processes in England and Wales during the inspection. It was clear that they are problematic. This report includes that additional content and the conclusions we drew from it.

⁴ The College of Policing was established in 2012 as the professional body for policing. It is both a company limited by guarantee and an 'arm's length body' of the Home Office. It is operationally independent of the Home Office. It is governed by a board of directors which has an independent chair. All members of the board are company directors.

Additionally

Our inspection also looked beyond processes to the broader purposes and aims of chief officer selection and development. It examined factors that had prompted the inspection such as workforce mobility, wellbeing and the need to promote chief officers who are representative of the society they serve.

We are grateful to the College for advising us in the design stages of the inspection and granting us access to the 2019 SCC as it took place. We are also grateful for the contributions from individuals working at the College.

Methodology

Our inspection took place between January and May 2019. Annex A contains a full description of the methods we used.

The inspection included:

- a rapid literature review;
- a review of other relevant documents;
- data collection and analysis;
- online surveys and interviews with superintendents, chief superintendents and chief officers, and recent graduates of the SCC;
- interviews with other interested parties; and
- observations at training events.

We are grateful to all the individuals and organisations who contributed, particularly the College (mentioned above) and the Joint Services Command and Staff College (the training body for the three-armed services).

About the SPNAC and the SCC

The SPNAC is the test police officers must pass to attend the SCC and become eligible for promotion to chief officer rank.

Outside London, chief officer ranks are:

- chief constable;
- deputy chief constable; and
- assistant chief constable.

In London, they are:

- commissioner;
- deputy commissioner;
- assistant commissioner;
- deputy assistant commissioner; and
- commander.

There are also assistant chief officer posts occupied by non-warranted police staff, for which attendance on the SCC is not a prerequisite.

Police officers become eligible to apply for chief officer posts in Home Office forces, Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland when they have passed the SPNAC and completed the SCC. SCC completion is not a requirement for officers in the British Transport Police or the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.

Senior police staff can also attend and pass a more limited version of the SPNAC – the SPSAC.

There are also other participants in the SCC – such as civil servants and international students – who are not required to pass the SPNAC or the SPSAC first.

The SPNAC and the SCC are organised and facilitated by the College.

Police oversight bodies and chief officer selection

The way that policing is overseen is different in Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales.

The Scottish model involves the Scottish Police Authority that supports, oversees and holds the national police force – Police Scotland – to account. In Northern Ireland, this role is performed by the Northern Ireland Policing Board. In England and Wales, it is performed by a PCC or their equivalent in each of the 43 geographical forces.

The role of these bodies (authorities, boards and commissioners) in relation to chief officer appointments is similar, in that both the Scottish Police Authority and police and crime commissioners appoint chief constables. The Scottish Police Authority and Northern Ireland Policing Board also appoint deputy chief constables and assistant chief constables.

In forces outside London, chief constables are obliged to consult PCCs (in Greater Manchester, the Metropolitan Mayor) before confirming the appointment of a deputy chief constable or assistant chief constable. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis must consult the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime before appointing a person as a Metropolitan Police assistant commissioner or deputy assistant commissioner.

Recent research and progress

The College and the NPCC have complementary responsibilities for workforce issues in policing. In the last three years, they have conducted work that sheds light on the concerns that prompted this inspection. They have made changes; some of their work is still underway.

College of Policing Leadership Review

The College of Policing Leadership Review (the leadership review) was conducted in 2015. It led to the creation of a new senior leadership hub in November 2018, with a dedicated team that aims to increase the number of applicants for chief officer posts and their representativeness from wider society. Other activities arising from the leadership review are intended to address:

- the impact on individuals assuming chief officer roles, including personal and financial impacts such as increased pension-related tax liabilities, and relocation and its effect on families;
- the nature of PCC and chief officer relationships, including accountability and governance;
- selection and CPD for those taking up chief officer roles; and
- developing police leaders from under-represented backgrounds to progress towards future senior roles.

This report reflects progress on aspects of the leadership review, some of which has been made since the inspection fieldwork was completed in April 2019.

Round table on police chief officer appointments

The College and the NPCC have also researched matters, such as reducing the length of chief officer tenure and the impact of the introduction of PCCs.⁵

⁵ [*Chief constable preparation, selection, tenure and retirement in the 'New Landscape of Policing'*](#), National Police Chiefs' Council, 2018.

At two 'round table' events held in October 2018 and January 2019, they agreed with representatives of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, the Chief Police Officers' Staff Association and the Police Superintendents' Association to act in four areas:

1. the personal impact on individuals considering chief officer roles, including financial, family and relocation factors;
2. ways of supporting constructive PCC and chief officer relationships, including accountability and governance;
3. the selection and continuing development of those taking up chief officer roles; and
4. developing policing leaders from all communities and backgrounds for future senior positions.

Our inspection concentrated on the third and fourth areas.

The work relating to the financial and personal barriers to mobility in the police force, and retaining chief officers in post, includes consideration of the tax restriction on lifetime pension earnings and annual allowances. These matters were not the subject of our inspection. However, we were repeatedly told by interviewees that they are a disincentive to remain in the service and seek promotion.

2. Getting to the assessment centre

What we inspected

We inspected the mechanisms forces use to identify and support those with the potential to become chief officers.

We focused on the processes and criteria that lead to a chief constable's decision to endorse a candidate – either a superintendent, chief superintendent or senior police staff member – to attend the SPNAC (or the SPSAC in the case of senior police staff).

We explored what candidates considered when deciding whether to apply. We also looked at if and how they were supported to do well in the SPNAC assessment process and beyond.

What we found

Application criteria lack guidance on how to select candidates

[The College provides valuable guidance](#) on the criteria candidates should meet before they can be considered ready to sit the assessment centre.

Candidates complete a competency-based application that the chief constable reviews before commenting on the accuracy of the candidate's evidence and deciding whether to endorse the application.

There are two types of endorsement:

1. a straightforward endorsement indicating that the person is 'ready now'; and
2. an endorsement with information about discrete areas for development to make them ready.

The guidance doesn't stipulate what a force should do to select talented individuals and help them make successful applications. The way forces do this is not always fair and transparent.

There are wide variations in the processes forces use to select and endorse candidates

We found that the processes forces use to select and endorse candidates varied widely in formality, complexity and openness. For example, the Metropolitan Police Service has a formal process based on successful completion of its own development centre programme and collective consideration by chief officers. Many forces have no formal process – in some, the decision to endorse a candidate is based on the personal choice of the chief constable.

Other forces fall between these two extremes and use processes including:

- annual talent reviews by the chief officer team;
- inviting applications;
- the chief constable approaching favoured candidates; and
- candidates putting themselves forward of their own volition.

When we asked whether there should be more consistency in the selection and endorsement process, some chief constables were concerned that a more prescriptive approach would not fit all forces, particularly smaller forces with fewer potential candidates.

Nevertheless, we believe a stronger element of prescription is needed because there is a risk that not all the most able candidates are getting to SPNAC.

Not all forces understand how to apply the endorsement criteria

We found that some forces were confused about the College's guidance and inconsistently applied the endorsement criteria.

For example, there was confusion over whether a superintendent is eligible to sit the SPNAC. The guidance clearly says they are eligible, yet some forces only recommend chief superintendents. This is because their chief constable believes that it is only at this rank that candidates have the necessary level of operational leadership experience. (In our survey of chief superintendents and superintendents 74 percent (222) said that superintendents were not given an equal opportunity to apply for the SCC).

We found that other forces take a different view: a superintendent can be exposed to such experience and be eligible for SPNAC. In recent years, the police service has seen significant reductions in the numbers of officers at superintendent and chief superintendent rank, with commensurate increases in the scope of their roles and their spans of control.⁶ Particularly in the larger forces, it is not unheard of for superintendents to be responsible for numbers of officers similar to, or greater than, those of a small police force. In at least one force (Wiltshire Police), there are no longer any chief superintendent posts. In our view, so long as they meet the criteria for skills and experience, superintendents should be eligible to apply.

⁶ There has been a downward trend since 2006, but the reduction is sharper since 2011. Police Superintendents' Association membership records show a drop: from 1,504 in April 2011 to 1,261 in April 2018, or 16.2 percent across the two ranks. Research carried out for the Association indicated an increased delegation of gold command responsibilities, which are now relatively uncommon at chief officer level.

Our interview and survey data show that some chief constables only endorse candidates who they consider to be 'ready now' for chief officer rank. But as mentioned above, the [guidance](#) encourages SCC attendance by candidates who would be ready to hold chief officer rank following certain professional development. We believe this inconsistency should also be addressed as it is unfair and could be holding able candidates back to the detriment of the police service.

A number of inexperienced candidates are nominated prematurely for SPNAC

Several SPNAC assessors told us they were concerned by the number of inexperienced candidates sitting the assessments without sufficient preparation or experience. They saw this as a risk to policing as well as to the health and wellbeing of individual officers.

We agree with the assessors' concerns and their recommendation that the selection criteria should be more clearly defined and enforced. They argued this would benefit the service by developing potential candidates' careers, guiding their appointments in the period leading up to their attendance at SPNAC. In our view, it would also ensure that successful candidates would be better prepared to attend the SCC. Finally, it would provide a basis for honest conversations with unsuccessful candidates, as well as ensuring that any damaging effect of the process was minimised.

By contrast, and making the case for the status quo, we were told that ensuring police candidates had a broad range of skills and experience was a prerequisite for selection in most forces, and that a rigid approach would not reflect the range of force structures and careers. This was particularly true in large metropolitan forces and national policing organisations. We therefore found a tension between calls for greater consistency and retaining flexibility to reflect difference force sizes and structures.

Potential candidates are concerned there is a lack of fairness and transparency in the endorsement process

In our surveys of chief superintendents and superintendents we found considerable concern about a lack of fairness and transparency in the current arrangements: 87 (29 percent) thought that there was bias in selection and that this made some reluctant to put themselves forward for promotion. The most common factors included how well each potential candidate got on with their chief officers; and whether they were a chief superintendent or superintendent.

