



Final report of the Independent Cultural Review into New South Wales Police Force

May 2026

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Advisory

Contents

Foreword.....	7
Executive summary.....	11
Summary of recommendations	24
About the Cultural Review	33
Scope and purpose.....	33
Methodology.....	34
Research framework.....	34
Approach.....	34
Trauma-informed and culturally safe engagement	35
Consultation.....	35
Limitations of the Cultural Review	39
NSWPF support of the Cultural Review.....	39
Reading this report.....	40
Key terms and definitions.....	41
Chapter 1. Context and culture	43
Overview of NSWPF	44
Functions, values and priorities.....	44
External regulation and oversight	45
Organisational structure	45
Operational strength	46
Workforce profile by years of service and exits.....	47
The changing nature of policing.....	49
Non-crime-related demand	51
Why culture matters in NSWPF	52
Mixed experiences of workplace culture.....	53
Equity, diversity and inclusion as a core cultural indicators.....	55
Diversity within NSWPF.....	56
Snapshot: Diversity within NSWPF.....	57
The opportunity for NSWPF – Key drivers of cultural reform.....	58
Chapter 2. Trusted leadership	59
Why trusted and inclusive leadership matters.....	61
Reform of the Commissioner’s Executive Team.....	61
A shared strategic vision and consistent behaviours.....	63
Ownership of cultural change.....	64

Capability and performance.....	71
Giving and receiving feedback.....	72
Recommendations	73
Chapter 3. Attraction, recruitment and the Academy	75
Recruitment.....	76
Financial barriers.....	76
Diversity in recruitment and alignment with government expectations.....	77
Navigating the application process.....	79
Recruitment campaigns	83
Recommendations	85
Academy and probation.....	86
Academy structure	86
Academy culture	86
Mixed experiences of psychological safety	87
Entry via the Professional Mobility Program.....	87
Role readiness.....	88
Academy curriculum.....	89
Probationary oversight.....	90
Recommendation	92
Chapter 4. Talent development and career progression	93
Development pathways and learning culture	94
Leadership development pathways	94
Confidence in the learning culture	95
Operational Training	95
Equity and local decision-making	96
Data and accountability	96
Supervisory practice and performance management.....	97
Managing performance	97
The role of middle management – supervision, support and feedback culture.....	99
Lack of conflict management skills.....	101
Recognition	102
Spotlight on unsworn staff.....	103
Pay and conditions	103
Role design, expertise and leadership.....	103
Development and Progression.....	104
Why people leave.....	105
Understanding attrition.....	105
The exit process	106
Promotions	107
The promotions process	108

Flexible work arrangements as a barrier to promotion.....	109
Trust in the promotions system.....	109
Appointment of superintendents.....	110
Applicant feedback	110
Access to relieving opportunities	111
Promotions and diversity	112
Recommendations	114
Chapter 5. Flexibility in a modern organisation.....	117
The case for flexible work.....	118
The cost of inaction	119
Current approach and experiences.....	120
Access to flexible work	120
Take up of flexible work.....	121
Attitudes to flexible work	123
Reasons for denial of flexible work requests	124
Recommendation	126
Chapter 6. Addressing harmful behaviours	127
Legislative and policy obligations	129
Drivers and risk factors of workplace harm	131
Experiences of harmful behaviours.....	134
Bullying.....	136
Discrimination	141
Sexual harassment	145
A hostile working environment based on sex.....	147
Historical experiences of sexual assault	148
Impact of harmful behaviours.....	149
Prevention and early intervention mechanisms.....	149
Policies, procedures and early intervention	150
Preventing misconduct and encouraging speaking up.....	151
Gap analysis and path forward.....	151
Response mechanisms and pathways.....	152
Accountability for harmful behaviours	155
Inconsistent leadership role modelling and capability	155
Low trust in the complaints process	156
Lack of awareness of reporting pathways	157
Perception of a lack of outcomes	157
Perception of inconsistent complaint management	158
Low satisfaction with complaints process.....	159
Improving psychological safety	160
Barriers to reporting harmful behaviours	161

Victimisation.....	162
Active bystander action.....	163
Recommendations	164
Chapter 7. Support and care	166
Positive impact of recent improvements	167
The role of Critical Incident Support.....	170
Tailored and proactive initiatives – Wellcheck and mental health clinicians	172
Employee Assistance Program	174
Barriers to accessing support.....	174
How stigma limits help-seeking behaviour.....	177
Stigma about long-term sick leave	178
Initiatives to actively reduce stigma	179
Addressing internal and external causes of psychological injury	181
How harmful and unsafe workplace behaviour drives psychological injury	182
Initiatives to reduce work pressure.....	183
Recognition and value as ingredients of support and care	185
Valuing the role of general duties staff	185
Recognising the work of unsworn staff.....	186
Recommendations	189
Chapter 8. Modern systems and enabling environment	191
Rostering	192
Current practices	192
Comparative insights.....	195
Data-driven decision-making.....	196
Technology systems.....	197
Reliance on outdated technology	197
Fragmentation.....	198
Professionalisation and accountability	199
Professionalisation and recognising external expertise	199
Systems accountability.....	199
Confidence in change and innovation	200
Recommendations	201
Appendix A. Terms of Reference	203
Appendix B. NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviour policies gap analysis	205
Appendix C. Cultural Review workforce survey questions	213

Acknowledgement

The Independent Cultural Review of New South Wales Police Force acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout New South Wales and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We recognise the enduring connection of First Nations people to land, water and culture and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACLO	Aboriginal community liaison officer
AEN	Aboriginal Employment Network
AIPM	Australian Institute of Police Management
CAD	Computer-Aided Dispatch
CET	Commissioner's Executive Team
CLAS	Community Language Allowance Scheme
COMPASS	Command Performance and Assessment System
COPS	Computerised Operational Policing System
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
GLLO	LGBTQA+ liaison officer
IPOS	Integrated Policing Operations System
IPROWD	Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way Delivery
LECC	Law Enforcement Conduct Commission
MCLO	multicultural community liaison officers
NSWPF	New South Wales Police Force
PASAC	Police Aboriginal Strategic Advisory Council
PMAC	Police Multicultural Advisory Council
PMES	People Matter Employee Survey
POLEN	Pacific Officers Law Enforcement Network
the Cultural Review	Independent Cultural Review into New South Wales Police Force

Foreword

From the Lead Reviewer

Like many institutions operating within rapidly shifting social, environmental, economic and technological contexts, the NSW Police Force (NSWPF) is in a period of transition shaped by the changing nature of crime, heightened public scrutiny, reduced workforce numbers and an increased demand for transparency.

These pressures also strike at the heart of a foundational principle of modern policing: that police derive their legitimacy from the consent, trust and cooperation of the community they serve. This concept of policing by consent, that ‘the police are the public, and the public are the police’,¹ remains central to contemporary policing. It underscores the principle that authority is not simply conferred by law, but earned through professionalism, fairness, ethical conduct and community confidence. When trust is strained, the legitimacy on which policing depends is weakened.

In a time marked by increasing polarisation, uncertainty and fear, the need for a police force that is supported, professionally grounded and committed to the highest ethical standards is more important than ever. Strengthening legitimacy requires not only operational excellence, but a culture that is inclusive, ethical and aligned with the values of the community.

Policing is a tough job, often performed under demanding and dynamic conditions. They are roles that can offer extraordinary and humbling experiences, engender loyalty and pride, and provide purpose and collegiality. They can also take a profound toll. The same work that binds people together can also break them.

In late 2024, I was asked by former Commissioner of Police Karen Webb to undertake an independent review into the culture of NSWPF. The Cultural Review was announced following media reports of a ‘toxic culture’ in NSWPF and descriptions of sexual harassment and assault against women in the force. This is not the first review of this kind. Over the last decade, there have been comprehensive cultural inquiries into police forces and emergency services in other Australian and comparable jurisdictions. The findings of these reviews describe environments that are characterised by command and control, narrow and outdated notions of who is best placed to keep the community safe, and resistance to change. They are places that have left bullying, discrimination, racism, sexual harassment and, at times, unethical conduct unchecked. They have struggled to provide the flexibility that a modern workforce needs and until recently, have prioritised physical safety over psychological safety. NSWPF is no exception but through this independent process and through a number of internal strategies and actions, has shown a commitment to change.

It is well accepted that culture in command-and-control environments is not just a setting or a backdrop. In a mutually reinforcing compact, culture informs and is informed by how people behave, how decisions are made, how teams hold together under pressure, how complaints are handled, how promotions are decided, how recruitment works, what gets tolerated, what gets rewarded, and what gets ignored.

When culture is strong, it supports ethical conduct, resilience and public confidence. When it’s poor, it erodes trust, drives good people away, and weakens operational effectiveness.

Over the last 10 months, my team and I have visited 35 sites across NSWPF. We have conducted 508 formal and informal interviews with sworn and unsworn staff. Over 4,473 people responded to

¹ Home Office (2012), *Definition of Policing by Consent*, FOI release, GOV.UK. Reproduces the 1829 *General Instructions* including the principle that ‘the police are the public and the public are the police’.

our workplace survey, and we have examined hundreds of pieces of data – policies, strategies, workplace demographics – and received over 100 written submissions. In total, we have connected with 5,170 participants.

It is a comprehensive picture that emerges. At many of the sites we visited, staff spoke of their passion for their jobs, their motivation for joining NSWPF, their desire to serve the local community they work in:

The fact that I am contributing to a safe society gives me a sense of purpose, that my working life means something.

— Written submission

But this enthusiasm was often dampened by experiences of stress, disrespect, fatigue, inequity and trauma.

Without exception, every woman that came forward to speak with us, described experiences or observations of overt or covert harassment, undermining and belittlement at some time during their service. Few had made formal complaints or reports and where they had, many described being ‘punished’ for speaking out. Many also acknowledged that things had improved over time in NSWPF. It is worth noting, however, that in the over 100 years since women have been permitted to serve within NSWPF, there has been just one female commissioner and two female deputy commissioners (one of whom then became commissioner). There are currently no women on the Commissioner’s Executive Team. This is not, as was suggested by one leader, because women don’t want the ‘top jobs’ but as a result of decades long social and institutional discrimination.

Equity, safety and respect do not emerge organically in policing; they are created, modelled and protected by leaders. Ensuring that women can participate, progress and thrive in NSWPF is not a ‘women’s issue’; it is a core leadership responsibility and a test of the organisation’s integrity.

Every encounter underscored the importance and influence of leadership. In commands and units where we met connected and skilled leaders who understood and cared about the day-to-day experience of their people and their communities, the workplace culture was generally robust.

The overall culture at this station is the best it has ever been. It’s a positive, youthful energy – people see the work as an opportunity to learn. With the right leadership, you can thrive.

— Confidential interview

In other commands, we heard of and observed leaders who failed to role model organisational values, who shrank from difficult conversations, who did not prioritise the development or care of their staff. In these areas, morale was poor.

We heard that there are inconsistent expectations and inconsistent consequences for people across the organisation. A level of protection is attached to ‘high value’ or ‘favoured’ people. The experience and perceptions of protection and favouritism also undermine the promotions process. At the most senior levels, we heard of problematic disunity and petty acts of retribution.

Our findings also reveal a distrust and disconnect between management and staff. Many staff reported feeling undervalued and unsupported. Lack of people-centred management and care is the number one reason that people are exiting the organisation.

A career in policing once offered a stable and varied pathway. In a broader environment of significant workforce disruption, it still can; however, workforce aspirations and expectations have changed, and NSWPF has work to do in attracting a diverse mix of excellent applicants who will not only join the organisation but be motivated and supported to stay and develop a career in policing.

Regressive views towards part time and flexible working mean that talented people are leaving. These rigid approaches are disproportionately affecting women, especially women with caring responsibilities.

Resistance to change and a hostility to outside expertise have created an insular mindset in parts of the organisation. Good ideas are frustrated, and helpful initiatives from local commands that could make policing more efficient are often stymied.

And yet, across every rank and command, there are stories of bravery, integrity, ingenuity and care. There are examples of cultural change, deeper inclusion and diversity in some commands, and efforts to build closer connections to the many distinct communities that NSWPF serves.

A recent significant investment has gone into the development of better mental health supports for NSWPF employees. The importance of this cannot be overstated. There are psychosocial tripwires in so many aspects of policing. Comprehensive support after a critical incident, mental health education and managers who care, should all be of the highest quality.

When you spend over a year with an organisation, reviewing data, plans and policies, and having hundreds of hours of conversation, it is tempting to play it all back. This is not what this report seeks to do. Instead, it applies an ethics-based methodology to form an assessment of the current state of culture at NSWPF, to identify the areas where focused effort will make the greatest difference to the greatest number of people.

While there may be a temptation to sensationalise, this Review should not be read as a beat up on police. On the contrary, we have seen up close the extraordinary instances of service and safety that the organisation provides to the community of NSW. Instead, the Review should be understood as an opportunity to hear directly from sworn and unsworn members across rank and region about how this service can be improved.

I commend former Commissioner Karen Webb for her decision to undertake this review and current Commissioner Mal Lanyon's commitment to reflection and action. While the findings are at times sobering, the recommendations are geared to ensuring that NSWPF is best able to keep its people and its community safe.

I am indebted to the excellent Cultural Review team who have worked with such tremendous care, professionalism, rigour and purpose – Julie McKay, Peter Davies, Catherine Dixon, Stacey Ong, Timumilli Sculthorpe and Justine Vaisutis.

Finally, and most importantly, we acknowledge the thousands of women and men of NSWPF for their service, and thank those who shared their experiences, challenges, ideas and hopes with such candour and generosity.

Kristen Hilton
Lead Reviewer

From the Commissioner of the New South Wales Police Force

For any policing organisation, culture underpins how we operate and ultimately how we earn and maintain the trust of the community we protect and serve. But for any police force to retain this trust, it must first be willing to look honestly at itself.

Policing is a difficult job, and we need to work together to ensure a safe, inclusive and fair workplace. The Independent Cultural Review highlights that our people demonstrate a very strong commitment to policing and the community, however it does identify issues including bullying, discrimination and a culture in which people have felt unable or unwilling to speak up about misconduct and unacceptable behaviour.

This needs to change. There will be no tolerance of harmful behaviour within our organisation. Everyone has a fundamental right to be safe at work. That can only happen when there's strong and visible leadership and a culture where we all have a shared responsibility to speak up.

I thank the many current and former staff for coming forward and speaking openly about their experiences. I understand that for some this has been a difficult and challenging process, but your input has provided a valuable base for future action. Your willingness to speak demonstrates both resilience and a belief that we can do better. We owe you not only our respect but our action.

As Commissioner, I am committed to ensuring the 29 recommendations in this Review are implemented with urgency and transparency. This is a chance to work on meaningful change.

I want our organisation to represent the best of us, and for our workplace to be a place where every individual is treated with dignity, where diversity is valued, and where harmful behaviours are called out and addressed. It must be a place where leaders lead with empathy, integrity and accountability.

The Review highlights what we are doing well as an organisation and where we need to improve. And while we have work to do, we have already committed to a number of initiatives which will bring about significant positive change, such as reviewing the promotions process to ensure confidence and transparency to the process, developing a leadership framework to set out clear expectations, reviewing the recruitment process to ensure we can get more people to join our organisation, focusing on harmful behaviours through a two-year program to educate and stop behaviours from happening and continuing our investment in mental health and critical incident support.

I want to thank Kristen Hilton and her team for their extensive work; their approach was carried out with genuine empathy and thoughtful consideration.

Together, I am confident that we can create a workplace where every member feels safe, valued, and empowered to uphold the standards our community rightly expects.

Mal Lanyon
Commissioner

Executive summary

Policing in NSW, as across Australia, is undergoing profound and accelerating change. Rapid technological advancement, environmental and geopolitical instability, and the increasingly borderless nature of crime are reshaping society and generating new forms of criminality. Although traditional crime rates have declined, demand for policing has not. Reports of sexual assault and cybercrime have surged alongside rising disaster-related incidents and mental-health callouts. In practice, police are now the first responders to a wide spectrum of social, health and environmental crises, not only criminal activity.

If it doesn't fall into a box, it falls to the cops.

— Informal interview

These pressures have intensified the complexity and workload of policing at a time when recruitment is declining, operational capacity is stretched, technology is outdated, and the justice and social service systems are under strain.

The internal environment presents its own challenges. While there are outstanding examples of leadership, courage, service and ingenuity across NSWPF, these are not consistent. Many frontline officers described a disconnect from management, entrenched perceptions of bias and favouritism, harmful behaviours, weak accountability, burnout and fatigue, and systems that are outdated or inflexible. Narrow stereotypes about who is suited to policing and police leadership remain embedded, despite pockets of progress.

Workforce diversity in NSWPF also remains limited, despite excellent initiatives such as the Pacific Officer Law Enforcement Network and other employee led diversity groups. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds make up 25 per cent of the NSW population but only half that proportion within NSWPF. Despite the development of diversity and inclusion strategies, representation has stagnated or declined over the past five years. Women and minority cohorts continue to report barriers to recruitment, development and promotion, as well as experiences of harassment and discrimination. Strong policy settings exist in many parts of the organisation alongside enthusiasm for reform, but implementation is inconsistent and often weak.

There are, however, real signs of positive change. The psychological toll of policing is now better recognized with greater investment in mental-health support and education than ever before. Over recent years, NSWPF has sharpened its focus on organisational culture, and local initiatives demonstrate innovation, stronger community engagement and a willingness to do things differently. In the last 12 months recruitment numbers have increased and there is a recognition that a greater investment in people centred leadership and management is fundamental to retention and high performance. There is also a strong appetite for change across many parts of the organisation.

The Independent Cultural Review

The Independent Cultural Review into the NSW Police Force was announced in September 2024 following reports of bullying and sexual harassment and formally established in March 2025. The Review was tasked with objectively assessing workplace culture, identifying systemic issues and recommending actions to build a more equitable, capable and culturally safe organisation. The Cultural Review examined leadership capability, diversity and inclusion, recruitment and promotion practices, and systems for preventing and responding to harmful behaviours. It did not investigate individual allegations.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, including a desktop review, analysis of workforce and engagement data, and extensive consultation with current and former staff. Ethics approval ensured confidentiality and trauma-informed practice. More than 5,170 people contributed through interviews, focus groups, written submissions and a workforce survey with 4,473 responses. Site visits to 35 locations provided critical insight into operational realities across the state.

NSWPF defines culture as the ‘patterns of behaviour that are encouraged, discouraged or tolerated over time’. Its Culture Strategy 2023–2027 identifies four levers that shape culture: purpose, leadership, people, and processes and systems. We agree with this framing. Building on it, the Cultural Review has identified seven key drivers of cultural reform which, when activated together, will support NSWPF to become a safer, more equitable, more effective and modern organisation: trusted leadership; recruitment and the Academy; retention and promotion; flexibility; support and care; prevention and response to harmful behaviours; and modern systems.

This is urgent work, but it will take time to embed and must be evaluated over the long term. It will require sustained investment in resources, capability and innovation. Ultimately, progress will depend on united, trusted and accountable leadership at the most senior levels of the organisation.

Trusted leadership

The challenges of modern policing for leaders

Police leaders operate at the intersection of critical operational risk and long-term organisational stewardship. They must make decisions in often volatile situations while also cultivating trust, cohesion and resilience across their teams and communities. Contemporary policing has changed. Contemporary police leadership must also change.

NSWPF is a hierarchical and rank-based organisation where authoritarian leadership styles remain common. While effective in operational contexts, we observed and heard how this mode of control can discourage employee input and different ways of thinking and stymie innovation and efficiency. Staff we spoke to described a gap in empathy and emotional intelligence for some senior leaders, partly due to the accumulated impact of frontline policing over their careers.

Good officers can become bad bosses because of the trauma they have experienced; their failure to get help; and their lack of self-awareness.

— Confidential interview

The social challenges faced by police, the impact of technology and the changing nature of the workforce require more adaptive and inclusive leadership capabilities. To ensure the trust of employees and the community, leaders must also exercise their powers and decision-making ethically and respectfully.

Diversity within senior leadership

There is an absence of diverse perspectives and backgrounds across the executive and senior leadership teams at NSWPF. In its most recent annual report, NSWPF reported that only 18.2 per cent of senior leaders are women. First Nations people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are also under-represented across leadership cohorts. This homogeneity risks undermining innovation, effective decision-making and community trust.

In contrast to other policing jurisdictions in Australia, the substantive membership of the Commissioner's Executive Team currently comprises all sworn roles, all filled by men who have long tenures in NSWPF. This composition signifies the barriers that women are experiencing in progressing within the organisation and speaks to the need to build a more diverse pipeline of talent for leadership roles.

The limited diversity within the Commissioner's Executive Team also reflects a wider organisational tendency to privilege uniformed experience over specialised knowledge. The assumption that 'a blue shirt solves everything' has led to critical technical roles often being filled by sworn officers without relevant qualifications or experience. In certain parts of the organisation this has resulted in an insular culture that is resistant to change and outside expertise.

Visible, caring and supportive leadership

Many employees spoke to us of the deep professional and personal bonds they have formed with their colleagues. This camaraderie is a source of resilience in NSWPF.

It's not the money. It's the people. I have affection for the people. There is a camaraderie. We help each other out here.

— Confidential interview

Conversely, there was inconsistency among senior leaders when it came to supporting their teams, demonstrating respectful behaviours and creating psychological safety. In our workforce survey, only 44 per cent of people reported that they felt respected and valued by management, and only 35 per cent agreed that they received the right support after critical incidents. Staff raised widespread concerns about factions and favouritism which influence decision-making from promotions, relieving opportunities and accountability for harmful behaviours.

If you are not part of the group, or a 'yes man', then your capability, drive and performance mean nothing.

— Confidential interview

Employees reported that they fear that speaking up or offering feedback will damage their careers.

If you open your mouth, you get sabotaged. It is crippling the organisation.

— Confidential interview

Through our site visits and confidential and expert interviews, we saw first-hand the role that commanders play in setting the tone of the culture within commands. Where they demonstrated empathy and engagement the positive impact on morale was profound.

The commander is the best – approachable, kind, warm. She is amazing for morale.

— Informal interview

During our consultations, there were numerous examples of senior leaders who were focused on visible, caring and supportive leadership within commands. These leaders clearly understand that culture drives strong operational performance.

This is the best [police area command] I've worked at. The commander cares. It is the most proactive station – finding out people's goals and strengths and how to improve.

— Confidential interview

These examples highlight the transformative potential of leadership behaviours aligned with respect and inclusion.

Driving cultural change

Over the past five years, NSWPF has developed clear culture and workforce strategies, including the inaugural Culture Strategy 2023–2027 and the Strategic Workforce Plan 2022–2032. However, awareness and uptake of these strategies outside Corporate Command remains low. Realising the vision they set out, will require senior leaders to take collective responsibility for driving cultural change. The 2025 People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) underscores this need: only 24 per cent of respondents felt that change was managed well within the organisation.

Leadership instability has compounded these challenges. During the Cultural Review, NSWPF underwent a significant transition, with Commissioner Karen Webb concluding her term in September 2025 and Commissioner Mal Lanyon appointed as her successor. This change played out publicly amid rumour and criticism. For some time, leadership at NSWPF has been characterised by perceptions of disunity, misalignment and factionalism at the highest levels.

Unity and accountability do not require uniform agreement, but they do require senior leaders to demonstrate genuine alignment, mutual trust and active support for one another. Without this, the organisation cannot deliver the cultural reform it has committed to.

The inconsistency we observed in how leaders drive culture strategies and model organisational values reflects leadership expectations that are under-developed and poorly embedded. Only 29 per cent of our workforce survey respondents agreed that NSWPF values and rewards supervisors and managers with strong people-management capability. Cultural leadership is still not afforded the same importance as operational leadership, and this imbalance is limiting the organisation's ability to shift culture at scale.

There are clear reforms that can accelerate cultural change including setting organisational targets for key people and culture priorities; strengthening leader accountability by embedding people and culture outcomes into the performance framework; and establishing independent oversight mechanisms to support, monitor and publicly report on the implementation of the Cultural Review's recommendations.

Together, these reforms would create the clarity, discipline and external assurance required to drive sustained cultural improvement across NSWPF.

Recruitment and the Academy

Recruitment, training, development and promotion in NSWPF are not just HR functions – they are cultural levers that shape who enters NSWPF, how they progress, and what behaviours and capabilities are rewarded.

The recruitment process

NSWPF's multi-stage recruitment process is rigorous and broadly aligned with approaches used in other Australian policing jurisdictions. While the process is complex, reflecting the demands and responsibilities of policing, between 2020 and 2024 NSWPF faced sustained challenges in attracting sufficient numbers of applicants. In 2025, this trend reversed sharply, with a significant increase in

applications, likely linked to the introduction of paid recruit training and better remuneration across the organisation.

Despite recent improvements, recruits still face financial barriers to entry. Recruits are required to pay Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) fees associated with the Associate Degree in Policing, projected to be \$17,664 in 2026, in addition to application-related costs. These upfront and deferred costs may disproportionately deter candidates from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those considering mid-career transitions. More broadly, NSWPF does not have a clearly articulated recruitment strategy that defines desired future workforce size, skills mix or diversity objectives, despite such approaches being common in comparable jurisdictions. In the absence of this strategic clarity, recruitment activity is largely reactive rather than targeted.

Staff we spoke to frequently described the application experience as cumbersome, with lengthy timelines, multiple assessment stages and vetting processes that may unintentionally discourage otherwise suitable candidates. NSWPF maintains the most demanding physical fitness standards of any Australian police service, notwithstanding evidence that other jurisdictions operate effectively with lower entry thresholds. The high standard required further narrows the potential applicant pool without clear operational justification.

Recruitment campaigns have improved in quality and resonance, with initiatives such as ‘Be a cop in your hometown’ demonstrating stronger local alignment and community representation. However, these campaigns are not systematically evaluated, and recruitment marketing decisions are not consistently informed by applicant or workforce data. Early attrition remains a significant concern, with just over a quarter of probationary constables (approximately 27 per cent) leaving within their first two years, raising questions about candidate fit, expectation setting and the effectiveness of recruitment targeting. Taken together, these findings suggest the need for a more strategic, data-driven recruitment approach that focuses not only on volume, but on long-term retention, workforce diversity and alignment with future policing capability needs.

We’re missing out on people with real-world experience who can empathise and engage with the community.

— Confidential interview

People see the helicopters, dogs, rescue – that’s the advertising campaign. But that’s not what most police do.

— Confidential interview

The Academy

The NSWPF Academy plays a critical role in establishing behavioural and professional standards and the early formation of workplace culture. It is the environment in which norms around conduct, integrity, safety and respect are first embedded and reinforced. Staff we engaged with who had joined NSWPF within the last five years overwhelmingly reflected positively on their time at the Academy, describing it as supportive, challenging and formative. A small number of interview participants, however, reported witnessing or experiencing harmful behaviours, underscoring the importance of the Academy’s role not only in skills development but in setting clear, consistently enforced cultural standards.

The current training model – comprising online learning and a 16-week residential program, followed by three further sessions during the probationary period – has not been formally evaluated since its introduction. While we observed genuine efforts by Academy staff to engage recruits and support their transition into operational policing, the tightly constrained curriculum limits the depth with which critical content can be explored. In particular, there is an opportunity to better embed mental health education, preventive practice and cultural awareness as integrated themes across training, rather than discrete or standalone sessions. Without this through-line, recruits may leave the Academy technically prepared but insufficiently equipped for the cultural and psychological demands of modern policing.

We found that experiences during probation are pivotal in shaping decisions to remain in, or exit, the organisation. Staff described variable oversight during this phase, with the quality of supervision and support heavily dependent on local workforce capacity and leadership. The introduction of the field training and assessment officer (FTAO) role and associated allowance represents a sound model in principle; however, workforce shortages mean that many probationary constables are deployed operationally without consistent access to an FTAO. In these circumstances, opportunities for structured feedback, learning and early intervention are diminished.

Staff consistently identified education development officers (EDOs) as a critical role in supporting probationary learning and assessing competence against required standards. Where EDO engagement was strong, recruits reported greater confidence, clearer expectations and more consistent development. Taken together, the findings suggest that while the Academy experience is largely positive, there's a need for more continuity between training, probation and operational practice to ensure recruits are set up for long-term success.

Talent development and career progression

Development, supervision and culture

A healthy and sustainable workplace culture depends on retaining capable people and supporting their development into leadership roles over time. In this context, the systems and behaviours that shape learning, supervision and progression are critical. We found that NSWPF has made substantial and positive investment in leadership and professional development, and that these programs are widely regarded as high quality and valuable. Demand for participation significantly exceeds current capacity, indicating both the perceived value of the offerings and the need to scale and sustain this investment to support the future workforce.

Scaling development and improving timing and access

While the quality of NSWPF's leadership development programs is a strength, access remains constrained and staff cannot always take up opportunities at the relevant time in their career progression. Training is frequently tied to rank rather than role, meaning officers may not access structured development until many years after they first begin relieving or supervising others. We support NSWPF's efforts to expand its development offerings from 2026. Online learning is also essential in a workforce of NSWPF's size and geographic spread, and we support its continued use for scale and consistency. To be effective, however, online learning must be clearly prioritised, contextually relevant and better tailored to policing realities, with clarity around why particular modules are required and how they support operational practice. Importantly, general duties officers require protected time to complete mandatory training during work hours, rather than relying on unpaid off-shift effort.

Strengthening supervisory capability at critical moments

Supervisory practice emerged as a key area for further investment. While many supervisors are committed and capable, staff confidence in supervision and performance management is mixed, with only 42 per cent of respondents to our workforce survey reporting regular, scheduled feedback conversations with their manager. We identified a need to more deliberately support supervisors at key moments that carry disproportionate cultural and workforce impact – such as giving performance feedback, managing emerging conflict, addressing incivility, and undertaking difficult conversations early, before issues escalate. Operational pressures frequently draw supervisors away from people leadership, yet these moments are precisely where targeted capability, support and reinforcement can prevent harm, improve outcomes and sustain team performance.

Promotions, trust and confidence

In contrast to development programs, the promotions system attracted consistently low levels of trust across the workforce. Interview participants described the process as opaque, inconsistently applied and overly reliant on discretion, contributing to perceptions of favouritism and uneven access to acting and relieving opportunities. Where staff had been unsuccessful in seeking a promotion, they described the feedback they received as variable in quality and availability, further weakening confidence in the system. These issues are occurring against a backdrop of elevated exits in recent years, resulting in shortages at middle-leadership levels and increasing pressure on those who remain. Addressing confidence in the promotions system is therefore critical – not only to fairness and inclusion, but to NSWPF’s ability to retain talent and build a credible, sustainable leadership pipeline.

The promotion system to superintendent and above is based wholly on nepotism and jobs for mates.

— Informal interview

Flexible work

Flexible work is increasingly recognised as a defining feature of modern employment and a critical determinant of an organisation’s ability to attract, retain and sustain a capable workforce. Employers that successfully embed flexibility are better positioned to access diverse talent, support wellbeing and improve retention in tight labour markets. The cost of inaction is well established, with rigid work models contributing to attrition, reduced engagement and poorer wellbeing. NSWPF acknowledges this at a policy level; however, we found that flexibility remains difficult to access in practice, and staff have limited confidence that flexible arrangements are supported, normalised or operationally valued.

While NSWPF’s flexible work policies are comprehensive, their practical application is reportedly inconsistent and often cumbersome. There is little visible leadership role-modelling of flexible work, minimal showcasing of effective arrangements, and limited guidance on how flexibility can be operationalised within policing contexts. Approval of flexible arrangements is highly contingent on individual commanders, enabling bias, variability and risk averse decision-making. Employees consistently reported stigma associated with working flexibly, as well as perceived career penalties, particularly for part-time work and people (mostly women) with caring responsibilities. Flexibility is commonly viewed by leaders as being in tension with operational delivery and, in the context of workforce shortages, as equating to reduced capacity rather than a retention or capability strategy.

Despite a stated intent to increase access to flexible work, NSWPF does not systematically collect or report data on flexible work arrangements, limiting the organisation’s ability to assess uptake, equity, or impact. Using part-time work as a proxy for flexibility, uptake is extremely low: only 4.6 per cent of staff work less than 0.8 full-time equivalent, compared to 26.8 per cent across the NSW Public Service, and less than 1 per cent of NSWPF leaders work part-time. This absence of data means that commitments set out in the Strategic Workforce Plan are not informed by evidence about where flexibility is working, where barriers persist, or how NSWPF might better leverage flexible arrangements to support workforce sustainability. Without measurement, flexibility remains aspirational rather than operational.

Cultural attitudes continue to act as a significant barrier to flexibility, including a prevailing assumption that operational effectiveness requires 12-hour shifts and full-time availability. NSWPF’s reliance on long shifts – among the longest in Australian policing – combined with rigid rostering arrangements and outdated first response agreements, was frequently linked by interview participants to fatigue, burnout and work–life conflict. While PMES results indicate approximately 50 per cent satisfaction with flexibility, qualitative evidence suggests that this result has remained largely static over time and masks entrenched structural and cultural barriers. Employees described leaving the organisation to regain control over their lives, highlighting that inflexibility is not only a workforce issue, but a direct contributor to attrition and diminished wellbeing.

People are leaving because they want their lives back. Everything you do is based on a roster. It takes over your life.

— Confidential interview

We lost two senior women recently as they were offered better pay and flexibility elsewhere. Both would have gone on to be sergeants.

— Informal interview

Addressing harmful behaviour

Addressing unsafe and harmful behaviours within policing organisations is critical to building institutional trust and legitimacy. Harmful behaviours not only impact negatively on individuals but shape culture, public trust and operational effectiveness.

We used a range of methods to understand the frequency and impact of harmful conduct in NSWPF, including a voluntary and confidential workforce survey, PMES data, internal complaint figures, interviews with over 500 current and former employees and written submissions. Based on this data, it is clear that bullying, incivility, discrimination and victimisation are occurring at unacceptable levels within NSWPF and present a systemic risk. Nearly one in three of those who responded to our workforce survey told us that they had experienced bullying in the last five years, while one quarter reported experiencing discrimination. This was followed by experiences of verbal abuse and/or threats (18 per cent) and victimisation (15 per cent).²

The impact of unsafe and harmful workplace behaviour on NSWPF employees is significant, with staff raising negative impacts on their mental health, self-esteem and confidence, as well as employment, career or work.

Bullying

Bullying was the most prevalent behaviour that respondents to our workforce survey said they experienced and witnessed, with 30 per cent responding that they had directly experienced bullying behaviours in the last five years. Employees who spoke to us about bullying described a pattern of behaviours that left them feeling scared, belittled or humiliated. Some reported having critical information deliberately withheld, making it harder to perform their duties. Others spoke of being the subject of rumour, gossip or exclusion.

Bullying is as much a part of this organisation as wearing a uniform.

— Confidential interview

Both sworn and unsworn employees also described retaliation when they attempted to speak up. Many reported that those who raise concerns risk being targeted, denied promotions, or having workplace benefits and opportunities withdrawn. The fear of being bullied, isolated or ostracised by colleagues or management is pervasive.

Those who speak up risk being targeted, denied promotions, or having workplace benefits and opportunities withdrawn. There is a very real fear of being bullied, isolated, or ostracised by colleagues and management. This culture of silence and retaliation discourages reporting and makes it extremely difficult for junior officers to feel safe or supported in coming forward.

— Written submission

This fear of retaliation can suppress reporting and erode trust in internal systems. NSWPF's 2025 PMES data records bullying at 13 per cent – lower than the rates reported in our workforce survey.

² 4,473 people who responded to our workforce survey, which was administered by the Social Research Centre.

Based on our consultations, we believe this lower figure reflects a reluctance to speak up rather than a lower prevalence of harmful behaviour.

