

Supporting women in policing through workplace culture and leadership



About us

Our vision

Improving lives through better skills and better jobs, delivering better services.

 @skills-for-justice

 skillsforjustice.org.uk

- Sector Skills Council for the UK's justice, community safety, fire and rescue, central and local government sectors
- Part of The Workforce Development Trust, a not-for-profit, registered as a charity in the UK
- Five brands, operating across sectors in UK and internationally
 - Skills for Health
 - Skills for Justice
 - People 1st International
 - SFJ Awards
 - iCQ Awards
- Offer a wide range of products and services
- Golden thread - build and maintain effective, skilled workforces that benefit the public

Our services



Workforce planning,
development and modelling



Research and evaluation



Frameworks and standards



Home Office



Cabinet Office



Ministry
of Justice



Border Force



HM Prison &
Probation Service



National Crime Agency



POLICE
SCOTLAND



NHS
England



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Addysg a Gwella Iechyd
Cymru (AaGIC)
Health Education and
Improvement Wales (HEIW)



Workplace culture and leadership supporting women in policing



Ask yourself these questions...

In policing,

- **Where** do we lose women in the pipeline?
- **When** do we lose them - and what are the pinch points?
- **Why** do those pinch points persist - locally and nationally?



NPCC Strategic Workforce Plan Pilot

Skills for
Justice

Purpose

- Develop a consistent approach to workforce planning in policing
- Support development of a coherent national workforce picture
- Provide the capacity and capability to enable forces to meet current and future demand



What are we doing?



- Four pilot forces
- Community of practice
- Stakeholder engagement
- Workforce data analysis

Key output

- A suite of workforce planning solutions, including toolkits and templates

Reflections on our 3 questions

How well were you able to answer these questions???

- **Where** do we lose women in the pipeline?
- **When** do we lose them—and what are the pinch points?
- **Why** do those pinch points persist—locally and nationally?

Leadership checklist: Supporting & retaining women in policing



1. Leadership behaviour & accountability



2. Strategic oversight & governance



3. Decision making & resource allocation



4. Talent management & career progression



5. Flexible working & workload management



6. Health, life stages & wellbeing leadership



7. Culture, standards & misconduct



8. Equipment, uniform & environment



9. Voice, engagement & listening



10. Retention, exit & organisational learning

Leadership checklist

SUPPORTING AND RETAINING WOMEN IN POLICING

Women now make up around 36% of police officers in England and Wales, but remain underrepresented at senior ranks. While representation at entry level has increased, this is not yet reflected consistently in leadership positions or progression pathways.

This has direct implications for leadership pipelines, operational capability, and workforce sustainability. Retaining experienced officers and staff is critical at a time when forces are managing workforce pressures and increasing demand, alongside heightened scrutiny around culture, standards and legitimacy.

Supporting and retaining women in policing is therefore a leadership issue. It requires consistent, visible action to ensure that opportunity, progression and experience are not shaped by gender.

How this checklist can be used

This checklist focuses on what leadership teams can do to influence those outcomes - through behaviour, decision-making, and organisational accountability. It shifts the emphasis from 'what exists' to what leaders actively do, model, resource, and are accountable for.

- The checklist is suitable for:
- Executive and senior leadership self-assessment
 - Informing strategic discussions and leadership away days
 - Supporting inspection readiness (including HMICFRS)
 - Embedding into leadership performance and appraisal frameworks
 - Providing structure for governance, people boards and oversight

The checklist is designed in line with the workforce and inclusion focus of the HMICFRS PEEL Assessment Framework (2025-2027), with a specific emphasis on the leadership actions that influence the attraction, development and retention of women in policing.



Leadership checklist

1. LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Visible leadership commitment to gender equality is demonstrated through actions, not just statements
- Sexist language, behaviour, and assumptions are challenged immediately and publicly
- Inclusive leadership is role modelled in operational and high-pressure contexts
- Leadership understands how decisions impact women differently across roles and ranks
- Gender equality outcomes are embedded in senior leadership performance objectives
- Leaders are held to account for inclusion, not just HR or EDI teams



2. STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT & GOVERNANCE

- Recruitment processes are fair, inclusive and support the attraction of women
- A clear, measurable strategy exists for retaining and progressing women
- The People Strategy explicitly addresses gendered barriers in policing
- Workforce data is reviewed, broken down by gender, rank, role and time served, and informs decisions
- Workforce planning is informed by the Force Management Statement and reflects future demand and workforce risks
- Retention risks for women are discussed at executive level
- Equality objectives influence strategic decisions (resourcing, restructuring, command models)
- The gap between policy intent and lived experience is understood and acted upon

3. DECISION MAKING & RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- Investment decisions consider gender impact (training, equipment, estates)
- Flexible working is resourced and planned, not treated as an inconvenience
- Women's networks and support initiatives have visible senior sponsorship
- Operational demands are managed so they do not systematically disadvantage women
- Inclusion priorities are protected during organisational pressure or crisis



4. TALENT MANAGEMENT & CAREER PROGRESSION

- High-potential women are actively identified and supported
- Acting, specialist, and development opportunities are allocated fairly
- Continuing professional development and PDR processes are applied consistently
- Caring responsibilities do not negatively influence perceptions of ambition or capability
- Promotion processes are scrutinised for gender bias at each stage
- Leaders sponsor women into opportunities, not just encourage them to apply
- Gender disparities in progression rates are tracked and addressed
- Positive action is actively considered and applied appropriately in recruitment and promotion decisions

5. FLEXIBLE WORKING & WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT

- Flexible working is actively supported across all levels
- Requests are handled consistently and transparently by managers
- Leaders understand operational flexibility models, not just policy
- Flexible working does not limit access to roles or promotion
- Narratives that equate presenteeism with commitment are actively challenged

Explore our resources

NPCC Strategic Workforce Plan Pilot



skillsforjustice.org.uk/npcc-wfp

Leadership checklist



skillsforjustice.org.uk/resources/leadership-checklist

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