Greater clarity is needed on the SPSAC's relevance to non-warranted police staff

Some non-warranted police staff told us of their concerns after failing SPSAC. They said they had been told their roles didn't provide enough scope for them to gain enough experience to pass. This was despite receiving what they described as good support and full endorsement against the relevant criteria from their chief constables.

As with police officers, we consider that non-warranted police staff would benefit from greater clarity about the purposes of SPSAC and the SCC.

Factors that affect potential candidates' decisions to apply for SPNAC

Potential candidates who regarded themselves as ready for promotion told us that gender and pensions (along with the application and endorsement processes discussed in this report) influenced their decision to apply for SPNAC (in cases where there is an open application process).

Gender

Several chief constables, and interviewees, including some women, told us that women are consistently less willing to put themselves forward for promotion than men and need to be more actively encouraged to apply.

Pension

We were told that the new pension arrangements, which broadly mean that officers will serve for 40 rather than 30 years before being eligible for a full pension, were affecting behaviour.

The prospect of longer careers may increasingly mean that potential candidates are delaying their application – serving for a very long period as a chief officer is not considered attractive. Further, the fixed-term appointments for deputy chief constables and chief constables could lead to officers not accruing full pensionable service if they achieve those ranks quickly.

Supporting candidates to prepare for SPNAC

When an individual receives their chief constable's endorsement there is a lack of consistency in the way they are prepared for the next stages, which is leading to a lack of fairness.

In Scotland, all candidates supported by the chief constable are offered up to two years of coaching and mentoring before attending SPNAC. In England and Wales, forces provide varying levels of support including training, coaching, mentoring, shadowing and briefing from senior officers.

Of 304 chief superintendents and superintendents surveyed, 33 percent said that there was a financial commitment in their force to prepare officers for SPNAC / SCC, while 30 percent said there wasn't a commitment and 37 percent said they didn't know. We were told in interviews that, in some cases, forces paid external providers to coach their candidates whereas, in others, the candidates paid for their own coaching. Some saw the variation in provision of coaching as unfair. We agree.

Coaching to pass the SPNAC vs coaching for professional development

We also have concerns about the purpose and impact of coaching for SPNAC.

We were told by those who had received coaching from external providers that the emphasis was on how to get through SPNAC rather than on wider professional development. Many interviewees and some respondents to our survey said that coaching had been a significant factor in getting them through the assessment. Some chief officer assessors considered that the coaching was so effective that there were candidates who passed SPNAC as a result, despite not having sufficient experience or leadership skill to take on a chief officer role.

Their comments show that coaching is undermining the efficacy of the assessment.

There are concerns about unfair access to information about tests

Some candidates also feel that other candidates have access to greater levels of information from the College about the tests.

The information about the tests on the College website is limited, but this is a natural consequence of the need to maintain the integrity of the tests. Nevertheless, we understand that the College has plans to increase the information available to all candidates.

We believe the perception of unequal access may have come about because of recent positive action by the College to encourage more applicants from minority groups. The College runs special workshops – such as 'Senior Leaders Career Pathway' and 'Senior Leaders Development Centre' – to increase the number of female and BAME candidates. They are designed to support people from under-represented groups to make decisions about their careers, including attendance at SPNAC. But they do not include information about the tests which is not available to others.

The College is also piloting new courses through its [Aspire programme](#). Some are open to all potential candidates, others are exclusively for female or BAME candidates. This shows the College taking positive action to address real and damaging imbalance and inequality, something we explore further in chapter 9. While the provision of these courses has led some to feel that there is unequal access to information and support, we found no evidence of this.

Based on our findings, we consider the concerns of unfairness to be ungrounded here. Nevertheless, we suggest the College takes steps to address the perception of unfairness through improved communication about the nature of these arrangements.

Concern about a wider problem for police leadership development

We were frequently told during our interviews that the inconsistency and lack of openness identified above extends to the selection and development arrangements for more junior officers across the United Kingdom.

There were frequent calls for a more coherent approach to appraisal, selection and development through all ranks and specialisms.

HMICS intends to conduct an inspection of training and development within Police Scotland in autumn 2019. In England and Wales, we understand that the College plans to review current arrangements. We welcome these initiatives.

Conclusion

The lack of consistency and fairness in selection and development arrangements is having a detrimental effect on police forces' ability to identify and support those with the potential to become chief officers.

The evidence we collected did not allow us to confidently conclude that the most able candidates find their way into the SPNAC process. Conversely, our findings suggest that, with the help of coaching from external providers, some weaker candidates appear to be getting to the tests and passing them. In our view, this is undermining the integrity of the assessment process.

We found a need for a more coherent and stringent approach to identifying, developing and selecting potential candidates for admission to SPNAC. We consider that this could consist of two products:

1. minimum standards and guidance on selection; and
2. a national support framework which enables all potential candidates to have coaching and advice on their application.

The first can be achieved without overburdening smaller forces, while still reflecting different force structures and those of national policing organisations.

The second would build on the plans which the College has to improve information about SPNAC and release forces from the burden of commissioning coaching. It can also be linked to a concept (developed in subsequent chapters of this report) of a 'guiding hand' to help forces and individual officers make the best choices about postings, and for officers to have access to impartial career and development advice.

The College is best placed to develop both products, based on its existing guidance and principles on chief officer selection and its professional expertise.

In our view, launching these arrangements would create an opportunity to explain the benefits of positive action for under-represented groups. We consider that, for the approach to carry sufficient weight for consistent implementation across the police service, it should be made compulsory by regulations.⁷

Recommendation 1

By 28 February 2020, the College, after consultation with the National Police Chiefs' Council, should draft new regulations that set out the criteria chief constables in England and Wales must apply and the process they must adopt when selecting candidates for SPNAC. The regulations should:

- be based on the principles set out in the College of Policing's existing guidance on chief officer selection: merit, fairness and openness;
- emphasise that SPNAC is open to officers of superintendent rank; and
- be suitable for adoption [by order of the relevant oversight bodies] in Police Scotland, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and national policing organisations.

⁷ Section 53A of the Police Act 1996; the Secretary of State may by regulations make provision requiring one or more police forces to adopt particular procedures or practices, or to adopt procedures or practices of a particular description. If, however, the College of Policing proposes draft regulations to the Secretary of State, he is obliged to make regulations in terms of the College's draft, unless any of three conditions applies. The first is that the proposed regulations would impair police efficiency or effectiveness. The second is illegality. The third is that it would, for some other reason, be wrong to do so.

There is no direct equivalent provision in Scottish Law. However, Section 5 of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 permits Scottish Ministers to give general or specific directions to the Scottish Police Authority providing that such direction has been laid before the Scottish Parliament.

Alternative arrangements apply in Northern Ireland.

Recommendation 2

By 31 May 2020, the College should provide:

- clear information to all potential candidates about the nature of assessments within SPNAC;
- access to support and advice which will enable all potential candidates to prepare adequately for SPNAC; and
- improved information about the supplementary arrangements for under-represented groups.

3. The Senior Police National Assessment Centre

What we inspected

We gathered information about the experience of SPNAC in its current form.

We interviewed, surveyed and reviewed:

- successful and unsuccessful candidates;
- candidates' managers; and
- briefings at the College (given to us by those responsible for the SPNAC experience, including several assessors).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a clear need for the College to maintain the integrity and rigour of the assessment. Therefore, we did not examine the individual test documentation such as candidate or role player instructions, marking guides or grading criteria. Nor did we observe candidates' participation, so there are limits to the judgments we can offer.

The information we gathered, including about matters such as pass rates, has enabled us to make observations and conclusions about whether a test of this type is needed and how well it fits with other aspects of police selection and development.

What we found

What is SPNAC for and what is it testing?

A prerequisite for effective selection and development is a clear understanding of what attributes are sought and why they are necessary for senior roles in policing.

Competency and values

The College has defined a set of nationally recognised values and behaviours for policing in its [competency and values framework](#).

The framework covers all ranks of policing and is grouped into three levels. The most senior (level 3) is relevant to chief officer performance, assessment, selection and development. The framework is designed to encompass a spectrum of policing roles in different forces. SPNAC is explicitly designed to assess candidates against this framework. However, we did not find consensus that it is an appropriate tool.

The College told us that the framework was developed following extensive research, as part of its leadership review. This included consultation with the police service and endorsement from the NPCC. The focus is not so much on what is done in operational terms, but how it is done, and is based on the [Code of Ethics](#). It mirrors

frameworks in other sectors, including that used by the leading professional body for human resources – the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#).

A hollow dispute over the value of the framework

Some chief officers were positive that the competency and values framework is a sound basis for selection and development. They believe that it was tested in SPNAC in the context of policing scenarios for which operational knowledge and experience were essential. Others, including some PCCs, considered the framework to be unhelpful.

Some argued that it was a long, unrealistic wish list. They said criteria for advancement should better reflect specific operating environments rather than attempt to be all things to all people. In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a corresponding divergence of views about the purposes of SPNAC.

There is a similar, related difference of opinion about the relative importance of operational and organisational leadership skills (we explore this in chapter 4).

Regarding the SPNAC tests: we were told by the College and people who had sat the tests that they are based on relevant policing scenarios, in which the framework has been applied. However, some recent applicants told us that these scenarios were not realistic. Whilst the tests are therefore based on the framework, and the College is trying to ensure that they reflect the environment in which senior police leaders operate, without access to the tests we are not able to judge how effective they are.

Regarding the framework: the competency and values framework reflects accepted, professional HR practice. The criticism that it is a “just a long list” seems unfair – it covers behaviours for all policing, divided into three levels of competency. The areas relating to chief officers are clear and not onerous. It has been endorsed by the NPCC.

We therefore consider that the service would do well to make it work rather than to undermine it.