Internal complaints data shows that bullying is the most common Respectful Workplace Behaviour matter raised within NSWPF. However, many complaints are declined for not meeting the legal threshold for bullying or are unsubstantiated following investigation. While we accept NSWPF's explanation that some matters involve reasonable management action, we remain concerned about the high levels of workplace incivility and conflict described to us, and the inconsistent capability of middle managers to address these behaviours early and effectively.

Discrimination

Discrimination was the second most prevalent behaviour identified by participants to our workforce survey, at 25 per cent. Discrimination in NSWPF was found to disproportionately affect women, First Nations staff, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ employees, and employees who use a primary language other than English. The most common forms of discrimination involved being denied training and development opportunities because of a protected attribute, unfair rostering and task allocations, and being assigned different duties despite holding the same position as colleagues. These concerns were also echoed in interviews, including difficult testimony from staff about being targeted, excluded and stereotyped based on their identity and attributes.

We note that as for bullying, NSWPF's 2025 PMES data for discrimination is significantly lower than our workforce survey, with 6 per cent of respondents reporting discrimination in the last 12 months.

Sexual harassment

In our workforce survey, 9 per cent of participants said they had experienced sexual harassment in the last five years, and 1 per cent reported experiencing sexual assault over that period. The two most common behaviours were sexually suggestive comments or jokes, and intrusive questions about a person's private life or physical appearance, that made the participant feel offended.

Through our confidential and expert interviews, participants told us that, while sexual harassment had previously been normalised within NSWPF, prevention and accountability measures to minimise these unlawful behaviours had resulted in significant improvements over time. It is encouraging that we heard there was less tolerance for sexual harassment in the workplace, with some staff noting that younger employees are more willing to speak up and that overt harassment is less tolerated than in the past.

Young women won't put up with it. They'll tell people now. When I started, there was no one to tell.

— Confidential interview

Strong action and accountability in relation to sexual harassment is also reflected in complaints data, which shows a high proportion of sexual harassment allegations are referred to investigation and sustained. NSWPF's 2025 PMES results reveal 4 per cent of respondents experiencing sexual harassment, which is consistent with the rest of the public sector.

It is important to acknowledge that we nonetheless heard a number of damaging accounts of sexual assault and sexual harassment, particularly from former employees. Historical sexual assault cases, some involving egregious abuses of power, continue to cause lasting trauma and highlight failures of organisational support. Victims described humiliation and breaches of confidentiality, including statements being circulated and being mocked.

Barriers to speaking up

There is an abundance of research globally, including into policing organisations, about significant levels of under-reporting when it comes to experiencing harmful behaviour in the workplace. For policing organisations, this includes a code of silence that discourages whistleblowing and a tendency for staff to downplay misconduct due to loyalty within their own group or ranks.

At NSWPF, we heard that very few people felt able to speak up about the unsafe behaviours they had allegedly experienced or witnessed. Through our workforce survey, we heard that the most common response to harmful workplace behaviour was for people to avoid the perpetrator (47 per cent) or consider leaving the organisation (45 per cent). Only 19 per cent of people spoke to the person or people involved, and only 13 per cent made a formal report. Barriers to reporting included people thinking nothing would be done, a perceived lack of support and confidentiality in the process, and a fear that their career would be jeopardised.

It's career suicide to speak up. That has to change.

— Confidential interview

NSWPF have put in place a range of mechanisms to encourage the reporting of misconduct and speaking up, to prevent and address poor behaviours. This includes a mandatory obligation for sworn officers to report police misconduct, confidentiality protections for complainants, an Internal Witness Support Unit, anonymous reporting, a 'speak up' campaign and resources, and online bystander training.

We believe these measures are making a difference. NSWPF's PMES data on grievance handling has been steadily improving over the period 2020 to 2025, with 56 per cent of respondents now agreeing that they would be comfortable raising a grievance with the organisation, compared to 30 per cent in 2020. While acknowledging improvement, this result is still significantly lower than the rest of the public sector. Our consultations revealed that improving psychological safety to speak up remains a priority.

Accountability for harmful behaviours

While NSWPF has robust policies and processes for managing misconduct, we heard significant concerns about how these operate in practice, particularly in ensuring accountability for harmful behaviours.

In our consultations, leaders in a person's reporting line were identified as the most common perpetrators of unsafe behaviours. In addition, only 49 per cent of respondents to our workforce survey believed that supervisors and managers were accountable for unsafe behaviours and inequality.

The best way to trash a good workforce is not to deal with poor behaviour.

— Confidential interview

The results of the survey and consultations also reveal inconsistent capability among middle managers to deal with incivility and interpersonal conflict in their teams. This diminishes the ability to prevent matters from escalating to misconduct. NSWPF should strengthen leadership accountability for harmful behaviours by embedding key performance indicators for respectful workplace behaviours into performance and promotion processes.

NSWPF has mature processes for responding to misconduct, including its Respectful Workplace Behaviour Management Model. Leading-practice features include the centralised triage and advice role of the Assessment and Advisory Unit and the work of the Assessment and Advisory Panel, and the availability of a range of pathways to resolve matters early. We acknowledge that complaint-handling processes have improved and confidence is increasing. However, our consultations revealed that there remain key areas of concern from the workforce:

- lack of awareness of reporting pathways outside the chain of command
- perceived inconsistent handling of reports and investigation outcomes
- insufficient independence and oversight of complaints that are managed by commands
- low satisfaction with the complaints process.

NSWPF should continue to build trust in the complaints process by enhancing its promotion of reporting pathways, resolution options and complaint outcomes for harmful behaviours, together with

further embedding person-centred, trauma-informed approaches. In addition, NSWPF should embed greater independence and oversight into the management of harmful workplace behaviours through increased audits and checks by Professional Standards Command and consider the role of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission in undertaking more regular reviews of the management and investigation of Respectful Workplace Behaviour matters (Tiers, 1, 2 and 3).

Prevention and early intervention

We observed a commitment to prevention and early intervention when it comes to disrespectful behaviours at NSWPF. Examples include elevating Respectful Workplace Behaviours matters as a corporate risk, the Professional Standards Command misconduct prevention library of resources, education sessions and workshops run by the Respectful Workplace and Safe Reporting Unit and the culture reviews undertaken by the Effective Workplace Unit within the People and Capability Command.

Given the risk profile of the organisation and the experiences we heard about NSWPF should enhance its prevention approach and risk management initiatives. Understanding the drivers and risk factors of harmful behaviours is important for ensuring prevention and response efforts are well targeted and effective. Based on our research and observations, key drivers and risk factors in NSWPF include rigid hierarchical structures and power differentials based on rank, high job demands and staff shortages, lower workforce diversity, the presence of some negative leadership styles and mixed leadership capability, and fears about reporting or making a complaint.

We recommend that NSWPF develop and implement a comprehensive two-year prevention strategy aimed at reducing harmful behaviours and promoting a safe, respectful and inclusive culture.

Support and care

Police work, particularly for frontline and specialist units, carries burdens and poses inherent risks that few in the community will ever understand. Sworn officers are regularly exposed to trauma and violence. They experience states of hypervigilance and must manage the weight of making critical decisions under pressure. Over time, these demands can lead to stress-related conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), strained relationships and elevated rates of substance use and suicide. Despite these well-documented risks, over time mental health support within law enforcement has been critically low.

NSWPF's investment in mental health initiatives has changed significantly since 2022, including through the \$79 million Pulse program, which introduced mental health clinicians across NSWPF, the Early Access Treatment Initiative and eWellcheck.

The support services are the best I've ever seen in the cops in 37 years. It's never been better for police.

— Confidential interview

Early indicators are encouraging, and these developments signal a growing recognition across the organisation that psychological health is fundamental to capability, retention and effective policing.

Sources of harm

Over the five years from 2019 to 2024, NSWPF paid \$1.75 billion in psychological injury compensation, reflecting both the volume and severity of psychological harm experienced by officers. In 2023–24, over half of all officers leaving the organisation did so for medical reasons, with psychological injuries the most common cause. However, the benefits of the Pulse program are beginning to have a positive impact, and psychological injuries reduced during 2025.

Historically, NSWPF has focused on reducing harm incurred from police work itself; however, data analysis and our conversations with employees revealed that much of the psychological harm within NSWPF stems from internal workplace culture, chronic workload pressure and harmful behaviours.

I have seen really hard stuff. Body parts under trains. People hanging. You deal with it. I thought that the trauma of that would push me out. But it wasn't that. It was the people I worked with. I could not get trained to do my job because a sergeant did not like me.

— Confidential interview

We encourage NSWPF to accelerate its focus on the internal drivers of psychological injury to ensure its people experience more supported and sustainable careers.

Stigma and support

We heard that serious stigma about poor mental health persist, manifesting through perceptions that mental health issues equal weakness or diminished capability. This culture silences early intervention, diminishes trust and perpetuates harm. Employees fear being labelled 'damaged goods'.

The inspector referred to the four guys on sick leave as 'dead wood'.

— Confidential interview

Conversely, where leaders actively modelled empathy and proactive care, it was reflected in morale and experiences of safety.

There's been a positive shift in the way management champion support. They tell people that services are available and are more proactive about offering support and checking in.

— Confidential interview

Many supervisors and managers at all levels face complex challenges to demonstrating more regular and proactive support and care for staff, including staff shortages, their own significant work pressure and, for many, undiagnosed symptoms of distress and anxiety, for which they are also owed care and compassion. Equipping leaders with the skills they need to support staff will take time, explicit training and focus. Encouragingly, NSWPF has commenced a journey to strengthen supportive leadership and increase leaders' confidence in recognising and halting early signs of declining wellbeing.

Value and recognition

Recognition matters. We heard that general duties officers – who form the backbone of policing – feel undervalued, while unsworn staff, Aboriginal community liaison officers and multicultural community liaison officers report exclusion and disrespect despite their critical role in community trust.

You do a million jobs and get no credit. But if you make a mistake, all the good stuff is thrown out the window.

— Informal interview

Where we heard of senior leaders actively promoting and valuing these roles, the benefits to morale and community outcomes were palpable.

The commander knows that this is a multicultural community, she promotes the multicultural part. I don't have to explain myself in this [police area command]. Ma'am takes a lot of pride engaging with the community, so it makes my life really easy.

— Informal interview

Structured recognition, induction modules highlighting these roles and formal collaboration mechanisms will help build morale and cohesion.

Modern systems and enabling environment

NSWPF's capacity to build a future-ready and inclusive culture depends not only on leadership behaviours, ethical standards and care for employees, but also on the systems that structure daily work, including rostering, data access and technology. Where they are outdated or fragmented, they erode transparency, accountability and trust. This effect is compounded by markedly low workforce confidence in NSWPF's ability to design, manage and deliver major change programs capable of achieving the system reform required.

Rigid rostering

Rostering emerged as a critical pain point. Managed largely manually at command level, rosters are unpredictable, opaque and disconnected from fatigue management or wellbeing considerations. In our workforce survey, 42 per cent of sworn staff reported having experienced discrimination linked to unfair rostering, with regional commands most affected.

We heard that chronic vacancies force constant changes, eroding morale and creating burnout.

We're robbing Peter to pay Paul by begging, borrowing and stealing people from different areas.

— Confidential interview

While other jurisdictions have trialled flexible models and integrated platforms, NSWPF continues to rely on spreadsheets and uniform 12-hour shifts. The Strategic Workforce Plan highlighted the need for a new, flexible rostering system in 2022, and while we were informed that significant work is underway, there has been no measurable impact of this work for employees to date. There is an urgent need for a statewide, fit-for-purpose rostering system that consolidates leave, training and wellbeing data, embeds demand-driven principles, and offers varied shift lengths to improve predictability and equity.

Better data and technology

Leaders also lack access to simple, real-time workforce data. Frequently, we heard that decisions about relieving, mobility and workload rely on 'gut feel' rather than evidence. This gap limits proactive interventions and cultural accountability. We recommend a dashboard consolidating attrition, absenteeism, probation progress, training completion and wellbeing metrics – linked to leadership key performance indicators and organisational reporting.

Technology systems can either compound or reduce inefficiency. Despite a strong appetite for trialling better systems in some parts of the organisation and significant investment, NSWPF still relies on multiple outdated technology platforms that do not speak to each other. Staff described duplication, delays and manual workarounds.

Half our technology doesn't talk to each other. Kronos doesn't talk to SAP so rosters have to use two different systems.

— Informal interview

Fragmentation across core systems – COPS, CAD court documentation – creates operational risk and administrative overload. Basic tasks like signing in, uploading body-worn camera footage, and accessing GPS routing remain manual. The time burden and frustration of this workload is causing significant distress within NSWPF.

Outdated systems are not just operational barriers – they are cultural ones. Without modern, integrated platforms and data-driven decision-making, NSWPF cannot deliver efficient policing, meet community expectations or embed reform. Significant and sustained investment in technology, rostering and accountability systems is essential to build a respectful, resilient and future-focused police force.

Summary of recommendations

Trusted leadership

Recommendation 1. NSWPF should ensure the composition and functioning of its executive team contains a broader diversity of perspectives, skills and experience to strengthen organisational culture, decision-making and public trust.

This requires NSWPF to:

- broaden substantive membership to the Commissioner's Executive Team to include civilian roles with specialist capabilities
- establish one to two dedicated roles on the Commissioner's Executive Team for assistant commissioners or executive directors, to be held on a 6 to 12 month rotational basis, to provide exposure to executive decision-making, build leadership capability and foster succession planning
- establish transparent criteria and processes for additional appointments to the Commissioner's Executive Team, to ensure merit-based selection and role modelling of inclusive leadership behaviours
- build a pipeline of more diverse talent for senior leadership roles, including developing measures to address the low representation of women, First Nations staff, and employees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation 2. To strengthen implementation, NSWPF should incorporate explicit targets and outcome measures into its people and culture strategies, with the Commissioner's Executive Team jointly responsible for driving and monitoring progress.

This requires NSWPF to:

- establish timebound organisational targets for employee engagement, retention, diversity, respectful workplace behaviours, and successful return to work from psychological injuries
- ensure that members of the Commissioner's Executive Team are held accountable for progress through their performance plans.

Recommendation 3. NSWPF should strengthen its leadership performance framework to embed accountability for culture and people management, making these responsibilities central to senior roles.

This requires NSWPF to:

- integrate explicit key performance indicators into leadership evaluations covering employee engagement, retention, diversity, respectful workplace behaviours, and successful return to work from psychological injuries – these measures must be weighted alongside operational outcomes to ensure cultural leadership is valued equally
- ensure that the Commissioner's Executive Team reports publicly on progress against cultural and people related key performance indicators in the NSWPF annual report, demonstrating accountability and continuous improvement
- introduce 360-degree feedback for senior leaders – recognising that such processes require significant psychological safety, we suggest beginning with the Commissioner's Executive Team, which will help establish the foundations for broader organisational adoption.

Recommendation 4. NSWPF should establish robust mechanisms to implement and monitor the Cultural Review's recommendations, ensuring transparency and accountability.

This requires NSWPF to:

- establish an advisory committee with external independent experts to guide the intent and implementation of the Cultural Review's recommendations, reporting directly to the Commissioner's Executive Team
- commission an independent audit of the Cultural Review's recommendations within two years, with findings on progress and impact reported publicly
- develop a clear implementation plan that sets out responsibilities, timelines and measures of success for each recommendation.

Attraction, recruitment and the Academy

Recommendation 5. NSWPF should develop and implement a comprehensive recruitment strategy that is mapped to current and future capability requirements, including diversity targets and requires public reporting against progress.

This requires NSWPF to:

- set annual recruitment targets based on workforce modelling, regional capability needs and projected exits, with periodic review to reflect operational demand
- embed measurable diversity goals aligned with the NSW Government Inclusion and Belonging Strategy, supported by targeted attraction initiatives for underrepresented groups
- publish recruitment outcomes against workforce, attrition and diversity objectives to ensure transparency, accountability and evidence-based refinement
- evaluate recruitment campaigns to ensure they accurately reflect the reality of general duties policing, drawing on feedback from probationary constables, field training officers and early leavers.

Recommendation 6. NSWPF should streamline the recruitment pathway to reduce administrative burden, improve candidate experience and target attraction of priority cohorts.

This requires NSWPF to:

- introduce an 'expression of interest' function on the recruitment homepage to capture candidate details early and enable tailored follow up
- recalibrate entry testing and vetting processes to ensure they are culturally informed and aligned with contemporary policing demands
- provide clear, accessible guidance and public FAQs on eligibility, including mental health eligibility requirements, explicitly addressing common misconceptions and aligning messaging with wellbeing commitments
- ensure transparent communication of the costs to complete training and any financial support available throughout the recruitment process.

Recommendation 7. NSWPF should implement targeted financial supports to reduce early career attrition and encourage applicants in high-need regions.

This requires NSWPF to:

- provide Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt relief or forgiveness for probationary constables who complete their first year of service
- review financial incentives to ensure they support retention in high-need regions.

Recommendation 8. NSWPF should better integrate wellbeing, cultural inclusion and mental health capability across Academy and probation training.

This requires NSWPF to:

- position wellbeing as a core capability – ensuring recruits understand hypervigilance, trauma exposure, organisational culture pressures and early warning signs of mental ill health
- embed mental health readiness and cultural inclusion throughout Academy and probation training – integrating scenario-based learning, de-escalation techniques and communication strategies for engaging individuals in crisis, and strengthening foundational understanding of First Nations and culturally diverse communities
- expand structured exposure to frontline realities – increasing operational placements, practical readiness for operational systems (i.e. CAD and COPS) and incorporating body worn video and other real-world examples to build situational judgement, critical thinking and confidence in complex environments
- conduct a formal evaluation within two years – assessing the impact of these enhancements on recruit readiness, cultural capability, wellbeing, retention and early career performance, including the effects of the shortened Academy program and the partnership with Western Sydney University. This information could be used to inform recruitment strategy in future years.

Talent development and career progression

Recommendation 9. NSWPF should strengthen the consistency, transparency and impact of its approach to leadership and management development for both sworn and unsworn staff, by ensuring equitable access, targeted capability building, and timely delivery at key career transition points.

This requires NSWPF to:

- collect and publish participation data (rank, region, diversity, employment type) to identify and address inequities in access to development opportunities
- establish clear expectations for critical leadership skills at each level, ensuring they are taught through structured learning and built into formal handovers and informal coaching for staff undertaking relieving duties or promotion
- support a culture of continuous learning by providing protected times within shifts for completion of mandatory training and ensuring that such training is realistic, role specific and scenario based.

Recommendation 10. NSWPF should strengthen retention by systematically analysing exit drivers and reviewing schemes and financial incentives that may unintentionally encourage departure.

This requires NSWPF to:

- integrate insights from exit surveys and separation data into regular command-level reporting to identify emerging trends, hotspots and actionable retention risks
- seek Treasury support to model targeted retention incentives, including bonuses or other measures.

Recommendation 11. NSWPF should immediately strengthen the integrity and transparency of promotion decisions through independent oversight and clear governance.

This requires NSWPF to:

- appoint independent, external senior executives or HR professionals to promotion panels for all roles at superintendent level and above, comprising at least one-third of panel membership
- require all panel members to declare work history and relationships with applicants, with independent review of conflicts or perceived conflicts
- ensure superintendent selections are made by assistant commissioners, informed by a regularly reviewed succession plan endorsed by the Commissioner's Executive Team
- develop and publish a promotions dashboard showing applications, outcomes and relieving data by rank, gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, culturally and linguistically diverse background, disability status and region, with quarterly reporting to the Commissioner's Executive Team.

Recommendation 12. NSWPF should ensure that HR decisions taken within commands are being made by people with skills and expertise in people and culture, to strengthen workforce management and support fair, consistent promotion pipelines and processes.

This requires NSWPF to:

- require that HR duty officers have specific HR training which could be provided for people interested in this stream of leadership
- ensure HR professionals oversee compliance with conflict-of-interest processes, feedback requirements and data reporting.

Recommendation 13. NSWPF should simplify and refocus promotion assessments to prioritise leadership capability, operational readiness and fair access.

This requires NSWPF to:

- remove the Technical and Operational Knowledge Assessment and replace it with consistent evaluation of leadership capability, behavioural indicators, operational readiness and performance history
- ensure written applications and capability assessments carry equal weight alongside interviews to reduce reliance on high-stress interview performance
- establish clear, standardised criteria for shortlisting and targeted questions.

Recommendation 14. NSWPF should embed structured, actionable feedback and development into all promotion and relieving processes.

This requires NSWPF to:

- require promotion panels to agree on specific feedback for each interviewed candidate, delivered verbally and documented for HR oversight and local follow through
- strengthen feedback for officers undertaking relieving opportunities to support leadership development and readiness
- introduce formal onboarding for first time relieving and newly promoted officers, including structured handovers and training in people management.

Recommendation 15. NSWPF should ensure equitable access to relieving and promotion opportunities.

This requires NSWPF to:

- establish regional HR-managed registers to allocate relieving opportunities transparently and equitably across eligible staff
- require commanders to document and justify allocation of relieving opportunities under six months, demonstrating how decisions balance operational needs, staff development and pipeline building
- require all advertised relieving roles to explicitly welcome flexible and part-time applicants, with clear criteria for assessing merit irrespective of work arrangements
- collect and publish annual promotion data by gender, cultural background and region/command to strengthen accountability
- increase visibility of senior female and culturally diverse role models through structured mentoring, leadership messaging and sponsorship.

Flexibility in a modern organisation

Recommendation 16. NSWPF should materially expand access to flexible work, with regional commanders held accountable for approving and enabling arrangements and the Commissioner's Executive Team monitoring participation, uptake and outcomes quarterly.

This requires NSWPF to:

- ensure leadership communication positions flexibility as an operational asset – explicitly linking flexible work to improved retention, care for employees, capability and continuity of first response coverage, rather than treating it as a constraint
- provide formal human resources training for all staff appointed to substantive or relieving HR roles ensuring those roles are supported by skills in workforce management, including flexible work assessment, performance feedback, difficult conversations, procedural fairness, and employee wellbeing
- embed flexible team leadership in all leadership development programs – equipping supervisors with practical tools to assess requests, manage performance in flexible contexts and design rosters and team workflows that maintain operational readiness
- develop pilots in frontline and shift-based environments – testing models such as split shifts, micro-flexibility and partial remote work where feasible, with systematic evaluation and dissemination of successful approaches in ways which are easy for leaders to replicate
- invest in flexible and hybrid delivery of mandatory and optional training – ensuring officers who cannot attend in-person sessions retain access to career development and promotion pathways. This includes ensuring employees returning from periods of caring-related leave have equal access to development opportunities and upskilling
- monitor employee experience of accessing flexible work.

Addressing harmful behaviours

Recommendation 17. NSWPF should develop and implement a comprehensive two-year prevention strategy aimed at reducing harmful behaviours and promoting a safe, respectful and inclusive culture.

This requires NSWPF to:

- ensure a systemic, risk-based approach is taken to the strategy, informed by People and Capability Command, Professional Standards Command and Health Safety and Wellbeing Command
- address known hazards, including bullying, discrimination, harassment, victimisation, incivility, interpersonal conflict, barriers to speaking up and reporting, and heightened risks for marginalised cohorts
- consult staff in the design process
- include measurable objectives, timelines, evaluation mechanisms and accountability for outcomes.

Recommendation 18. NSWPF should identify a broader range of harmful behaviours as risks in its existing risk management frameworks and proactively manage harmful behaviours as psychosocial hazards.

This requires NSWPF to:

- continue to elevate respectful workplace behaviours as a corporate misconduct risk
- update the Psychosocial Risk Management Framework to include discrimination and victimisation as significant psychosocial hazards.

Recommendation 19. NSWPF should strengthen leadership accountability for harmful behaviours by embedding key performance indicators for respectful workplace behaviours into performance and promotion processes.

This requires NSWPF to:

- ensure that performance evaluations for senior leaders factor in People Matter Employee Survey data on negative workplace behaviours and grievance handling, as well as reportable indicators around complaint timeliness, mandatory training, workplace injury leave and misconduct prevention
- support leaders who are managing complaints to clearly communicate decisions and outcomes to all relevant parties to reinforce transparency and fairness.

Recommendation 20. NSWPF should build trust in the complaints process by enhancing its promotion of reporting pathways, resolution options and complaint outcomes for harmful workplace behaviours.

This requires NSWPF to:

- enhance awareness campaigns for reporting pathways outside the chain of command, especially the role of the Respectful Workplaces and Safe Reporting Unit
- positively promote the use and benefits of alternative resolution pathways and shift the perception that a decision to 'decline to investigate' a complaint may not always mean that no action has been taken – de identified examples of meaningful alternative action should be communicated to the organisation
- increase transparency in reporting outcomes to the workforce through a regular report detailing complaint numbers, most common allegation types, complaints closed, timeliness, and the number of types of resolution and disciplinary actions taken.

Recommendation 21. NSWPF should embed greater independence and oversight into the management of harmful workplace behaviour.

This requires NSWPF to:

- increased audits and checks of harmful workplace behaviour matters by Professional Standards Command to address concerns of inconsistent handling of complaints by commands
- consider the role of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission in undertaking more regular reviews of the management and investigation of Respectful Workplace Behaviour matters (Tiers 1, 2 and 3).

Recommendation 22. NSWPF should improve workforce satisfaction in the management of harmful workplace behaviour matters by further embedding person-centred, trauma-informed approaches.

This requires NSWPF to:

- explicitly update relevant guidelines to spell out what a trauma-informed and victim-centric approach means in the context of harmful workplace behaviour matters– NSWPF has recently adopted this approach in its handling of domestic and family violence³
- enhance training for complaint handlers on person-centred, trauma-informed approaches to complaint handling and investigations which recognise intersectionality
- broaden the availability of expert advice and support provided to commands and participants in harmful workplace behaviour matters by Professional Standards Command, Respectful Workplace and Safe Reporting Unit, and the Internal Witness Support Unit.

Support and care

Recommendation 23. NSWPF should build on its investment in mental health by prioritising proactive and preventive support and care and increasing in-house expertise and capacity.

This requires NSWPF to:

- establish an in-house Critical Incident Support unit staffed by qualified psychologists with expertise in emergency services – the unit should be resourced to respond to critical incidents across the state via a mix of remote and in-person attendance
- increase the number of mental health clinicians, to ensure they are more visible and available in commands and have active support from all commanders in progressing psychological health initiatives, as well as providing more regular and structured clinical supervision and peer support
- seek further investment to pilot and evaluate WellChecks for priority staff, including Police Link and radio operators
- significantly increase the cohort of in-house police psychologists to meet existing and future demand and ensure their workload and role is sustainable
- increase resources for the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Command so it can conduct more structured and ongoing evaluation of all mental health initiatives, including cost-benefit analyses of proactive initiatives that reduce stigma and normalise psychological support against the costs of injury and related claims.

³ Domestic and Family Violence Guidelines, Version 2.0 (2025), see page 18.

Recommendation 24. NSWPF should continue to build leadership capability at all levels to reduce stigma and normalise early access to support as injury prevention and a retention measure.

This requires NSWPF to:

- embed comprehensive and mandatory training across all leadership programs that equips leaders with knowledge, skills and strategies in recognising, preventing and responding to psychosocial risks
- embed and evaluate mental health education across the employee life cycle to ensure a culture of prevention and early intervention is continuously strengthened
- expand Project Mentis to increase psychosocial hazard reporting, particularly in relation to organisational stressors and harmful behaviour, and implement more structured evaluation of the program to embed continuous improvement
- ensure the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Command and commanders encourage and support peer support officers across commands to trial tailored initiatives, such as the Maroubra Peer Welfare Program, with structured evaluation to monitor impact
- increase visible, senior representation among the peer support officer cohort, so that senior leaders who have recovered from psychological injury are more actively in the network and role model the benefits of early support and treatment and reduce stigma.

Recommendation 25. NSWPF should strengthen recognition and respect for general duties and unsworn employees, including Aboriginal community liaison officers and multicultural community liaison officers, as critical contributors to policing and community trust.

This requires NSWPF to:

- introduce more structured induction measures that highlight the work and value of Aboriginal community liaison officer and multicultural community liaison officer roles, including a dedicated training module at the Academy, delivered by liaison officers and consistent induction across police area commands
- establish formal consultation and collaboration mechanisms with Aboriginal community liaison officers, multicultural community liaison officers and unsworn networks to ensure their expertise is supported, resourced and profiled, and that success stories are shared across commands.

Modern systems

Recommendation 26. NSWPF should urgently implement a single, statewide workforce management system that integrates rostering, leave, training, fatigue and wellbeing data, and applies demand-driven principles to align workforce allocation with service needs and risk.

This requires NSWPF to:

- procure or build a fit-for-purpose platform that replaces fragmented command-level practices and consolidates rostering, leave, training and fatigue data in one system
- embed demand-based rostering rules into the platform to allow shift swaps and better match staffing to predicted workload, risk profiles and local service demand
- provide predictable and transparent rosters, with options for varied shift lengths (for example, 8, 10 or 12 hours) and equitable access to respite arrangements, including 'corro days'
- use system data to actively monitor fatigue, overtime reliance and inequities in access to leave and relief.

Recommendation 27. NSWPF should strengthen workforce data insights through a real-time cultural and workforce intelligence dashboard that supports evidence-based decision-making and embeds accountability across leadership.

This requires NSWPF to:

- consolidate workforce indicators such as attrition, absenteeism, probation progress, mobility, training completion and wellbeing metrics into a single, accessible dashboard
- provide commanders and HR inspectors with consistent, real-time data to guide relieving decisions, workload distribution and targeted wellbeing interventions
- link workforce and cultural metrics to leadership performance frameworks, reviews and organisational reporting to promote transparency and timely intervention
- use trends and exceptions data to support early identification of cultural, supervision, or workload risks at command and regional levels.

Recommendation 28. NSWPF, with NSW Government support, should modernise core policing systems through staged, user-centred upgrades that reduce administrative burden, support frontline effectiveness and professionalise leadership.

This requires NSWPF to:

- replace legacy systems (including COPS, CAD and court documentation processes) with modular, interoperable technology that reduces duplication, manual entry and error
- deliver immediate frontline productivity improvements such as digital sign-in, user-friendly GPS-enabled dispatch, and automated body-worn video upload and transcription
- embed frontline officer input into system design, testing and implementation to ensure usability and adoption
- establish transparent governance for technology investment decisions, with public reporting on milestones linked to operational efficiency and workforce wellbeing.

Recommendation 29. NSWPF should expand leadership pathways to recognise external qualifications, cross-sector experience and unsworn roles, and embed clear, competency-based promotion and appointment criteria.

This requires NSWPF to:

- recognise relevant external qualifications and experience from other public service, first responder, and regulatory agencies as valid pathways into leadership roles, including senior and specialist appointments.

About the Cultural Review

The Independent Cultural Review into NSWPF (the Cultural Review) was announced by former NSW Police Commissioner Karen Webb in September 2024 following news reports of bullying and sexual harassment, both current and historic. The Cultural Review was established in March 2025, led by Kristen Hilton, former Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner.

Scope and purpose

The Cultural Review was tasked with objectively assessing NSWPF's workplace culture based on a range of qualitative and quantitative data. Where relevant, we sought to identify areas needing improvement as well as make recommendations to support a more equitable, capable and culturally safe workplace.

The Cultural Review's scope spanned:

- developing a baseline understanding of the culture of NSWPF, with a focus on identifying leading practice and areas of concern relating to diverse representation, equitable recruitment, progression and promotion practices and the provision of a safe and respectful workplace
- the effectiveness of NSWPF systems and processes designed to prevent and respond to behavioural, cultural and integrity challenges
- leadership commitment and capability to create and maintain safe and respectful workplaces
- options to drive sustained cultural change and promote ethical behaviour that is consistent with an equitable and culturally safe police force.

Importantly, the Cultural Review's focus was on systemic workplace issues. We did not conduct investigations into allegations pertaining to specific individuals.

The Cultural Review excluded:

- consulting with former employees who exited the organisation prior to 2020
- recommendations regarding the establishment of a restorative justice scheme.

The full terms of reference are included in Appendix A.

The Cultural Review was conducted in four phases:

Phase 1: Review establishment, familiarisation, research	Establish the team, familiarise with the operational context and climate and seek approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee for the research component of the Cultural Review.
Phase 2: Engagement and consultation	Engage and consult with current and former staff and expert stakeholders.
Phase 3: Analysis and report writing	Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data and report writing.
Phase 4: Testing recommendations and report release	Testing recommendations with NSWPF and finalising the report for release.

Methodology

Research framework

The research framework defined three broad lines of enquiry that expand upon the terms of reference:

- **Understanding the environmental and social factors that influence the organisation.** This included resourcing demands, the changing nature of crime, public sentiment, legal and policy frameworks and oversight mechanisms.
- **Understanding the workplace culture.** This included leadership capability, development and alignment, the composition and diversity of staff, the fairness of recruitment, retention and promotion cycles, staff experience of safety and support with a focus on how the organisation actively prevents and responds to inappropriate behaviours and unlawful conduct including discrimination, harassment, victimisation and bullying.
- **Understanding the impacts.** This included the employment and wellbeing outcomes for employees associated with any negative experience of workplace culture and issues of safety and integrity within NSWPF.

The research framework guided the questions and evidence that we examined.

Approach

The observations and recommendations in this report are supported by a robust evidence base obtained from a mixed methods approach. This methodology was approved by NSWPF.

The approach included:

- **a desktop review** of relevant academic research, relevant findings from other independent reviews into workplace equality and integrity, and relevant corporate and public information such as legislation, policies, processes, strategies and plans
- **quantitative data analysis** of corporate and publicly available data such as workforce demographic data and People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) data
- **qualitative consultation** with current and former staff – both sworn and unsworn – and expert stakeholders through site visits, focus groups, confidential 1:1 interviews, written submissions, informal interviews and a workforce survey.

We requested data and information from NSWPF and received over 450 documents and files, including workforce data, policies, plans and strategies.

Formal consultation and engagement began in June 2025, following approval of the Cultural Review's ethics application by the Bellberry Human Research Ethics Committee (2025-03-493). We sought ethics approval to ensure that the Cultural Review's methodology and approach met the highest standard as set out under the National Health and Medical Research Council's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2023).

We took this approach in recognition of the sensitive nature of information that we would be seeking from participants, including experiences of bullying, harassment and discrimination. We were also conscious of participant concerns regarding confidentiality of the information they shared, how it would be stored and who had access to it.

We developed a participant information and consent form outlining key information for participants to read. We also developed a support services resource and distress protocol to refer participants for further support after engaging with the Cultural Review.

Trauma-informed and culturally safe engagement

We were committed to conducting consultations that were as trauma-informed and culturally responsive as possible. Our team had relevant training in trauma-informed practice, Aboriginal cultural safety and responding to disclosures of sexual violence. Members of the Cultural Review team represented a mix of diverse genders, sexual identities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and cultural identities.

Consultation

Over the course of the Cultural Review, we heard from 5,170 current and former employees and expert stakeholders.

We heard many stories of dedication, resilience, trauma and harm. We acknowledge the courage and generosity of current and former staff who shared their stories. For many, it was the first time that they had shared their experiences with another person. Many were motivated to share their stories to improve the day-to-day lives of NSWPF's people and community.

Figure 1. Cultural Review participants

Type of consultation	Participants
Formal interviews	208
Informal interviews	300
Focus groups	48
Familiarisation visits	22
Written submissions	102
Workforce survey	4,473
Expert interviews	17
All engagement	5,170

We did not systematically collect data on participants' diversity in the qualitative consultations except for gender, sworn/unsworn status and current/former employment status. This was to support the safety and comfort of participants. However, in many cases participants voluntarily disclosed diversity such as cultural background, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity, or LGBTQIA+ identity.

Familiarisation visits

Prior to receiving ethics approval, we conducted familiarisation visits to understand the operating environment of NSWPF. This included visits to Parramatta HQ, Sydney Olympic Park and the Police Executive Office.

