

# Introduction

Introduction to the guidelines on conducting effective investigations.

First published 28 August 2023

## What are these guidelines for?

These guidelines provide clear evidence-based guidance on conducting effective investigations. They are not intended to be a full description of the investigative process and should be read in conjunction with the [Investigations authorised professional practice \(APP\)](#).

They also provide guidance on the support that investigators need.

## Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are for individuals of all levels and roles who are involved in the investigative process. This includes – but is not limited to – call handlers, police community support officers (PCSOs), uniformed police constables and supervisors, as well as those in detective roles.

While not all these individuals will have a formal investigator title, they all seek information, look for evidence and record what they find. These activities form an investigation, so these individuals are investigators. Their investigations, often at the initial stages, can have an impact on the delivery of the best outcomes.

Although different roles require different levels and stages of involvement in the investigative process, all these individuals should consider carefully how they apply the guidelines to their practice. Local force systems will determine the approach to assess capacity and capability in relation to the allocation of investigative resources.

There are also guidelines specifically for chief constables and supervisors in relation to the support needed to enable effective investigations.

## Who developed these guidelines?

These guidelines were developed collaboratively by a College development team and a College guideline committee, which consisted of frontline practitioners, subject matter experts and

academics. The role of the guideline committee was to agree and finalise the scope, consider the evidence and draft the guidelines, taking into account the views of stakeholders.

## How was the scope of the guidelines developed?

The scope of the guidelines was developed based on a wide range of sources, including research evidence, inspection reports, inquiries and consultation with practitioners.

It was developed by the College and was finalised and agreed by the committee following a consultation with practitioners, academics, members of the public and individuals from partner organisations.

The College undertook a thematic analysis of the recurring issues facing policing, to help identify where national standards could be used to drive improvement activity. This work highlighted a number of perennial issues, one of which related to limitations in investigative capability and issues with the collection, use and disclosure of evidence.

The initial scanning work for these guidelines and a review of available evidence supported this, suggesting that there were weaknesses in general investigative core skills and non-specialist investigative capability. The scope of the guidance therefore focused on how best to conduct effective investigations overall.

The initial scoping used the term 'investigative mindset', which is a term previously used in the Core Investigative Doctrine. This term describes the use of a disciplined approach to investigations that ensures the decisions made are appropriate to the case, are reasonable and can be explained to others. Building on this description and based on evidence, we have expanded the definition of an effective approach to investigations to also include:

- understanding one's role in an investigation, and contribution to the process, from the outset of an incident
- being open-minded, being professionally curious, and identifying and following all reasonable lines of enquiry
- being proportionate
- understanding and being aware of biases

- employing good interpersonal skills

These actions and behaviours, as well as the support required for investigators to carry them out and display them, are detailed in these guidelines.

## How evidence-based are these guidelines?

The guidelines and supporting information draw on an extensive review of the relevant social research, in the form of a rapid evidence assessment (REA). They also reflect insights from over 800 police officers and staff, as well as partner organisations. This is referred to throughout the guidelines as 'practitioner evidence'.

This evidence was collected through a range of engagement activities, including an online survey with police officers and staff, interviews with frontline uniformed police officers and detectives, a call for practice, a workshop with District and Crown Prosecutors, and interviews with investigators from wider law enforcement agencies.

It should be noted that much of the evidence relates to barriers to effective investigation, rather than those factors that support it.

In developing the guidelines, there has been an assumption, where appropriate, that the opposite practice to an identified barrier is likely to support effective investigations.

The criteria for assessing the standard of evidence as good, moderate or limited are set out in the [REA report](#).

## Supporting resources

We have highlighted existing products within the guidelines that we think will help forces to implement these guidelines. Additionally, an implementation plan is being developed to set out key activities and resources that will support forces to embed the guidelines into operational policing.

## Tags

Investigation   Managing investigations