To test or not to test: another spectrum of opinion

We received a wide range of views on the process, structure and need for assessments.

At one end of the spectrum were those who thought SPNAC was an excellent way of testing whether an applicant was ready, or almost ready, for a chief officer role and that it was rigorous and moderated fairly. Further, there was an explicit link to the SCC, in that detailed information – for example, about areas for development – was shared with SCC organisers.

At the other end of the spectrum were those who regarded SPNAC as either completely unnecessary, saying that progression based on tests was artificial, or that the focus was wrong or too narrow. We were told on numerous occasions about able, talented officers who just could not pass. Related concerns were reflected in our chief superintendent and superintendent survey results: of 18 who had attended SPNAC, 12 (67 percent) said that they did not consider that the assessments enabled them to demonstrate readiness for chief officer roles.

In the middle, we found those who were generally content with the nature and purposes of SPNAC but had comments and suggestions for improvement.

One chief constable likened the SPNAC to pole vaulting – in that it is an enormously high barrier to get over – and suggested reconfiguring it to be more akin to hurdling; a series of much lower barriers to jump. The same chief constable warned that the high barrier puts some officers off applying and said that others come “crashing to earth after vaulting”.

We note that the average success rate for candidates sitting SPNAC during 2015–2018 was 46.7 percent, with a range from 45.55 to 47.1 percent.⁸ We are not able to judge whether the bar is set at the right level. Given the lack of consistency we found in the process(es) of getting to SPNAC – and the fact that candidates will not have sat a national process for police promotion since their inspectors’ exams – there is a strong case for a rigorous and uniform filter. But it must ensure that only the most able candidates get through, and in sufficient numbers.

Not all tests are relevant to all police forces

The tests are based on local Home Office force arrangements and work with PCCs. They are, in part, designed to assess political awareness. But there are also national policing organisations, such as the National Crime Agency, that have a different line of accountability, as well as metropolitan forces in London and Greater Manchester. Further, there are different political dynamics in Scotland, Northern Ireland and, to a lesser extent, Wales.

In our view, the focus on arrangements principally in local Home Office forces puts candidates from other policing organisations at a disadvantage. It limits the scope of the exercises, and therefore their value, in testing wider policing scenarios.

This view was shared by police from Scotland who said that what was being tested was too Anglo-centric: some of the tests were based on scenarios applicable only to England and Wales. Therefore, they did not provide an opportunity to explore issues as they related to a national force, such as Scotland, which was a missed opportunity for all. We agree.

⁸ College of Policing data supplied to HMICFRS on 13 March 2019.

SPNAC and SPSAC

Police staff sit a more limited version of SPNAC – SPSAC. They were unanimous in the view that they should sit the same exercises as their officer colleagues. The current practice is for them not to partake in the exercises to brief a chief constable on a major event or to participate in a media briefing.

The senior police staff we interviewed demonstrated – in our view, convincingly – that these activities were often central to their current and potential future roles. Nevertheless, some of the exercises may need reframing to recognise the different experiences and career pathways that police staff undertake.

Conclusion

Our conclusions concerning SPNAC are framed in the context of:

- the public interest, ensuring that policing is of a uniformly high standard;
- the fact that potential candidates will probably not have been tested in a nationally agreed process since their inspectors' exams; and
- the wide variation in progression arrangements in forces, particularly at senior levels (we explore this in chapter 6).

Our evidence suggests a need for a national assessment to ensure there is a high standard of skills and experience in all those eligible for chief officer roles. Further, from the limited information available to us, SPNAC is based on the competency and values framework with clear outcomes sought, in scenarios based on real policing challenges. However, whether SPNAC is doing the best job it can is difficult to judge – we believe it needs further work.

Because we were not inspecting the competency and values framework, the College, or SPNAC in its entirety, we have insufficient evidence on which to draw firm judgments.

The evidence suggests, however, that police staff should sit all the current exercises and we recommend that the College considers making this change.

To ensure that SPNAC is fit for purpose, we recommend that the College enhances the independent and professional oversight of SPNAC. This could be done in two ways.

- The first relates to membership of the professional reference group that advises the College on SPNAC (and the SCC). At present, this group's members are exclusively from policing, including representatives of Police Scotland and a PCC representative. We concluded that the group's contribution would be enhanced by widening the membership. A wider group could include individuals with a professional background in assessment and leadership development in other sectors, and those with an academic and research background, including experts with an international perspective.
- The second, which could be done instead of the first – or, preferably, in addition to it – would be to commission an independent evaluation of SPNAC on a routine basis. Our recommendations are as follows.

Recommendation 3

By 28 February 2020, the College should abolish the SPSAC and instead use all SPNAC assessment exercises when assessing senior police staff, so that warranted and non-warranted candidates are judged on the same basis.

Recommendation 4

By 31 December 2019, the College should widen the membership of the professional reference group to include individuals with professional backgrounds in leadership development in other sectors, and experts with an academic and research background, including those who can provide an international perspective.

Recommendation 5

By 31 March 2020, the College should commission a truly independent evaluation of SPNAC, to be carried out on a routine basis.

4. The Strategic Command Course

What we inspected

We are grateful to the College for allowing us access to a session of the SCC. This, together with our survey and interviews, has enabled us to examine how it fits with the wider arrangements for selection and development.

We asked questions about the course in our surveys. We spoke to those responsible in the College for the SCC's design and development, chief officers on the professional reference group including NPCC portfolio holders⁹, together with other chief constables and attendees from the last three years. This included police officers and police staff.

We also observed sessions of the Higher Command and Staff Course (HCSC) at the Joint Services and Command Staff College. This has parallels with the SCC in that it is pitched at similar ranks and, as with the SCC, officers usually attend it just before they are promoted to the most senior roles in the military. As with the SCC, we spoke to those who attended the HCSC and those who facilitated the course.

What we found

The SCC's purpose

The [College describes the SCC](#) as “policing's most senior leadership development programme, preparing police officers and staff for promotion to the most senior ranks in the service”.

Eligibility to attend and the SCC's importance for further promotion

The SCC is open to police officers at superintendent and chief superintendent ranks, and staff at equivalent grades from all United Kingdom forces who have shown the potential to progress further in their careers (usually by passing SPNAC or SPSAC). Satisfactory completion of the SCC is a statutory requirement for officers seeking promotion to ranks above chief superintendent in all Home Office forces.¹⁰

⁹ The National Police Chiefs' Council appoints members to take responsibility for developing policy specialist areas of policing including working with others such as government departments. One such area is 'Workforce' which is led by a chief constable who is supported by other senior officers on individual topics such as 'HR capability'.

¹⁰ Police Regulations 2003 Regulation 11 paragraph 1(A) states: “[...] Subject to any enactment governing an appointment to a rank higher than that of Chief Superintendent, and to regulations 9 and 10, no person shall be appointed to such a rank unless he has satisfactorily completed such courses or assessment centres as the Secretary of State shall determine.”

History and course content: the SCC has adapted to improve accessibility in a critical environment

The SCC has undergone significant changes over the last 20 years. The most recent flowed from the College's 2015 leadership review. Now, as with SPNAC, SCC content relates to the competency and values framework. The course duration was also reduced from 12 weeks to 8 weeks.

The current format was introduced in 2016. It consists of two four-week blocks, separately covering operational and organisational leadership. A summary of the content of each block is included in Annex C.

The blocks can be taken within one year or across two consecutive years, allowing participants choice and flexibility in the way they study. This was welcomed by recent graduates. However, these changes have attracted criticism from those recruiting SCC graduates. Some said that there is too much emphasis on making it convenient for candidates and suggested that a longer course would be more appropriate.

We recognise that the College has made the changes to increase accessibility and consider this a highly important factor for all candidates when making decisions about the course.

Strategic guidance and oversight: the SCC would benefit from additional voices in its professional reference group

Since 2016, the course has been examined by the College and its professional reference group and updated annually. Although the reference group now includes PCCs, all its members are directly involved in United Kingdom policing. This is a missed opportunity to gather insight and be challenged by expertise beyond policing and the United Kingdom. While there is much to admire in United Kingdom policing, there is a great deal that also can be learned from outside policing and beyond the borders of the United Kingdom. For example, organisational leadership, cultural change and trends in society that will affect policing.

Despite a lack of external input in the reference group, the course has continued to adapt. The most notable recent change was the appointment of new training providers. They were brought in to support the 'business skills'¹¹ elements and assess candidates' performance during the organisational leadership section of the course.

¹¹ This aspect of the course includes subjects such as strategic financial and human resource planning and change management.

This was partly the result of students criticising the quality and quantity of this section of the course. The College responded well and made changes (including the appointment of new training providers) that were regarded as positive. We have no doubt that the College will keep this, as well as other aspects of the course, under review. Nevertheless, we consider the College's valuable efforts to develop the SCC would be strengthened by the inclusion of an independent element to its evaluation. All organisations can benefit from a fresh set of eyes to provide a perspective on the services they provide.

Independent oversight and evaluation would make the course more valuable to the police

As with SPNAC, we found a wide range of opinion about how valuable the SCC is in developing senior police leaders. It reflects the different roles and experience of interviewees and survey respondents, as well as their attendance (if they attended) on the course.

In our interviews, some – mainly PCCs and some chief officers – questioned whether the course is worthwhile. They were highly sceptical about what it is trying to develop and its purposes. This sentiment reflects the debate about the relevance of the competency and values framework that we explored earlier. It also relates to what is taught and how – some chief officers compared the outcome unfavourably with what is available in major business schools and universities.

Others – mainly recent graduates and people involved in the course's development – shared some very positive views.

Further, there was a consistent view across everyone we surveyed that the course provides the opportunity for participants to create and develop supportive personal networks. This mirrored the experience of military students at the HCSC.

There was a strong sense from some recent and past graduates that the SCC had set them up with a team for life who they could draw on for support, information and advice – even “a shoulder to cry on”. The importance of this is not to be underestimated; later, we describe the strong sense of isolation that some senior leaders often feel. Nevertheless, in light of all the contrasting views, we believe that independent oversight and evaluation of the course is advisable.