Formal interviews

We conducted over 200 confidential 1:1 interviews with current and former employees online or in person from June to September 2025. Prospective interviewees were able to register an expression of interest through the Cultural Review website. Interviewees were provided with a participant information and consent form to sign along with key information about the Cultural Review, including privacy and confidentiality of interviews. Interviews were semi-structured and used guiding questions that were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee. Participation in interviews was voluntary, and participants were able to decline to answer any question.

Figure 2. Demographic information relating to formal interviews

Respondent profile		Number	%
Total		208	100
Role	Unsworn	35	16.8
	Sworn	173	83.2
Gender	Female	101	48.6
	Male	107	51.4
Employment status	Current employee	144	69.2
	Former employee	64	30.8

Informal interviews

We conducted 300 informal interviews during site visits. These were typically shorter in duration than formal 1:1 interviews and were open to any employees on site. The interviews were guided by the participants and the experiences they wished to share. While these interviews have informed the review, we did not collect identifying information about participants in informal interviews, and participants were not asked to provide written consent. As approved in our ethics application, verbal consent was obtained from participants to informal interviews. We were careful to ensure that participants in informal interviews were aware of, and had access to, the participant information sheet, by making copies available, providing information verbally, sharing cards with the QR code to the Cultural Review website, and otherwise directing people to the website.

Focus groups

A number of focus groups were conducted during site visits. We took a flexible approach to organising the focus groups, keeping some open for drop-ins and some more structured, inviting specific cohorts of employees such as clerk grade 9–10s or employees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We also conducted focus groups online with Aboriginal community liaison officers and multicultural community liaison officers.

Workforce survey

A workforce survey was developed by the Cultural Review and administered by the Social Research Centre, a specialist research and evaluation centre owned by ANU Enterprises.

The survey was distributed to current staff by NSWPF and former staff through the Cultural Review website and social media and the Police Association of NSW. The survey asked questions about culture, recruitment, promotion, leadership capability and experiences or witnessing harmful behaviour. A copy of the survey questions is Appendix C.

In total, 4,473 current and former employees responded to the survey. The survey was open for four weeks from 11 August to 5 September 2025.

Figure 3. Diversity of survey respondents

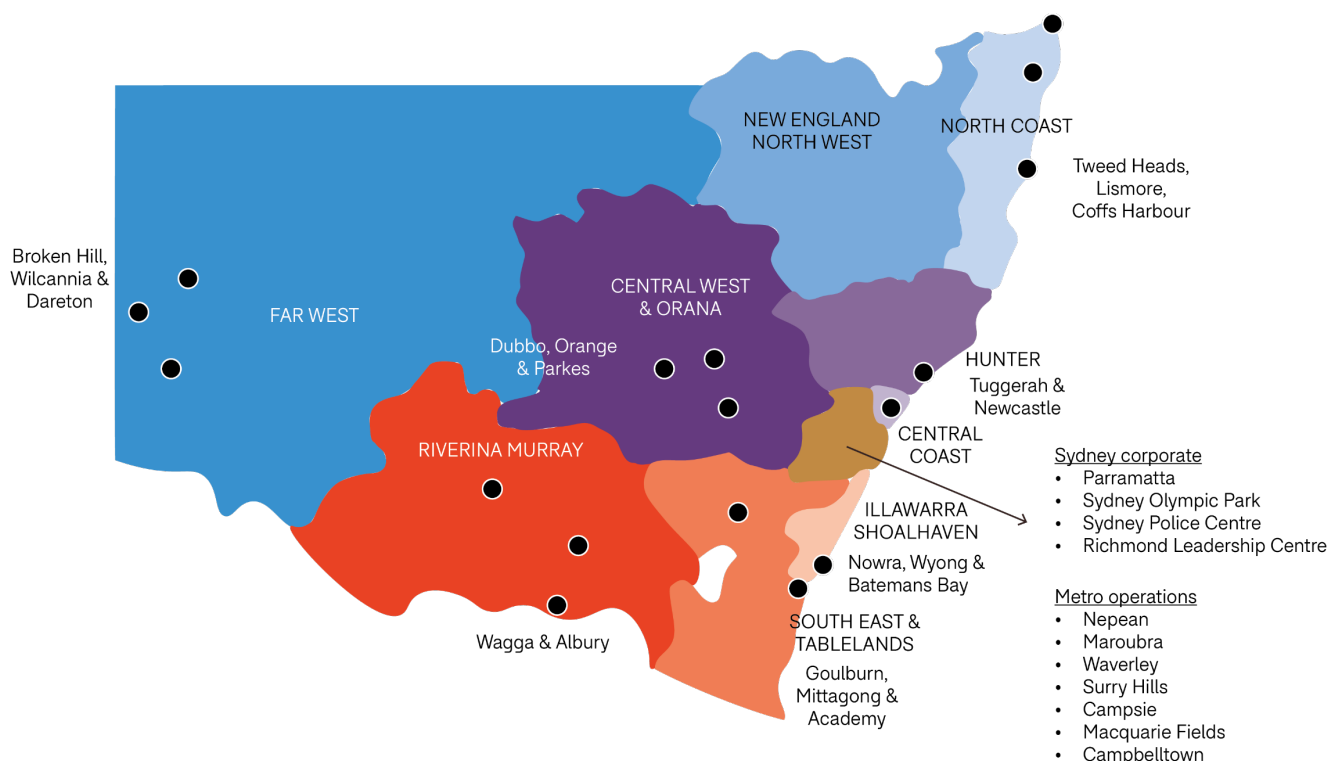
Respondent profile		Number	%
Total		4,473	100
Role	Unsworn	1,185	26.5
	Sworn	3,008	67.2
Gender	Female	1,600	35.8
	Male	2,436	54.5
	Other / Prefer not to say / Not sure	437	9.8
Employment status	Current employee	4,269	95.4
	Former employee	204	4.6
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin	Yes	162	3.6
Use a language other than English at home	Yes	498	11.1
Sexual orientation	Another sexuality	256	5.7
Have a disability	Yes	491	11.0

We worked with the Social Research Centre in the design of the survey and analysis of the data to minimise and check for response bias. The survey design followed best practice, including clear and neutral language, and was endorsed by NSWPF and received ethics approval. The dataset was weighted to match the known demographic profile of current employees. This is a well-established and widely recommended approach that helps to ensure the results represent the broader employee population. The Social Research Centre did not find any patterns to indicate response bias. There was also substantial consistency between structured survey responses and open-ended comments. In summary, the survey results reflect the experiences of a broad cross section of current employees, rather than a small group of disproportionately negative respondents.

Site visits

We visited 35 locations including 18 police area commands and police districts in regional operations, 12 police area commands and police districts in metro operations, four corporate centres and two specialist commands. Included in this program were site visits to the Police Academy at Goulburn, Richmond Leadership Centre and PoliceLink in Tuggerah. Visiting locations of sworn and unsworn police staff enabled us to get a better understanding of the physical working environment of employees at NSWPF including accompanying police staff on ride-alongs.

Figure 4. Locations visited by the Cultural Review



Written submissions

We received 102 written submissions from current and former employees. The Social Research Centre administered the submissions process, providing guiding questions for participants. Written submissions opened on 25 June 2025 and closed 5 September 2025.

Expert interviews

We conducted 17 expert interviews online or in person with people in key areas or roles within NSWPF relevant to the Cultural Review, such as recruitment, culture, and diversity and inclusion. The interviews were tailored for each area, to help us develop a deeper understanding of policies, processes, systems and practice. We also met with key external stakeholders including the Hon. Yasmin Catley MP, NSW Minister for Police, the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission, the Police Association of NSW and the Public Service Association of NSW.

Limitations of the Cultural Review

The Cultural Review's findings are limited by the quality and scope of information we could access, including qualitative and quantitative information. In some cases, we were unable to access information because of the difficulty NSWPF had in retrieving relevant data. Data is often held at the local level, with systems unable to consolidate and aggregate information easily.

Participant safety and confidence in its implementation

During consultations with current staff, we observed mixed experiences of management support for staff to participate in focus groups and interviews. Some staff expressed significant concern about their safety and worried about privacy and confidentiality. Others were supported – and even accompanied – by their managers to participate.

Initially, we intended to conduct 100 1:1 interviews. This number was doubled with the support of NSWPF due to overwhelming demand.

Current and former employees were deeply hopeful that parts of their work experience would change. They were less hopeful about NSWPF's willingness and capacity to implement the required reform. Some referenced NSWPF's poor responses to PMES findings and a lack of action.

We have the PMES, but culture isn't built on soliciting feedback on that type of survey ... Every year you put in a response that's not very positive but every year we get HR saying it was really positive. It doesn't align. I've heard it said before that only negative people do it. If you think that what are you doing about it ... It's easy to label you as disgruntled. The way that NSWPF respond to the outcomes of this Review will be interesting because it will only be an improvement in culture if the senior exec respond to it in the way the Review recommends.

— Informal interview

NSWPF support of the Cultural Review

NSWPF worked collaboratively with us to support the conduct of the Cultural Review, including communicating with current and former employees, coordinating site visits and providing significant amounts of information. NSWPF established a range of governance mechanisms to support the work of the Cultural Review.

We met on a regular basis with the Commissioner of Police and Dean Smith (Deputy Commissioner, Corporate Services). Weekly project meetings led by Brett Greentree (Assistant Commissioner, People and Capability) and Gemma Halliday (Group Director, People, Strategy and Engagement) ensured good communication between the Cultural Review team and NSWPF. We are also grateful for the assistance of Chief Inspector Sean Heaney (Manager, Effective Workplaces) and his team.

Reading this report

This report is in eight parts:

The **Executive Summary** provides a summary of the Cultural Review's findings and recommendations.

Chapter 1 – Context and climate provides an overview of the police operating environment including legislation, organisational structure, governance and challenges, performance of NSWPF, leading practice and an overview of NSWPF's workforce diversity.

Chapter 2 – Trusted leadership examines leadership capability and behaviour and how leadership enables a supportive and positive culture that values its employees.

Chapter 3 – Career attraction, development and promotion explores attraction and recruitment of new employees, development including time at the Police Academy and Richmond Leadership Centre and the equity of promotion processes.

Chapter 4 – Talent development and career progression looks at the learning culture within NSWPF, supervisory practice and performance management, why people leave the organisation, and pathways to promotion.

Chapter 5 – Flexibility in a modern organisation explores access to, and use of, flexible working arrangements, and equity and inclusion for employees with diverse backgrounds and identities.

Chapter 6 – Addressing harmful behaviours reflects what we heard about experiences of harmful behaviours including bullying and harassment in NSWPF.

Chapter 7 – Support and care assesses the effectiveness of NSWPF's investment in employee wellbeing and care such as mental health clinicians, chaplains and counselling through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Chapter 8 – Modern systems and enabling environment discusses the critical infrastructure that modern systems and process provide to enabling a safe and equitable workplace culture. This chapter explores technology and information systems such as rostering and performance management systems.

Key terms and definitions

Aboriginal cultural safety	The National Agreement on Closing the Gap describes cultural safety as overcoming the power imbalances of places, people and policies that occur between the majority non-Indigenous position and the minority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person so that there is no assault, challenge or denial of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's identity, of who they are and what they need.
Bullying	Workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed toward a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety (physical or psychological). Reasonable management action is not bullying – such as genuine and reasonable instructions or setting reasonable performance goals, standards and deadlines. For more information, see SafeWork NSW.
Culture	Culture is shaped by people but also by the written and unwritten rules of the organisation. Culture can contribute to a positive, fair and purposeful experience or it can perpetuate work practices and behaviours that do not meet explicit standards and values. Poor culture can result in individual and organisational harm and erode trust.
Discrimination	Discrimination is when someone is treated less favourably based on protected attributes such as race, age, sex, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation. Australian anti-discrimination legislation includes the <i>Age Discrimination Act 2004</i> , <i>Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986</i> , <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i> , <i>Racial Discrimination Act 1975</i> and <i>Sex Discrimination Act 1984</i> . The relevant state legislation in NSW is the <i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1977</i> which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, sex, transgender, disability, carer responsibilities, religion, marital and domestic status, homosexuality and age.
Diversity	Diversity is defined by Diversity Council Australia as the differences between people in relation to their social and professional identity. Social identity can include, for example, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background, age, gender, LGBTQIA+ status, culture or faith. Professional identity can include education, organisational level, profession, location. These aspects come together in a unique way for each individual and shapes the way they view and perceive their world and workplace.
Inclusion	Inclusion is fostering an environment where every individual, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances can participate meaningfully and contribute with confidence. It ensures that people feel valued, accepted and supported to thrive in our community and within the workplace.
LGBTQIA+	Individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex or asexual.
Non-binary	Individuals whose gender identity falls outside of man and woman or male and female binaries.
Participant	A person who participated in the Cultural Review such as through a confidential 1:1 interview, submitting a written submission or responding to the workforce survey.
Psychological safety	Psychological safety is a concept that goes a step further than minimising risk of psychosocial hazards and psychosocial harm. Psychological safety can be defined as the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas questions, concerns, or mistakes, and the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. Teams with psychological safety are reported to be higher performing. The safety to speak up can also support ethical leadership, decision-making and integrity measures.

Psychosocial hazard	SafeWork NSW defines psychosocial hazards at work as aspects of work and situations that may cause a stress response which in turn can lead to psychological or physical harm.
Sexual harassment	Under the <i>Sex Discrimination Act 1984</i> (Cth), sexual harassment occurs when a person makes an unwelcome sexual advance or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, or engages in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, where a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated the possibility that the harassed person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.
Sworn officers	People who are appointed as a police officer of the rank of constable under the <i>Police Act 1990</i> (NSW). While the Cultural Review may refer to police officers as 'sworn employees' in this report, we are not intending to mischaracterise the office of constable as a standard employee relationship.
Unsworn employee	People that are employed as administrative employees (non-police officers) under the <i>Police Act 1990</i> (NSW).
Victimisation	Victimisation is subjecting someone to a detriment or threatening to subject someone to a detriment because they have lodged a complaint, they intend to lodge a complaint, or they are involved in a complaint of bullying, discrimination, harassment or sexual harassment.

Chapter 1.

Context and culture

Policing in Australia has changed profoundly over the past decade. While community safety remains at the heart of police work, the environment in which police operate has become more complex, more demanding and exposed to greater public scrutiny. Rising mental health distress, increased reporting of gendered violence, youth disengagement, political polarisation, rapid technological change, and the growing frequency and severity of natural disasters have all expanded the expectations placed on police. These shifts mean that police are often the first responders to social, economic, and environmental pressures that sit well beyond traditional notions of ‘fighting crime’.

In this context, culture has become one of the most important determinants of the effectiveness of a modern policing organisation. Culture shapes how officers exercise discretion, how they treat the public and one another, how they respond to vulnerability, and how they adapt to new challenges. It influences trust, legitimacy, safety and the organisation’s ability to attract and retain the workforce it needs. A policing organisation can have strong policies but without consistent and capable leadership, effective communication and support, and shared and enacted standards, these tools cannot deliver their intended impact.

For NSWPF, strengthening culture is not an abstract exercise. It is a core operational requirement. Cultural reform is essential to meeting contemporary community expectations, supporting the wellbeing of police, and ensuring that the organisation can respond effectively to the complex demands of modern policing.

In this chapter, we explore aspects of NSWPF’s current operational context and outline the systemic cultural levers that present opportunity for reform.

Overview of NSWPF

NSWPF is responsible for reducing violence, crime and fear for more than eight million people across NSW, operating over six policing regions and covering more than 800,000 square kilometres. It remains one of the largest law enforcement agencies in Australia and one of the state's largest single employers.

At 30 June 2025, NSWPF employed 20,385 staff, comprising:

- 15,887 sworn police officers
- 4,508 administrative and professional staff (known as unsworn staff).⁴

In 2024–25, NSWPF received \$5.3 billion in recurrent funding from the NSW Government (excluding capital expenditure), reflecting the scale of its operational responsibilities and the breadth of services delivered across metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

NSWPF sits within the broader Communities and Justice portfolio, alongside the NSW Crime Commission, the Department of Communities and Justice, Courts and Corrective Services. This positions the organisation within a wider justice ecosystem responsible for community safety, crime prevention, legal processes and rehabilitation.

Functions, values and priorities

NSWPF operates under the *Police Act 1990* (NSW) and Police Regulation 2025 under the NSW Minister for Police and Counter Terrorism. Its functions defined in the Police Act are to prevent and detect crime, protect people from injury or death, protect property from damage, and provide essential services in emergencies.

The Police Act defines eight values for the organisation:

- integrity above all
- upholding the rule of law
- preserving the rights and freedoms of individuals
- seeking to improve the quality of life by community involvement in policing
- striving for citizen and police personal satisfaction
- capitalising on the wealth of human resources
- making efficient and economical use of public resources
- ensuring that authority is exercised responsibly.⁵

NSWPF's most recent strategic framework *Force 2030* describes the NSWPF mission as to 'work with the community to reduce violence, crime and fear'⁶ by focusing on five key priorities: our community, our people, innovation and capability, strategic partnerships and crime reduction and public safety.

NSWPF's *Strategic workforce plan 2022–2032: 'Policing for the future'*⁷ sits alongside the broader strategic vision and provides direction on how to build the NSWPF workforce for the future. A number of the elements in the workforce plan are reflected in this Cultural Review. Importantly, the workforce plan acknowledges the central roles of leadership, culture, and accountability, in achieving the outcomes it seeks.

⁴ NSWPF Annual Report 2024–25

⁵ Police Act 1990 (NSW), s7

⁶ Police Act 1990 (NSW) s6

⁷ *Policing for the Future*: NSWPF Strategic Workforce Plan 2022–2032

External regulation and oversight

NSWPF is subject to relevant state occupational health and safety legislation including the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW) and *Work Health and Safety Regulation 2025* (NSW). The state regulator is Safe Work NSW. NSWPF is also subject to federal and state anti-discrimination legislation including the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW) and the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth). The Sex Discrimination Act contains changes introduced in 2024 to legislate a positive duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment and a hostile work environment on the grounds of sex.

NSWPF is overseen by the independent Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC), which was established under the *Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act 2016* (NSW), to detect, investigate and expose serious misconduct and serious maladministration within NSWPF and the NSW Crime Commission. In addition, any member of the public can make a complaint to NSWPF through its website or directly to LECC. Internally, Professional Standards Command is responsible for overseeing complaints related to misconduct.

NSWPF has a statement of values and a code of conduct and ethics. These documents outline the organisation's stated values and expected standards of conduct, providing a reference point for guiding behaviour and decision-making within NSWPF.

Like all government agencies, NSWPF is subject to the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (NSW), the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022* (NSW) and the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (NSW). In addition to standing oversight mechanisms, NSWPF has been the subject of ad hoc formal inquiries, reviews and royal commissions on issues such as corruption and misconduct, including the Wood Royal Commission in 1995–97 and the recent NSW Audit Office review *The mental health and wellbeing of NSW police*.

Organisational structure

NSWPF is headed by the Commissioner of Police with four executive deputy commissioners leading 6 regions and 16 commands/ units/ branches. The Commissioner of Police reports to the NSW Minister for Police and Counter Terrorism who, in turn, is accountable to the Parliament of NSW for the integrity and soundness of decisions and performance of the organisation.

The current Commissioner of Police is Mal Lanyon APM, appointed in October 2025. At the time of the Cultural Review's commencement in February 2025, the organisation was led by former Commissioner Karen Webb APM, the first female Commissioner in NSWPF's 174-year history. Commissioner Webb concluded her term in September 2025.

The Commissioner's Executive Team is comprised of the Commissioner and deputy commissioners who are collectively responsible for day-to-day decision-making within NSWPF, including developing and implementing overall strategic direction, planning, monitoring and measuring performance, setting and implementing budgets, and reporting to government.

Sworn employees currently make up 79 per cent of the NSWPF workforce, with unsworn employees comprising 21 per cent. These two groups are covered by different industrial awards and represented by different unions. Sworn police officers are covered by the Crown Employees (Police Officers) Award and are represented by the Police Association of NSW. Unsworn administrative and professional staff are covered by the Crown Employees (Public Sector – Salaries) Award and are represented primarily by the Public Service Association of NSW. This separation of awards and unions reflects long-standing distinctions in employment arrangements, career structures and industrial representation across NSWPF.

Following successful completion of training at the Police Academy, sworn officers commence as probationary constables and work their way up the ranks set out in section 12 of the Police Act. Unsworn employees are employed under NSW Public Sector grades.

Operational strength

Currently NSWPF covers 31 police area commands in 3 metropolitan areas, 26 police districts in 3 regional areas as well as a range of specialist commands and units operating across geographies.

Figure 5. Staffing in each region

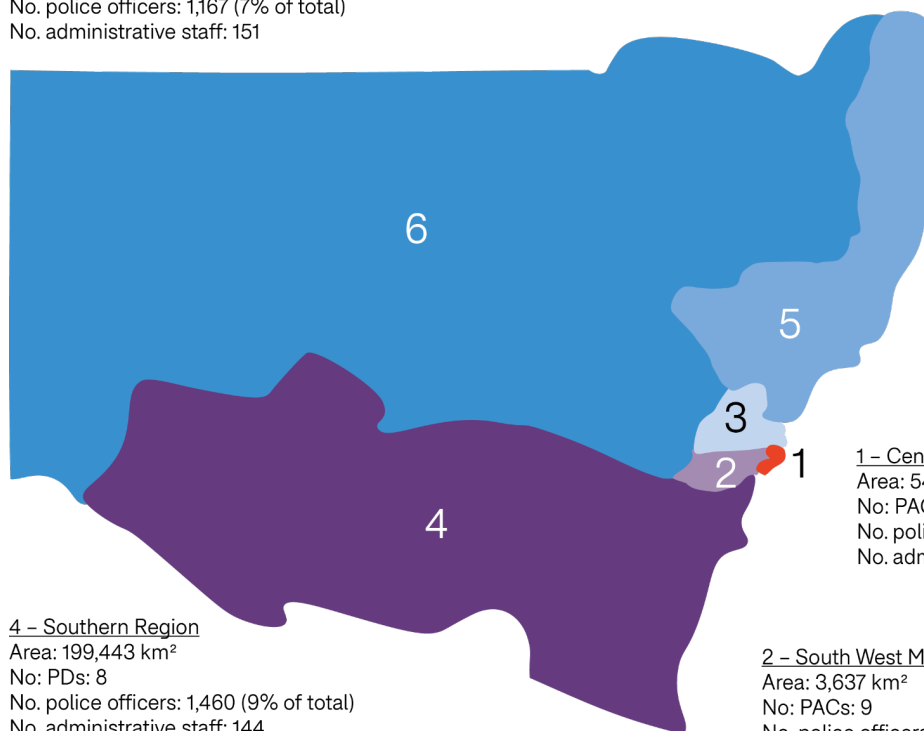
6 – Western Region

Area: 520,382 km²

No: PDs: 7

No. police officers: 1,167 (7% of total)

No. administrative staff: 151



5 – Northern Region

Area: 70,114 km²

No: assistant commissioners: 1

No. PDs: 11

No. police officers: 2,090 (13% of total)

No. administrative staff: 196

3 – North West Metropolitan Region

Area: 6,254 km²

No: PACs: 12

No. police officers: 1,961 (12% of total)

No. administrative staff: 192

1 – Central Metropolitan Region

Area: 541 km²

No: PACs: 10

No. police officers: 1,930 (12% of total)

No. administrative staff: 186

4 – Southern Region

Area: 199,443 km²

No: PDs: 8

No. police officers: 1,460 (9% of total)

No. administrative staff: 144

2 – South West Metropolitan Region

Area: 3,637 km²

No: PACs: 9

No. police officers: 1,877 (12% of total)

No. administrative staff: 179

The number of operational police staff has been steadily declining over the last five years (down 8 per cent), with the number of police exiting NSWPF doubling during the same period. Most police exits have been due to medical retirement. The number of officers in frontline policing roles (senior constables, constables and probationary constables) has seen the greatest fall, down 11 per cent over the last five years, while the number of commissioned officers (superintendents and inspectors) has grown by 6 per cent in the same period. These numbers may overstate the number of operational police, as they include police who are employed but are on long-term sick leave.

Figure 6. Operational police by rank

Rank	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Commissioner and deputy commissioners	5	5	5	5	6	6
Assistant commissioners	*	*	*	20	20	20
Commissioned officers	784	798	822	831	833	860
Senior sergeants and sergeants	3,071	3,047	3,067	3,085	3,136	3,173
Senior constables, constables and probationary constables	13,643	13,917	13,612	12,811	12,119	11,826
TOTAL	17,498	17,762	17,501	16,752	16,114	15,887
Police exits	736	949	1,307	1,428	1,390	

Source: Data provided by NSWPF, this does not include unsworn employees.

The decrease in the number of operational police evident in NSW is consistent with declining numbers of police officers nationally. Compared to other states and territories, NSW has the second lowest rate of police staff as a proportion of the state's population⁸ – in June 2024, NSW has 213 police staff per 100,000 people, compared with 267 police staff per 100,000 people nationally.

One factor contributing to a reduction in operational police numbers over the last five years was a significant decrease in applications in 2022 and 2023. The number of applicants rebounded in 2024 and soared in 2025. However, during this same period, the success rate of applicants decreased.

Figure 7. New police recruitment applications received and passed

Application phase	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
New recruitment applications received	2,424	2,393	1,554	1,700	2,468	5,458
New recruitment applications passed	1,286	1,217	854	729	1,096	— ^(a)

(a) Applications passed in 2025 was not available to the Cultural Review, though we note that more than 1,000 people attended the Academy during this period.

Source: Data provided by NSWPF.

Workforce profile by years of service and exits

Another factor reshaping the NSWPF workforce in recent years has been the number of experienced officers exiting the organisation via the Optional Disengagement Scheme.

Running from 2022 to 2024, the scheme offered a lump-sum payout and career transition support for officers with over 10 years' experience who wanted to transition out of NSWPF. Over 3,000 police employees left NSWPF while the scheme was operating. In particular, the number of staff with more than 20 years' experience exiting the organisation doubled during those years.

The departure of many experienced staff significantly hollowed out the number of sworn employees at middle manager level with 11 to 15 years of experience. The unsworn workforce has a similar challenge at middle management levels, without access to a scheme similar to the Optional Disengagement Scheme – the largest cohort of staff (44 per cent) have been employed with NSWPF for three years or less. The retention of experienced staff with over 10 years' experience is critical to help train and pass on knowledge and practice to new employees.

⁸ Productivity Commission,

Figure 8. Workforce profile by years of service, at June 2025 (%)

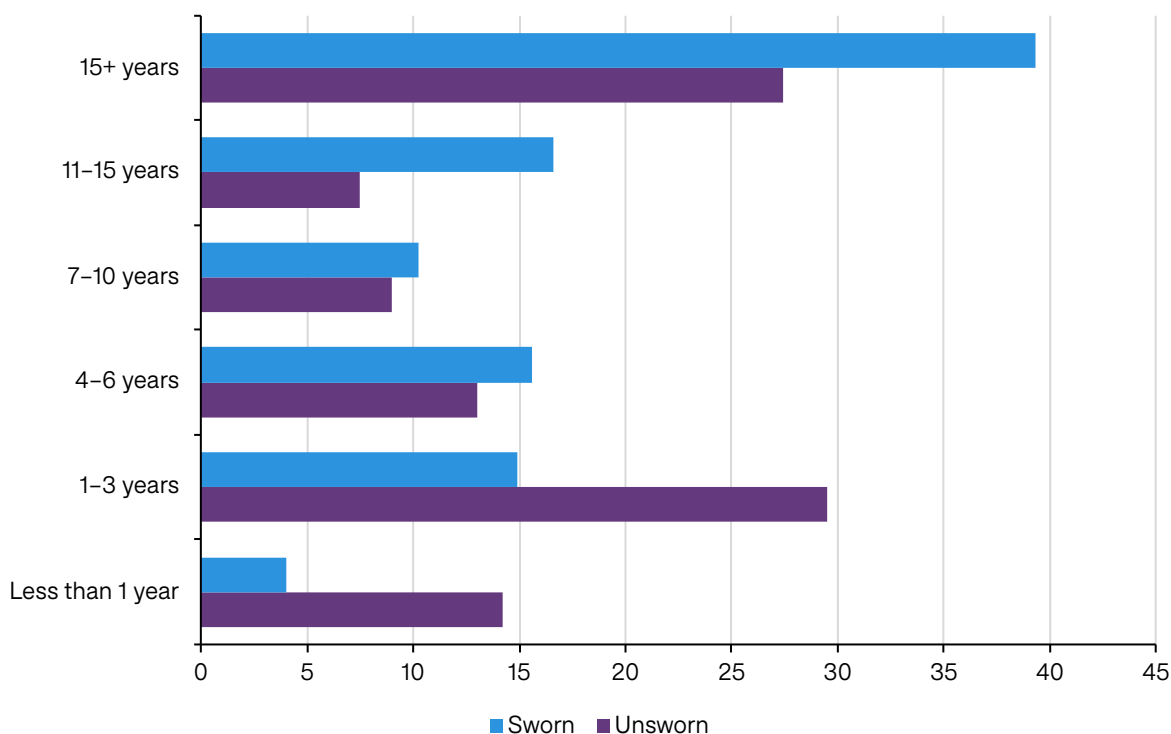
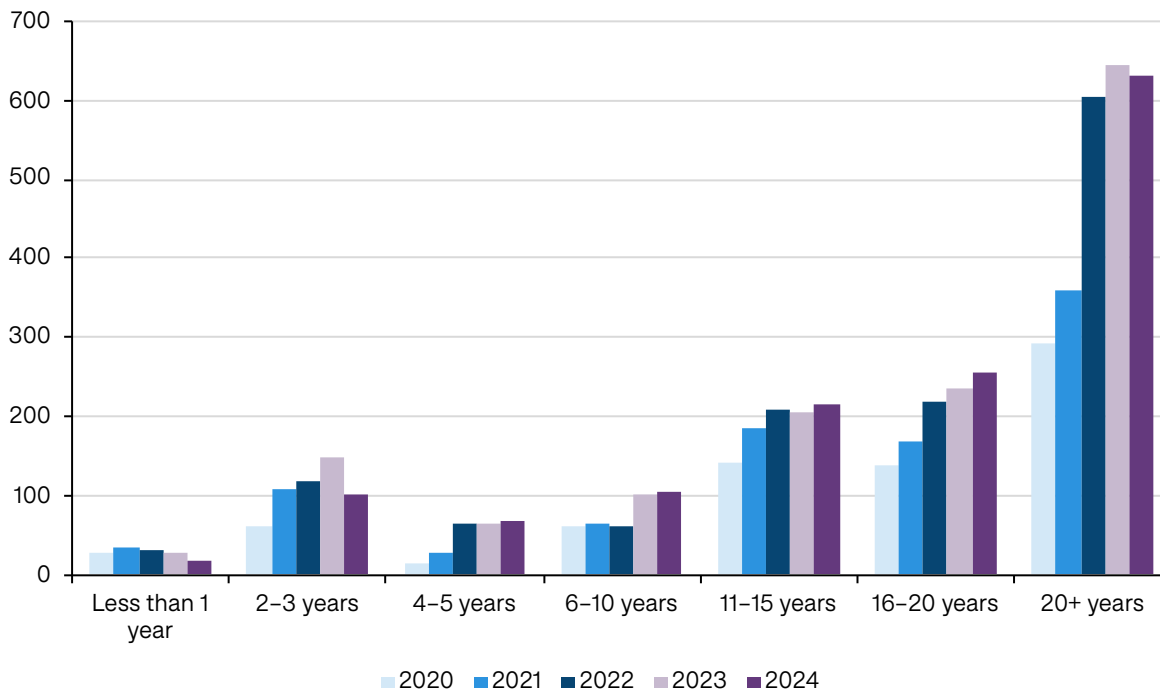


Figure 9. Police staff exits by years of service, 2020-24 (n)



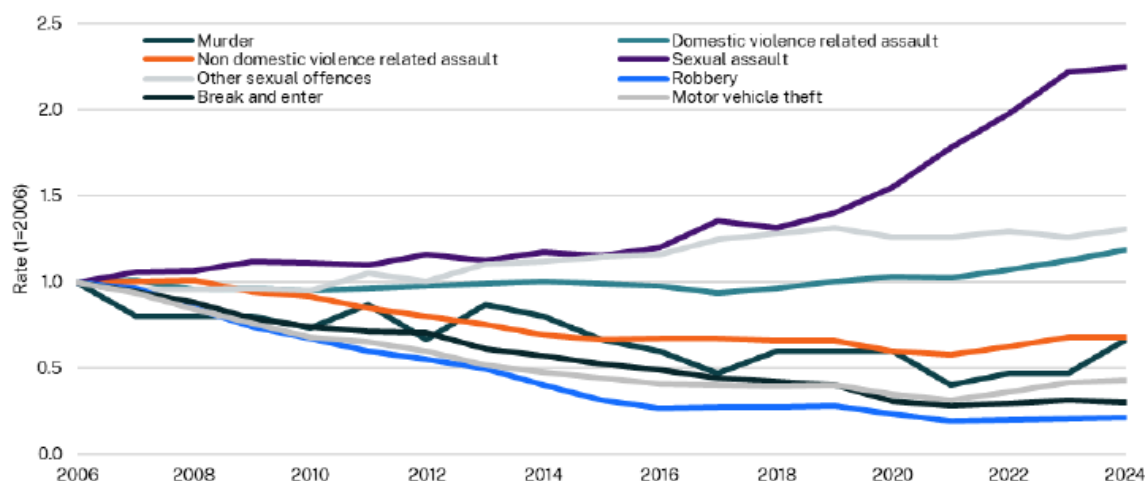
The number of police staff exiting the organisation has almost doubled over the last five years and women are exiting at a faster rate than men – 8 per cent of male police left the organisation in 2024, compared to 10 per cent of female police.

The changing nature of policing

Broad social, technological and environmental shifts have significantly changed both the demand for and the complexity of police services. Over the last decade, the number of reported ‘traditional’ crimes in NSW has decreased by 11 per cent, from almost 700,000 reported incidents in 2015–16 to under 625,000 in 2024–25.⁹ This includes fewer property-related crimes (for example, breaking and entering fell 5.5 per cent) and reports of personal theft (down 10.9 per cent). Factoring in population growth during this period, this represents a 20 per cent decrease – down from 9,337 incidents per 100,000 people in 2015–16 to 7,482 per 100,000 people in 2024–25.¹⁰

While crime rates have decreased, demand for policing has not decreased. In the last 25 years, sexual assault and other sexual offences have increased by 213 per cent.¹¹ There is little data on the volume of cybercrime – any crime that involves the use of a computer or some other digital device, or computer network – but 2024 data shows nearly one in two people (47.4 per cent) were the victim of cybercrime in the previous 12 months.¹²

Figure 10. Recorded crime rates, NSW



Source: BOCSAR, 2025; NSW Treasury, 2025

Note: The recorded crimes are indexed to 2006 levels for incidents per 100,000 people for all categories except for murder, which is indexed for victims per 10,000 people.

In line with increased reporting of gendered crimes over the past decade, women and girls now represent a growing proportion of victims of crime. Nationally, they account for 68 per cent of victims of selected offences, and 51 per cent in NSW.¹³ Women and girls are significantly over-represented as victims of sexual assault (74 per cent),¹⁴ noting that domestic and family violence is not included in these particular ABS victimisation statistics. Research also shows that women with disability in Australia are twice as likely to have experienced sexual violence over their lifetime compared with women without disability. First Nations women experience disproportionately high rates of violence and are 31 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family-violence related assault. Lesbian, bisexual and queer women also experience higher rates of sexual violence than heterosexual women.

⁹ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, reference NSW_trends25Q2.

¹⁰ Calculated from NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, reference NSW_trends25Q2 and Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data.

¹¹ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, reference NSW_trends25Q2.