Can a single senior development course meet the needs of modern policing?

There is pressure on the SCC to provide training across a wide spectrum of topics to a wide set of candidates. We were told that discussions about the course in policing “go back and forth” without resolution. The SCC is trying to address several challenges, detailed below.

The wide range of students' backgrounds compromises the course's depth

Those attending the SCC have different backgrounds, experience and development needs. There will be superintendents on the course with considerable experience, alongside those who have been temporary assistant chief constables for a long time. There will be officers from the smaller forces like Cumbria, alongside those from the larger forces such as the Metropolitan Police and national forces of Scotland and Northern Ireland. There is an argument that says their learning would be more effective if it was tailored to support their individual requirements and progress, in their current or higher rank.

Two of the aims of the course are to:

1. address areas for development; and
2. provide assurance through course assessment that these have been remedied.

Regarding operational leadership: we were told by recent police officer graduates of the SCC that exercises in the operational leadership module were not particularly challenging. They said that, in any case, they needed to be supplemented (beyond the SCC) by the requisite accredited command courses.¹²

Many police staff told us they valued the experience of (elements of) operational command training. This was an area in which they, understandably, tended to need more support. However, there were mixed views in this group about its relevance to their likely future roles. They expressed concern more generally about the lack of career paths on offer to them.

On balance, we were persuaded that the experience they gain from undertaking the operational leadership block will help them contextualise decision making in their specialisms, which include finance and human resources.

Regarding organisational leadership: we were told that much of the content was new territory and a greater challenge, for which some police officers were likely to need additional support. But many police staff, most of whom had office-based roles including finance and human resources, said that elements of this block were "pretty basic".

We are concerned that teaching classes of very mixed ability and experience does not give the SCC the capacity to explore topics in sufficient depth to equip students for chief officer roles in all forces.

¹² Gold Public Order Commanders Course, Strategic Firearms Command Course, or Multi-Agency Gold Incident Command. The College of Policing expects participants of the SCC to attend one of these courses before they complete attend the SCC.

The course strikes the right balance between operational and organisational leadership

Serving chief officers differed in opinion on the importance of operational and organisational leadership when asked about the course's content and balance.

Some thought that the SCC was well balanced. Others thought it focused too much on organisational leadership, with insufficient emphasis on operational matters. However, they conceded that the course was only one element in officer training and that the 'SCC experience', together with the accredited training that sits outside it, was often more important (than the course content).

We consider the balance between the two elements of the course should be maintained because officers need operational and organisational leadership skills. However, there is a risk that time is spent ensuring that all participants achieve a pass, rather than all participants being developed in both areas.

The SCC is too Anglo-centric

Whilst most participants in the SCC are from Home Office forces, there are significant numbers of others. For example, Police Scotland.

Police Scotland represents 10 percent of United Kingdom police officers. It sends its aspiring chief officers to the SCC when they have successfully completed SPNAC.

Those officers, together with their colleagues in Northern Ireland and Wales, described the course as "Anglo-centric" (as they did SPNAC). They referred to the dominance of inputs relating to working under PCCs, rather than exploring policing more widely. For example, some significant elements of policing are managed at a regional or national level and involve working with national governments.

To some extent, these comments were mirrored by interviewees from national policing organisations and the metropolitan forces. We found their views compelling. We understand that the College has organised for all SCC participants in 2020 to have an additional week spent on the course in Police Scotland. We welcome this development.

It is too early to say whether the course's revised business and financial inputs are sufficient

The course content is continually changing. Some comments from previous participants – for example, about the lack of business and financial input – have been addressed as recently as this year (2019).

It is too early to say whether the SCC's changes are sufficient to meet the needs of participants and forces. It is encouraging that the College intends to continue reviewing the SCC to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Topics including technology and investigative skills need greater attention

Topics interviewees said need greater attention include:

- ICT and its role in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of policing; and
- investigative skills, which some suggested were lacking at a senior level.

We agree on both counts and are of the view that the police service has been too slow to grasp the opportunities presented by technology. We understand that the College is planning to address these gaps within the SCC.

There were mixed views about whether the SCC would benefit from a more formal academic element (which has been more prominent in earlier versions of the course). We have recommended that the professional reference group that advises on course content should have additional members, including from academia. They will be best placed to judge whether this is a serious gap which should be filled.

The SCC should be part of a framework of continuing professional development

On its website, the College explicitly places the SCC in the context of other offers of development under an umbrella of CPD and lists a range of courses that are available. We explore CPD in more detail in chapter 5, concluding, despite the best intentions of the College, that it is underdeveloped and undervalued in the police service.

In these circumstances, and considering the other issues described in this report, there are unrealistic expectations on the SCC.

We agree with the College that the SCC should be considered as part of a coherent development process which is readily understood and valued by the police service. However, a better balance needs to be struck between a comprehensive SCC syllabus and a comprehensive CPD framework. This would prevent overloading the course content and help make sure that each element is provided in the right setting, to the right people, at the right time.

Logistical and environmental issues

We considered whether the timing, setting and teaching methods employed are supporting the aims of the SCC.

Greater diversity of training methods is needed

Some suggested there were too many sessions from chief officers reflecting on their own experiences. Whilst these were sometimes interesting, they tended to be repetitive and focused on what they had done rather than how or why they had done it, or to what effect.

There was a call from some participants and chief constables for a greater diversity of inputs from beyond policing and government. Those same chief constables also regarded the SCC format, which is based on lectures and syndicate discussion, as too limited. They felt that the College could include a case study approach like that used in leading business schools for some aspects of the course.

We consider that the College may come to agree on some of these points with increased independent oversight.

There is not enough time for reflection and consolidation of learning

The course is reported to be challenging and intense (although failing the course is rare – we did not identify any examples of individuals not graduating from the course).

Some said the intensity had increased as the duration of the course has been reduced. While participants valued many inputs, a common view was that they would benefit from more time to reflect and discuss with others in syndicates, as well as time on their own to consolidate their learning.

From what we saw, the course appeared to be heavily weighted towards inputs. We suggest this issue is included in any subsequent independent evaluation.

It is unclear whether the timing of the course is right for candidates

The timing of the SCC in an officer's career influences the way they view and participate in it.

For police officers, the SCC immediately precedes selection processes for chief officer posts. There is pressure on students to be noticed during the course. Some say this reduces it to something akin to a finishing school. Most interviewees agreed that the prospect of finding the right job preoccupies students – “it skews things” was one interviewee's observation.

Some suggest that a better approach would be to attend the SCC after being selected for a post. (We consider selection for posts after the SCC in chapter 6.) This would focus attention on learning rather than selection. But it would deprive applicants of the benefits of the SCC before they apply for jobs.

We consider this to be a finely balanced argument that warrants further consideration (in the context of developing better selection arrangements).

The facilities aren't the best for helping people learn

In recent years, the SCC has been delivered at the police staff college at Ryton. While the facilities weren't a major concern to most of the participants we spoke to, we were struck by the very basic nature of the setting, particularly when compared with the high quality of facilities we saw at the Joint Services and Command Staff College.

The facilities at Ryton were cramped, with poor visibility and acoustics. One of the lecturers described how hard it was to ensure that his presentation was legible and audible to those seated at the back of the room.

We recognise, to some extent, that the basic nature of the facilities is emblematic in its modesty and helps counter suggestions that the course breeds a sense of entitlement. However, we consider that there might be other ways of delivering the course which would improve the experience of participants. We suggest that the College explores using other training facilities in its longer-term planning. They could be public or private sector facilities, however there may be benefits to the public purse by opting to use other facilities in the public sector.

Conclusion

While many aspects of the course are valuable and worthwhile, we found too many question marks over the SCC. We consider that it needs a rethink.

The balance between optimum content and structure is not one we can settle. It cannot be isolated from the wider issue of professional development. In the absence of a coherent approach to development that is understood and valued by the police service, we believe that the expectations resting on the SCC are unrealistic.

The evidence we collected suggests that the SCC is trying (and in the views of some, failing) to be all things to all people. There is also evidence that it is not stretching students to equip them fully for roles in all forces.

There is overwhelming evidence that the SCC pays insufficient attention to the policing contexts in Scotland, Northern Ireland and, to a lesser extent, Wales.

We conclude that a process of reflection and change should be led by a newly-constituted professional reference group, supported by professional, independent and possibly international evaluation of the SCC. Whilst the SCC has undergone review and is regularly updated, we consider that additional input from experts beyond UK policing will provide the fresh perspective that is needed. In that context, future development should lead to a course which meets the needs of policing and is set clearly in a framework of CPD that needs to be understood and valued by the police.

Recommendation 6

When reconstituted, the professional reference group should commission a thorough and truly independent review of the SCC. The College should use the outcome to redesign the course as part of a wider programme of continuous professional development. The redesign process should also address the points raised in this inspection report.

5. Continuous professional development

What we inspected

CPD is defined by one source (the [CPD Standards Office](#)) as “the intentional maintenance and development of the knowledge and skills needed to perform in a professional context”.

The SCC is likely to be one of the most significant elements of formal training for potential chief officers. Once appointed, there are some opportunities for further development.

We interviewed representatives of the College and current serving chief officers about what was available and the ways that officers and staff accessed it. We looked for gaps, good practice and the extent to which CPD complemented the SCC.

What we found

Continuous professional development is not taken seriously enough in policing

There was universal acknowledgement that, despite the College’s best efforts to promote a CPD approach in policing, it is not sufficiently comprehensive or coherent compared with other professions. Some of it is also not accredited. We found different views about how serious the gap is and how it might be filled.

In policing, the CPD framework is strongest in the arena of functional operational skills. There are ‘gold’ (or strategic, the highest level) command courses in police use of firearms, major incidents and public order. These courses are ‘pass’ or ‘fail’.

There is a clear framework of expectations, including organisational competence, usually achieved by successfully completing the course, and operational competence, which usually follows the participant gaining relevant experience and passing a further assessment.

There is usually a lifespan of accreditation. Many of those who go on to become chief officers will arrive at the SPNAC accredited in some of these areas (but not usually all).

A fragmented approach

Beyond this functional arena, CPD is fragmented.

The College expects all SCC graduates to produce a personal development plan to support their continuing career. While there is information available about courses, there is no formal framework or career guidance to help officers or their forces make decisions about how they put their plans into practice to develop careers that benefit

them and policing. Nor did we identify any clear link from those plans to previous or subsequent performance appraisals.

Some chief officers don't feel this is a serious problem and have made strenuous, regular efforts to further develop themselves, often through academic study, coaching and mentoring. Many others feel cut adrift and confused as to what development needs they should be focusing on and what is available to address them. Some felt the issue was reduced to a matter of what their force can afford or is prepared to pay – usually very little, we were told.

The College and NPCC run day-long training events on issues such as finance. However, the recent SCC graduates we spoke to had not attended them, mainly because they didn't feel that they had the time.

We consider that the limited approach to CPD does not make the most of its senior leadership capacity.

Continuous professional development is better for senior leaders in other organisations, including the military

There is a marked contrast with the experience, practice and culture of many other professions, including the military.

The military has a well-developed system of further training for its most senior personnel after they have attended the HCSC, which is explicitly linked to an appraisal process.

This includes the opportunity for a three-week course developing business and finance skills at the Joint Services' own business college. The military also has well-established relationships with academia, notably the Department of War Studies at King's College London.

We also spoke to staff in the police and other agencies who hold professional qualifications in areas of law, finance and human resource management. They described a system of structured and accredited training and CPD in their chosen professions. Some also had a professional body to offer a guiding hand and support decisions about how to progress and develop. (We introduced this concept in chapter 2 in relation to advice to potential candidates for SPNAC).

External development and secondments are out of favour

Chief officers work closely with senior personnel in other organisations. While the SCC covers topics which are relevant, there are opportunities to learn from and with other organisations. We were given past examples of development days and joint training with public service partner organisations, and senior officers going on secondment to local authorities, the civil service or the private sector. However, we found no evidence that opportunities of this nature are now common or valued.

Some interviewees suggested that secondments to HMICFRS, national policing bodies or organisations beyond policing, were in decline. In the past, these had been useful opportunities for talented individuals to develop as potential future chief officers.

Regarding secondments to HMICFRS: these are now predominantly undertaken by people towards the end of their career. While they are often very talented people, the experience they gain is unlikely to be used in the longer term for the benefit of policing.

These observations are consistent with the view – expressed by most interviewees – that time outside the force is not valued. Further, it could be seen to disadvantage an individual if they are out of their force for too long. Parochialism of this nature is worrying.

External leadership training opportunities are also out of favour

Business schools and universities run senior development programmes suitable for police officers. However, we found few officers who had taken advantage of them.

We also spoke to representatives of the Cabinet Office, who are developing a cross-public sector development programme. One of its aims is to provide cross-sector learning on the leadership challenges facing those in charge of major organisations. They hoped to include chief constables in the first cohort of the course. We note that, in developing the course, the Cabinet Office has consulted the College. There may be opportunities to ensure that the course is beneficial to chief officers and is consistent with a developing approach to CPD.

These are symptoms of a wider deficit and debate in policing

Organisations representing the police, as well as some interviewees, said that a framework for the selection and development of chief officers should not be designed in isolation. Instead, it needs to be set against a clear statement of what is expected at each level of policing and better integrated with performance appraisal.

Others stressed that while there are statements such as the College's Professional Profiles, these are either not understood or used. The lack of clearly stated and accepted expectations is an issue for all ranks of police officers. It is beyond the scope of this inspection, but we gathered sufficient evidence to suggest it is an area that warrants further attention.

Conclusion

The failure to fully implement a sufficiently comprehensive, coherent, accredited approach to CPD is an unwelcome and unsustainable feature in policing.

Regarding aspiring chief officers: this is underpinned by the absence of a guiding hand to advise them on how, where and when they should enhance their skills. The consequence is poor take-up of training (apart from when it is mandatory) and confusion among officers as to what they should do. A further, serious consequence is an unrealistic expectation on the SCC to fill the gap.

We agree with the views expressed by most interviewees and the College – the police service should establish a more comprehensive, coherent, accredited system of CPD, supported by a guiding hand. (We explore this concept further in chapters 6 and 7.) Further, to ensure that applicants for chief officer posts have received the training and development they need to perform well, we consider that CPD accreditation should be an explicit requirement for appointment. (We explore selection in chapter 6).

We also consider that CPD should be developed in tandem with the SCC, for consistency and to ensure that the syllabus is not overloaded. For example, one approach might be to reduce the elements on operational policing and use more bespoke courses. Another might be to reduce the financial elements and place them in a more specialist module.

Decisions to change the syllabus must be made by a sufficiently informed group. Decisions should be made with an eye to changing demands and issues for policing, but also on an individual level. They should be linked to personal development reviews in forces.

Establishing a clear and coherent CPD framework in the first instance will provide the foundations for future development. Whilst it is for the College with the National Police Chiefs' Council to design, success depends on active involvement of the police service in that design, and co-operation in implementation.

Recommendation 7

By 1 September 2020, the College and the National Police Chiefs' Council should design and operate a new, comprehensive continuous professional development framework for chief police officers and staff that reflects the range of chief officer roles across the United Kingdom and encompasses development opportunities within and beyond policing. It should include specified standards of accreditation and timelines for completion and be supported by a guiding hand to help officers make the best development and career choices.

6. The selection processes for chief officer appointments

What we inspected

Concerns that prompted this inspection included the decreasing number of applicants for chief officer roles.

We asked chief officers and potential applicants for their views on the effectiveness and fairness of the arrangements for selection.

This area was not within the scope of this inspection. However, we gathered information that we consider important and share in the public interest.

Our conclusions relate to providing greater consistency and coherence to progression (from the perspective of forces and individual officers and staff). Our commentary relates to selection at all chief officer ranks unless otherwise indicated.

What we found

Disparate selection criteria and no consensus on the balance between policing and business skills

The debate about the most important skills, competencies and behaviours for police leadership extended to the selection criteria for posts. Some forces used criteria based on the competency and values framework while others developed their own.

One of the areas of debate was the relative importance of the need for a chief officer to have operational skills (as opposed to business skills). Some chief constables and deputy chief constables told us that, while business skills were important in addressing the longer-term risks to their organisations, the greatest immediate and reputational risks arose in relation to operational failures. Therefore, competence in operational policing has become paramount when selecting chief officers.

Others stressed that while most newly-promoted chief police officers were operationally competent, their wider business and organisational skills were too often underdeveloped and undervalued.

Most chief constables stressed their wish to assemble capable teams with balanced complementary attributes.

This seems an unarguable goal. Further, we consider achieving that goal would be helped by the introduction of an accredited CPD, proof of which could be a requirement for chief officer appointments. Currently, however, some chief constables found it elusive as the choices available to them were few. Contrary to

this general trend, and indeed the concerns which prompted this inspection, we spoke to others who felt they were fortunate to have excellent candidates.

Some PCCs felt they should have a more direct role in the appointment of the whole chief officer team to ensure they had the right set of individuals. (As mentioned in the introductory chapter, there are already obligations on the part of chief constables to consult them.) Some went as far as to suggest that the timing of chief officer appointments should be linked more closely to their election cycle. However, one PCC highlighted the potential risk to operational independence and impartiality which would be inherent in such an approach. On this last point we agree.

Chaotic processes and a desperate form of speed dating

There is a period at the end of the SCC when forces advertise for assistant chief constable and some deputy chief constable posts. This is not, in the opinion of many of our interviewees, an orderly affair. It was criticised by all the participants we asked about the process. The critique came from several perspectives.

The College allows time for informal networking and for chief constables to ‘sell’ their forces. This is not in itself problematic. But we were told that – at a time when there were a limited number of candidates – the arrangements amounted to a “desperate form of speed dating”.

The subsequent arrangements by which officers apply for posts were described to us by one chief constable as “chaos”. His views were echoed in different terms by many others that we spoke to.

Lack of guidance and support for candidates

Assuming they have not been already been paired off in the manner described above, SCC graduates are left to decide which jobs to apply for. We found that the sources, advice and guidance available to them are very limited (much like their CPD).

Graduates are most likely to be advised by their local forces, whose interests won’t always match those of the individual officer and/or the police service.

We consider that they would benefit from impartial expert advice and guidance at this crucial stage, and subsequently. Building on the concept of guiding the officer in their development, a guiding hand in policing could help officers make the right choices at the right time in their careers.

Inconsistent selection processes

The information and processes used to select candidates are not consistent in the United Kingdom.

We were told that there is a robust system in Scotland typically involving an application, assessment centre and psychometric tests, followed by a panel interview.

In England and Wales, arrangements vary from force to force. We were told that some selection processes were professionally and fairly conducted, including some which explicitly followed the College's guidance.

We were also told of at least two incidents, both within the preceding three years, where processes fell far short of good practice. While we cannot substantiate the claims in relation to these incidents, there is a clear perception – from most participants in our inspection – that selection processes are generally unfair and unlikely to lead to the best people being promoted into the most appropriate positions.

We found that an application and interview is the basic norm, but that other selection tools are not commonly used. Nor is relevant, readily available information. For example, we saw little evidence that any information on the candidates' performance at the SPNAC or the SCC is considered.

Some chief constables viewed the SCC report as “unhelpfully bland”. Some told us they regarded application forms as a necessary element but did not take the applicants' comments in them seriously, “because they were just an opportunity for an applicant to say how wonderful they were”.

Unlike Scotland, forces in England and Wales seldom use an assessment centre. Some chief constables in England and Wales stressed that this is what SPNAC provided and questioned why they would duplicate it.