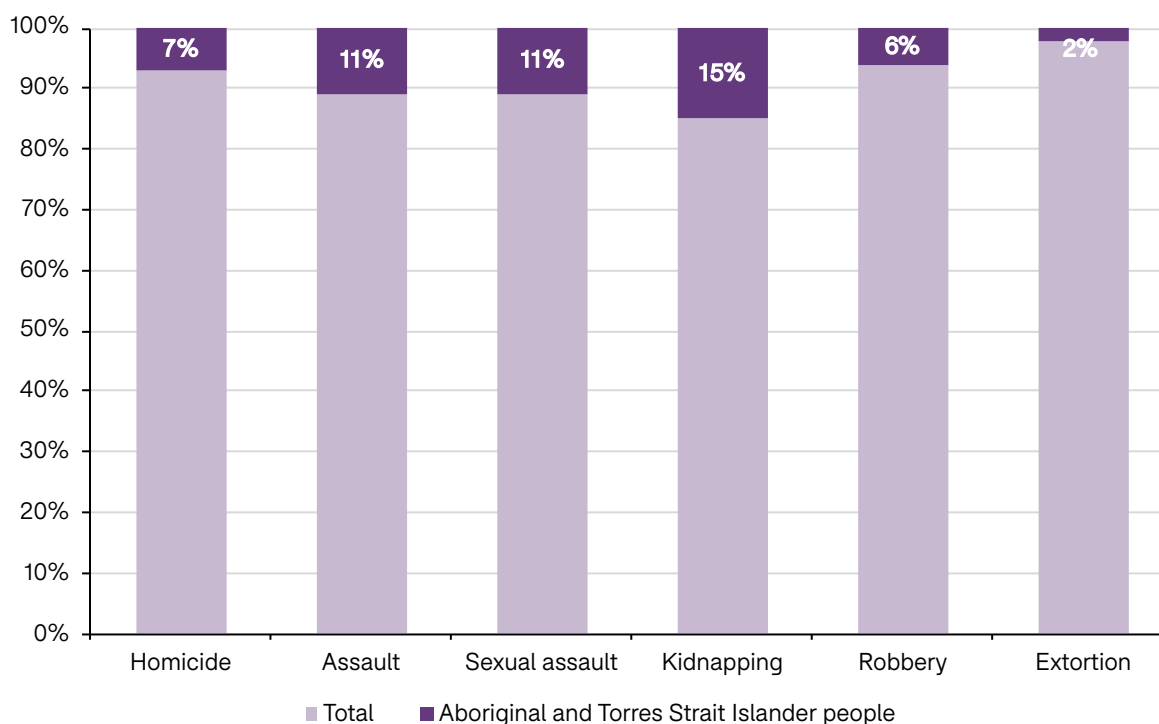
¹² Australian Institute of Criminology (2025), Cybercrime in 2024, p.16.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Recorded Crime – Victims, 2024 released on 3 September 2025

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Recorded Crime – Victims, 2024 released on 3 September 2025

While the ABS data does not provide a breakdown of the diversity of victims of crime, it does collect data on First Nations victims. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of crime are over-represented as victims of crime in every category of crime except for blackmail/extortion.

Figure 11. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of crime (%)



Understanding who is most affected by crime and how intersecting forms of gender, disability, Indigeneity, sexuality and social vulnerability shape risk is essential for developing police responses that are attuned to the needs and lived experiences of victims.

As noted in NSWPF's Strategic Workforce Plan, this imperative aligns directly with Sir Robert Peel's foundational principle that 'the police are the people, and the people are the police'.¹⁵ Modern interpretations of this principle emphasise policing by consent, where legitimacy is earned through trust, fairness and a deep connection to the communities police serve. When the reported demographic profile of victims shifts, policing must evolve accordingly. A workforce that reflects the diversity of its community is better positioned to recognise vulnerability, build trust and respond in ways that are culturally informed, trauma-aware and grounded in legitimacy.

While NSWPF has acknowledged the importance of diversity in a number of their workforce strategies, there is an opportunity to more fully explore the link between workforce diversity and improved responses to gendered and intersectional harms.

¹⁵ Home Office (2012), Definition of Policing by Consent, FOI release, GOV.UK. Reproduces the 1829 General Instructions including the principle that 'the police are the public and the public are the police'.

Non-crime-related demand

NSWPF is now also responding to an ever-growing volume of non-crime related demand, including disaster-related incidents, mental-health-related callouts, and ambulance- or medical-related emergencies. Recent NSW data shows the scale of this shift: in 2023–24, urgent response calls covering both crime and non-crime incidents increased by 48 per cent over five years, reaching 218,551 calls. This reflects a policing environment in which officers are increasingly the first responders to social crises, natural disasters and community distress, not only criminal activity.

This trend is not unique to NSW. Strategic assessments of policing in England and Wales (2022), Queensland (2019), Tasmania (2019), the Australian Federal Police (2023) and NSWPF's own Strategic Workforce Plan (2022) have identified a consistent set of pressures facing modern police services:¹⁶

- ageing populations and increasing cultural diversity in the community, where individuals may have differing perceptions of safety and trust in police
- broad social changes including decreasing mental health in the community, increasing rates of gendered violence and increasing rates of violence towards frontline workers such as paramedics and emergency room staff
- the impact of technology and globalisation increasing cybercrimes, often crossing jurisdictions, and police adoption of new technology lagging behind criminal activity
- the impact of climate change increasing the frequency and magnitude of natural disasters such as floods and bushfires
- an increase in political extremism and public protests
- a reduction in new police recruit applications nationally following the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to resourcing shortfalls.

These trends have increased both the volume and complexity of police work beyond 'fighting crime', in parallel with decreasing recruitment and capacity, outdated technology and a stretched justice and social sector.

The 2022 UK Police Foundation's *Strategic Review of Policing* found that police 'are increasingly the public service of last resort, picking up the pieces where other services have failed'.¹⁷ We heard similar views from NSWPF on the ground that police are attending more non-crime jobs such as mental health incidents which require officers to remain at hospital for hours with an individual until formally handed over, prisoner transfers and attending incidents at aged care homes.

With prisoner transport, if we arrest someone it's our responsibility to get them to a corrective cell or a jail. If they have to come back to court, we used to have to go and pick them up and bring them back to work. In large areas, it might be a five-hour drive. We've pushed a lot that mental health is a health issue, not a police issue. Corrections officers should be transporting people from jail. Police are sitting in hospital for mental health issues.

— Confidential interview

NSWPF is undertaking several projects to better understand demand and reduce the impact on frontline police. However, we heard consistently that non-crime callouts are significantly affecting workload, wellbeing and operational capacity. Officers reported that staffing levels across metropolitan, rural and regional NSW are not well matched to demand, and that inconsistent staffing models combined with the lack of statistical recognition of non-crime demand are contributing to stress, burnout and fatigue.

¹⁶ Australian Federal Police, (2023), The future of federal policing: Blue Paper To 2030 and beyond
Barber, M & Police Foundation, (2022), A new mode of protection: Redesigning policing and public safety for the 21st century
Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management, (2019), Next generation policing: Tasmania Police Capability Review Findings, GSA Management Consulting, (2019), Queensland Police Service: Strategic Review Final Report.

¹⁷ *A New Mode of Protection: The Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales*. London: The Police Foundation, 2022.

These pressures are compounded by NSWPF's unusual model for determining resource requirements within police area commands (PACs) and regional areas. First response agreements are negotiated regionally with the Police Association of NSW and are based on historic estimates of callout duration rather than contemporary demand patterns. The NSW Auditor-General's report *The mental health and wellbeing of NSW police* found that, to meet these agreements during current workforce shortages, NSWPF is recalling staff from proactive policing to cover general duties.¹⁸

This context is important in understanding the current state of culture with NSWPF.

[How would you describe the culture?] It's tired. Exhausted. On the coalface, the boys and girls – we're running the workforce at 60–65 per cent. Calls from the public don't stop, jobs don't stop, the investigations don't stop. But there's less people to do it.

— Confidential interview

Why culture matters in NSWPF

NSWPF defines culture as 'the patterns of behaviours that are encouraged, discouraged or tolerated over time', shaped by both explicit and implicit signals about what the organisation values. NSWPF's *Culture Strategy 2023–2027* describes culture as an 'evolving ecosystem' influenced by four levers: purpose, leadership, people, and processes and systems, which together shape organisational norms.

This aligns with organisational theory, which sees culture as the unwritten rules that guide how people behave and make decisions. In policing, these rules are amplified by hierarchy, tradition and operational pressure. Culture influences how power is exercised, how misconduct is addressed, how sworn and unsworn staff experience their workplace, and how the organisation is perceived by the community.

Community confidence depends on fairness, integrity and respect, and these perceptions underpin the legitimacy of police authority. Because policing relies on public cooperation, culture is not peripheral; rather, it is a core determinant of effectiveness.

In recent times, NSWPF has developed a more strategic approach to creating a positive workforce culture. Under its *Roadmap for Change*, the Strategic Workforce Plan recognises the importance of investing in the capability of the workforce, improving mental and physical wellness, increasing diversity of thought and building a culture of learning, innovation and accountability.¹⁹

NSWPF's Culture Strategy also identifies several organisation-wide initiatives to drive cultural improvement, including the establishment of culture action groups (CAGs) across commands and regions. These groups are intended to identify local cultural strengths and challenges, support the implementation of culture initiatives, create feedback loops between frontline staff and leadership, and embed cultural expectations into everyday practice.

However, we heard that these initiatives have been taken up inconsistently, often depending on the commitment, capability and priorities of local leaders. In some commands, CAGs are active and influential; in others, they exist largely in name only. This variation reflects a broader theme in the Cultural Review, that leadership is the critical determinant of whether cultural reform is prioritised, modelled and sustained. The importance of leadership accountability and capability in driving cultural change is examined further in the 'Trusted leadership' chapter in this report.

¹⁸ Audit Office of New South Wales (2025). *The mental health and wellbeing of NSW police*. Performance Audit Report, 11 June 2025.

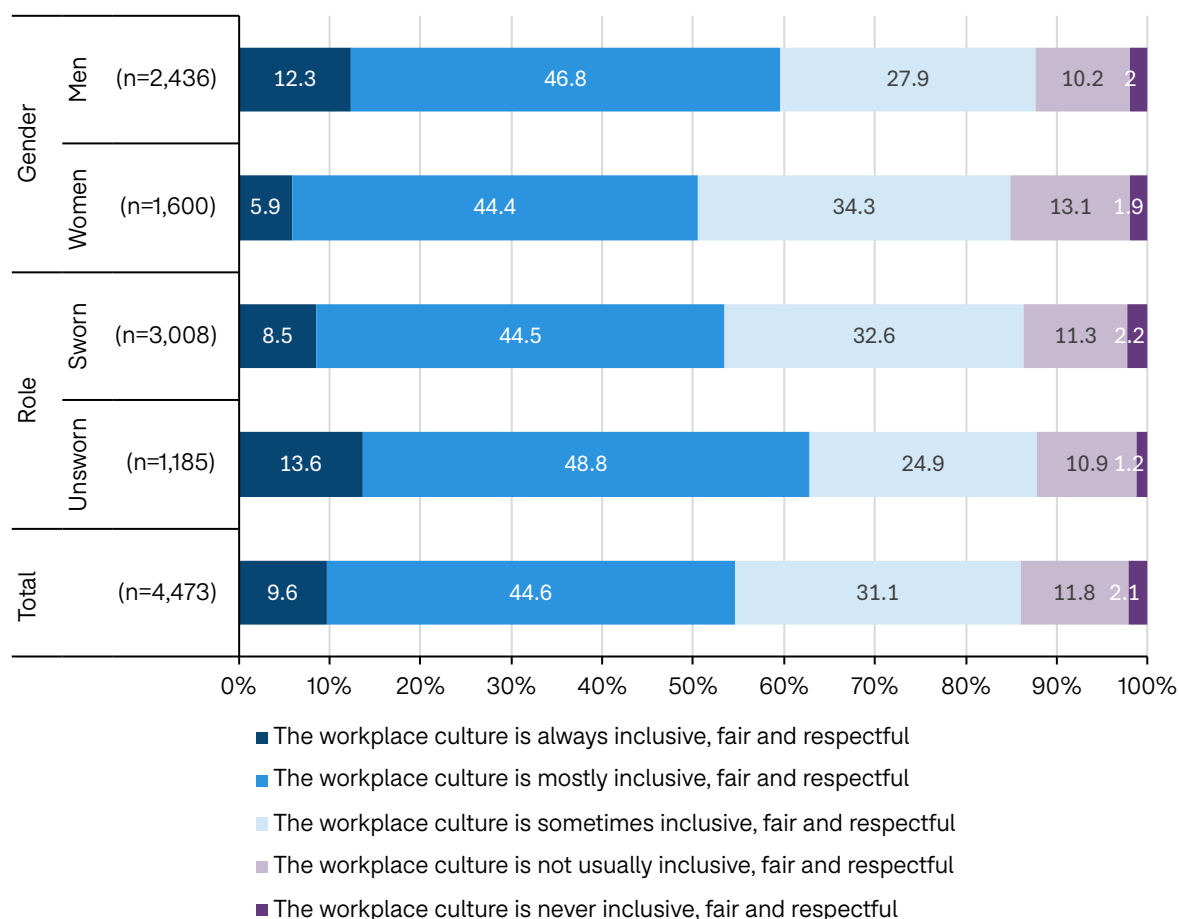
¹⁹ *Policing for the Future: NSWPF Strategic Workforce Plan 2022–2023* p72.

Mixed experiences of workplace culture

Employee data reflects mixed experience of workplace culture. NSWPF's efforts to better prioritise employee wellbeing and conditions is evident across a number of indicators in the organisation's most recent People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) results. In particular, perceptions of fair pay, employee engagement, and health and safety have improved despite NSWPF still lagging the broader Communities and Justice portfolio and Fire and Rescue NSW on key measures such as flexible working, job satisfaction and wellbeing. We reflect upon PMES results in greater detail through the report.

However, both PMES results and responses to our workforce survey indicate that there is significant work to do. Fewer than half of respondents to our workforce survey (45 per cent) described the culture as mostly inclusive, fair and respectful, and only 44 per cent felt respected and valued by management, despite 75 per cent feeling respected by colleagues. Workload pressures were also evident, with 53 per cent reporting negative impacts on their physical or mental health.

Figure 12. Cultural Review workforce survey – Perceptions of workplace culture (%)



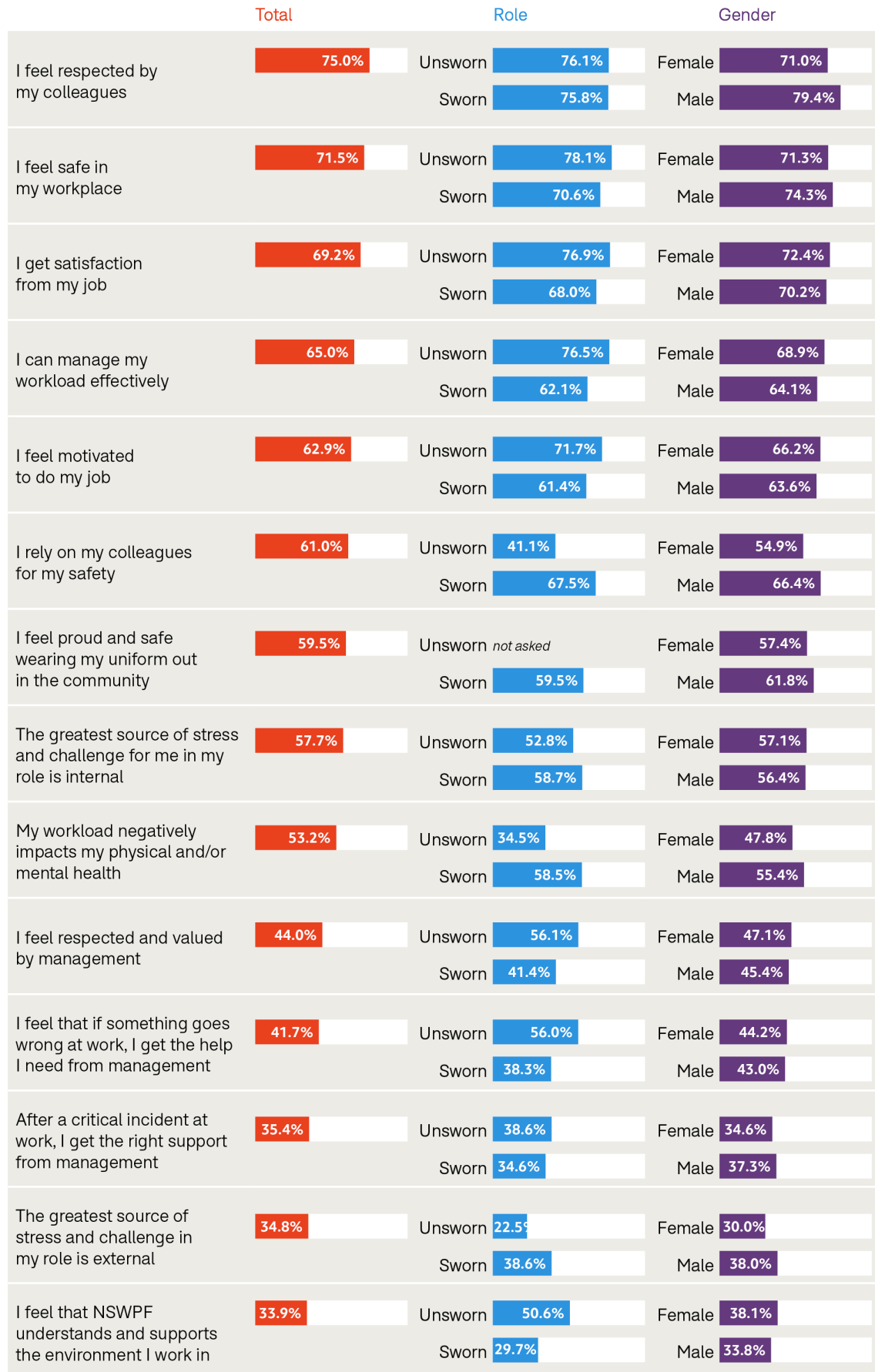
Q2: Which of the following best describes the workplace culture at NSWPF?

Note: Table displays the proportion of respondents who selected each statement (single response).

Overall, the findings depict an organisation where collegial support and pride in the job remains strong but perceptions of fairness, leadership capability and cultural consistency vary significantly.

The results also indicate that the greatest source of stress for staff is internal rather than external, with 58 per cent of respondents identifying internal sources of stress compared 35 per cent who identified external factors. The majority of staff also reported that they do not feel that NSWPF understands and supports the environment that they work in.

Figure 13. Cultural Review workforce survey – Perception of climate and culture (% agree)



Base: All respondents (n=4,473), except for the statement 'I feel proud and safe wearing my uniform out in the community', which was asked to only sworn employees. Unsworn n=1,185; sworn n=3,008; female n=1,600; male n=2,436.

Research on workplace motivation demonstrates that people thrive when they experience ‘small wins’ – regular signals that their work is meaningful, progress is recognised and leaders are responsive.²⁰ When these signals are absent, motivation declines, disengagement grows and staff become less willing to speak up or challenge poor behaviour. In policing, where stress is high and public scrutiny is constant, the cumulative effect of small wins or small losses, has an outsized impact on wellbeing, retention and performance.

Equity, diversity and inclusion as a core cultural indicators

Equity, diversity and inclusion are foundational analytical lenses for understanding organisational culture. They show how power, safety, fairness and legitimacy operate within a workplace. Decades of organisational research shows that patterns of inclusion and exclusion reveal who is valued, whose voices carry influence, and which behaviours are normalised or tolerated. In policing, these dynamics are especially consequential: they shape internal trust, psychological safety and decision-making, and they directly influence how the organisation is perceived by the communities it serves.

Policing, like many hierarchical and historically male-dominated institutions, has long had low participation by women, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, First Nations people and other people with diverse attributes or identities. Evidence shows that staff from under-represented groups are disproportionately exposed to bullying, harassment, and discrimination within police organisations, reflecting deeper cultural norms about belonging, authority and legitimacy.

²⁰ Amabile, T. M., & Kramer, S. J. (2011). *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

Diversity within NSWPF

NSWPF has increased its focus on diversity, equity and inclusion strategies in recent years. The organisation launched its first Inclusion and Diversity Strategy in 2020 and followed it with a new Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy in 2024. Many of the initiatives under these strategies are reported on through the Diversity and Inclusion Council; however, these frameworks have not yet translated into sustained or meaningful system-wide progress and concerns were raised with us about the effectiveness of the council in its current form. The current strategy lacks targets, time frames and clear accountability mechanisms, and NSWPF's diversity efforts remain fragmented and insufficiently embedded in organisational decision-making and leadership.

There have been some positive developments. According to data provided by NSWPF, LGBTQIA+ representation has increased from 4 per cent in 2020 to 6 per cent in 2025, and sworn leadership has also become modestly more diverse in some areas, with the number of women at inspector rank and above growing from 139 to 185 since 2020. The establishment of employee networks and the long-standing LGBTQIA+ liaison officer (GLLO) program and the Pacific Officers Law Enforcement Network (POLEN) have provided important avenues for support and community engagement. Notably, the proportion of First Nations employees is on par with community representation. These gains demonstrate that progress is possible when initiatives are well supported and connected to operational practice.

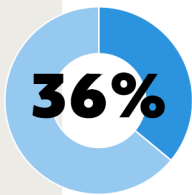
However, these improvements sit against a backdrop of stagnation or decline across almost every other group. Women remain just 28 per cent of sworn officers, a figure unchanged for five years, and they are significantly under-represented in a number of specialist commands. Representation of staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds has declined across the workforce, and representation of staff with disability has dropped to just 0.4 per cent, far below both the NSW Public Service and the broader community. The discrepancy between formal disability disclosure (0.4 per cent) and anonymous survey reporting (4 per cent) suggests that many employees do not feel safe to disclose their disability to the organisation.

The lived experience of employees from diverse backgrounds and identities reinforces these data trends. Some staff reported persistent sexism, racism, homophobia and ableism, with some describing openly discriminatory comments and behaviours that go unchallenged. Women reported missing out on development opportunities and having their merit questioned. First Nations employees described cultural disrespect and stereotyping, while employees with disability described being denied reasonable adjustments or discouraged from pursuing promotion. These experiences point to deep cultural norms – typically white, male, straight and able-bodied – that continue to shape access to opportunity and belonging within NSWPF.

Without strong leadership commitment, clear accountability and evidence-based planning, diversity initiatives risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

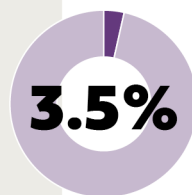
Snapshot: Diversity within NSWPF

Women



The proportion of women in NSWPF has remained unchanged for the last five years at around 36 per cent of the total workforce. This is lower than the proportion of women in the NSW population (55 per cent). Of this figure, only 28 per cent of the operational workforce are women. Women represent 20–21 per cent of leadership ranks (commissioned officers and above) and 21 per cent of assistant commissioner rank and above, less than half of the NSW Public Service average of 45 per cent for senior leaders (Band 1 and above).^(a) NSWPF's 2024 Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy committed NSWPF to a Gender Equality Action Plan; however, this is yet to be developed.

First Nations



The NSWPF Aboriginal Employment and Engagement Strategy's vision is to 'be an employer of choice for Aboriginal people by providing culturally safe workplaces that enable Aboriginal employees to build rewarding careers, reach their full potential and contribute to the success of the NSW Police Force'.^(b)

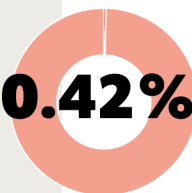
While the proportion of First Nations employees in NSWPF reflects the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the community at 3.5 per cent, they are under-represented in leadership, particularly within uniformed police ranks. There were only 12 First Nations commissioned officers in 2024 (three women and nine men), representing 1.4 per cent of commissioned officer roles (inspector and superintendent) at that level in 2024. Similarly, there were 11 First Nations people at clerk 9/10 and 11/12 grade in 2024.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds



Employment of people from culturally and linguistically diverse populations within NSWPF is significantly below the proportion in the community. People from culturally and linguistically diverse populations backgrounds represent around 25 per cent of the NSW community, but they represent less than half of that proportion in NSWPF (11 per cent). This proportion has remained largely unchanged for the last five years. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are also underrepresented in leadership, representing 9.9 per cent of sworn roles of inspector and above in 2025 and 10.3 per cent of administrative leadership roles of clerk 9/10 and above.

People with a disability



People with a disability who have disclosed their disability to NSWPF represent 0.42 per cent of the workforce compared to 17 per cent in the community and 2.6 per cent in the NSW Public Service in 2023.^(c)

The Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy states that NSWPF will implement a Disability Action and Inclusion Plan. There is no time frame stated for implementation of a plan.

Diversity-focused staff-led networks

While NSWPF does not have specific diversity plans for target groups, it has an overarching Diversity and Inclusion Council, positions for Aboriginal community liaison officers (ACLOs), multicultural community liaison officers (MCLOs), GLLOs and informal employee-led networks for diversity such as neurodiversity, Pride in Policing, and POLEN. These are discussed elsewhere in this report.

(a) NSW Public Service Commission, (2023), Workforce Profile Report 2023.

(b) NSWPF (2024) Aboriginal Employment and Engagement Strategy.

(c) NSW Public Service Commission, Workforce Profile Report 2023.

The opportunity for NSWPF – Key drivers of cultural reform

NSWPF cannot achieve meaningful cultural reform through policy statements or structural adjustments alone. Real change requires a comprehensive, organisation-wide approach that is grounded in the lived experience of its people, supported by evidence, and reinforced through consistent practice.

Through the Cultural Review, we identified a set of key levers that, when activated together, will help NSWPF transition to a safer, more equitable, more effective and modern organisation. These levers are interconnected and must be considered as part of a coherent reform effort. While different commands and business areas will hold primary responsibility for specific elements, progress depends on collective ownership, genuine engagement with staff, and ongoing evaluation to ensure reforms are not only designed but actually experienced in day-to-day policing.

The key drivers of cultural reform are:

- **Trusted leadership** – visible, ethical, accountable leadership that creates psychological safety
- **Attraction, recruitment and the Academy** – attracting diverse talent and reinforcing inclusive values during early training
- **Talent development and career progression** – transparent systems that counteract informal networks
- **Flexibility** – embedding modern ways of working that balance professional and personal responsibilities
- **Support and care** – understanding mental health risk factors, wellbeing systems and psychological safety
- **Preventing and responding to harmful behaviours** – proactive prevention and consistent, transparent consequences
- **Modern systems** – data, HR, and reporting systems that enable transparency and accountability.

Chapter 2.

Trusted leadership

Police leadership is both challenging and critically important. Senior police leaders operate in an environment defined by high-risk operational demands, political pressures, complex organisational management and intense public scrutiny. They must lead within rigid hierarchies and legal frameworks while exercising emotional intelligence, ethical judgement and cultural awareness in their interactions with both the community and their own people. The role requires leaders to move seamlessly between crisis decision-making and the ongoing work of building trust, capability and cohesion across their commands.

As a paramilitary organisation, people look up to their leaders and need to trust them.

— Confidential interview

To meet the demands of modern policing, adaptive, inclusive and ethical leadership capabilities are essential. More than ever, police organisations need leaders who can cultivate an internal culture that values diverse perspectives, fosters learning and prioritises the wellbeing of their people. This includes leaders who can hold themselves and each other to account against a shared set of values and behaviours, and who recognise that the pressures of the policing environment require strong mutual support across the leadership cohort. In this context, leadership is not only about operational command; it is about shaping a culture that enables safe, effective and community-centred policing.

This is not yet the current environment within NSWPF, where dominant command-and-control approaches to leadership in many parts of the organisation are undermining speaking up, diversity of thinking and innovation.

Many employees across ranks and locations told us they do not feel respected, valued or supported by senior leaders. Perceptions of favouritism and bias in decision-making among senior leaders is a major source of concern. In particular, the promotions process is widely perceived as based on factions, networks and friendships, rather than merit and talent. This undermines confidence in leaders and reinforces the belief that people are sometimes placed in senior roles without the necessary skills and experience.

We have interpreted 'senior managers' or 'senior leaders' as comprising the rank of commissioner, deputy commissioner, assistant commissioner, and superintendent and, where applicable, the unsworn equivalents.

We have interpreted 'middle managers and supervisors' as comprising inspector, senior sergeant and sergeant ranks, and the unsworn equivalents.

We found that leadership capability and behaviour is inconsistent throughout NSWPF. Overall trust and confidence in senior leadership is lower than expected, while the experience of supervision and support from middle managers is mixed. There are recognised gaps in NSWPF's middle management, caused partly by many employees leaving through the Optional Disengagement Scheme, and partly by inconsistent expectations and oversight of management roles across commands.

In this chapter, we focus on the role of senior leaders to drive an internal culture that is agile, innovative, safe, fair and inclusive and accountable for cultural reform. In the ‘Talent development and career progression’ chapter, we focus on middle management, addressing capability gaps and ensuring reform of the promotions process. In the ‘Addressing harmful behaviours’ chapter, we focus on the role of middle management to address unsafe and unlawful behaviours and manage incivility and conflict before it escalates.

What is working well

- There has been significant recent investment in organisational strategies to enhance culture and align workforce planning to meet future challenges and opportunities in policing.
- There are many examples of senior leaders who believe that culture drives operational performance and are focused on visible, accountable and supportive leadership within commands.

What is not working

- The Commissioner’s Executive Team does not reflect the diversity of the community it serves, and its substantive membership does not incorporate specialist civilian expertise.
- There is a lack of diversity in the broader leadership cohort in relation to women, First Nations people, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- A lack of diversity of thinking, experience and skills among executive and senior leadership risks undermining innovation, effective decision-making, and trust in leadership and in the organisation.
- Senior leaders are not sufficiently aligned or accountable for driving organisational strategies concerning people and culture. Perceived barriers include a low appetite for change, organisational insularity, a lack of a learning culture, a tendency to drive activities rather than outcomes and evaluation, and poor change management.
- Senior leaders are not consistently role modelling the values of the organisation or creating the conditions for psychological safety, including safety to speak up.
- Despite the current public sector capability framework and some reportable indicators, performance processes and evaluations do not ensure that people management and culture are central to senior roles.

Why trusted and inclusive leadership matters

NSWPF is a hierarchical, rank-based organisation characterised by a clear chain of command. Authoritarian leadership styles are common in command-and-control environments, and NSWPF is no exception. Such approaches are designed to ensure effective responses to situations that may threaten the community or the safety of officers. While effective in many operational contexts, they can be problematic when used indiscriminately across different contexts.

Autocratic styles of leadership discourage employee consultation, diversity of thought and involvement in decision-making. Where leaders expect employees to follow orders without question, it can lead to a fear of speaking up, even against poor, unsafe or unlawful behaviour.²¹ A top-down, directive leadership structure tends not to be collaborative or intentionally focused on issues of diversity, equity or inclusion.²²

There is now a wealth of evidence that shows inclusive organisations that value diversity are more innovative, more productive, deliver better customer service and community outcomes and attract and retain the best talent in an increasingly competitive job market.²³ Teams that can draw on a diverse range of perspectives, experiences and knowledge are more likely to solve problems effectively. Inclusive environments have been found to include higher levels of commitment, productivity and collaboration, result in better wellbeing, and decrease the risk of discrimination, harassment and other unsafe behaviours in the workplace.²⁴

Through our site visits and confidential and expert interviews, we saw and heard first-hand the particularly important role that commanders play in setting the tone of the culture within commands.

The culture here is good. The boss is attentive to staff. He checks on us. Sends us emails, welcomes people, puts posts on Facebook, writes letters to the community about what we've done and how proud he is of us.

— Confidential interview

Sergeants also play a key role in shaping behaviour, standards and morale on the frontline. Sitting between senior command and frontline staff, these middle managers are cultural gatekeepers. They are central to translating values and the success of any cultural reform.

Reform of the Commissioner's Executive Team

The NSWPF Commissioner has primary responsibility for the day-to-day governance of the organisation.²⁵ The Commissioner's Executive Team (CET) is responsible for overall strategic direction, planning for the future, achieving government priorities, monitoring and measuring corporate performance, ensuring compliance, setting budgets and managing financial performance, managing organisational reform and reporting to government.²⁶ Through our expert interviews, we understand that CET is intended to function like a board, with each substantive member having an equal voice or contribution to decision-making.

²¹ There are many reviews and academic studies of policing that explore the difficulties of authoritarian or command and control leaderships styles on workplace culture. Recent examples include, Independent Police Conduct Authority, *Bullying, Culture and Related Issues in New Zealand Police* (2021), paragraph 136-144; Queensland Human Rights Commission, *Strengthening the Service: Independent review of workplace equality in the Queensland Police Service*, 2024, p. 108.

²² Castell, *Inclusive Leadership – A Transformative Approach to Police Leadership in the 21st Century* (2018), p. 51.

²³ See generally, Diversity Council of Australia, 'The case for Inclusion@Work 2023-2024'; International Labour Organisation, 'Transforming enterprises through diversity and inclusion' (2022), which also cites research from McKinsey, Boston Consulting Group and Accenture, p. 70–71.

²⁴ International Labour Organisation, 'Transforming enterprises through diversity and inclusion' (2022), p. 37-38.

²⁵ Commissioner's Executive Team Charter.

²⁶ NSW Police Force Annual Report 2023-2024, p.10-11. Commissioner's Executive Team, Charter, p.1.

The governance structure at NSWPF includes a number of internal committees, boards and councils. Several of these are relevant to this Cultural Review:

- Audit and Risk Committee
- Inclusion and Diversity Council
- Strategic Workforce Planning Steering Committee
- People Committee.

There is also a corporate sponsorship program covering strategically significant issues to the organisation and community, including portfolios relating to Aboriginal engagement, domestic and family violence, mental health and youth. The corporate sponsors for those programs are drawn from the assistant commissioner and commander cohorts.

There is a clear lack of gender and age diversity among the substantive members of NSWPF's CET, with an all-male team who have been with the organisation since the 1980s. Unlike other policing jurisdictions, CET does not currently include civilian roles with specialist capabilities among its substantive members, including in areas such as finance, technology, strategy, infrastructure, and human resources.²⁷ This can be contrasted for example, with equivalent leadership teams in Victoria (two unsworn deputy secretaries), Western Australia (an unsworn executive director) and Queensland (whose governance framework includes a board of management with a deputy chief executive role). While senior executives in civilian roles attend CET meetings and are valued for their portfolio expertise, our understanding is that they are not actively invited to participate in broader leadership decision-making.

Below deputy commissioner level, there are 20 substantive assistant commissioners and 7 unsworn staff at the SES band 2 level in NSWPF.²⁸ As set out in the 'Context and culture' chapter, there is a lack of diversity in the leadership cohort in relation to women, First Nations people, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In its most recent annual report, NSWPF reported that women in senior leadership was 18.2 per cent and that there were three First Nations people in senior leadership roles.²⁹ This is not simply a matter of numerical imbalance; it means that the perspectives, lived experiences and cultural knowledge of these groups are largely absent from NSWPF's primary decision-making structures.

This gap has real operational consequences. It limits the organisation's ability to understand and respond effectively to the needs of multicultural communities which make up 25–28 per cent of the NSW population. These weaknesses are compounded by data showing that women and girls are disproportionately the victims of certain crime types, and by independent reviews showing that First Nations people are significantly over-represented in NSWPF contact, including in targeted policing programs and use-of-force incidents.³⁰

During our consultation, we heard that the governance structures at NSWPF did not support a diversity of thinking, experience or skills among executive leadership. This includes robust conversations and different points of view, particularly given the rank structure.

CET should be run like a board. Robust conversations. Diversity of thought. Thinking like a board director. There is none of that.

— Expert interview

²⁷ Compare for example to Victoria Police, whose senior leadership group includes four Deputy Commissioner roles as well as two Deputy Secretary roles, including for information technology, infrastructure services, corporate and regulatory services. See also the Queensland Police Service, whose governance framework includes a Board of Management with a Deputy Chief Executive role for strategy and corporate services as well as an extended Executive Leadership Team including both Assistant Commissioners and Executive Director roles.