The quest for localism is leading to unhealthy parochialism

Although the application process was not the main inhibitor to applicants applying, the lack of consistency in arrangements across forces placed an unnecessary burden on applicants who wished to apply for more than one job.

There was concern from most potential candidates that the current arrangements are not robust or fair and that in many cases the result was pre-determined, often involving the appointment of a local candidate.

A range of participants in our inspection were worried about unhealthy aspects of localism. This was reflected in an over-emphasis on local knowledge and experience, and a risk-averse attitude towards those who did not have this, even if they were highly qualified in skills needed by the force.

We share this concern that localism in the selection of chief officers has, in some instances, turned into a deeply unhealthy parochialism that is not in the public interest.

Limited adoption of College guidance

As mentioned above, the College offers detailed written guidance on effective selection processes. This reflects best practice, including how to eliminate unconscious bias. Further, the College offers advice and support to forces in their selection processes through the senior leadership hub. At the time of the inspection, the take-up of this support was limited to a few forces.

We were told by some chief constables and PCCs that, in their concern to increase the pool of candidates, they had paid for similar support from executive search companies.

We consider that forces are missing a good opportunity – not only to professionalise the way that they recruit, but to improve confidence among potential candidates that the process will be fair (which might encourage them to apply).

Conclusion

From the information we have gathered, there is a case for greater consistency and professionalism in the processes used to select chief officers. This is a risk to the police service because, without improvement in these respects, the pool of applicants will not increase in size.

The College offers valuable support and guidance which we urge forces to accept. It is a matter of concern that so few forces were doing so at the time of our inspection.

The absence of impartial career advice and guidance in the form of the 'guiding hand' we introduced earlier (discussed fully in chapter 5) and the absence of robust CPD, (discussed in chapter 5), means that, in a pool of limited size, the skills and experience of applicants will not necessarily be optimal either.

7. Mobility and relocation

What we inspected

During the inspection we gathered information about where chief officers had served and the factors they considered when deciding whether to apply for a post.

What we found

The need for senior leaders with a broader perspective

In our view, the need has never been greater for the police service to function, with the National Crime Agency, as part of a single law enforcement system. But there is an increasing number of officers who have only served in one force, including at chief officer level. Many do not move forces at any point in their careers.

We found that there is widespread concern among chief officers, other police officers and informed observers about the effect this has on policing – the lack of experience of different forces may breed a narrow perspective of what policing is or how it should be done. Further, it risks leaving the service without sufficient numbers of chief officers with the breadth of skills, experience and vision necessary to design and operate effective, efficient regional and national policing functions. With the ever-present need to secure improvements in efficiency, and with many crime types becoming more regional, national and international in character, functions of this nature will increasingly be required. The service needs its most senior leaders to have the broadest of perspectives.

This potential risk was highlighted in our rapid literature review, which we refer to in Annex A. Police forces and national policing organisations vary in scope – the problems they face and the skills available to address them. They need individuals with well-balanced skills and teams that have an array of skills that meet local, regional and national needs.

A grounding in a broad range of experience in different policing organisations and forces is one of the ways in which the effectiveness of chief officers can be developed.

Barriers and inhibitors to mobility

Finance

In the introduction to this report, we wrote that financial concerns in relation to pensions, tax and allowances are having a large impact on decisions to apply for promotion. They have a similar impact on decisions to relocate on promotion. We were told that, until these matters are settled in a satisfactory way, any other measures taken to increase the pool of applicants may have very little impact.

Financial matters beyond pensions were also raised as influencing decisions. Some considered that the removal packages offered by forces (which they said do not cover the real cost of moving), combined with what they saw as a limited increase in salary, were having a negative effect. One PCC suggested that greater flexibility on remuneration could be a solution. However, public scrutiny would make this a politically difficult solution.

Favouring home-grown talent

We were told by several interviewees that they would not consider applying for a chief constable post where the serving deputy was also applying, as, in their view, it was almost certain to be a “done deal”. Strictly speaking, that isn’t the case. But there is a distinct correlation between success as an applicant in a chief constable recruitment process and having served as the deputy in that force. Further, the perception that the local candidate will be favoured is, in our view, likely to decrease the number of applicants for a role and therefore to enable a self-fulfilling prophesy.

In 2018, the [NPCC report](#) found that 27 of the 42 chief constables (62 percent) outside London had been deputy chief constables in their own forces, indicating that internal applicants are likely to be at an advantage.

Some said they were assured there was a level playing field and found, again in their view, this not to have been the case. They stressed the time and effort involved in making a serious application and the knock-on-effect in their own forces once it was clear that they were looking for promotion elsewhere – “they think you’re already out of the building”.

There is also a reputational risk in applying for roles. This is because if the applicant is unsuccessful, particularly on more than one occasion, they can begin to look ‘unappointable’.

Temporary promotion is blocking movement

A further issue relating to bias towards home-grown talent is the practice of retaining officers on temporary promotion for long periods. We were told of several instances where this happened, despite those individuals failing the SPNAC. This blocks opportunities for those who have been successful and undermines the credibility of the SPNAC.

We consider that this practice should stop and that regulations (containing sensible time limits to give chief constables a degree of flexibility) be drawn up. This would preclude periods of 'temporary' promotion becoming so lengthy that they begin to resemble permanent promotions.

Uncertainty in the local election cycle

We were told that another inhibitor for some potential applicants was the cycle of PCC elections, although this related mainly to deputy chief constable and chief constable applicants. They said that an imminent election would deter them from applying until the votes were counted – they wanted to know who they would be working for.

The reputation of the PCC and chief constable was often a factor that potential applicants considered when deciding whether to apply for roles.

Potential candidates are often unwilling to move home

Interviews, our research and that of others support the view that there is a general unwillingness among potential applicants for chief officer posts to move to another area. While many officers do so, there is often great reluctance. Some told us that that with many officers having partners with a career, coupled with caring responsibilities, relocating was less appealing. This was seen to limit the pool of candidates for roles. There is also strong anecdotal evidence to suggest that this is getting worse.

Our rapid literature review (see Annex A) and interviews point to this being particularly a police problem. People in some other professions, senior public and private sector employees are more inclined to see mobility as part of the job.

Removal of the requirement for chief constables to have served in more than one force

The unwillingness of many officers to move forces and the lack of compulsion to do so was considered a major factor in limiting the pool of candidates for posts. Several chief constables expressed frustration with it. One described it as "pot luck" whether sufficient numbers of capable people applied.

Before 2012, police regulations stipulated that an officer could not be promoted to chief constable without having occupied a chief officer post (assistant chief constable or above) in another force or policing organisation for at least two years. This regulation was abolished at the same time as PCCs were introduced in England and Wales.

The reasons for abolishing the regulation included the impact on those officers with caring responsibilities. Some had successfully appealed (to the Home Secretary) against the regulation being imposed in their cases.

Several chief constables spoke of the need to inject an element of realism around relocation, specifically in relation to nominating candidates for SPNAC and the SCC. Some suggested that a willingness to relocate should be a prerequisite for attendance at SPNAC. Others favoured a more informal approach of helping candidates explore the implications of promotion on their professional and personal lives, so that they could make more informed choices before applying for SPNAC.

Options for change

We explored two options with interviewees:

1. reinstating a mobility rule; and
2. providing greater support and guidance to forces and individuals, through the concept of a guiding hand for national workforce planning purposes.

Reinstating a mobility rule

There was a clear majority in favour of a rule change, although some qualified this with the need to offer more flexible working for those with caring responsibilities. We agree. The requirement could be met through secondments to external bodies and businesses, as well as national policing organisations.

There were voices against such a rule, mainly from the PCCs we spoke to.

Providing a guiding hand for national workforce planning

There was overwhelming support for more support, guidance, and a national workforce planning function. We described this concept as a 'guiding hand' which, in many respects, aims to regain the benefits from the former Senior Appointments Panel approach in England and Wales and the role previously undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary. (Our proposal is not to reinstate HMICFRS in that role.) It also builds on work which the College is doing to develop a database of skills, competencies and career histories of potential candidates, which enables them to search for roles and be notified of existing and upcoming vacancies.

Features of the guiding hand that interviewees said they would welcome include a skills, competencies and experience database containing information about eligible candidates. Such a system could include similar information about current members of chief officer teams. This would enable:

- the creation of lists of candidates who fit specific posts;
- an executive search function to advise forces on strong candidates who would complement their existing teams;
- a career support facility to advise candidates on jobs in teams where they would most likely be a good fit; and
- a development advice function that would link job choices to other development opportunities (in the context of CPD).

We consider that this function should be the responsibility of the College because of the unique perspective it gets from promoting knowledge and training individual officers. It would benefit from information and advice, particularly on the strengths and weakness of different forces, by working with HMICFRS, HMICS, the NPCC and police forces. We also consider that it should be in place prior to the re-introduction of the mobility rule in order that officers can make the best choices for appointments.

Conclusion

On the basis of the evidence we have gathered, there is a strong case for changing the selection processes for chief officer posts. Change is needed to encourage greater openness, transparency and mobility.

Additionally, we consider that there is a strong case for re-imposing a mobility regulation to ensure that chief constables have experience beyond that gained in just one force. It is needed to overcome the inertia which – for some selection processes – risks making the pool of applicants a stagnant one. We recognise the different context within Scotland. Under a single national force with multiple deputy chief constables, chief officers are exposed to challenges and experience not available in many local forces.

We consider that the regulation could be made to work, provided there is sufficient flexibility and imagination to develop opportunities for those who would find it particularly difficult to work away from their current home.

We also consider that this would help promote a more positive perspective on learning and development, including learning from other organisations, by encouraging secondments as part of the guidance to officers on their future career and development.

Recommendation 8

By 31 July 2020, the College, with support from the National Police Chiefs' Council, HMICFRS, HMICS and police forces, should establish and begin operation of a national workforce planning function for all chief officer posts in the United Kingdom. The function should, as a minimum, include:

- the maintenance of a skills, competencies and career-history database on eligible candidates;
- the maintenance of similar information about the current membership of chief officer teams;
- the creation of lists of candidates who fit specific vacancies;
- an executive search function to advise forces on candidates who would best complement their existing teams; and
- a career support facility to advise candidates on roles and other development opportunities that would help meet their career aspirations.

Recommendation 9

By 1 September 2020, the Home Secretary, Scottish Ministers and the Northern Ireland Policing Board should make regulations / directions:

- requiring that an officer would be eligible to apply for a chief constable position only if they had served for at least two years in another organisation at chief officer or equivalent level; and
- limiting the period of time for which a chief officer post can be filled on a temporary basis to a maximum of 12 months.

8. Wellbeing and tenure

One of the concerns which prompted this inspection was a decrease in the average period of tenure for chief constables.

There are several causes for this. These include financial disincentives relating to pension and pay, which we have explicitly excluded from this inspection as they are the subject of work by others (identified in the introduction to this report). However, we were told on numerous occasions that these issues need to be addressed.

Our focus was on the wellbeing of chief officers, something we had been alerted to by individuals and organisations within policing.

It is not clear what an ideal tenure for a chief police officer should be. It is likely to vary, depending on the job and the person. Our evidence suggested that very short tenures present unsettling churn in forces. It also suggested, for different reasons, that very long tenures can be inadvisable too.

What we inspected

Our interviews and surveys explored reasons for the decline in average periods of tenure. We examined what arrangements there were to support chief officers and make sure they maintained their wellbeing while they were in post.

We asked individuals what it felt like to be in a chief officer role and how they coped. We spoke to representatives of the Scottish Chief Police Officers' Staff Association and the Chief Police Officers' Staff Association, who allowed us access to recent survey data.

What we found

The evidence for declining periods of tenure is stark. This passage from the [NPCC report](#) (page 34) is quoted in full:

The analysis of the tenure of chief constables between 1980-2018 supports the hypothesis that there is a higher 'churn' of chief constables than experienced in the last forty years. The review found that since 1980 there has been a steady decrease in chief constable tenure culminating in an unprecedentedly short average period in the rank of 3.8 years in 2018. For chief constables working outside the [Metropolitan Police Service] the average length of service in the rank is currently 3.65 years. This figure has fallen annually since 2014. On average a chief constable in the 1980s had 1.2 years more experience than their colleague serving in the 2010s. Again, the average period of tenure is shorter if MPS officers are removed from the data

with non-metropolitan chief constables serving in the 1980s enjoying 1.65 years more experience than chief constables serving in the 2010s. During the 1980s there were eighteen chief constables with more than a decade's service in the rank outside of the MPS. In the 2010s there were five.

The report presents several hypotheses for these changes.

1. The sharp fall in the tenure of non-Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) chief constables in 1997 coincided with the Police Act 1996, reflecting a radical shift in police governance and enhanced HMIC and Audit Commission inspection regimes. These increasingly focused on delivery against performance indicators and value for money.
2. A restructuring of the MPS took place in the mid-1990s.
3. A similar reduction in non-MPS chief constable tenure occurred in 2002, ahead of the introduction of fixed-term appointments and extensions for senior officers (Police Regulations 2003; Regulation 11).
4. The years 2013 and 2017 saw the further loss of experienced chief constables coinciding with the PCC elections of 2012 and 2016.

We and the report's authors cannot draw conclusions on the validity of these suggestions. However, the current downward trend is both marked and worrying.

There is an absence of support for chief officers

Against this background, there was widespread acknowledgement that there was often an absence of support for chief officers and that chief officers in general were isolated and under huge pressure with unsustainable workloads. Whereas forces, the NPCC and the College are taking positive steps to preserve the wellbeing of the workforce in general, the arrangements for chief officers were underdeveloped.

Several interviewees spoke about how difficult it was for a chief officer to get help from the occupational health units in their own force. The admission that there was a problem would be very visible and the support they received unlikely to take account of their position in an organisation. In Scotland, the Scottish Parliament Justice Committee and the sub-committee on policing liaise regularly with the Scottish Chief Police Officers' Staff Association on matters of personal concern to chief officers.

A few interviewees registered a note of caution about the severity of the problem and questioned whether officers had been realistic about what they would face on promotion. They argued there needed to be understanding and realism about the challenges chief officers would face. Arguably, this should form part of the conversations in force prior to applications, to ensure that people know what they are facing. If they wish to put themselves forward they should make self-care a priority.

According to the wellbeing survey conducted by the Chief Police Officers' Staff Association, the problem is extensive.¹³ They found that 10 percent of assistant chief constables / assistant chief officers registered critical anxiety scores, with bullying and peer pressure cited as a factor. This is worrying.

HMICFRS support to chief constables

The most senior leaders in any organisation (not just police forces) are often under considerable and sustained pressure and can feel a strong sense of isolation.

For many years, it has been the custom and practice of the inspectors of constabulary to provide advice and support to chief constables when they have been under such pressure. It has also been the case that when an inspector of constabulary has reason to believe that a chief constable may be under undue pressure, it is appropriate for the inspector of constabulary to act, depending on the circumstances.

A chief constable suffering undue pressure, who may be struggling to cope or in danger of reaching that point, may jeopardise the efficiency and effectiveness of their force and the public. It is not open to the inspector of constabulary to do nothing. There have been several instances of this kind in recent years. However, this role tends to relate to chief constables, rather than all chief officers.

Chief officers are developing informal support networks

Some chief officers spoke positively about how they had created and used informal support networks to provide sympathy, empathy and advice. As mentioned above, both recent and past graduates valued the SCC for enabling such networks. Some, who had particularly good relationships with their PCC, said this was also a good source of support. However, this was far from the majority view.

At the time of this inspection, the Chief Police Officers' Staff Association was developing a support framework based on its 'panel of friends' approach. The approach is in place to support officers subject to litigation, complaints or misconduct allegations. The intention is that the support framework be available to all chief officers. While some interviewees were aware of this development, it was too soon to have been used by any of our interviewees. After the completion of our fieldwork for this inspection, we also learned that the College intends to develop a specific wellbeing chief officer CPD programme in the current financial year.

We welcome these initiatives but recognise that more resource should be allocated to meet the apparent welfare need.

¹³ Police Officers' Staff Association members survey, 2018. 281 responses.

Conclusion

The problems in the provision of welfare support for chief officers should not be ignored.

We welcome the Chief Police Officers' Staff Association's approach to developing a support network but recognise a need to dedicate more resource to meet demand.

We also welcome the measures taken in Scotland by the Scottish Police Authority and conclude that such remedial action should be prioritised and adequately resourced throughout the United Kingdom.

9. Diversity in the workforce

There continues to be debate and concern in the police service about how to make sure that policing reflects the communities it serves. This extends to the removal of barriers to entry and advancement in the service, particularly those faced by women and people from minority groups.

What we inspected

We examined the experiences of individuals in selection and development, as well as schemes designed to enhance the representativeness of chief officers. We questioned them about what had been helpful or beneficial.

As our focus was on the chief officer cadre, we also considered the data held in Scotland, Northern Ireland and in England and Wales by the Home Office¹⁴ on the level of representation of women and people from minority groups. The data is measured differently across the United Kingdom. For consistency, we refer to the categories of “ethnic minority” and “women”.

What we found

Under-representation of ethnic minority police officers

The percentage of officers from ethnic minority backgrounds from across the police service is low. Among chief officers it is even lower.

In England and Wales, the percentage of police officers (of all ranks, not just chief officers) from an ethnic minority increased from 5.6 to 6.6 percent between 2015 and 2018. There are many local variations which, to some extent, reflect the local population. In Scotland it is 1 percent.¹⁵ In Northern Ireland it is 0.5 percent.¹⁶ In all areas, the police service continues to be under-represented relative to the local population.

In 2018, in England and Wales, 2 percent of chief officers were from an ethnic minority background.

¹⁴ Home Office Statistical Bulletins: [2015](#), [2016](#), [2017](#), [2018](#).

¹⁵ [Equality & Diversity Mainstreaming & Outcomes Progress Report 2017-2019](#), Police Scotland, 2019, page 67.

¹⁶ [Workforce Composition Statistics](#), Police Service for Northern Ireland.

At the time of our inspection, there was no chief constable from a BAME background heading a United Kingdom police force. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, there were no chief officers from a BAME background.¹⁷

The number of female chief officers is proportionate to the number of female officers, but not at chief constable level

The data here is a little more encouraging. Just under one third of police officers are women and more than a quarter of chief officers are women.

The percentage of female police officers

- In England and Wales, the percentage of female police officers (of all ranks, not just chief officers) increased from 28.2 to 29.8 percent between 2015 and 2018.
- In Scotland, the percentage is 30 percent.¹⁸
- In Northern Ireland it is 29.5 percent.¹⁹

The percentage of female substantive chief officers

- In England and Wales, the percentage of female chief officers was 27.1 percent in 2018. That is slightly lower than the percentage of female police officers.
- In Scotland, the percentage of female chief officers was 17 percent as of 31 March 2018.²⁰
- In Northern Ireland there is only one woman in a chief officer team of nine.²¹

Of greater concern were the figures relating to chief constable appointments. At the time of our inspection, only 4 of the 43 territorial Home Office forces was led by a woman. Whilst there are other women of chief constable rank serving in other policing organisations, the disparity in representation between chief officer and chief constable is of concern, particularly outside London.

Neither of the current chief constables in Scotland and Northern Ireland are female.

¹⁷ As at 21 May 2019. Source: data held by HMICS and Police Service of Northern Ireland.

¹⁸ [Equality & Diversity Mainstreaming & Outcomes Progress Report 2017-2019](#), Police Scotland, 2019, page 67.