²⁸ Data provided to the Review by the NSWPF.

²⁹ NSW Police Force Annual Report 2024-2025, p.31. Senior leaders are defined as those holding the ranks or grades of Senior Executives Band 1 to 4, or the rank of Superintendent.

³⁰ Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC), 2020–21 Use of Force Monitoring Report.

NSWPF should make greater efforts to increase diversity among its leadership ranks through reform of CET, building a pipeline of more diverse talent and setting targets to address the low representation of women, First Nations staff, and employees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in senior leadership roles. The substantive membership of CET should be broadened to include women and civilian roles with specialist capabilities. NSWPF should establish transparent criteria and processes for additional CET appointments to ensure merit-based selection and role modelling of inclusive leadership behaviours.

A shared strategic vision and consistent behaviours

To build internal and external trust and confidence, it is critical for NSWPF to have a shared vision for the future that supports the modernisation of the organisation. NSWPF's vision is 'A safer NSW' and its purpose is 'Working with the community to reduce violence, crime and fear.' The NSWPF values are described in the *Police Act 1990* (NSW). The values together with the Code of Conduct and Ethics are set out in the NSWPF Standards of Professional Conduct. See the 'Context and culture' chapter of this report for further discussion of the NSWPF values.

During the Cultural Review, NSWPF's strategic plan *Our focus, our future*³¹ was in place and set out a series of actions relating to people, systems and leadership. The goals are to develop capable and resilient people, build effective systems and enhance leadership. The end state is to maximise performance, future-proof service delivery, and build an agile and innovative organisation.

Figure 14. Capability-focused objectives and actions in NSWPF strategic plan *Our focus, our future*

Objectives	Actions
Develop capable and resilient people to maximise performance	→ Ensure safe workplaces, safe people, and safe operations. → Facilitate flexible workforce allocation and deployment to meet demand and community need. → Support and encourage personal development through education and training opportunities. → Embed misconduct prevention and reinforce ethical behaviour. → Actively contribute to respectful, inclusive and productive workplaces. → Promote and capitalise on workforce diversity. → Increase individual capacity to respond to complex and evolving policing and societal issues. → Enhance staff knowledge, skills and expertise in the use of new policing methodologies.
Build effective systems to future-proof our service delivery	→ Identify and share information, intelligence, and best practice. → Streamline and improve organisational processes. → Partner with industry to deliver innovative and integrated information, communications, science and technology. → Progress infrastructure and asset modernisation.
Enhance leadership to build an agile, innovative organisation	→ Put People First to positively influence culture. → Reinforce accountability and good governance at all levels. → Technology enabled and modernised workforce. → Invest in people and enhance capabilities including communication, change and performance. → Capitalise on a diverse and inclusive workplace.

³¹ NSWPF, *Our Focus Our Future*, available at v12_Corporate_Plan_-_Our_Focus_Our_Future_OP2.pdf

The new Commissioner recently published an updated one-page ‘statement of intent’, *Force 2030*, which nominates ‘crime reduction and public safety’, ‘strategic partnerships’, ‘innovation and capability’, ‘our people and our community’ as the key priorities. It is not clear whether *Force 2030* displaces the objectives and actions in *Our focus, our future*. In relation to the priority concerning ‘our people’, the Commissioner stated in *Force 2030*: ‘We will engage our people and back them with strong leadership, the right training, development, and a safe environment to deliver a rewarding career’.

Published in 2023, NSWPF’s inaugural Culture Strategy 2023–2027 aims to embed the values of respect, pride, trust, a people-first approach and professionalism. Leaders are expected to be authentic and empathetic to the community and staff, and to recognise, develop and appreciate staff. Importantly, there is an expectation for executive leaders to consistently communicate and reinforce cultural values and accompanying behaviours.

NSWPF has put a considerable amount of research and consultation into producing its *Strategic workforce plan 2022–2032: ‘Policing for the future’*.³² Mapping trends in technology advances, citizen expectations, societal shifts and the changing nature of crime and work, this strategy aims to position NSWPF to meet the challenges of global trends over a 10-year period. The outcomes in this strategy also align well with the themes explored in the Cultural Review. Other relevant strategies include the *Talent strategy 2022–2027*, recent *Diversity, inclusion and belonging strategy* and *Aboriginal employment and engagement strategy 2019–2025*.

Many of these strategies and vision statements articulate genuine aspiration and set out a clear direction for the future. However, we observed that awareness of these plans and their intent is low outside the Corporate Command. In conversations with senior leaders across the organisation, these documents were rarely referenced, and it was difficult to discern how the various vision statements, strategies and action plans relate to one another or build a coherent narrative for the organisation. While we understand that reporting on the outcomes of the strategic workforce plan does occur, we were not provided with these reports, making it challenging to assess progress or alignment. This lack of visibility and integration means that strategic intent is not consistently translated into operational understanding or leadership practice across NSWPF.

Ownership of cultural change

To realise its vision of a modern workforce, NSWPF senior leaders need to be more aligned, driven and accountable to building an internal culture that is agile, innovative, safe, fair and inclusive. There is currently low, albeit growing trust among the workforce that executive leaders are providing clear direction and making improvements to meet future challenges.

Many policies are not worth the paper they are written on and are applied only when it suits the pre-determined outcome. ‘At the commander’s discretion’. This then creates many moral injuries when police encounter unfairness of process.

— Confidential interview

Only a third of respondents to our workforce survey (34 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘I feel that NSWPF understands and supports the environment I work in’. The sentiment is also reflected in NSWPF’s 2025 People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) results:

- Only 40 per cent of participants agreed with the statement ‘My senior executives provide clear direction for the future of the organisation’.
- Only 41 per cent of participants agreed with the statement ‘My organisation is making improvements to meet future challenges’.

These results are significantly lower than the rest of the public sector and the comparative NSW Communities and Justice portfolio. However, encouragingly, the results have improved since NSWPF’s 2024 PMES.

³² NSWPF, *Strategic workforce plan 2022–2032: ‘Policing for the future’*.

During our consultations, respondents blamed the perceived lack of vision and direction within NSWPF on a range of factors:

→ A culture that does not value innovation and has a low appetite for change.

We are low maturity in everything we are doing. We do look outside and have great ideas. But there is zero appetite – we keep getting told we are apolitical, traditional in our values and change averse.

— Expert interview

→ A lack of a learning culture. People spoke about NSWPF not utilising or encouraging external education, including through the promotions process. Further, having not worked outside of the organisation, leaders were not used to being challenged.

→ A tendency to drive activities and not outcomes; to react rather than to plan and evaluate.

It's about activities, not about outcomes, not about evaluating what we did ... Did it make a difference?

— Expert interview

→ Lack of accountability and consistency when it comes to messaging, process, performance and follow-through.

→ Organisational insularity, including a lack of qualified people for specialist roles and an 'arrogant' attitude that a 'blue shirt' solves every problem.

It just beggars belief that in our organisation, to be the head of people and culture, you only need to be a street cop; to be the head of technology, you need to be a street cop; to be the head of infrastructure and assets, a street cop. That just doesn't make sense ... If you want to lead people and culture and have all that responsibility and accountability, you need qualifications to do that, but we just assume that a blue shirt solves every problem ... In the past when we've had qualified civilians in some of these roles, we have just absolutely eaten them up and spat them out because cops don't want to be told. Our culture is we already know the answers. We don't need these externals to come in and tell us how to do our business.

— Expert interview

NSWPF must place far greater emphasis on genuine staff consultation, clear communication and disciplined change-management practices if it is to achieve the cultural shifts it seeks. This requires senior leaders to listen to the workforce, communicate consistently, and apply rigour to planning processes – including business plans and action plans – as well as to the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives. The People Matter Employee Survey highlights the scale of the challenge: in 2025, only 24 per cent of respondents agreed that change is managed well within the organisation.

Accountability for key people and culture strategies will be strengthened by establishing clear, organisation-wide targets for employee engagement, retention, diversity, respectful workplace behaviours, and successful return-to-work following psychological injury. These targets must be supported by explicit senior leadership accountability through performance plans and evaluations. Embedding measurable expectations at the top of the organisation is essential to driving focus, consistency and continuous improvement.

Throughout consultations, employees expressed deep scepticism about whether the Cultural Review would lead to meaningful change and whether executive leaders were sufficiently committed and capable of supporting the transformation required. This sentiment is echoed in PMES results, where employees regularly report a lack of visible action on survey findings. To build trust, ensure transparency and accelerate reform, NSWPF should establish independent mechanisms to advise on, monitor and audit the implementation of the Cultural Review's recommendations.

Consistent leadership behaviours

We found that senior leadership behaviour is inconsistent throughout NSWPF and that overall trust in senior leadership remains low. In our workforce survey, participants were asked a series of questions about management, which was defined as ‘the group of senior managers in your organisation’. The survey interpreted senior managers as from commander rank upwards in the structure, and civilian equivalents.

Some key findings from the survey responses are set out below:

- Only 44 per cent of people agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘I feel respected and valued by management’. The result is significantly more positive for unsworn employees (56 per cent, compared to 41 per cent for sworn employees).
- Older cohorts feel more respected and valued than younger ones – employees aged 60+ (60 per cent) and 50–59 years (52 per cent) responded most positively compared to those aged 40–49 years (46 per cent), 18–29 years (42 per cent) and 30–39 years (38 per cent).
- For cohorts with diverse backgrounds and identities, some reported feeling very low levels of respect from senior management, namely people with disability (29 per cent) and First Nations staff (36 per cent). In contrast, LGBTQIA+ staff and employees who use a language other than English reported feeling respect at levels similar to or higher than the workforce overall, at 44 per cent and 46 per cent respectively.
- Perceptions of respect and being valued varied across commands, with respondents from Metropolitan Field Operations reporting lower levels of respect and value at 39 per cent, and Corporate Services comparatively the highest at 52 per cent.

We need to acknowledge people's good work and effort. It makes us want to do more. Just a little bit of recognition. It is not hard and sets a culture of people wanting to aspire to good cops.

— Confidential interview

Survey results were even lower regarding senior managers’ support for employees and the environment in which they work, including where there is a critical incident or if something goes wrong. Feedback from unsworn employees was the exception, with generally more positive perceptions of leadership support.

Figure 15. Cultural Review workforce survey – Perceptions of respect and support (% agree)

	Total	Role	Gender
I feel respected and valued by management	44.0%	Unsworn 56.1% Sworn 41.4%	Female 47.1% Male 45.4%
I feel that if something goes wrong at work, I get the help I need from management	41.7%	Unsworn 56.0% Sworn 38.3%	Female 44.2% Male 43.0%
After a critical incident at work I get the right support from management	35.4%	Unsworn 38.6% Sworn 34.6%	Female 34.6% Male 37.3%
I feel that NSWPF understands and supports the environment I work in	33.9%	Unsworn 50.6% Sworn 29.7%	Female 38.1% Male 33.8%

Base: All respondents n=4473; unsworn n=1185; sworn n=3008; female n=1600; male n=2436.

In interviews, staff described a lack of practical care for wellbeing and injury management. Frontline staff shared instances of senior leaders failing to care for staff who were visibly distressed and needed support following challenging events. Others recounted leaders denying flexibility or accommodation (such as alternative duties or station shifts) to staff with mental health concerns and neglecting to follow up or check in with staff on long-term sick leave.

The culture around injured officers is that there is currently a lot of lip service that we care for our people.

— Confidential interview

These concerns, which are explored in more detail in the ‘Support and care’ chapter, also impact staff retention.

Some of the sentiments reflected in our workforce survey are also reflected in NSWPF’s 2025 PMES results:

- Only 41 per cent of respondents felt they received adequate recognition for their contributions from the organisation.
- Only 36 per cent of respondents felt senior executives listen to employees.
- Only 48 per cent of respondents felt senior executives model the organisation’s values.

When we delved into the results relating to senior leaders more deeply, the following themes emerged:

- widespread concern about factions and favouritism
- a disconnect with the front line
- fear of speaking up.

Factions and favouritism

Many people perceive the promotions process to be based on favouritism and who you know, rather than merit and talent. People told us that to progress in the organisation, you needed to align yourself with a leader and toe the line. Getting ahead was not only described as having the right friendships and networks but also protecting those who supported and promoted you.

If you are not part of the group, or a ‘yes man’ then your capability, drive, performance means nothing.

— Confidential interview

This sentiment was described as the ‘politics’ of the organisation, stemming from CET down. We heard a range of concerns about senior appointments, including a lack of independence on senior panels, the misuse of targeted questions, and limited trust between the deputy commissioner and assistant commissioner cohorts. As a result, people reported that the senior team are neither collegiate nor cohesive and do not consistently back one another, impacting collaboration, effectiveness and morale.

I look at upper management and see the bias and feel it’s not faithful or fair. I want to help the young ones, but I tell them the truth – it’s who you know not what you know so start networking.

— Confidential interview

I have insight into the senior executive – Commissioner, DC and AC level. Until that cohort walk the walk of what they want to implement – eliminating nepotism and corruption – until they actually fall in line with what they want the other 20,000 staff to do, it will never change. The organisation is so political.

— Confidential interview

We also heard that favouritism in promotions and a lack of consistent training meant that people were placed in senior roles without the necessary skills and experience.

More broadly, the promotions process was described as rewarding obedience over innovation. In this regard, some people said the bonus system for commissioned officers also entrenched obedience, because people were performing in a way that ensured their boss was not questioned. These issues are explored further in the ‘Talent development and career progression’ chapter.

We’ve created an echo chamber culture, where you surround yourself with people that you have promoted, whose role is to protect you ... [W]e actually don’t want people to come to work and be a disruptor, be an innovator, find ways to improve.

— Expert interview

Disconnect with the front line

In our informal and formal interviews with front line police and in some expert interviews, a recurrent concern was a disconnect between general duties employees and senior leaders from superintendent level and above.

Now the frontline workforce can see what the problems are. There’s a massive disconnect with the people in charge at the top.

— Expert interview

There was a strong sense among staff that senior leadership were disengaged from their realities, had limited understanding of how general duties policing has changed, and demonstrated a lack of respect for the role. Many described senior leaders as out of touch and unaware of the practical impact of their decisions — ‘only monitoring the big things’ — while overlooking the pressures and risks borne by frontline officers. Some felt that senior leaders were more focused on their own careers and the internal politics of advancement than on the organisation or the needs of police on the ground. Concerns were also raised about senior leaders displaying poor behaviours, making complaints against one another, and failing to set a positive tone for the organisation. These views were echoed in several expert interviews.

People at lower levels see the hypocrisy. People see the ‘do what I say, not what I do’.

— Expert interview

Some staff raised operational issues, including a perception that senior leadership was unable to anticipate and respond effectively to staffing shortages.

There’s been no forward thinking about this workforce crisis. You could clearly see it was coming.

— Confidential interview

People shared concerns about regional commanders and assistant commissioners pushing pressure and demands down the line without adequate planning, communication or assistance. Staff said there was a lack of appreciation for how busy police area commands are and talked about the paperwork and the in-between tasks that go along with general duties. Some people raised the inefficiencies of top-down leadership, where they are being asked to write reports, put things into systems and produce documents without understanding the reason, how that work adds value, or who the audience is.

Staff consistently emphasised the value of visible leadership. Many described the positive impact of senior leaders completing a general-duties shift once a month, noting that it signalled genuine care and kept leaders connected to both their people and the communities they serve. Generational expectations also emerged as a strong theme. Younger staff in particular expressed a desire for leaders who demonstrate care, understanding and empathy—leaders who talk openly about mental health, broad thinking and prioritise team engagement and wellbeing. Several employees questioned

why, when newer generations are clearly articulating different expectations of leadership, these perspectives are not more actively embraced by the organisation.

But there is no point saying something to people who are not listening.

— Confidential interview

If you're that protected by rank, are you ever going to hear what people think? Are you ever going to hear good ideas? That rank is the massive barrier to hearing things. The best conversations are when there is no rank in the room.

— Confidential interview

Fear of speaking up

Psychological safety refers to a shared belief that it is safe to express ideas and concerns, ask questions, make and admit mistakes, take risks, and ask for help in the workplace, without fear of ridicule, victimisation or other harm.³³

If you could chart an officer's career, they're aspirational, they're energetic, they want to try things differently and they'll get to a friction point. And then all of a sudden, it becomes a safety game. It's defence, and it's 'Don't take a risk because you'll be criticised. Don't try something, because it may not work and it will affect your career'.

— Expert interview

A significant number of people across different ranks shared with us a fear of speaking up in the workplace. This sentiment spanned a range of settings:

- not wanting to raise complaints about poor behaviour and misconduct
- being fearful of making mistakes and being punished
- needing to conform in order to progress in the organisation
- being perceived as a troublemaker for asking questions or having a rigorous conversation
- being punished for asserting your rights
- being bullied if you are perceived as non-conforming.

Some staff perceive senior leadership's view of what makes a good manager as someone who says 'yes' to their boss. This meant they were unable to discuss the points of friction in a job, including the impact of leadership. Participants in our consultations also reflected that if you make a mistake, it is often not seen as an opportunity to learn, but rather an opportunity to be punished.

What's valued by the culture is someone who says 'yes' and is compliant and won't stand up for anything. It is a massive barrier for advancement.

— Confidential interview

If you open your mouth, you get sabotaged. It is crippling the organisation. The people who are favoured don't question anything or have a rigorous conversation. There is a fear of repercussion.

— Confidential interview

At a senior level, some leaders talked about the impact of the rank structure and hierarchy:

- the difficulty of challenging more senior leaders about their decisions
- not wanting to say the wrong thing in forums and meetings
- protecting egos for fear of giving offence.

³³ Professor Amy Edmonson, How fearless organisations succeed, *PWC Strategy + Business*, 2018; Amy Gallo What is Psychological Safety? *Harvard Business Review*, February 2023.

This was described as exhausting and counterproductive.

If senior leaders are to be accountable for the desired cultural change and reform at NSWPF, then they need to model organisational values, focus on psychological safety and develop and demonstrate more visible, caring and inclusive leadership capabilities. There are already examples of leaders who are driving this approach within the organisation to great success. This is detailed further below.

Visible and caring leadership

Throughout our consultations, staff consistently emphasised the importance of visible, engaged and caring leaders, particularly commanders, whose behaviour sets the cultural tone for their commands. Across our site visits and interviews, we observed many examples of senior leaders who modelled this well. Typically they were leaders who were approachable, took time to speak with staff, acknowledged good work, supported flexible work arrangements, conducted regular welfare checks, normalised conversations about mental health, and created opportunities for inclusion and camaraderie. These examples demonstrate the positive impact that committed, people-focused leadership can have on workplace culture and staff wellbeing.

The commander is the best – approachable, kind, warm. She is a strong female leader and amazing for morale.

— Confidential interview

The commander knows we are getting pumped but asks others to help us out. He is approachable as well. Everyone is approachable here. I feel supported here.

— Confidential interview

Things that are amazing are how they support each other when they've been to a critical [incident] or a pursuit, or something violent – how well they support each other when they come back in. And how the senior members rally around that group and that every commander will always call the people directly.

— Confidential interview

Leadership accountability

The inconsistency among leaders to drive people and culture strategies and to role model organisational values stems from a poorly implemented set of leadership expectations.

One of the most telling responses to our workforce survey is that only 29 per cent of respondents think NSWPF values and rewards supervisors and managers who have strong people management skills. For unsworn staff, the figure was higher (37 per cent, compared to 28 per cent for sworn staff).

The executive needs to agree on a position as to what are the behaviours and capabilities that we want our leaders to have.

— Expert interview

Performance conversations and agreements are a critical mechanism for holding people to account, but they also play an important role in developing the skills of managers and supervisors to reflect the leadership capabilities the organisation needs to succeed. Providing feedback in the form of coaching, guidance, correction and celebrating achievements is a core aspect of management. This should be integral to the performance management system.

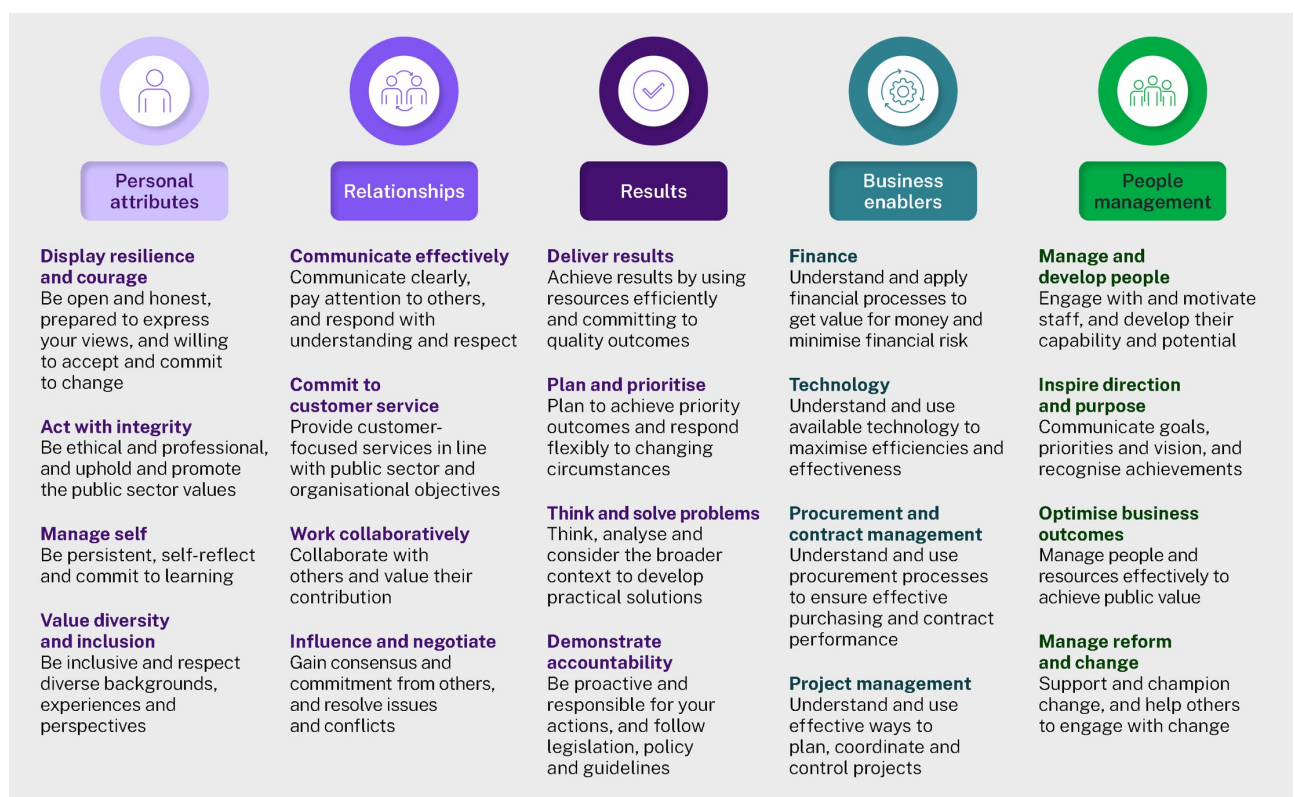
Capability and performance

NSWPF relies on the NSW Public Sector Capability Framework to underpin the performance of its employees and leaders, across capability levels (foundational, intermediate, adept, advanced and high advanced). Relevant to the Cultural Review, the capability framework includes a range of personal attributes:

- ‘display resilience and courage’ (including being willing to accept and commit to change)
- ‘act with integrity’ (including being ethical and upholding the values)
- ‘manage self’ (including self-reflection and learning)
- ‘value diversity and inclusion’.

A summary of the framework is set out below.

Figure 16. Capability groups in the NSW Public Sector Capability Framework (version 3, 2026)



The Commissioner is required to enter into an annual performance agreement with the Minister for Police.³⁴ NSWPF senior executives (including deputy commissioners, assistant commissioners, executive directors) must enter into a performance agreement with the Commissioner and have their performance reviewed at least annually.³⁵ Non-executive commissioned officers (superintendents and inspectors) must have their performance reviewed, at least annually, by the Commissioner or by some person nominated by the Commissioner.³⁶

During confidential and expert interviews, we heard that the capability framework was not well embedded in the individual performance process for leaders, even though leaders should be at a level of adept, advanced or highly advanced. Further, we heard that the performance process was not monitored or implemented consistently for senior leaders and middle managers. Notwithstanding that it is a requirement, some senior executives told us that they did not have a performance agreement; others confirmed that performance reviews are not occurring regularly.

³⁴ Government Sector Employment (NSW Police Force) Rules 2017, Schedule 1 (Model Contract)

³⁵ Government Sector Employment (NSW Police Force) Rules 2017, section 52.

³⁶ Police Act 1990, section 77.

There is a lack of accountability from the top down. Deputy commissioners are not held accountable for culture. It should be part of deputy commissioner agreements. It should also be on performance agreements. Senior leaders/commanders must be accountable for the wellbeing of their staff.

— Confidential interview

The Command Performance and Assessment System (COMPASS) includes reportable indicators relating to crime, public safety, community and partners, prevention, disruption, response, people, systems and leadership. We understand that superintendents are measured against COMPASS indicators with monthly and quarterly reporting, including the following indicators relevant to people:

- mandatory training
- sick leave
- excess annual leave
- projected excess annual leave
- workplace injury leave.

However, it was not explicit how these benchmarks are designed to support improvements to culture and culture action plans on the ground. Further, we heard that they are not consistently tied to regular performance conversations or reviews with commissioned/senior officers.

Giving and receiving feedback

Our workforce survey provides some insights into how leaders give and receive feedback:

- Only 35 per cent of respondents agreed there was a safe process for employees to provide feedback to supervisors and managers on their management and supervision.
- Only 44 per cent of respondents said they received timely, actionable feedback on a regular basis from their supervisor or manager.
- Only 38 per cent of respondents said they receive regular feedback on how their behaviour contributed to the team or organisation.

In the 'Talent Development and career progression' chapter of this report, we explore in detail the concerns that staff raised about the lack of meaningful conversations between managers and their staff about behaviour, performance or careers, and their criticism of the 'My Performance' system. This includes the NSWPF PMES results related to performance management.

Lack of feedback has many negative consequences for culture and performance, including staff being unaware of performance expectations or the impact of their behaviour on others in the team, but also feeling undervalued or unappreciated in relation to their work, or unsupported when it comes to career development and welfare.

Feedback is a two-way process. Supervisors need to have self-awareness and insight to improve their leadership skills and address gaps through internal and external training. In our workforce survey, only 44 per cent of respondents were comfortable and encouraged to give feedback to their supervisors and managers.

In a command-and-control environment, speaking up is often discouraged and potentially career limiting. As revealed in the results of our workforce survey and our consultation, this extends to providing genuine feedback to leaders, including about what could be improved. We heard that giving feedback about what could be better is frowned upon and those who do so may be tarnished as troublemakers.

Supervisors and managers should be asking their staff for feedback on their management, including how they can better support their work, performance, development and welfare. This could happen as part of regular performance check-ins or reviews. Importantly, NSWPF should also provide structured avenues for confidential upward feedback as part of leadership performance and development.

Feedback loops in NSWPF should also extend to managers asking their teams how to better support and improve team dynamics, cooperation, welfare and inclusion. This is especially important during times of change, but also during periods of stress and friction arising from workforce shortages and demand challenges.

I've had the pleasure of working under some of the most wonderful managers (inspectors) we have to offer in the force. I have also had (currently have) the displeasure of working under some others who are the exact opposite. How can our promotion system produce that extreme? I would introduce 360-degree management reviews for all commissioned officers. Probably to be done every two to three years. They are a valuable tool for all concerned and should be linked to their contracts and other promotions.

— Written submission

One thing I feel strongly about is the need for regular reviews and audits of team leaders by their staff. It's essential that leadership is not just assessed from the top down, but also from the ground up. Staff members are often the ones who experience the day-to-day impact of a leader's decisions, communication style, and overall approach to team culture. Their feedback is invaluable. I believe there should be structured opportunities for team members to provide anonymous, honest feedback about their leaders, and that this feedback should be reviewed by senior management. It's one of the most effective ways to ensure that those in leadership roles are truly supporting their teams, upholding professional standards, and fostering a respectful workplace. Having the right people in leadership is critical, but just as important is making sure they're held accountable and supported to grow. When leaders know they're being evaluated not just by performance metrics but by the wellbeing and trust of their team, it encourages a more transparent, ethical, and inclusive culture.

— Written submission

Trusted leadership begins with tone from the top and visible role modelling of the behaviours that NSWPF seeks to embed. Yet leadership at NSWPF remains constrained by limited diversity, fragmented vision, inconsistent respect for staff, and weak accountability for people management. Meaningful change requires investment in shaping attitudes, setting clear behavioural expectations and accountabilities, and strengthening development and systems that support respect, belonging and trust at every level.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. NSWPF should ensure the composition and functioning of its executive team contains a broader diversity of perspectives, skills and experience to strengthen organisational culture, decision-making and public trust.

This requires NSWPF to:

- broaden substantive membership to the Commissioner's Executive Team to include civilian roles with specialist capabilities
- establish one to two dedicated roles on the Commissioner's Executive Team for assistant commissioners or executive directors, to be held on a 6 to 12 month rotational basis, to provide exposure to executive decision-making, build leadership capability and foster succession planning
- establish transparent criteria and processes for additional appointments to the Commissioner's Executive Team, to ensure merit-based selection and role modelling of inclusive leadership behaviours
- build a pipeline of more diverse talent for senior leadership roles, including developing measures to address the low representation of women, First Nations staff, and employees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation 2. To strengthen implementation, NSWPF should incorporate explicit targets and outcome measures into its people and culture strategies, with the Commissioner's Executive Team jointly responsible for driving and monitoring progress.

This requires NSWPF to:

- establish timebound organisational targets for employee engagement, retention, diversity, respectful workplace behaviours, and successful return to work from psychological injuries
- ensure that members of the Commissioner's Executive Team are held accountable for progress through their performance plans.

Recommendation 3. NSWPF should strengthen its leadership performance framework to embed accountability for culture and people management, making these responsibilities central to senior roles.

This requires NSWPF to:

- integrate explicit key performance indicators into leadership evaluations covering employee engagement, retention, diversity, respectful workplace behaviours, and successful return to work from psychological injuries – these measures must be weighted alongside operational outcomes to ensure cultural leadership is valued equally
- ensure that the Commissioner's Executive Team reports publicly on progress against cultural and people related key performance indicators in the NSWPF annual report, demonstrating accountability and continuous improvement
- introduce 360-degree feedback for senior leaders – recognising that such processes require significant psychological safety, we suggest beginning with the Commissioner's Executive Team, which will help establish the foundations for broader organisational adoption.

Recommendation 4. NSWPF should establish robust mechanisms to implement and monitor the Cultural Review's recommendations, ensuring transparency and accountability.

This requires NSWPF to:

- establish an advisory committee with external independent experts to guide the intent and implementation of the Cultural Review's recommendations, reporting directly to the Commissioner's Executive Team
- commission an independent audit of the Cultural Review's recommendations within two years, with findings on progress and impact reported publicly
- develop a clear implementation plan that sets out responsibilities, timelines and measures of success for each recommendation.

Chapter 3.

Attraction, recruitment and the Academy

Attracting a diverse and capable cohort of recruits is a critical priority for NSWPF as it seeks to address workforce shortages, meet emerging operational demands and ensure that its workforce reflects the diversity of the NSW community.

Recruitment is not simply an administrative function – it is a cultural signal. The way the organisation represents its purpose, values and day-to-day realities directly influences who chooses to apply, who progresses through the pipeline and who ultimately sees policing as a viable and sustainable career. Historically, dominant narratives about policing have shaped the profile of applicants. However, contemporary labour markets, shifting community expectations and the evolving nature of police work require a more strategic, adaptive and evidence-based approach to attracting talent.

The early stages of a policing career – recruitment, training at the Academy and the probationary period – are foundational in shaping professional identity, behavioural norms and long-term commitment. The extent to which recruits encounter consistent expectations, constructive supervision, psychological safety and a coherent understanding of their role strongly influences whether they remain, whether they thrive and how they internalise the standards of the organisation. Conversely, misalignment between espoused values and lived experience during this period increases the likelihood of early attrition, performance issues and disengagement.

As policing becomes more complex – requiring greater interpersonal capability, cultural competence, technological literacy and adaptive problem solving – NSWPF must ensure that its recruitment and probation systems attract, develop and retain individuals equipped for this environment. This necessitates not only improvements to recruitment and retention procedures, but also improvements to the cultural conditions that support learning, accountability and inclusion from the outset.

What's working well

- The total number of recruits increased in 2025, indicating early impact from efforts to attract and process a larger pool of candidates.
- The Academy experience observed and described by employees is grounded in organisational values, expected behaviours and positive professional traditions.
- Reported behavioural issues at the Academy are now addressed more promptly and decisively, demonstrating clearer expectation setting and accountability.

What's not working well

- NSWPF does not yet have a clear organisation-wide recruitment strategy to guide how it will build a more diverse and representative workforce.
- The financial burden placed on recruits (including medical costs and HELP debt) may deter suitable applicants.
- Recruitment campaigns do not consistently reflect the core realities of general duties policing, creating a risk of misaligned expectations.
- The quality of probationary oversight varies significantly, with inconsistent standards of supervision, cultural leadership and support across commands.

Recruitment

As in other uniformed organisations, NSWPF recruitment involves a multi-stage assessment process, including eligibility screening, cognitive and physical testing, security vetting, medical and psychological assessments and final selection. Successful applicants then complete structured online and in-person training at the Goulburn Academy before entering probationary service. This process is well established and consistently applied.

Historically, NSWPF experienced a strong candidate pool of suitable candidates. However, application numbers declined sharply between 2020 and 2022, falling from 2,424 to 1,554, resulting in significant recruitment shortages. During the same period, exits increased, driven in part by the Optional Disengagement Scheme. This scheme was established to provide eligible officers with a supported and dignified pathway to leave NSWPF, offering a structured financial package and career transition assistance as they moved into new careers, study or retirement. However, those who accessed the scheme were predominantly highly experienced officers, and their departure has created capability gaps in several parts of the leadership pipeline.

While some leaders have attributed the downturn in applicants to public sentiment during COVID-19, the absence of a recruitment strategy aligned to internal attrition patterns and external labour market conditions is evident.

Recent reforms, including the introduction of paid Academy training (approximately \$1,360 per week plus allowances, totalling \$30,984 over 16 weeks), have contributed to a significant increase in applications. In 2025, NSWPF received 5,458 applications, and more than 1,000 recruits completed training in the same year. The shift to paid training brings NSWPF into alignment with all other Australian policing jurisdictions, where remuneration during training is already standard practice.

However, the broader recruitment approach remains largely oriented toward achieving numerical replacement of departing officers rather than addressing long-term workforce demand, regional capability requirements or diversity objectives.

Financial barriers

In response to workforce shortages, NSWPF has introduced a series of reforms to its training pathway since 2023:

- In January 2023, the University Certificate in Workforce Essentials – a mandatory pre-entry qualification that provides foundational knowledge and skills required for policing including ethics, communications and legal principles – was reduced from eight weeks to four, with fees lowered and a \$3,000 allowance provided to reduce financial barriers.
- In March 2024, the on-campus component of the Associate Degree in Policing Practice was condensed into a 16-week paid training program. During this period, recruits were employed as temporary administrative staff and received approximately \$30,984 in salary and allowances.

These measures were designed to reduce financial barriers to entry and make policing careers more accessible and attractive to prospective applicants and have succeeded in attracting more applicants. However, we found no evidence that the reforms have been evaluated for their impact on applicant diversity, operational readiness, retention or cultural integration. While they have substantially increased the volume of recruits entering the Academy, it remains unclear whether they are achieving the intended outcomes or addressing the longer-term workforce challenges.

NSWPF is the only policing jurisdiction in Australia to offer a university-level qualification as part of its recruit training. Most other jurisdictions offer a Diploma in Policing qualification. In NSW, recruits are required to complete an Associate Degree in Policing Practice, currently delivered by Charles Sturt University but transitioning to the University of Western Sydney from 2026. This requirement was introduced following the Wood Royal Commission (1995–97) as a means of professionalising policing and embedding greater academic rigour into foundational training. However, despite the widely welcomed decision to start paying recruits, the HELP (Higher Education Loan Program) debt incurred as part of completing an Associate Degree – estimated at \$17,664 for 2026 cohorts – may still present a significant barrier to applying. This is particularly true for candidates from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or those already carrying student debt, potentially limiting the diversity and breadth of the recruitment pool.

Other jurisdictions, including police forces in Victoria and Queensland, have sought to remove potential financial barriers to applying, covering the costs incurred by applicants during the recruitment process. In NSW, candidates must cover the cost of medical assessments and other recruitment-related expenses themselves.

I recommended [my] daughter join VicPol for free Academy, better pay and 11 weeks' leave. [She] can transfer to NSWPF after two years – or stay in Victoria for seven and get a lifetime pension.

— Confidential interview

Some probationary constables we spoke to reported being unaware of the HELP debt or its repayment terms, highlighting the need for clearer financial information during recruitment.

Probationary constables consistently reported that the associate degree was not perceived as transferable to other jurisdictions or valuable outside policing. There is an opportunity to use financial incentives – such as waiving HELP debts – to help retain new recruits in the early years of service. Queensland Police, for example, offers up to \$20,000 in HELP debt relief for recruits who complete training and probation, providing a model for NSWPF to consider.

Figure 17. Good practice: Cadet Program

The recently announced NSW Police Cadet Program provides prospective candidates with structured exposure to policing prior to full recruitment, similar to the Australian Defence Force Gap Year initiative. Early feedback suggests the program may help prepare candidates for the job and improve understanding of general duties work, particularly for younger applicants with limited work experience. Evidence from the Australian Defence Force indicates that, while retention from gap year programs is often modest, they improve public perceptions and attract candidates who may not otherwise consider service. The effectiveness of the cadet program will depend on the quality of station-based experiences and rigorous evaluation of outcomes, including impacts on diversity, candidate readiness and early career retention.

Diversity in recruitment and alignment with government expectations

The NSW Government's Inclusion and Belonging Strategy sets clear diversity expectations across the public sector in relation to gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, and disability employment. Notwithstanding its status as a major public sector employer, NSWPF has not established corresponding targets, despite being required to contribute to these outcomes. While the *NSWPF Talent Strategy 2022–2027* acknowledges the importance of a more diverse recruit pool, the organisation has not actively considered the desired diversity composition of recruit cohorts.

NSWPF does not have a Reconciliation Action Plan, however it does have an Aboriginal Employment and Engagement Strategy and it has developed a range of different programs and initiatives between 2019 and 2025 to improve the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. While outlining a range of initiatives aimed at increasing the attractiveness of policing careers, this Strategy does not contain targets or specific strategies to increase First Nations employment.

NSWPF's workforce remains significantly less diverse than the communities it serves, creating a widening risk of cultural disconnect and diminished public trust:

- In October 2025, women comprised only 28 per cent of operational police – unchanged for five years and far below women's representation in both the NSW Public Service (45 per cent) and NSW population (55 per cent). Within specialist commands, women's representation falls to 12–19 per cent; and within leadership ranks, only 20–21 per cent.
- The number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the workforce has decreased over the last five years falling from 776 (3.6 per cent) in 2020 to 716 (3.4 per cent) in 2025.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander officers made up 3.6 per cent of operational police, on par with First Nation representation in NSW, but First Nations people represent only 1.4 per cent of commissioned officers.
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds represent just 12.2 per cent of staff despite comprising 50 per cent of the NSW population.³⁷ A small relative increase in CALD people in police leadership growing from 73 people in 2020 (9 per cent) to 83 people in 2025 (10 per cent).
- The gap is even more pronounced for people with disability, who account for 0.3 per cent of the workforce in formal HR data, compared to 17 per cent of the NSW population and 2.6 per cent of the NSW Public Service, raising questions about the safety of disclosure.
- LGBTQIA+ representation sits at 6 per cent in the 2025 PMES, slightly above the 4.5 per cent estimated representation in the NSW community, but this representation is not carried through to more senior ranks where there are very few visible role models.

With no meaningful growth in representation of women, staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, or people with disability over the past five years, NSWPF risks entrenching a workforce that does not reflect the communities it polices – limiting cultural insight, weakening legitimacy and undermining the trust essential for effective, community centred-policing.

We need to overhaul recruitment. The culture needs to reflect the community, in terms of diversity – we need to actively recruit people who are LGBTIQ+ and accept people who are neurodiverse, trans. How can we police communities we don't represent?

— Formal interview

Interviews revealed significant confusion among leaders regarding the purpose and use of diversity targets. Many expressed concern that targets would compromise standards, reflecting limited understanding of the evidence linking workforce diversity to operational effectiveness. Resistance was often framed as a fear of 'backlash', rather than a lack of capability or evidence to support diversity initiatives. The results of our workforce survey also indicated gendered differences in perceptions of equity in NSWPF recruitment – while 81 per cent of men perceived that women have equal opportunities, only 64 per cent of women responded the same way.

We need to continue to hire the best people, not just [women] because that is a government agenda.

— Formal interview

Leadership is too scared to set targets. The more diversity we bring in, the more questions are asked about how we do things.

— Informal interview

³⁷ <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2025-09/psc-2023-increasing-cald-representation-senior-leadership.pdf>

We also identified a significant opportunity for the NSW Police Force to broaden its talent pipeline by attracting individuals from other professions, including those seeking a mid-career transition or displaced through technological change such as AI-driven automation. While this cohort has not traditionally been considered within the organisation's diversity framework, it represents a strategically important source of skills, experience and capability. Realising this opportunity, however, would require addressing structural barriers to entry, particularly the reliance on a single recruitment pathway through the Police Academy as a recruit, which is likely to deter experienced candidates and limit NSWPF's ability to recruit specialised or lateral talent.

Approaches to diversity targets in comparable uniformed organisations

Comparable organisations have adopted structured, evidence-based approaches to recruiting diverse cohorts that emphasise capability, operational effectiveness and community representation.

Victoria Police has implemented a *Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2023–2030*, supported by targeted recruitment programs designed to increase representation from culturally and linguistically diverse and First Nations communities. These programs provide tailored preparation for potential recruits and coaching and pathway support and have resulted in measurable increases in the diversity of recruit intakes, including the employment of 21 African-Australian participants through the Diversity Recruitment Program.

The Australian Defence Force similarly positions diversity as a capability requirement, emphasising that a workforce reflecting a broad range of backgrounds enhances adaptability, decision-making and operational performance. Since 2014, the Australian Defence Force has had explicit recruitment targets for women, First Nations people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and has invested in dedicated recruitment experts, targeted campaigns, entrance pathways and community engagement to expand the applicant pool. During that period, women's representation in the defence force has increased from 14.4 per cent in 2013 to 20.7 per cent in 2023–24, with a stated aim and public modelling of reaching 25 per cent by 2030.³⁸

These organisations demonstrate that diversity targets, when framed as capability objectives rather than compliance mechanisms, can improve recruitment outcomes, strengthen community trust and enhance operational effectiveness. Their public reporting highlights increased representation across targeted groups and improved candidate readiness through structured support programs. NSWPF's current approach does not yet reflect this level of strategic clarity or investment.

Navigating the application process

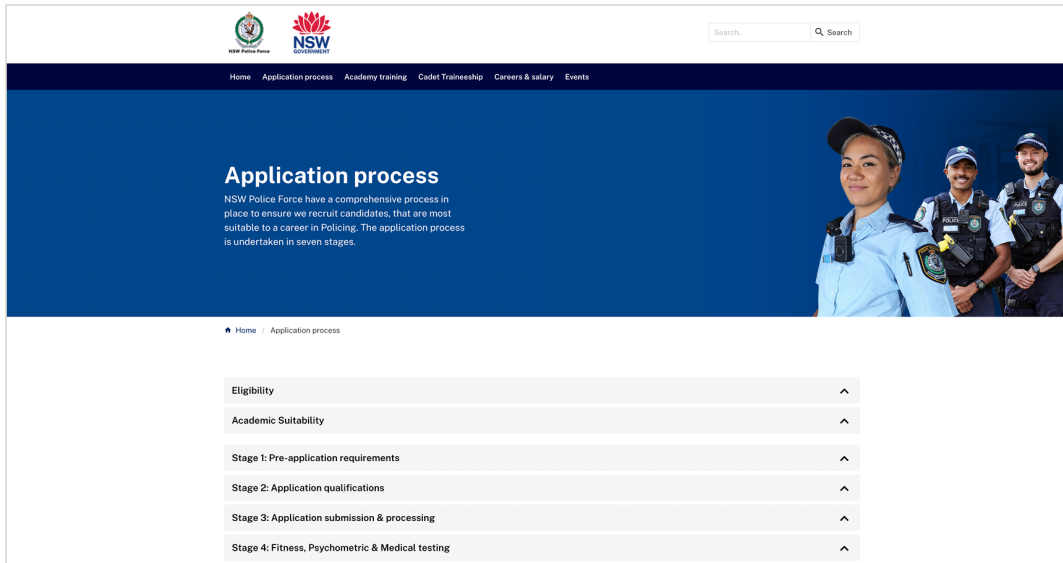
Our analysis of the recruitment process revealed other unnecessary barriers for prospective applicants.

The NSWPF application process requires candidates to locate the correct entry point, move across several websites and complete multiple steps before reaching basic eligibility information. In contrast, the websites for the Australian Defence Force, Victoria Police and Queensland Police Service use prominent 'Apply now' pathways and simple expressions of interest that enable early engagement, data collection and tailored follow-up. NSWPF's approach risks losing suitable candidates early in the process, particularly those without policing networks or with lower digital literacy.

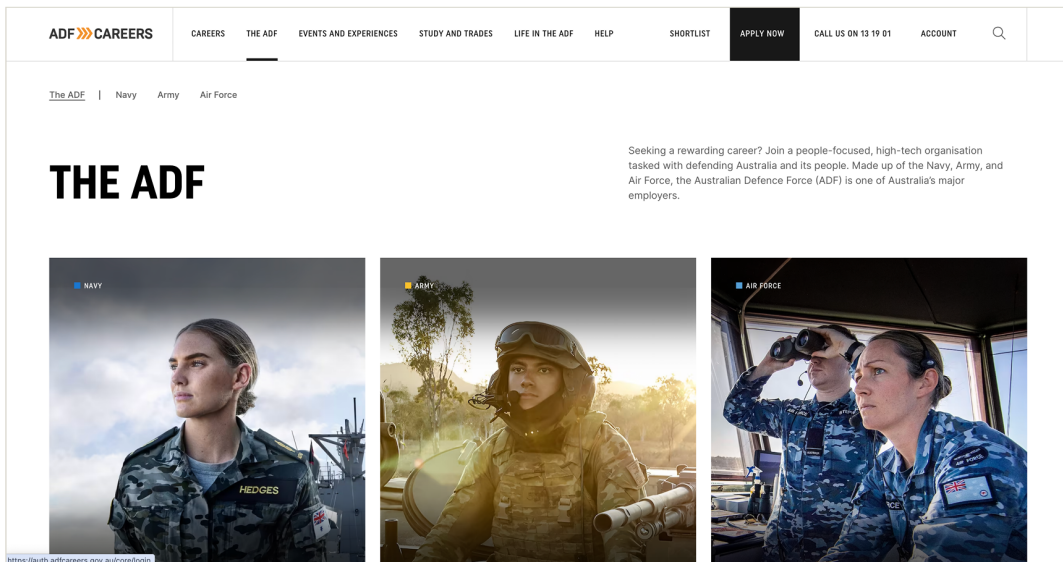
³⁸ [Women in the ADF Report 2023-24](#)

Figure 18. Screenshots of application page

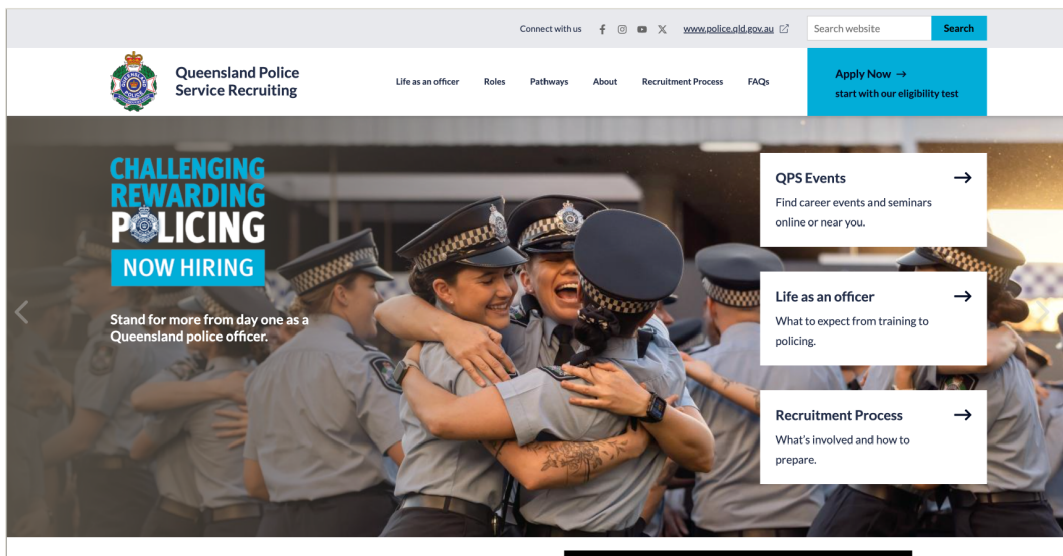
NSWPF recruitment webpage



Australian Defence Force recruitment webpage



Queensland Police Service recruitment webpage



Vetting and disclosure requirements

As it stands, several elements of the recruitment vetting process may unintentionally exclude capable candidates from diverse backgrounds.

The ‘Associations’ test, designed to identify integrity risks, can disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants whose kinship networks may be broader and more interconnected than other groups within the community. Evidence from the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency shows that First Nations candidates face systemic barriers in recruitment, including vetting frameworks that do not account for cultural context or the impacts of over-policing. It is encouraging that NSWPF has acknowledged this by ensuring that all applications from candidates who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are reviewed by a First Nations team member. However, we also heard that this current intervention has not resulted in tangible increases in the successful application of First Nations candidates.

We note that in other agencies, First Nations applicants are often supported through the recruitment process by a dedicated First Nations case manager or mentor, with the explicit objective of increasing representation within a defined timeframe. Where applicants encounter structural or procedural barriers (such as failing an associations assessment), these matters are typically escalated for consideration by more senior decision-makers than would otherwise be involved for non-identified candidates. This approach recognises the cumulative impact of systemic barriers and embeds accountability for outcomes at senior levels. A similar model may offer an effective framework for NSWPF to support First Nations recruitment while maintaining appropriate probity and standards.

We also heard that current mental health disclosure requirements create confusion and potential barriers for applicants. Many staff who participated in the Review reported believing that recent psychological support or the use of antidepressant medication is automatically disqualifying, despite this not being stated in policy. Given that 42.9 per cent of Australians have experienced mental ill health in their lifetime, unclear messaging risks deterring otherwise suitable candidates and sits at odds with NSWPF’s stated commitment to wellbeing³⁹.

I was told you couldn’t join the cops if you had seen a psychologist or taken medication for mental health in the past two years. I don’t even remember who told me – but everyone seemed to accept it. So I waited and applied after the two-year mark. But it seems crazy that we promote mental health and wellbeing and encourage people to come forward – but punish those who have sought support prior to joining.

— Confidential interview

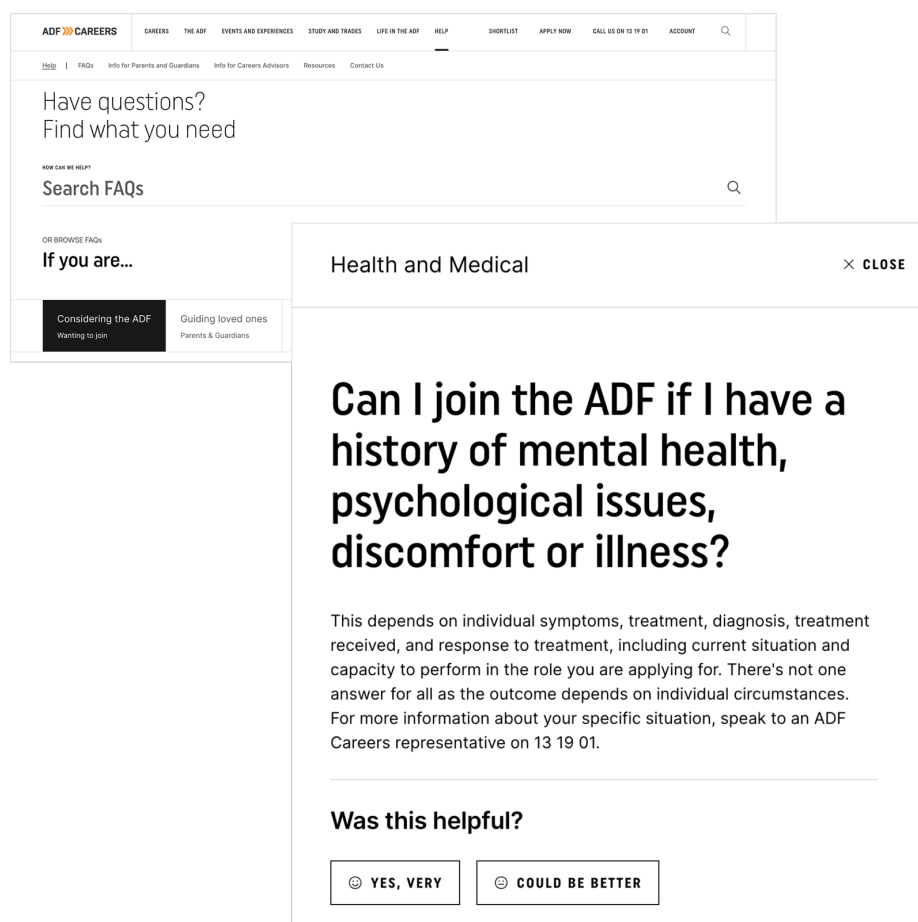
I have some mates who are on anti-depressants before applying for the cops. You’re told that you have to be off anti-depressants for at least 12 months before you can apply. So then you’re more likely to lie and be at risk, rather than deal with it. Heaps of people are on anti-depressants and are still operational.

— Confidential interview

Providing clear ‘frequently asked questions’ on the NSWPF website would be a simple way to reduce confusion and ensure there is a single ‘source of truth’ for prospective applicants. For comparison, the Australian Defence Force does this through a series of short responses on its website, with referrals to a central ‘recruitment hotline’ for more information.

³⁹ [Prevalence and impact of mental illness - Mental health - AIHW](#)

Figure 19. Mental health-focused FAQs as part of the Australian Defence Force’s recruitment process



Fitness standards that exceed other jurisdictions

Physical fitness standards are an essential component of policing and first responder work, but when they are poorly communicated, outdated or misaligned with the actual requirements of modern policing, they can function as unnecessary gatekeepers. Evidence from the Australian Defence Force, fire services and other policing jurisdictions indicates that strict or misunderstood fitness expectations can deter capable applicants long before they enter the recruitment pipeline, narrowing the talent pool and disproportionately excluding women, older candidates, and people with diverse backgrounds and identities. In many jurisdictions, the *perception* of not meeting fitness benchmarks is as much of a barrier as the standards themselves.

NSWPF’s entry fitness standards are among the highest in Australia, exceeding those of Victoria Police, Queensland Police and the Australian Federal Police. Yet, of the sworn employees who responded to our workforce survey, only 55 per cent of sworn employees agreed that the physical assessment reflects actual job demands, and just 34 per cent agreed the psychological assessment aligns with policing realities. With no ongoing fitness requirements for officers once they are in service, the rationale for high entry thresholds is unclear. The Review also notes that some NSW Police Force entry requirements, particularly the swim test, may disproportionately deter or affect candidates from culturally diverse backgrounds. In many cases, the skills being assessed could be taught and tested during training, rather than acting as a barrier at entry.

Figure 20. Comparison of fitness requirements across jurisdictions and organisations

Service	Fitness tests			
	Beep test	Push-ups	Sit-ups / Core	Other key tests
NSW Police	Level 7.1	25	Prone bridge (90s)	Grip strength (30kg), vertical jump (30cm), Illinois agility (≤ 20 s), swim test
Victoria Police	Level 5.01	5	Prone bridge (60s)	Grip strength (30kgs), Illinois agility (20 seconds), swim 100m in 4 minutes
Queensland Police	Level 5.7	10	Prone bridge (90s)	100m swim
South Australia Police	–	–	–	Trigger pull (13 × each hand); 10kg vest run 80m; 25m run carrying two 15kg weights; slippery beam; 20 step ups; drop to ground and stand 5 times; memory test
Western Australia Police	Level 6.1 (women), 7.1 (men)	10	1 sit up	Grip strength (30kg), Illinois agility, 35kg bag carry
Australian Federal Police (AFP)	Level 6.5	8/15 (gender-based)	4 (staged)	–
Army	Level 7.5	15 (men), 8 (women)	45 (both)	–
Navy	Nil except clearance divers	–	–	–
Air Force	Level 5.1 (women), 6.1 (men)	10 (men), 4 (women)	20 (feet held)	–

Recruitment campaigns

While recruitment campaigns play an important role in attracting new applicants, there is an opportunity for NSWPF to sharpen its focus so they more accurately reflect the realities of general duties policing. We found no evidence that NSWPF evaluates the effectiveness of its campaigns or uses candidate data to inform campaign design. This disconnect not only creates unrealistic expectations but may also contribute to early attrition and undermine the broader cultural intent of recruitment – to attract people who understand, value and are prepared for the realities of policing. Without alignment between messaging, organisational culture and operational experience, recruitment campaigns risk undermining efforts to build a sustainable and diverse workforce.

Recruitment messaging and candidate expectations

Recruitment campaigns have undoubtedly contributed to recent increases in applications, but current messaging does not consistently reflect the realities of general duties policing. Interviews with recruits, probationary constables and field training officers indicated that campaign materials still emphasise tactical imagery – helicopters, dogs, rescue operations – rather than the core work of general duties. Many early-career officers reported feeling unaware and unprepared for the volume of domestic and family violence, mental health incidents and family dysfunction that dominate frontline policing. Several described feeling unprepared for the interpersonal, documentation and administrative demands of the role.

Field training officers and commanders reported that recruits often arrive with unrealistic expectations shaped by social media campaigns, with some describing a perception that NSWPF is attracting ‘TikTok cops’. Officers leaving within their first three years frequently cited misaligned expectations as a key factor.

We are literally promoting policing on TikTok – and we promote all the ‘highlights’ of being a police officer and none of the reality. Kids who join based on an ad on social media aren’t going to stay.

— Confidential interview

"The NSWPF recruitment campaign is false advertisement – you simply cannot get to those roles. It is a complete joke"

— Informal interview

Despite these challenges, targeted campaigns have attracted candidates who may not otherwise have applied. ‘Be a cop in your hometown’ resulted in 69 placements, the Elite Athlete Pathway saw four athletes join the force, and the Professional Mobility Program brought 43 officers from other jurisdictions. These initiatives demonstrate the potential of targeted recruitment to broaden the candidate pool and support regional placement. However, none of these campaigns have been formally evaluated, and NSWPF does not systematically collect structured feedback from Academy participants, probationary constables, field training officers or early leavers. Without this evidence base, recruitment messaging risks remaining disconnected from operational realities and diversity goals.

Figure 21. Good practice: IPROWD

IPROWD (Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way Delivery) provides a culturally informed pathway for First Nations candidates, offering preparatory training, fitness support and exposure to Academy expectations. Since 2008, more than 1,200 participants have completed the program, with graduates entering NSWPF, the AFP and other emergency services. Interviews with participants highlighted strong stakeholder engagement and positive learner outcomes, and the program is widely regarded as a successful model for culturally safe recruitment preparation. However, we found limited evidence of systematic evaluation of IPROWD’s long-term impact on recruitment, diversity or retention, or consideration of alternative models that could complement or extend its reach.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5. NSWPF should develop and implement a comprehensive recruitment strategy that is mapped to current and future capability requirements, including diversity targets and requires public reporting against progress.

This requires NSWPF to:

- set annual recruitment targets based on workforce modelling, regional capability needs and projected exits, with periodic review to reflect operational demand
- embed measurable diversity goals aligned with the NSW Government Inclusion and Belonging Strategy, supported by targeted attraction initiatives for underrepresented groups
- publish recruitment outcomes against workforce, attrition and diversity objectives to ensure transparency, accountability and evidence-based refinement
- evaluate recruitment campaigns to ensure they accurately reflect the reality of general duties policing, drawing on feedback from probationary constables, field training officers and early leavers.

Recommendation 6. NSWPF should streamline the recruitment pathway to reduce administrative burden, improve candidate experience and target attraction of priority cohorts.

This requires NSWPF to:

- introduce an 'expression of interest' function on the recruitment homepage to capture candidate details early and enable tailored follow up
- recalibrate entry testing and vetting processes to ensure they are culturally informed and aligned with contemporary policing demands
- provide clear, accessible guidance and public FAQs on eligibility, including mental health eligibility requirements, explicitly addressing common misconceptions and aligning messaging with wellbeing commitments
- ensure transparent communication of the costs to complete training and any financial support available throughout the recruitment process.

Recommendation 7. NSWPF should implement targeted financial supports to reduce early career attrition and encourage applicants in high-need regions.

This requires NSWPF to:

- provide Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt relief or forgiveness for probationary constables who complete their first year of service
- review financial incentives to ensure they support retention in high-need regions.

Academy and probation

The NSW Police Academy and probation processes set the foundation for conduct and behaviour that contribute to shaping workplace culture. While there is an Academy culture that is distinct from the broader workplace culture, we focused on the impact of Academy training on the experience of probationary constables recruits. The recruits we spoke to were keen to share their experiences of the Academy and their time on probation with us, and their accounts revealed a mix of positive reflections and some concerns.

Most participants in the Review described the Academy as supportive and collegial, noting recent efforts to strengthen culture and the strong relationships formed with peers; however, some reported negative experiences that pointed to specific behaviours and cultural messages that undermined their confidence, sense of safety and feelings of inclusion. A small number of Review participants described disproportionately strict enforcement of minor rules around uniform and marching, being yelled at and called names under the guise of ‘getting recruits ready for how community members might treat them’, inconsistent treatment during weapons training, and security staff overreacting to small infractions like forgetting keys when showering. Collectively, these everyday interactions signalled rigidity rather than support and detracted from a sense of belonging and psychological safety.

Taken together, these mixed experiences suggest that while the Academy is making progress, aspects of its culture remain challenging. This variability in how recruits experience the Academy’s culture has implications not only for individuals’ wellbeing but also for early-career confidence, retention and the broader organisational culture that recruits carry with them into operational roles.

It is important to note that the Cultural Review was underway during a period of significant change, with the 25-year contract with Charles Sturt University transitioning to the University of Western Sydney during the Review’s engagement phase.

Academy structure

The Academy delivers a multi-phase training and probation model designed to prepare recruits for operational policing. The current structure includes:

- session 1: a 16-week online component completed prior to residential training
- session 2: a residential phase at the Academy, including a short four-shift station placement
- sessions 3–5: a three-stage probationary period (each 12 weeks), undertaken within commands under the supervision of field training and assessment officers (FTAOs) and education development officers (EDOs).

Recruits and probationary constables are required to demonstrate competency across defined operational and behavioural standards.

Academy culture

Over the course of the Review, we made two trips to the Academy and spent considerable time engaging with staff and recruits. We observed a largely positive, well-resourced and supportive environment. Many recruits and sworn officers described strong feelings of connection, pride and motivation during their time at the Academy, and several described it as the most affirming period of their NSWPF career.

The Academy leadership maintains a clear focus on supporting students in their learning while embedding policing traditions within the program. Ceremonial and formal activities contribute to a sense of belonging and pride. The Badge Run – a group run marking the transition from student to probationary constable – serves as an example of teamwork, physical readiness and shared progress. Formal events, including the student dinner and awards, recognise achievement across multiple skill areas and honour the memory of fallen police. Academy leadership also set explicit expectations regarding the behaviour of recruits. We heard recent examples of students being removed from training for breaches of conduct, often identified by peers.

In my entire time with the NSWPF, the Academy was the best time for me.

— Informal interview

Results from our workforce survey support this generally positive picture. Among sworn staff who graduated between 2022 and 2025, 62 per cent reported feeling a sense of belonging at the Academy, 69 per cent agreed they were exposed to leaders and instructors who inspired them during in person- training, and 64 per cent indicated they would recommend the recruit training experience to future applicants. However, women reported consistently lower levels of belonging, inspiration and overall satisfaction than men. This suggests that current efforts to build pride, inclusion and cultural understanding are not being experienced uniformly and require further attention to ensure they resonate across the workforce.

We did not have access to comparable data from other Australian policing jurisdictions, though we note that the UK publishes an annual survey reporting on satisfaction with training pathways into UK police services.⁴⁰ That survey consistently shows high overall satisfaction among new recruits with entry routes and training, while also highlighting that experiences are not uniform, with recruits from minority backgrounds and some age cohorts reporting less positive outcomes and higher early wellbeing pressures.

Mixed experiences of psychological safety

Despite the overall positive environment, we heard mixed experiences of inclusion and psychological safety at the Academy over the last five years. Some recruits perceived the academic framing of police practice as disconnected from operational realities, and scenario-based training – particularly in relation to domestic violence – was described as lacking realism and complexity. A small number of people described experiences of harmful behaviours from Academy staff during weapons training and some of the more intense scenario-based sessions. These accounts shared common threads of threats, intimidation and belittling, and individuals reported feeling uncomfortable raising concerns formally, particularly when other staff were present and did not intervene.

[Name] would frequently grab people and choke-hold them if they didn't do a hold correctly. It was like the more mistakes we made, the greater force he used. The other staff saw it happen and never stepped in. I witnessed many assaults in the name of teaching us the ropes.

— Confidential interview

We also heard from individuals who had experienced sexual harassment, stalking and intimidation while at the Academy. These experiences were not widespread, and there was evidence that recruits were removed from the Academy when found to have breached behavioural expectations. However, barriers to reporting remain significant. The power dynamics between students and staff, combined with the perception that reporting was lengthy and not confidential, were described as deterrents. Several interviewees noted that the Professional Standards Command process is lengthy and formal, making it an intimidating pathway for raising concerns about day-to-day behaviour or lower-level misconduct.

Entry via the Professional Mobility Program

We also heard from participants in the Professional Mobility Program, which enables officers with prior policing experience in other jurisdictions to join NSWPF through a shortened training pathway. These experiences were mostly positive. Participants reported feeling respected for their existing skills and knowledge, and described the Academy environment as welcoming and professionally validating. Their reflections reinforce the broader finding that the Academy generally provides a supportive and well structured learning environment, while also highlighting the importance of maintaining consistent standards of conduct and psychological safety across all training cohorts.

⁴⁰ [Police Uplift Programme New Recruits Onboarding Survey 2023 – Report – GOV.UK](#)

Role readiness

Interview participants consistently flagged concern that, despite extensive training prior to and during their time at the Academy, they did not feel well set up for the role of a general duties probationary constable. Further, there was a strong sentiment that probationary constables did not have the skills they were expected to have when they arrived at a station and were immediately ‘not meeting expectations’ which impacted their sense of confidence and belonging.

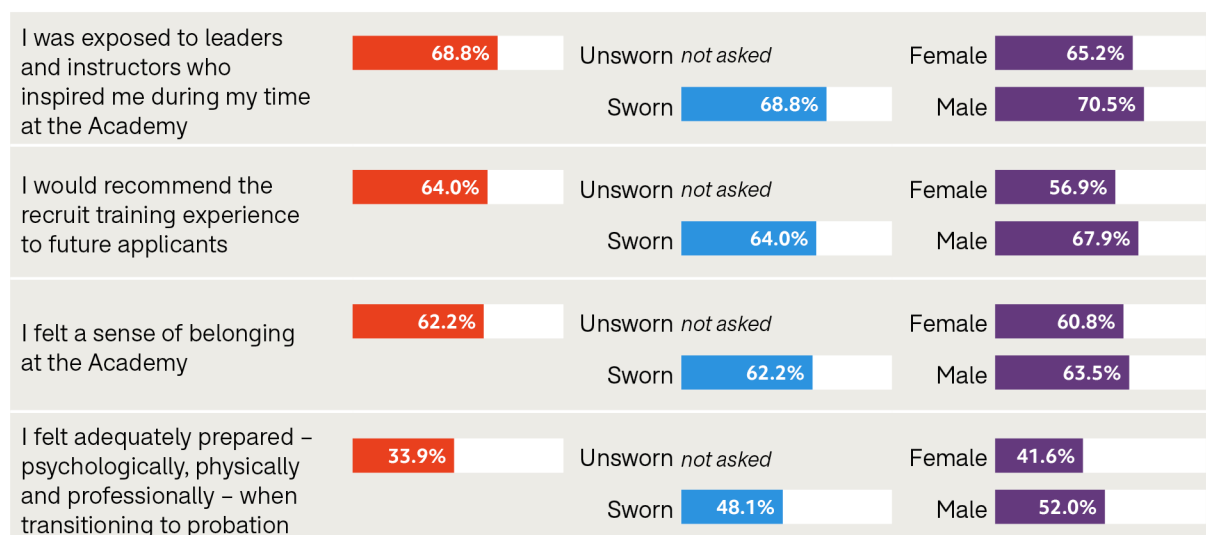
Our workforce survey found that less than a third of recent recruits (30 per cent) agreed that their time as a recruit prepared them for the realities of the job they were being asked to do. In addition, just under half (48 per cent overall, but only 41 per cent of women) agreed they felt adequately prepared – psychologically, physically and professionally – when transitioning to probation. A significant number of recent recruits described feeling a lack of connection during the online training component, with only 38 per cent agreeing they felt connected to NSWPF during this component.

I loved the Academy. I was stuck there for 16 weeks because of COVID, but everyone was lovely. I got on well with the instructors. But the Academy definitely didn't equip me to be a constable. You need to experience it firsthand.

— Informal interview

Staff we spoke to reported that limited exposure to frontline policing during training – combined with the removal of components such as attending a postmortem – meant that many recruits entered general duties with minimal experience of the emotional, interpersonal and operational demands of the role. These foundational experiences are now encountered ‘on the job,’ where the consequences and pressures are significantly higher than in a controlled training environment. Staff we spoke to described the Academy curriculum as densely packed and struggling to reflect the realities of contemporary policing. Recruits and probationary constables identified gaps in training related to mental health, community hostility, and domestic and family violence which comprise a significant proportion of general duties call-outs and require both technical competence and psychological preparedness.

Figure 22. Cultural Review workforce survey – Perceptions of Academy experience (% agree)



Base: All respondents n=188; unsworn n=0; sworn n=188; female n=46; male n=130.

Academy curriculum

The Academy operates under significant and competing demands. Policing is a rapidly evolving profession, and the curriculum is under near-constant pressure from government, senior leadership, specialist commands and external stakeholders to incorporate new content or highlight emerging issues. The result is a schedule that is full, tightly sequenced and continually adjusted. While these pressures are understandable, they also mean the curriculum has grown incrementally rather than being purposefully designed around the realities of frontline policing today.

Within this context, three areas stand out as under-developed and of concern to recruits as they prepare for operational duties: mental health education, cultural awareness, and practical understanding of police systems and processes that officers are expected to use from day one.