¹⁹ As at 1 May 2019. Source: [Workforce Composition Statistics](#), Police Service of Northern Ireland.

²⁰ [Equality & Diversity Mainstreaming & Outcomes Progress Report 2017-2019](#), Police Scotland, 2019, page 67.

²¹ As at 8 June 2019. Source: [Our Leadership](#), Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Non-warranted officers and staff improve overall representation rates

In England and Wales, if police staff are factored in, the overall workforce figures for women and people from BAME groups increase. In 2018, 61.3 percent of police staff were women, as well as 45 percent of police and community support officers and 49 percent of designated²² officers. The equivalent figures for BAME groups are 6.8 percent, 9.5 percent and 8.1 percent. These figures represent slow improvement over recent years.

In Scotland the pattern is different. Whereas the proportion of women is similar to that in England and Wales at 63 percent, the proportion of BAME staff is the same as for police officers, at only 1 percent.²³ In Northern Ireland the figure is 0.7 percent.

There are continuing, significant disparities across the United Kingdom. Those relating to BAME representation are the most serious.

Initiatives are not having a sufficiently positive effect

These figures reflect the position at a time when there have been schemes in operation, such as Direct Entry and Police Now, designed (in part) to increase the numbers of officers and staff from under-represented groups. We were told by those concerned that these schemes, however well-intentioned, were not achieving the desired results and that more needed to be done. As mentioned in chapter 2, the College has been piloting a new Aspire programme. However, it is too early to assess whether this has been a success.

Staff associations have been helping with information and advice. They have started initiatives to do more. We were told that they were launching a national mentoring scheme in partnership with the College. The scheme aims to train 900 middle-to-senior-level managers to coach under-represented groups across the service by the end of 2019.

We also heard that there were strong, supportive women's networks in the police. Nevertheless, we were told by several chief constables that they had difficulty encouraging some able and talented women to put themselves forward for promotion.

²² Designated officers are skilled police staff (who are not police officers) employed to exercise specific powers that would otherwise be available to police officers. Designation can be to one or more of four roles: police community support officer (PCSO), investigation officer, detention officer and escort officer.

²³ [Equality & Diversity Mainstreaming & Outcomes Progress Report 2017-2019](#), Police Scotland, 2019, page 68.

Resentment from some quarters

Despite the concern the figures we have quoted may provoke, a significant number of interviewees felt that those who fell outside these groups (women and minority groups) were now at a distinct disadvantage in terms of career advancement.

This was expressed in terms of resentment towards the schemes that provide the support referred to in chapter 2, and suggestions that appointments had been made to increase numbers from under-represented groups rather than reward merit. We could not verify such claims and evidence to the contrary is not hard to find.

Shifting the agenda to ‘an alternative diversity’ is problematic

We were told that policing was missing diversity of thought. This is difficult to define. In some cases, it related to a general principle that chief officer teams were at their best when they had a balance, not only of skills and experience, but personality types. There is some evidence that this leads to successful teams. However, some told us that it related to the type of individual who would be successful at SPNAC and that this was too narrow in outlook. Increasing diversity of thought in this sense, would, in their view, improve policing.

However, others told us that they feared that the emphasis on this was a way of deflecting the fact that the police service has not, so far, been successful in achieving representativeness in terms of ‘visible diversity’.

Conclusion

In an inspection of this type, when forceful and contentious views are expressed, it is not always easy to draw conclusions. But we conclude that significant progress needs to be made in representation, particularly among BAME officers. The underlying resentment at what has been done to help so far is problematic. This is a challenge for police leaders who, if they are to tackle the resentment successfully and assemble a more diverse workforce, need to articulate the case for it more strongly.

We do not make any specific recommendations in relation to how representative chief officers are of the society they serve, but stress that all the actions arising from the other recommendations in this report be considered in terms of their impact on equality. If implemented, our recommendations about improving chief officer selection and development processes will benefit the police and the communities they serve.

Annex A – Methodology

Our inspection took place between January and May 2019. It included a review of relevant documents, data analysis, surveys, interviews and observations at training events.

Our inspection included the following methods:

- a desktop assessment and document review of the existing evidence base;
- a rapid literature review of academic research into effective chief police officer attributes, selection, training and development, together with evaluation of evidence about other relevant organisations;
- an assessment of data from the College, including information about SPNAC applicants and their success rates (patterns and themes across forces and concerning representativeness of society);
- a review of recent surveys and work involving superintending ranks and chief officers, examining chief officer recruitment and retention; and
- a review of the content of the SPNAC and the SCC.

In addition, we designed a series of anonymised surveys, which we sent to three distinct groups:

- All chief constables (18 respondents). We asked them about their selection and development processes for SPNAC as well as their experiences in relation to their professional development.
- Selected cohorts of graduates of the SCC (29 respondents). We asked them how well equipped and prepared they were for their role following the SCC, where they are now and what additional inputs would have been of assistance.
- All chief superintendents and superintendents (304 respondents). We asked them about their perceptions and experience of selection and development for the SPNAC.

We carried out a series of observations. These included attendance at:

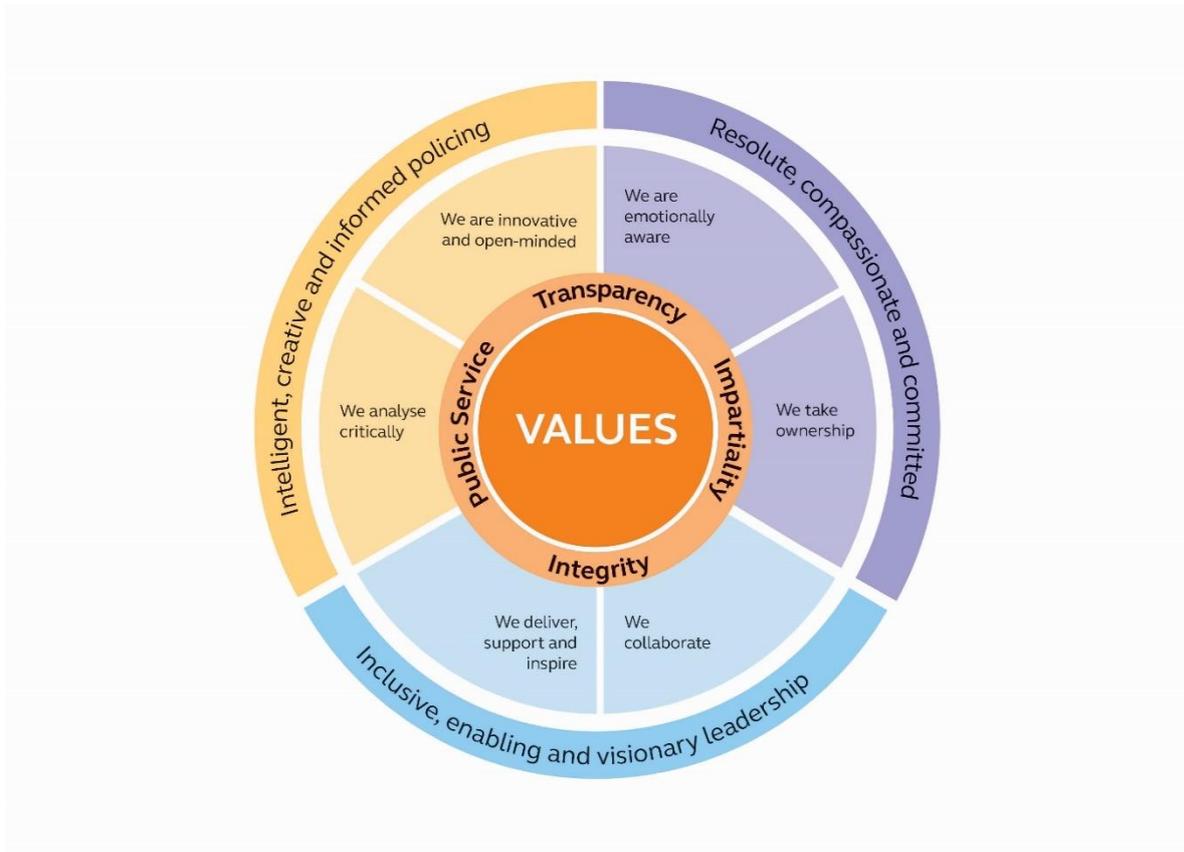
- the SCC to observe the course; and
- the HCSC at the Joint Services and Command Staff College.²⁴

We carried out interviews with:

- a sample of serving and recently retired senior police officers and senior police staff (chief officers, superintendents and chief superintendents, and police staff equivalents);
- principal personnel from the College; and
- senior representatives of other organisations including:
 - the Home Office;
 - the Scottish Government;
 - the Scottish Police Authority;
 - the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners;
 - the NPCC;
 - the Chief Police Officers' Staff Association;
 - the Independent Office for Police Conduct;
 - the Crown Office;
 - the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner for Scotland; and
 - representatives of other bodies which interact with chief officers, such as local authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service, providers of probation services and the Police Foundation.

²⁴ This is the highest-level course provided to senior Army, Navy and Royal Air Force officers. Those attending broadly equate in seniority to those attending the SCC.

Annex B – Competency and Values Framework



[The full framework is available at the College's website.](#)

Annex C – Strategic Command Course 2020 outline

Module 1 – Operational leadership

Focuses on the high-risk areas of operational policing – aims to develop qualified operational police commanders ready now to be appointed to chief officer roles across the United Kingdom.

Module 2 – Organisational leadership

Aims to develop accountable public sector leaders and equip them with the business skills required to lead and transform high profile multi-million-pound public sector organisations with integrity whilst safeguarding the public.

Personal leadership

Aims to develop resilient, confident, emotionally intelligent, ethical, politically astute leaders with clear values, integrity and the ability to create and communicate organisational and personal vision.

Strategic partnerships

Aims to develop senior leaders to identify and maximise the opportunities and benefits of working in public and private sector partnerships and collaborations.