Mental health education

Recruits reported limited understanding of foundational concepts such as hypervigilance, the physiological effects of adrenaline, and the cumulative impact of exposure to trauma. Concerningly, many staff we spoke to noted that they already ‘know that policing breaks people’, reflecting a narrative that is widely shared informally among officers. Existing sessions tend to focus on trauma witnessed as part of the job, but there is less emphasis on the impact of organisational culture – how feeling excluded, uncertain or unsupported in the early stages of their career can also contribute to mental ill health. Rather than accepting the idea of being ‘broken’ by the profession as an inevitability, the Academy has an opportunity to reframe the conversation around prevention, early warning signs, and the supports available to officers throughout their careers. This includes being explicit that NSWPF culture is in transition, and that leaders at every level must actively engage with wellbeing supports, model healthy behaviours, and reinforce that psychological safety is a core component of operational readiness.

While the Academy includes a lecture on mental health in week 15, there could be greater focus on preventive strategies, de-escalation techniques, and communication approaches for engaging individuals in crisis. These gaps are particularly concerning given the high volume of mental-health-related call-outs in general duties. We also heard that some probationary constables felt their FTAOs and sergeants may not have adequate training in mental health, leaving them exposed when they had questions or concerns about how best to handle a particular call-out. Recruits consistently expressed a desire for more practical, scenario-based training that reflects the complexity of contemporary policing, where officers are frequently the first responders to acute mental health episodes, often involving individuals with co-occurring trauma, substance use or cognitive impairment. Strengthening this component of the curriculum would better prepare recruits for the realities of frontline work and reduce the risk of escalation, harm or officer burnout.

Cultural awareness and capability

Staff we spoke to also described cultural capability as being insufficiently embedded in the curriculum.

LECC has highlighted significant risks in this area, noting that Aboriginal people accounted for 46 per cent of adults who received consorting warnings – despite comprising less than 3.5 per cent of the NSW population.⁴¹ LECC also observed that officers often treated community engagement as peripheral to core policing duties, undermining trust and accountability.

A 2025 ABC investigation further revealed disproportionate stop and search rates affecting First Nations, African, Pasifika and Middle Eastern communities, with First Nations people 5.6 times more likely to be searched than white Australians. These findings underscore the need for foundational training that positions cultural competence as a core operational skill rather than an optional or peripheral topic.

⁴¹ LECC, Review of the operation of amendments to the consorting law under Part 3A Division 7 of the Crimes Act 1900, 2023. See link - [Review of the operation of the amendments to the consorting law under Part 3A Division 7 of the Crimes Act 1900 - Final Report | Law Enforcement Conduct Commission](#)

Acknowledging the importance of cultural competence, the NSWPF has invested in the development of Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs) and Multicultural Community Liaison Officers (MCLOs) to deepen relationships between police and community. The experience of these officers will be explored further in the 'Support and care' chapter of this report.

Recruit access to these experts is typically limited to guest speaking roles during session 2 at the Academy. While these officers are recognised as experts and essential to understanding local communities, they have minimal involvement in curriculum design or delivery. We acknowledge that the Academy has a designated First Nations support role for recruits, acknowledging the cultural load experienced by some students who are away from Country and navigating community perceptions of policing.

Figure 23. Community liaison roles within NSWPF

The Aboriginal community liaison officer (ACLO) program supports police area commands to build better relationships with Aboriginal communities and provide advice on Aboriginal issues. They play an integral role in realising the key priorities of NSWPF's *Aboriginal Strategic Direction 2024*, which include:

- Community safety – communication and understanding
- Partnerships – collaborate and influence
- Safety and wellbeing of young people
- Family safety and domestic violence.

The multicultural community liaison officer (MCLO) program employs people from diverse cultural backgrounds to facilitate communication and build trust between police and local cultural communities. We observed numerous examples of MCLOs building deep, trusted relationships in the community, though the MCLO network told us that MCLO roles are often misunderstood or undervalued, especially by new staff or commanders unfamiliar with the position.

Operational systems and practical readiness

Recruits we spoke to also expressed concern about their preparedness to use key police systems and processes that are required from their first day in the field. These systems are complex, high stakes, and central to operational effectiveness, yet recruits reported that their exposure during training was limited and often disconnected from real world scenarios. Specifically, recruits referred to the CAD and COPS systems – both of which they were expected to use from their first shift, and which their training officers assumed they would already be familiar with. Many described feeling unprepared and anxious about making errors in systems that carry operational, legal and safety implications.

This challenge was compounded by frustration with outdated technology and interfaces. As a generation of digital natives, recruits expected intuitive, modern systems, but instead encountered platforms that were slow, cumbersome and difficult to navigate. Several noted that their lack of familiarity significantly increased the time required to complete basic tasks, which in turn created additional workload pressure for their teams. In some cases, probationary constables reported feeling reluctant to ask for help, worried that their lack of proficiency would be interpreted as incompetence rather than a training gap.

Probationary oversight

NSWPF relies on a two-tiered model of probationary oversight, centred on two roles – FTAOs and EDOs. Together, these roles are intended to provide structured supervision, coaching and assessment during the first year of operational policing.

Role of field training and assessment officers

FTAOs are responsible for supervising, mentoring and assessing probationary constables during their initial months in the field. They are expected to guide new officers through day-to-day tasks, model professional standards and ensure recruits demonstrate competence in operational policing. FTAOs receive an allowance and must be confirmed constables with at least 15 months of service, currently performing general duties, and have completed designated FTAO training.

In practice, we observed significant variation in the availability and capability of FTAOs. Due to staffing shortages, it was common for shifts to have no FTAO present, leaving other team members to provide informal oversight. While some FTAOs demonstrated strong commitment to mentoring and probationary development, we observed others speaking disparagingly about probationary constables in open-plan environments. The absence of structured support – such as supervision, peer learning or cultural leadership development – appears to limit the consistency and quality of the role.

We also heard a small number of examples of misconduct and overreach by FTAOs. Some probationary constables described reluctance to raise concerns due to the power imbalance inherent in the supervisory relationship and a lack of psychological safety.

Review participants also raised FTAO wellbeing as a concern. Officers reported burnout when assigned consecutive probationary constables without breaks and noted a decline in morale when separated from their peer networks. The current system does not assess readiness for the FTAO role beyond basic eligibility, nor does it provide structured development pathways or formal recognition for those who excel in probationary supervision.

Role of education development officers

EDOs provide the second layer of oversight, with responsibility for monitoring probationary constables' workplace learning and ensuring they meet prescribed competency standards before confirmation. EDOs are expected to provide coaching, track progress and act as a quality assurance mechanism for frontline capability.

The first year of service requires probationary constables to demonstrate proficiency across incident response, communication, community engagement and procedural compliance. We found substantial variation in the level of coaching and support provided by EDOs across stations. In some locations, EDOs viewed the success of probationary constables as a personal responsibility and had established structured mentoring approaches.

Since starting as EDO I have tried to curate the first day for new pros – trying to support a positive start. It seems to have had a positive impact [notable improvement in behaviour from previous cohort].

— Confidential interview

In other locations, EDOs expressed frustration with the training process and concern about being required to sign-off constables they did not believe were operationally ready. Interviewees also raised concerns about inappropriate relationships between supervisors and probationary constables, which undermined confidence in the integrity of the oversight process.

The current probationary oversight model provides a clear structure on paper, with defined roles for FTAOs and EDOs. However, we identified substantial variation in practice, driven by staffing shortages, inconsistent supervisory capability, limited support for those in oversight roles and barriers to reporting concerns. While many probationary constables experienced supportive and constructive supervision, others encountered misconduct, disengagement or cultural messages that undermined confidence and psychological safety. Strengthening the consistency, capability and integrity of probationary oversight remains essential to ensuring recruits transition safely and effectively into operational policing.

Recommendation

Recommendation 8. NSWPF should better integrate wellbeing, cultural inclusion and mental health capability across Academy and probation training.

This requires NSWPF to:

- position wellbeing as a core capability – ensuring recruits understand hypervigilance, trauma exposure, organisational culture pressures and early warning signs of mental ill health
- embed mental health readiness and cultural inclusion throughout Academy and probation training – integrating scenario-based learning, de-escalation techniques and communication strategies for engaging individuals in crisis, and strengthening foundational understanding of First Nations and culturally diverse communities
- expand structured exposure to frontline realities – increasing operational placements, practical readiness for operational systems (i.e. CAD and COPS) and incorporating body worn video and other real-world examples to build situational judgement, critical thinking and confidence in complex environments
- conduct a formal evaluation within two years – assessing the impact of these enhancements on recruit readiness, cultural capability, wellbeing, retention and early career performance, including the effects of the shortened Academy program and the partnership with Western Sydney University. This information could be used to inform recruitment strategy in future years.

Chapter 4.

Talent development and career progression

People development and career progression are foundations of organisational culture and operational capability within NSWPF. Responsibility for these functions sits with the Deputy Commissioner, Corporate Services, supported by the People Capability Command and Recruitment Command, which together oversee workforce strategy, organisational development, training, leadership development and promotion systems. At the local command level, commanders and HR inspectors and education development officers play critical roles in translating these frameworks, coordinating development opportunities, managing relieving and secondments and supporting performance and supervisory processes.

Development and promotion systems shape the cultural environment in which policing work occurs. Research on organisational behaviour consistently demonstrates that how an organisation develops, assesses and advances its people signals its underlying values, norms and expectations.⁴² Transparent development pathways, credible performance management and fair promotion processes contribute to cultures characterised by trust, psychological safety and shared accountability. Conversely, when development systems are fragmented or inconsistently applied, they can weaken cultural cohesion by creating uncertainty about expectations, diminishing confidence in leadership and undermining perceptions of fairness.

In a policing context, these dynamics have direct operational implications. Effective supervision, access to capability-building opportunities, and trusted advancement processes support workforce readiness, decision-making quality, and leadership capacity at all levels. They also influence retention, motivation and the willingness of employees to engage in continuous improvement. Development and promotion systems therefore operate not only as human resource mechanisms but as core levers for strengthening organisational culture and sustaining operational effectiveness.

What's working well

- NSWPF has expanded access to leadership development courses.
- There are some positive individual examples of recognition.

What's not working well

- The workforce has low trust in the promotions process.
- There are widespread perceptions of favouritism in the promotions process.
- NSWPF does not have a strong feedback culture.

⁴² Schein, E.H., 2010. *Organizational culture and leadership*. 4th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Development pathways and learning culture

Leadership development pathways

NSWPF delivers its leadership development pathway primarily through the Police Leadership Centre (PLC). In 2025, 450 future leaders participated in a PLC program. Training is delivered both in-person and online. All staff at PLC hold a Certificate IV in Training, reflecting a structured approach to program delivery and, at the time of writing, the content for each of the core leadership programs was being reviewed. The residential programs are supported by a visiting fellow – a senior officer – who attends sessions, provides guidance and contributes to the depth of discussion.

At the time of the Cultural Review, the core leadership programs were made up of four programs aligned to different ranks and career stages – Discovery, Explorer, Influencer and Mastery.

Figure 24. Leadership programs at NSWPF

Program	Description
Discovery	A self-enrolment online program designed for probationary constables, constables and unsworn employees (grades 1/2–3/4). It introduces foundational leadership qualities and philosophy, decision-making, teamwork, coaching and feedback, effective communication, emotional intelligence, change management, conflict management, and the meaning of service within NSWPF.
Explorer	Designed for senior constables and sergeants, as well as unsworn employees at grades 5–8. A five-day program delivered at PLC, it focuses on self-reflection, including DISC profiling, ⁴³ and covers professional standards, human resources, incident and emergency management, respectful workplace behaviours, equity matters, health and safety laws, and discrimination laws.
Influencer	Targeted at sergeants, inspectors, and unsworn employees at grades 7–10. Delivered primarily through a five-day residential program at PLC, it includes some online learning over the following six months. It explores the differences between leadership and management, emotional intelligence, high-performing teams, learning through failure, crucial conversations, strategic thinking and inspiring change. Immersion activities include professional standards, HR, emergency management, media and finance.
Mastery	Designed for inspectors and superintendents (grades 9–10) with at least two years' experience. The five-day program is supported by ongoing engagement for seven months. It requires participants to demonstrate adaptive leadership approaches to complex problems, apply systems thinking and make strategic decisions. The program includes mentoring and covers HR, professional standards, emergency management, media and finance.

In response to feedback from sworn and unsworn officers, NSWPF expanded its course offering from 2026, to provide both leadership and development programs for sergeants, inspectors and chief superintendents, using both the PLC campus and Dubbo to increase regional access. We anticipate that this new structure will address some of the feedback we heard, namely that access to training opportunities was challenging and, at times, misaligned with the critical moments in an officer's career when they would really value training.

⁴³ DISC is a behavioural insights tool that assesses participants against four styles – dominance, influence, steadiness and conscientiousness.

Confidence in the learning culture

We heard consistently positive feedback from people who had attended courses at PLC in the last 18 months. Interview participants spoke about the content being mostly relevant, energising and disrupting their thinking, and they described the time with peers from other geographies and commands as invaluable. Our observations of both session delivery and limited course content supported these reflections.

Despite this, only 44 per cent of respondents to the 2025 PMES agreed that they were satisfied with the professional development opportunities available at NSWPF. During our consultations, we heard that access to training was inconsistent and that demand exceeds supply, creating long waiting times for people who express interest in attending the courses.

Timing for courses is perceived to be a recurring barrier. Many miss opportunities at critical transition points, including during promotion processes or shortly after appointment to a new rank. When courses are 'at rank', it overlooks the fact that many NSWPF officers have been acting in the rank for months or years before holding the substantive position. A number of interview participants flagged that local command culture did not support the application of new leadership approaches and that some senior leaders remained resistant to change.

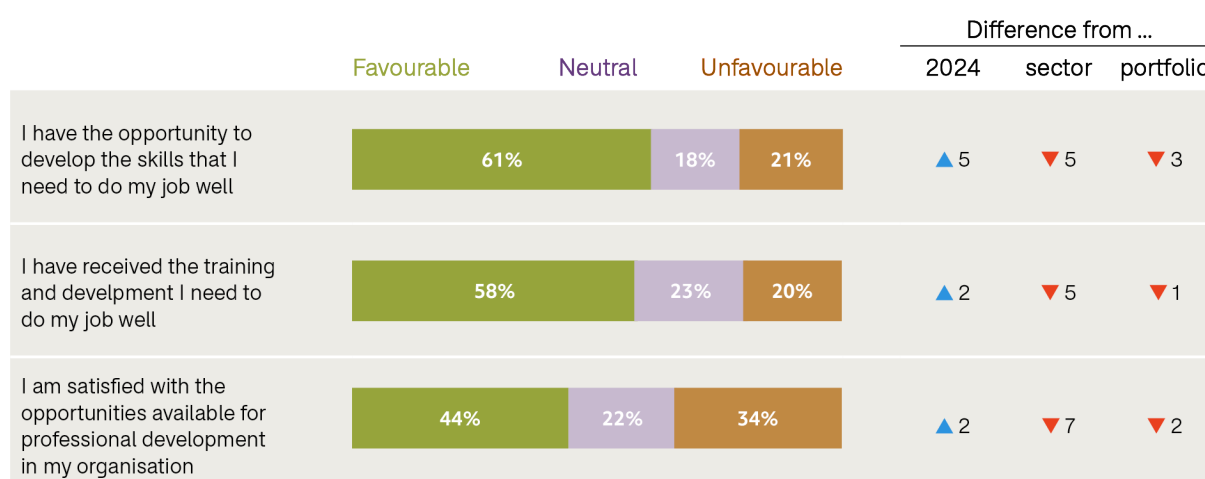
I have been a [rank] for 8 years. The [course name] was great – I just wish I had come when I was first starting out.

— Informal interview

I learned so much and was so excited to return to [location]. But the inspector was not supportive of my ideas about how we might be able to improve things. It took the wind out of my sails.

— Informal interview

Figure 25. PMES 2025 – Perceptions of learning and development (%)



Note: Difference measured in percentage points.

Operational Training

It was made clear during our consultations that operational training presents similar challenges. General duties officers frequently reported being unable to access initial driver training, use-of-force refreshers, or specialist modules they had requested. These requests were commonly declined due to staffing shortages, cost constraints or local prioritisation decisions. Despite workforce shortages being front of mind for most officers, we observed that not being able to access their preferred training and development opportunities was impacting their engagement.

Online learning

In addition to the leadership development programs, NSWPF has a significant number of online training options available for all staff on the PETE platform. Some programs are mandatory, while others are available on an ‘as needs’ basis to staff.

Despite their availability, we heard that online training is widely regarded as burdensome and compliance driven. Officers described the volume of mandatory modules as excessive and ‘tick the box’ in nature. Many reported completing online training at home, often while doing other tasks, because no time was allocated during shifts. Messaging about online modules was frequently ignored, and officers noted that online delivery was poorly aligned with the learning preferences and operational realities of the workforce. While most officers did not object to the content – such as recent LGBTIQ+ awareness training – they objected to its timing and the perception that it displaced operational training they considered more urgent.

We aren’t a workforce that is familiar with online learning. No one learns anything. They just check through and never think about it again.

— Confidential interview

Online training and Nemesis messaging go to junk box and people just don’t engage with online training.

— Confidential interview

Equity and local decision-making

Access to development opportunities is also perceived as inequitable. Some officers reported repeated refusals for training while others received multiple opportunities, reinforcing perceptions of favouritism. Local decision-making plays a significant role: some commanders prioritised development and training as part of a broader retention strategy, while others focused on immediate rostering needs. One example of good practice involved an education development officer who established a local committee to track requests and ensure each officer accessed at least one nominated training opportunity per year.

Data and accountability

Despite the scale of investment, NSWPF does not publish disaggregated data on participation in PLC by rank, region or employment type, nor does it report on retention, career progression or the long-term impact of training. There is no evidence of systematic evaluation of leadership programs or accountability mechanisms to ensure that skills learned are applied in practice. The absence of this data limits the organisation’s ability to assess whether development systems are improving capability or supporting career pathways.

By contrast, the Australian Defence Force publishes significant data on the diversity make up of people attending promotion gateway courses and those being selected for boards and advisory committees, honours and awards. The report *Women in the ADF* is considered global leading practice reporting and has contributed to increased trust in leadership but also to accountability for progress on agreed metrics.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ [Women in the ADF Report 2023-24](#)

Supervisory practice and performance management

Managing performance

Under section 67 of the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013*, the head of each government agency is responsible for developing and implementing a performance management system for its employees. Within NSWPF, section 50 of the Government Sector Employment (NSW Police Force) Rules 2007 further clarifies that performance management must be used to set expectations, monitor and review performance, develop capability and recognise achievement. Ideally, performance would be managed both through regular, informal feedback conversations and through a regular cycle of formal performance reviews.

NSWPF's formal performance framework centres on the MyPerformance system, designed to support regular feedback, development planning and career conversations. The system has recently transitioned from biannual to annual check-ins. We understand that the decision to move to an annual check-in was a result of workforce pressures. The MyPerformance system includes a performance plan component intended to align individual goals with role descriptions and command business plans.

Despite these structures, we found that staff's experience of performance management diverges significantly from its intended design. Officers reported that operational pressures leave little time for reflective feedback or meaningful dialogue. NSWPF's 2025 PMES data shows that only 42 per cent of people have scheduled performance feedback conversations with their manager, a number that hasn't improved since 2022. Many employees described feeling that feedback and proactive conversations were simply not a priority. Supervisory capability varies widely, and many staff described having few, if any, formal performance conversations throughout their careers. Where conversations did occur, they rarely addressed development goals or career ambition. At senior ranks, the system was viewed as largely symbolic and carried limited operational weight.

I haven't had a formal performance review in years. No one does – it just gets closed out in the system.

— Confidential interview

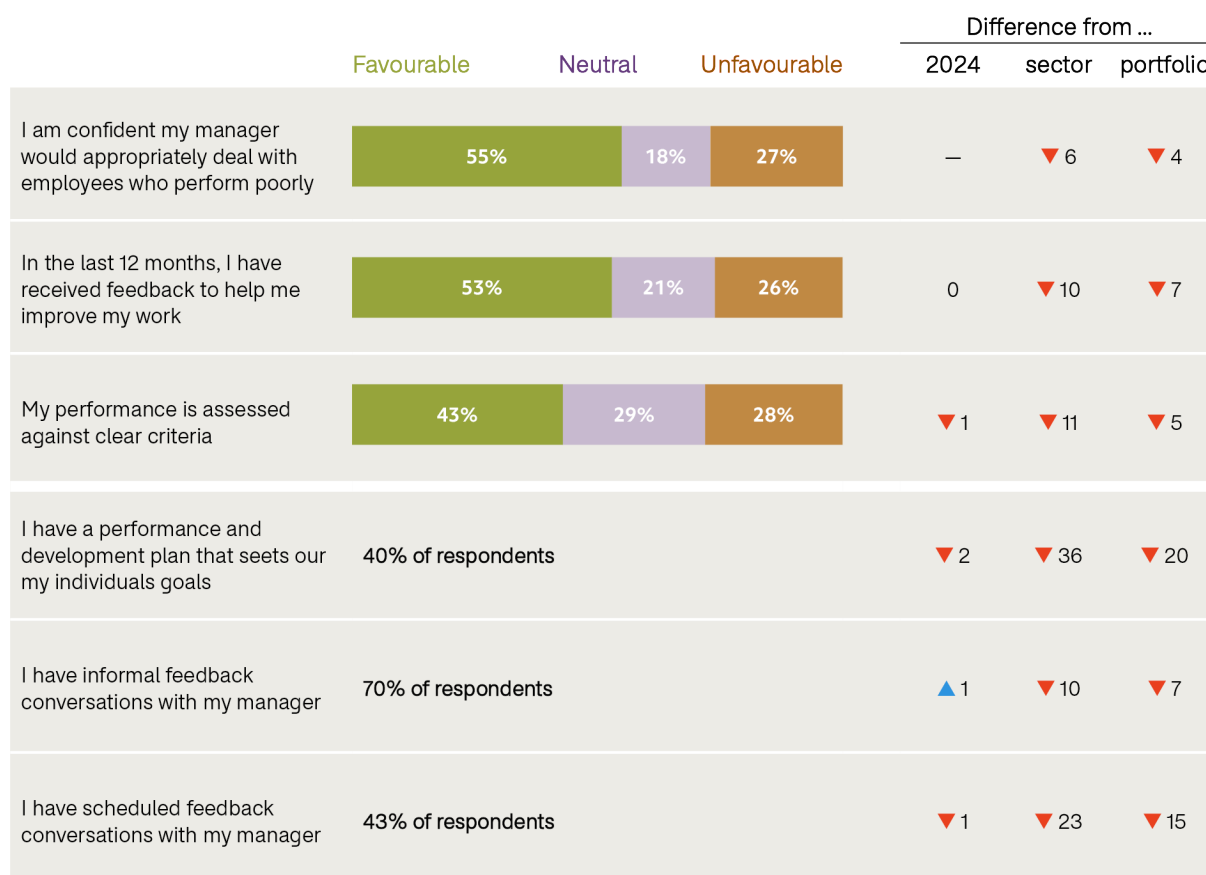
We heard numerous examples of leaders threatening to put people on performance Improvement plans when they made mistakes, rather than these plans being seen as a tool to support someone who might not be meeting the requirements of their role. One theme that came through strongly was employees feeling as if they could do many things right without any recognition, but that if they made an error, the performance system was 'used against them'.

Everyone makes mistakes, but you could do 100 things and make one typo or send something a day late and the threats about performance management would come.

— Confidential interview

NSWPF's 2025 PMES data reveals widespread dissatisfaction with the performance management process.

Figure 26. PMES 2025 – Performance management (%)



Note: Difference shows percentage points.

We heard from supervisors at all levels that there was a pervasive reluctance to give feedback, driven by concerns that performance conversations may trigger formal complaints. This has contributed to a culture of avoidance, where difficult conversations are deferred or bypassed. As a result, low-level behaviours often go unaddressed until they escalate into formal complaints or misconduct investigations.

Performance improvement plans (PIPs) are sometimes used as exit mechanisms rather than developmental tools, and underperformance is frequently managed through exclusion or micro-management.

At senior levels, officers are expected to have individual performance agreements in place. We found that these were not consistently completed or updated. The current template does not support structured development conversations, and officers frequently reported receiving only a 'noted' response from their manager. While resources exist to support effective performance conversations, they are not mandatory and are rarely sought out.

We were advised in December 2025 that NSWPF has developed a suite of new tools to support performance conversations, including conversation guides for performance conversations, goal setting and difficult conversations. While this is positive, we observed that there are many documents and guides developed by NSWPF which are not used in 'everyday' policing and associated people management. It will be important for NSWPF to share these tools with staff, develop the right capability to use the tools effectively, and evaluate whether they have the intended impact.

We were also advised that NSWPF has undertaken a new process to apply a nine-box grid to assess the top 200 leaders in the organisation. This work had been modelled off the Australian Defence Force 'star plot' process which seeks to identify leadership potential. This tool is commonly used in workforce planning to map leadership potential against performance, enabling targeted development and succession planning. The NSWPF process considers employment history, qualifications, experience, individual and corporate performance, and talent assessment. However, the framework has not yet been formally endorsed, and its application remains limited.

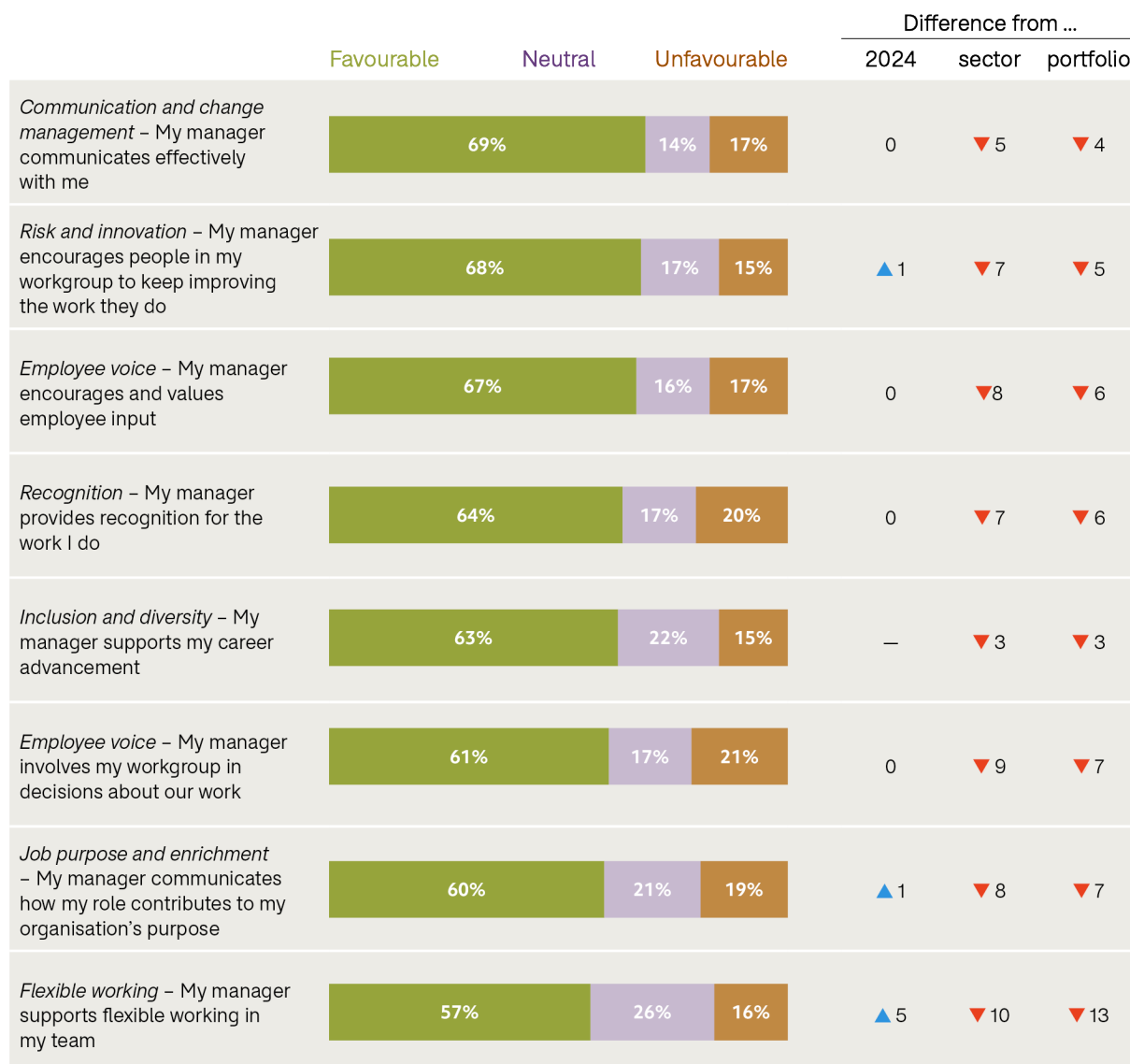
We also heard concerns about the integrity and transparency of the performance system. There is a widespread perception that the system can be used to place 'black marks' against individuals. We heard frequent examples of rosters and transfers being misused to manage – or avoid managing – performance issues, with examples of poor performers being transferred rather than managed, punitive scheduling and opportunities to work in other areas of the organisation being obstructed due to interpersonal conflict. These practices compound the lack of confidence in performance management and contribute to disengagement.

The role of middle management – supervision, support and feedback culture

The varied and often poor application of the performance process speaks to a broader observation of inconsistent middle management capability across NSWPF. In a large, geographically dispersed organisation that operates under constant operational pressure, middle managers play an outsized role: they are the day-to-day interpreters of organisational expectations, the primary shapers of team climate, and the people who determine whether cultural reform is experienced in practice or remains aspirational. Middle managers are, in effect, the 'keepers of the culture', the group whose behaviours most directly influence whether staff feel safe, supported and aligned to organisational values. Interviews and survey data reveal a critical lack of consistency in middle management leadership capabilities and behaviours across NSWPF.

NSWPF's 2025 PMES data shows that while the majority of NSWPF respondents feel support from their manager, there is still a significant opportunity to improve management and supervisory capability across NSWPF.

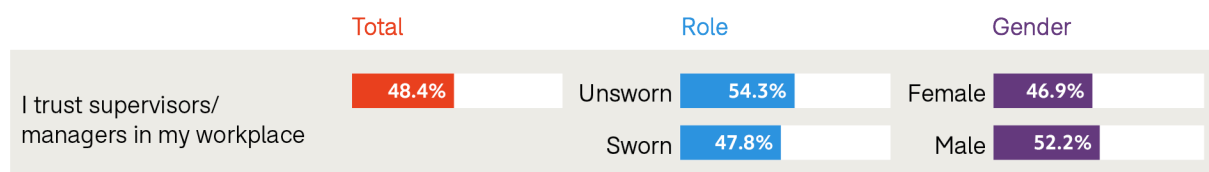
Figure 27. PMES 2025 – Management (%)



Note: Difference shows percentage points.

Less than half of the respondents to our workforce survey (48 per cent) said they trusted their supervisors and managers. Agreement was higher from unsworn employees at 54% and for those aged 18–29 (52 per cent). Staff with a disability reported lower levels of trust (33 per cent), as did First Nations staff (46 per cent).

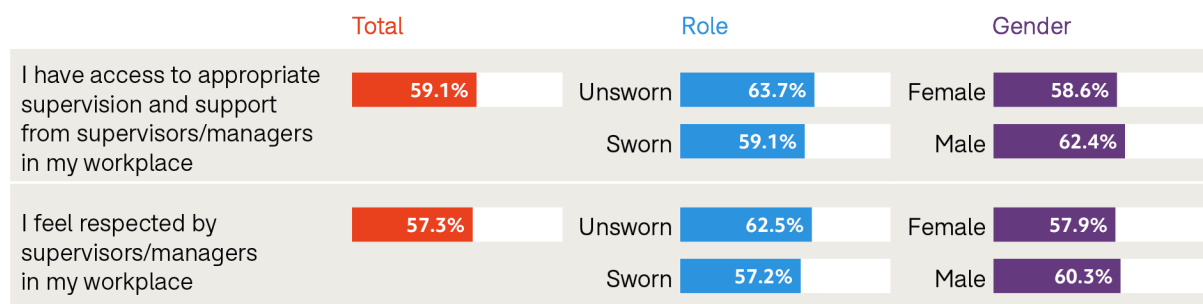
Figure 28. Cultural Review workforce survey – Trust in supervisors/managers (% agree)



Base: All respondents n=4,473; unsworn n=1,185; sworn n=3,008; female n=1,600; male n=2,436.

Our workforce survey showed more positive results in relation to supervisory support and management respect for staff – 59 per cent of respondents agreed that they have access to appropriate supervision and support from supervisors/managers. Again, the result was higher for unsworn employees and respondents aged 18–29, at 64 per cent. Those employed for three years or less also reported stronger levels of agreement at 72 per cent. Staff with a disability or who identify as LGBTIQ+, recorded lower levels of agreement at 43 per cent and 49 per cent respectively.

Figure 29. Cultural Review workforce survey – Access to supervision and support, and respect from supervisors/managers (% agree)



Base: All respondents n=4,473; unsworn n=1,185; sworn n=3,008; female n=1,600; male n=2,436.

In our interviews, one of the key challenges raised in relation to the supervision and mentoring of frontline police officers was the lack of retention of middle management, including the exodus of officers through the Optional Disengagement Scheme. People talked about officers being promoted too early, the lack of experience on the ground, and a concern that the organisation is asking too much of staff given their level of experience. This was perceived to be impacting performance and morale.

There are too many young ones supervising young ones. We have lost the experience on shift to debrief informally, coach and challenge.

— Confidential interview

The constables don't have a senior constable in the truck guiding them. We hardly have any of those senior constable roles. Where are they? They have been transferred out or are acting up.

— Confidential interview

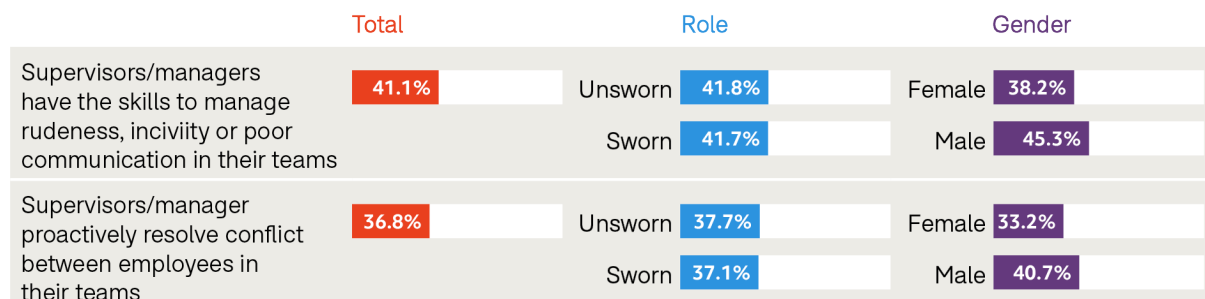
Lack of conflict management skills

The results of our workforce survey also indicate that both sworn and unsworn middle managers have low levels of skill in managing incivility, poor communication and conflict within their teams. Only 41 per cent of respondents agreed that supervisors and managers have the skills to manage rudeness, incivility or poor communication, with agreement even lower among women (38 per cent). Similarly, only 37 per cent of respondents agreed that supervisors and managers proactively resolve conflict between employees, again dropping to 33 per cent for women.

Moreover, less than half of respondents (49 per cent) agreed that supervisors and managers model and drive safety, respect and inclusion. While the figure is more favourable for unsworn employees (56 per cent) and for those with tenure of three years or less (64 per cent), the overall results point to significant inconsistency in leadership capability across the organisation.

Conflict management skills and consistent role modelling are essential to driving a positive and respectful culture. When these skills are lacking, harmful behaviours are more likely to go unaddressed and escalate. This issue is explored in more detail in the 'Addressing harmful behaviours' chapter in this report.

Figure 30. Cultural Review workforce survey – Supervisor/manager capability (% agree)



Base: All respondents n=4,473; unsworn n=1,185; sworn n=3,008; female n=1,600; male n=2,436.

Recognition

Beyond formal development and supervision, staff we spoke to consistently shared that recognition – particularly informal, everyday acknowledgment – was a key factor in feeling valued and staying engaged. While formal awards and commendations exist, staff described these as unevenly applied and often dependent on individual commanders. Initiatives such as recognition boards, family days and employee-of-the-month programs were well received but tended to disappear with leadership turnover.

What mattered most to staff were not elaborate gestures or formal awards, but simple signs that their manager knew them, appreciated their work, and noticed when they handled a situation well. Many participants described wanting a genuine thank you, a brief note or a comment that reflected personal awareness. The absence of this kind of recognition was often cited as a source of disengagement.

People don't stay for the money – they want to feel valued and feel like they are doing something that matters. Someone looking you in the eye and saying 'thank you' for a job well done goes further than any formal process.

— Informal interview

Our new boss started an employee-of-the-month program and the person gets a cheesy picture in the muster room and onsite car parking for a month. People really value it – but time will tell if it lasts.

— Informal interview

Recognition was not framed as a demand, but as a reflection of leadership culture. Where it was present, staff felt valued and supported; where it was absent, they felt interchangeable and described being 'just a number'. These insights suggest that recognition – particularly informal and relational – is a meaningful part of workplace culture and contributes to retention.

Spotlight on unsworn staff

Policing organisations with strong paramilitary traditions often attach status to powers such as arrest, command and use of force. Within these cultures, operational experience is positioned as the core source of legitimacy, and ‘real policing’ is closely associated with frontline uniform roles. This dynamic can create an implicit hierarchy in which unsworn (civilian) staff are viewed as support rather than integral contributors, even when they hold specialist expertise in intelligence, HR, forensics, analytics, community engagement, IT, legal services or organisational reform. The result is a tendency toward operational dominance, undervaluing of strategic capability, and reduced diversity of professional background and leadership style.

NSWPF employs both sworn officers and unsworn staff across operational, administrative and specialist functions. Sworn officers hold constabulary powers and progress through a rank-based structure, while unsworn employees are employed under the NSW Public Sector framework, with roles graded according to capability and responsibility. Both groups contribute to frontline service delivery and organisational performance, yet operate within distinct employment systems that shape their experience, status and opportunities.

Across the organisation, we heard consistent reports of inequity between sworn and unsworn employees, with consequences for morale, retention and cultural cohesion.

We literally do the same job. Day in. Day out. Yet he's a hero and I am invisible. We are paid differently, but it's more than that – when our leaders come in they hardly look in my direction.

— Informal interview

I worry about the admin staff. They are often hearing about situations and cases in great detail ... There's rarely a pause to consider the impact of trauma on those team members.

— Informal interview

Pay and conditions

During our consultations, we heard about several roles where sworn officers were paid more than unsworn employees performing similar or identical functions - for example, in forensics where both sworn and unsworn staff are doing the same role. The maximum salary for a clerk grade 5/6 is approximately \$113,000 under the Crown Employees (NSW Police Administrative Officers and Temporary Employees) Award 2009. The maximum salary for a senior constable is around \$130,000, excluding specialist allowances – a difference of more than 20 per cent.

Differences in conditions also contribute to perceptions of inequity. Sworn officers are entitled to a minimum 10hour break between shifts, while unsworn administrative officers in frontline roles are only required to have an 8hour break. Unsworn staff told us this discrepancy made them feel less valued and raised concerns about fatigue and wellbeing.

Civilians are not taken as seriously ... despite being more qualified or experienced in some areas. The number of stripes on a sworn officer's shoulder is not an indication that they have the skills to perform a particular nonoperational role.

— Confidential interview

Role design, expertise and leadership

Unsworn employees also reported that the grading of certain roles – particularly those exposed to trauma, such as radio operators – did not reflect the complexity or emotional demands of the work. Many felt their professional expertise was undervalued and that challenging ideas was interpreted as disrespectful to commissioned officers. Some described this as limiting innovation and compromising operational effectiveness.

Civilians are more likely to challenge ideas. If you get a commander that isn't used to civilians, then they want to get an officer in, so they'll say 'yes' to them.

— Confidential interview

We heard multiple examples of sworn officers with limited subject-matter expertise being appointed to lead teams comprised largely of unsworn staff, even where experienced civilian employees had demonstrated leadership capability. This contributed to a perception that advancement for unsworn employees was constrained and that career progression often required leaving NSWPF.

I had another inspector talking about the massive difference in pay and saying that civilians don't deserve any more than what they get and we should put up with it.

— Confidential interview

Some try to establish their authority based on their rank rather than professionalism. If I present things they don't understand they fear being humiliated.

— Confidential interview

Development and Progression

Development pathways for unsworn employees were described as minimal, ad hoc and inconsistently supported. While all employees have access to the NSWPF online learning platform, unsworn staff reported limited access to structured leadership development or operational training. Representation of civilian staff at senior levels remains low: of the 26 Senior Executive Level 2 positions (assistant commissioner and executive director) in 2025, 81 per cent are held by sworn employees, including in corporate commands such as Health, Safety and Wellbeing, Infrastructure and Assets, and People and Capability. At Senior Executive Level 3 (deputy commissioner), there are no unsworn leaders, despite unsworn staff comprising 21 per cent of the workforce.

During the Cultural Review, we were informed that work was underway through the Strategic and Organisational Functional Review (SOFR) to identify roles that could be undertaken by either sworn or unsworn employees and acknowledges this positive step. This approach may broaden development opportunities and leadership pathways for civilian staff.

Some employees suggested rebranding administrative staff as 'professional staff' to better reflect their expertise. However, the issues raised point to deeper structural imbalances in recognition, development and progression. Without targeted investment in unsworn capability and leadership, NSWPF risks losing experienced staff and reinforcing a culture in which civilian expertise is marginalised.

Why people leave

Understanding attrition

Understanding why employees leave is one of the most strategically important insights a policing organisation can have. Attrition is rarely just an individual choice – it is a mirror held up to culture, leadership, workload, safety and legitimacy. When organisations have limited insight into their attrition trends, they lose the ability to diagnose systemic risks early, protect capability or build a workforce that reflects and serves the community.

In recent years, the leading cause of exits from NSWPF related to psychological injury. This was compounded by the introduction of the Optional Disengagement Scheme between January 2022 and July 2024.

We note the significant efforts underway to reduce the impact of psychological injury and ensure that people are supported back to work. This is explored further in the ‘Support and care’ chapter in this report.

The current arrangement allows for officers facing psychological injury to access up to seven years of leave at 75 per cent pay through workers’ compensation. While this structure is designed to support recovery, we heard clear examples of where individuals were using this leave provision as an exit pathway when they may have been able to be retained and reintegrated with different supports in place. We spoke with officers who openly discussed their plans to ‘head off on 75’, reflecting a cultural norm that frames long-term leave as a pathway to exit rather than a mechanism for rehabilitation.

Like all cops, I have seen enough to go off. Any doctor would write me off. I want to retire – to be marched out. But my wife thinks I am mad – why wouldn’t I finish seven years earlier, go off on sick at 75 per cent pay and just enjoy life.

— Confidential interview

While it is hoped that changes to the Police Blue Ribbon Insurance (PBRI) system and the removal of the one-off payment referred to as a ‘mortgage buster’ will reduce this trend, addressing workplace culture and incentivising retention will also be required.

The Optional Disengagement Scheme was a voluntary separation program introduced to enable eligible officers to exit police service with a structured financial package. The scheme operated under specific Australian Taxation Office rulings that classified approved payments as ‘genuine redundancy or early retirement’ amounts, which allowed payments to be taxed concessional provided officers met age, service and eligibility criteria. Participation required that the disengagement be employer initiated, that the role was no longer required or part of an organisational restructuring process, and that officers did not return to policing within a defined period, consistent with Australian Taxation Office requirements for concessional tax treatment.

While the impact of this scheme was widely discussed during our consultations, we did not see evidence of any formal review or impact assessment to inform future decision-making.

We also heard that many general duties staff reported that their work is often undervalued compared to detective and specialist roles, and there is a perception that they are not respected or acknowledged for their contributions.

Longer-term general duties staff reported that over time, the culture in the organisation had become inverted – where non-frontline roles once saw their purpose as supporting general duties staff so they could provide the best frontline service to the community, there is now an attitude among non-frontline roles that general duties is a mandatory rite of passage and one of the least valued roles in the organisation.

We're treated as second-class citizens, and it's used as a threat: 'If you don't do X or if you misbehave you will be sent back to GDs'. No wonder why young ones want to get out ASAP.

— Confidential interview

According to NSWPF exit data, sworn staff with five years' experience or less accounted for just over half of all sworn staff resignations (52 per cent) between 2020 and 2024. While there are many factors that may contribute to this data, it is worth noting that all sworn staff must complete a minimum three-year general duties role. This exit data tells a compelling story that NSWPF should consider how to better support new general duties recruits as a core retention strategy.

The exit process

Since 2024, all departing NSWPF staff are required to complete the 'Resignation/notice of retirement' form which includes a check box stating 'I have completed the Resignation Survey and discussed the issues and any possible resolution of these issues that are the cause of my decision to resign'.

While the survey is sent via email and voluntary, we heard that this process is consistently applied and 'embedded'. However, we heard from numerous former police who had not had the opportunity to complete an exit survey. While we were not able to interrogate whether this related to contact details, technology or user issues, there remains an opportunity to ensure every individual who departs the organisation has the opportunity to give feedback.

In addition, NSWPF advises that it has agreed to participate in an Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) research program on police attrition and recruitment. The exit survey has been aligned to the ANZPAA national standard for collecting this data.

A feature of many aspects of NSWPF culture has been low psychological safety. When discussing the exit process, interview participants told us this low psychological safety meant that even when people did complete an exit survey, they were not honest about the reasons for leaving – especially if these related to the behaviour or attitudes of a senior leader.

Of concern was the sense that even when feedback was given in exit interviews, it was not actioned or followed up. The lack of centralised analysis and reporting on exit interview data (including data on those who chose not to fill in the survey) means that NSWPF is missing the opportunity to identify or address patterns of exit linked to specific leadership styles or station cultures. Anecdotal evidence we heard included examples of individuals whose leadership approach contributed to repeated team dysfunction and staff exiting across multiple locations, yet no formal performance management action was taken. This lack of accountability allows culturally damaging behaviours to persist and undermines trust in internal systems.

Promotions

Promotion processes matter profoundly in policing. They are one of the clearest signals of what the organisation truly values, not simply what it claims to value. In a command-and-control environment where hierarchy shapes identity, belonging and power, promotions function as the cultural engine of the organisation. They determine who is elevated, whose behaviour is legitimised, and what leadership looks like in practice. In this way, promotion systems either reinforce the existing culture or become one of the most powerful levers for cultural reform.

The current promotions process within NSWPF is perceived to be characterised by insularity, protection and nepotism. While the formal process is well documented, individuals' experience of promotion is shaped more by relationships, inequitable access to relieving opportunities and panel composition than by merit or leadership capability. These dynamics are consistently cited as a key reason for disengagement, stress and turnover, particularly among officers who feel overlooked, excluded or punished for seeking advancement.

We heard widespread concerns about the promotions process from both sworn and unsworn cohorts. Unsworn employees reported limited access to relieving and promotion opportunities outside metropolitan areas, while sworn officers described entrenched favouritism, informal networks and inconsistent standards at the highest levels. The most acute cultural and structural challenges remain concentrated within the sworn cohort.

While there are opportunities to strengthen and simplify the promotions process, without addressing the root cause of the issues raised – namely, a culture that tolerates nepotism and 'jobs for mates' – it is unlikely that NSWPF will have a promotions process that is trusted, places the most competent people in roles, and delivers the best technical competency and leadership capability for the organisation.

The promotion system to [superintendent] and above is based wholly on nepotism and jobs for mates. If you don't toe the party line or have any type of independent thought, you cannot and will not be promoted. In short, NSWPF sadly cannot be trusted with the promotion system, it needs to be managed externally to NSWPF to remove jobs for those in the clique.

— Informal interview

The current promotions process favours cronyism. In many instances we already know who will get jobs because of their connections rather than ability. It is also a system that is shamelessly self-promoting. No checks and balances on what basically are lies/gross exaggerations in job applications.

— Confidential interview

The division of leadership and advancement opportunities for civilian staff is incredibly limited and, in cases, deliberately restricted in favour of sworn officers occupying those positions. This applies to roles where the requirement to be sworn is not necessarily required to perform the duties of the position. In my particular branch, there is a roughly 50/50 split of sworn to unsworn employees with sworn officers occupying >90 per cent of the leadership roles, despite that the role does not require being sworn to undertake.

— Informal interview

The promotions process

The current promotions process for sworn officers is governed by the *Police Amendment (Promotions) Act 2020* No. 23, which implemented recommendations from the 2019 Broderick Review into the NSWPF promotions system. The Act replaced the previous 'next-in-line' model with a merit-based selection process for advertised roles. The process is further detailed in the NSWPF *Promotions Manual*, which outlines the pathway for promotion from sergeant to superintendent. Eligibility is based on time-in-rank requirements – two years for senior constable, sergeant and inspector – and is supported by ongoing performance management through the MyPerformance system.

The process comprises four stages:

Stage A

- Step 1: Individual capability assessment
- Step 2: Technical and operational knowledge assessment (TOKA)

Stage B

- Step 3: Promotion application (CV, cover letter and responses to targeted questions)
- Step 4: Position-specific capability assessment (interview).

Although the system was designed to promote transparency and align advancement with capability and aspiration, its implementation has not consistently supported the organisation to identify leadership potential nor built the workforce's confidence in the process. Responses to our workforce survey and interviews indicate that early-career officers frequently report no intention to progress beyond the rank of sergeant, describing the process as burdensome and influenced by informal networks. Officers also expressed low trust in leadership, which they associate with perceived favouritism in promotion decisions.

The TOKA, which assesses technical and operational knowledge, is not a feature of most other Australian police jurisdictions. In other jurisdictions, merit is assessed through performance history, leadership capability and behavioural indicators. While the TOKA provides a measure of technical knowledge, it does not assess interpersonal skill, team leadership or readiness for supervisory responsibilities.

While leaders emphasised the importance of assessing technical and operational knowledge in senior promotions, we noted that many staff who had been promoted had been relieving in the role for extended periods – often months or years – prior to promotion. This suggests that the appropriate time to test technical knowledge is likely before the relieving period begins, not on substantive promotion. Officers noted that removing the TOKA could reduce procedural burden without compromising integrity, provided leadership capability is assessed consistently across all stages.

The documented promotions process determines shortlisting for interview based on candidates' responses to targeted questions, CV content and TOKA results. However, staff reported inconsistent guidance on expectations, significant time spent preparing applications and limited feedback. Some reported that targeted questions were tailored to favour specific candidates, including content known only to one applicant, undermining perceptions of fairness.

Although the promotions manual does not state that interviews are the sole determinant of suitability, staff consistently reported that interview performance is treated as the deciding factor. Written materials – including CVs and capability assessments – are often not considered in final decisions. Staff described high levels of interview-related stress and noted that performance anxiety disproportionately affects some candidates.

We also heard concerns about the composition of interview panels. In some cases, candidates were contacted prior to their application being reviewed and informed that a preferred candidate had already been identified. We heard examples of candidates who did not meet minimum written criteria being interviewed and endorsed under pressure from the panel chair.

While we did not formally map relationships between commanders and promotion outcomes, multiple staff suggested that such an exercise would reveal patterns of preferential access and advancement.

Flexible work arrangements as a barrier to promotion

Promotion was also reported to be less accessible for staff working part time or under flexible working arrangements. Although the promotions manual references the Flexible Work Arrangements Manual, most advertised roles do not include statements welcoming flexible or part-time applicants. Through our interviews, we heard a strong sentiment that officers working part-time or requiring regular flexibility would not progress through the promotions process, which disproportionately affects women, parents, carers and those requiring adjustments for injury or illness. As NSWPF does not collect data on flexible work arrangements, we were unable to determine from the data whether this barrier is occurring in practice.

Visibility of upcoming promotion opportunities is limited to staff who meet tenure requirements, rather than being visible to all staff as would be common practice in other organisations. As a result, many candidates are unaware of future roles or selection criteria and are unable to prepare in advance.

Trust in the promotions system

The NSWPF Promotions Manual and Capability Framework provides detailed guidance on promotion processes, including mechanisms for conflict resolution, panel composition and the declaration of conflicts of interest. Despite the existence of these formal structures, confidence in the fairness and integrity of the promotions system remains low.

Results from our workforce survey revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the promotions process, with only 14 per cent of respondents agreeing that the best person is appointed to each role. Perceptions of fairness and transparency were similarly low, with just 18 per cent viewing the process as equitable and only 58 per cent reporting a clear understanding of how it operates. Additionally, 73 per cent of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that in-groups and cliques influence progression and promotions within the organisation.

Interviews and submissions also revealed pervasive perceptions that proximity to senior leaders, rather than demonstrated capability, is the most reliable pathway to advancement. Staff described informal networks, opaque decision-making and inconsistent access to developmental opportunities as barriers to progression. Supervisors and commanders were frequently cited as holding disproportionate influence over promotional outcomes, particularly through the 'individual capability appraisal' process. Staff reported reluctance to raise concerns about leadership behaviour due to fear of retribution or negative impacts on future promotion prospects.

We heard examples of staff initiating short-term projects or complaints to generate case studies aligned with the capability framework. We also heard examples of candidates making anonymous complaints against competing candidates during promotion processes as a tactic to undermine them. Independent panel members described pressure to support predetermined outcomes and noted that those who challenged candidate eligibility or panel preferences were rarely invited to participate in future panels.

Mental health stigma was also identified as a factor influencing promotion outcomes. Staff who had taken recent stress leave reported being deemed unsuitable or discouraged from applying. While NSWPF leadership assured us that this was not the case, we consistently heard this was a fear or barrier for staff considering promotion. We interviewed a number of inspectors who believed raising mental health concerns would make them vulnerable to exclusion from informal networks. They were hesitant to seek support due to the potential reputational impact.

While procedural safeguards exist, they are not consistently understood, accessed or trusted. The gap between formal policy and how it plays out in reality undermines employees' confidence in the merit-based intent of the promotions system.

Appointment of superintendents

We also identified a structural tension in the current process for appointing superintendents. Assistant commissioners would normally be responsible for appointments at superintendent rank. However, deputy commissioners have assumed responsibility for these decisions, citing concerns about the quality and consistency of judgements made by assistant commissioners. Conversely, some assistant commissioners expressed the view that deputy commissioners' involvement reflects their desire to exercise personal discretion over appointments, raising perceptions of partiality.

A best practice approach would require that those directly responsible for supervising appointees play a formal role in selection, within a system that is clearly defined, procedurally fair and subject to evaluation. If there are concerns regarding the judgement and decision-making of a particular cohort or individual, this should be addressed through feedback and performance conversations.

Under Ma'am Webb, the appointment of superintendents was removed from ACs because of a perception of bias in that cohort. The reality is that it has just pushed the favouritism and bias up another level. There is no trust or transparency around the process.

Formal interview

Applicant feedback

The Promotions Manual outlines expectations for feedback at multiple stages of the promotions process. Where an officer is deemed not yet suitable during the individual capability assessment, the manual states that the commander or manager should discuss feedback with the candidate prior to submitting the outcome in SAP Fiori. If a candidate does not progress to interview or is unsuccessful at interview, they may request verbal feedback from the panel. Panel members can access training on giving feedback, and it is incorporated into leadership development programs. We were informed that new training materials had been developed in late 2025 to support this feedback process.

We viewed a suite of forms that panel chairs and panel members are required to complete during the promotions process. These include documentation of written application reviews, shortlisting decisions, and individual feedback on each candidate's interview performance. The forms are comprehensive and clearly designed to support fair and transparent feedback. They are required to be lodged with the HR manager, who plays a critical role in reviewing the documentation, ensuring alignment with final decisions, and facilitating meaningful feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

Despite these directions, we found that feedback is inconsistently delivered and often lacks specificity. Staff who were not shortlisted or unsuccessful in interview reported receiving little or no meaningful feedback. Where feedback was provided, it was frequently described as generic, vague or unrelated to the application. Officers indicated that it was rarely actionable or useful in preparing for future candidacy.

I applied and I was the only applicant and didn't get the job. So I went up to get some feedback, spoke to the commander here and she said she had heard I had a bad attitude and this is part of the reason I didn't get the job. None of the sergeants had approached me about my attitude or performance so it was a shock.

— Confidential interview

I've asked for feedback from nearly every superintendent – it's general and they are asked not to provide specific feedback.

— Confidential interview

Requests for panel feedback were often unanswered. In other cases, feedback was delivered in a manner that did not reflect the candidate's application or interview performance. Staff reported that the absence of a formal appeal or review mechanism contributed to perceptions that decisions could be made without accountability, reinforcing concerns about fairness and transparency.

In contrast, staff who received personalised feedback and development planning from their commander reported increased engagement and trust in leadership. These instances were uncommon but demonstrate the potential impact of constructive feedback on retention and morale.

Leadership readiness is also affected by the lack of structured onboarding following promotion. Successful candidates are expected to assume new responsibilities with minimal formal preparation. Many handovers are inconsistent and typically informal, even for those who have acted in the role previously. Where training is provided, it focuses on technical functions such as reporting and data systems, with limited emphasis on people management or interpersonal skills.

Staff reported variable access to leadership development following promotion. Some received no formal support, while others remained at rank for extended periods without further training. This inconsistency contributes to uneven leadership capability and limits the organisation's ability to build a consistent standard of supervisory and management practice.

When [I] got promoted to sergeant there was no handover, not even a briefing.

— Confidential interview

Access to relieving opportunities

Acting appointments serve both an operational and developmental purpose within NSWPF. Relieving opportunities are a critical pathway for staff seeking advancement within the organisation. They provide essential exposure to higher duties, allow individuals to build operational insight, and offer a platform to demonstrate leadership capability in real time. For many, relieving is the only way to gain experience in roles they may later apply for substantively. As such, the process for identifying and allocating relieving roles must be treated with the same level of transparency and fairness as the formal promotions process.

Within her team, [X] actively supports promotions through relieving opportunities and tailored training.

— Confidential interview

The Acting Appointments and Secondments (Police Officers) Manual outlines the framework for sworn employees:

- appointments under six weeks are at the discretion of the commander
- appointments up to three months require a region-level expression of interest (EOI) and commander decision
- appointments over six months require a region-level EOI and joint decision between the commander and another officer substantively at the relieving rank or higher from another command (statewide advertising requires approval from Recruitment, Transfers and Appointments).

Despite this structure, we found that access to relieving opportunities is often determined informally, with significant variation across commands. Operational constraints are frequently cited as reasons for declining requests, yet staff consistently reported that relieving roles are routinely offered to preferred candidates – often described as ‘favourites’ – regardless of eligibility or experience. In some cases, roles were held open to allow select individuals to build their experience in a more senior role, while others were discouraged from applying or pressured to withdraw. This uneven access creates a cycle where those with relieving experience are better positioned to succeed in interviews, having recent, relevant examples aligned with the capability framework.

Because I'm part time they won't accommodate my relieving opportunities as a supervisor. Which means that I'm not competitive and then I won't get the job.

— Confidential interview

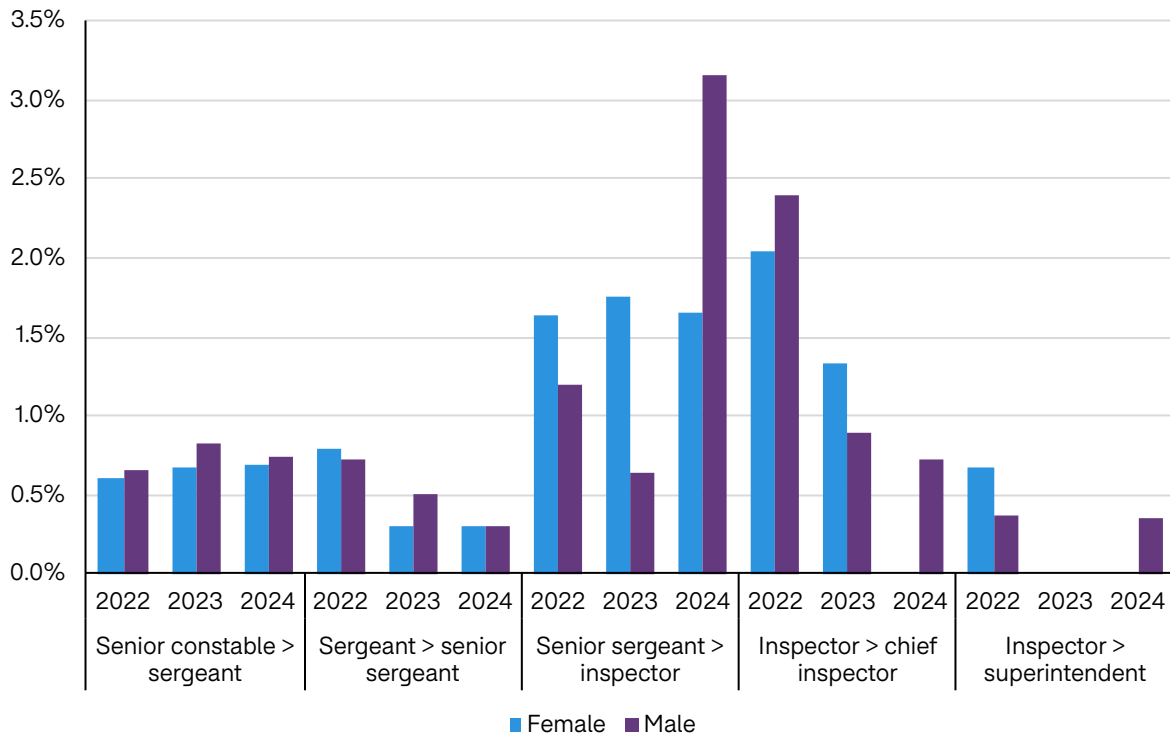
These experiences further undermine trust in core processes and contribute to a culture where familiarity is privileged over fairness.

We identified examples of good practice where officers seeking relieving opportunities were included on a regional register, with the HR manager responsible for distributing opportunities equitably across the group throughout the year. In some commands, a stronger feedback culture was also evident, with supervisors taking time to explain why individuals may not have been selected and outlining steps for future consideration. In these environments, confidence in the process and trust in leadership were notably higher.

Promotions and diversity

Promotion data from 2022 to 2024 reveals persistent gender disparities across senior ranks within NSWPF. Male staff consistently received a higher proportion of promotions, particularly at the inspector and superintendent levels, while promotion rates for female staff were more evenly distributed across years and ranks. Notably, women were more likely to be promoted from senior sergeant to inspector in 2022 and 2023, but their representation declined at higher ranks in 2024.

Figure 31. Promotions by gender at five transition points, 2022 to 2024



The current promotions process may unintentionally reinforce structural barriers for women, staff with diverse background and identities, and those outside dominant networks. Despite reforms intended to improve transparency and fairness, some staff members' experience of promotions within NSWPF continues to reflect unequal access, informal influence and inconsistent support for diverse candidates.

44 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men believe there is a lack of female role models within NSWPF.

Women remain under-represented in leadership roles across all ranks, including sergeant, inspector, superintendent, assistant commissioner and deputy commissioner. Barriers to advancement include limited access to relieving opportunities, a lack of senior female role models and the impact of caring responsibilities.

Staff reported that part-time work arrangements often result in a perceived loss of standing, with women frequently questioned about their return to full-time work. These experiences contribute to a broader perception that flexible arrangements are incompatible with leadership progression. While women continue to face disproportionate questioning and are not proportionally represented in promotions, there is nonetheless a perception among some male employees that they are being unfairly disadvantaged.

Parental leave was also identified as a point of disadvantage. Staff described highly variable experiences upon returning to work, dependent on the attitudes of local leaders. In some cases, supervisors were willing to adjust rosters to support new parents. In others, officers were told they could not return unless they resumed a full roster. In regional areas, limited access to long daycare further constrained the ability of women to return to shift work unless flexibility was offered around start and finish times. We heard examples of couples working at the same station being supported to alternate shifts to manage childcare. However, there were also reports of gendered assumptions by HR duty officers – for example, women being granted flexibility not extended to men, based on the perception that only women were primary carers.

Parental leave is a speed bump on the progression because they want recency on your examples. I haven't made it to doing the test and then you can't go for interviews for two years. But if you take a year off for parental leave it impacts that ... it will always have an impact on your career but the organisation doesn't do anything to minimise that, it's tough.

— Confidential interview

Having a baby stunts your career. It put my career back. I only had nine months off and it put it back two to three years.

— Confidential interview

While we did not receive data regarding the proportion of officers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds being promoted, officers from multicultural and multifaith communities reported being overlooked persistently for relieving opportunities or for promotion, even when they had extensive relieving experience.

In both expert interviews and informal discussions, participants shared perceptions that staff for whom English was a second language would be less effective in high-pressure situations. NSWPF has invested in multicultural community liaison officers (MCLOs), civilian specialists who seek to strengthen communication, trust, and cooperation between police and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. MCLOs who participated in the Cultural Review reported feeling that officers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often chose to 'play down' their diversity, rather than feeling like it could be recognised as a strength. There did not seem to be widespread recognition of the benefits of cultural and linguistic diversity to understanding cultural nuance, family dynamics and tone which can make a significant difference to the trust between the community and police. We heard two examples of commanders who explicitly told us of the benefit to their command of having officers who could speak multiple languages and connect with diverse communities, a sentiment consistently echoed by the MCLOs.

In my time at [station], it was great, we had a lot of different cultural representation within the police. It's very, very strong and they are capitalising on that and it's promoted and celebrated. We had seven or eight different nationalities on that team. They were able to contribute working with those multicultural communities.

— Confidential interview

We also heard concerns about perceptions of bias in how sponsorship is understood and applied. There is substantial research indicating that women may require additional support and encouragement to pursue promotion, particularly during periods of caregiving. The current promotions system relies heavily on individuals identifying themselves as promotion-ready and navigating the process independently. Where commanders and inspectors played a sponsorship role, staff were more likely to consider promotion pathways. Staff expressed discomfort with the concept of female- or diversity-focused sponsorship, despite acknowledging the widespread culture of informal sponsorship for members of the 'in group'.

Some male staff expressed concern that women were being promoted too quickly, while female staff reported fear of being perceived as promoted solely because of their gender. The backlash following the appointment of Commissioner Karen Webb was cited as a significant example of this dynamic. These perceptions reflect broader tensions around gender, merit and inclusion, and highlight the need for consistent leadership messaging and culturally safe promotion practices.

Recommendations

Development

Recommendation 9. NSWPF should strengthen the consistency, transparency and impact of its approach to leadership and management development for both sworn and unsworn staff, by ensuring equitable access, targeted capability building, and timely delivery at key career transition points.

This requires NSWPF to:

- collect and publish participation data (rank, region, diversity, employment type) to identify and address inequities in access to development opportunities
- establish clear expectations for critical leadership skills at each level, ensuring they are taught through structured learning and built into formal handovers and informal coaching for staff undertaking relieving duties or promotion
- support a culture of continuous learning by providing protected times within shifts for completion of mandatory training and ensuring that such training is realistic, role specific and scenario based.

Recommendation 10. NSWPF should strengthen retention by systematically analysing exit drivers and reviewing schemes and financial incentives that may unintentionally encourage departure.

This requires NSWPF to:

- integrate insights from exit surveys and separation data into regular command-level reporting to identify emerging trends, hotspots and actionable retention risks
- seek Treasury support to model targeted retention incentives, including bonuses or other measures.

Promotions

Recommendation 11. NSWPF should immediately strengthen the integrity and transparency of promotion decisions through independent oversight and clear governance.

This requires NSWPF to:

- appoint independent, external senior executives or HR professionals to promotion panels for all roles at superintendent level and above, comprising at least one-third of panel membership
- require all panel members to declare work history and relationships with applicants, with independent review of conflicts or perceived conflicts
- ensure superintendent selections are made by assistant commissioners, informed by a regularly reviewed succession plan endorsed by the Commissioner's Executive Team
- develop and publish a promotions dashboard showing applications, outcomes and relieving data by rank, gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, culturally and linguistically diverse background, disability status and region, with quarterly reporting to the Commissioner's Executive Team.

Recommendation 12. NSWPF should ensure that HR decisions taken within commands are being made by people with skills and expertise in people and culture, to strengthen workforce management and support fair, consistent promotion pipelines and processes.

This requires NSWPF to:

- require that HR duty officers have specific HR training which could be provided for people interested in this stream of leadership
- ensure HR professionals oversee compliance with conflict-of-interest processes, feedback requirements and data reporting.

Recommendation 13. NSWPF should simplify and refocus promotion assessments to prioritise leadership capability, operational readiness and fair access.

This requires NSWPF to:

- remove the Technical and Operational Knowledge Assessment and replace it with consistent evaluation of leadership capability, behavioural indicators, operational readiness and performance history
- ensure written applications and capability assessments carry equal weight alongside interviews to reduce reliance on high-stress interview performance
- establish clear, standardised criteria for shortlisting and targeted questions.

Recommendation 14. NSWPF should embed structured, actionable feedback and development into all promotion and relieving processes.

This requires NSWPF to:

- require promotion panels to agree on specific feedback for each interviewed candidate, delivered verbally and documented for HR oversight and local follow through
- strengthen feedback for officers undertaking relieving opportunities to support leadership development and readiness
- introduce formal onboarding for first time relieving and newly promoted officers, including structured handovers and training in people management.

Recommendation 15. NSWPF should ensure equitable access to relieving and promotion opportunities.

This requires NSWPF to:

- establish regional HR-managed registers to allocate relieving opportunities transparently and equitably across eligible staff
- require commanders to document and justify allocation of relieving opportunities under six months, demonstrating how decisions balance operational needs, staff development and pipeline building
- require all advertised relieving roles to explicitly welcome flexible and part-time applicants, with clear criteria for assessing merit irrespective of work arrangements
- collect and publish annual promotion data by gender, cultural background and region/command to strengthen accountability
- increase visibility of senior female and culturally diverse role models through structured mentoring, leadership messaging and sponsorship.

Chapter 5.

Flexibility in a modern organisation

Flexible and inclusive workplace conditions are core operational strengths in a modern policing organisation. When officers and staff have access to genuinely flexible ways of working, it enhances wellbeing, supports sustained performance and enables the organisation to respond more dynamically to community needs.

Every employee will, at different points in their life, need to balance their job with caring responsibilities. These responsibilities take many forms: raising children, supporting aging parents, assisting family members with disability or illness, meeting cultural or kinship obligations, caring for Country, maintaining transnational family ties, or managing one's own mental health and recovery from trauma. When organisations recognise this diversity of care and design flexibility into roles and systems, they enable employees to participate fully and sustainably in work, rather than relying on ad hoc exceptions that create inequity and limit long-term engagement.

Building this flexibility into the organisational fabric strengthens NSWPF's ability to deploy the right people in the right place at the right time, while fostering a culture where all members feel valued and able to contribute fully.

What is working?

- There is increasing recognition from NSWPF leadership and industrial bodies that flexible work is a priority to meet future operational delivery.
- Relevant awards provide for flexible work.
- We found individual examples of leaders supporting staff to work flexibly.

What is not working?

- Across the organisation, many employees report that they do not have the flexibility they require.
- The current flexible work policy framework is overly detailed and prescriptive.
- Culturally, flexible work is seen as something that detracts from first response, rather than enabling operational effectiveness.
- Individual commanders lack the confidence to support flexible work arrangements, especially where there is significant pressure to meet first response agreements.
- Gaps between available resourcing and the demand make it hard for the organisation to understand what forms of flexibility are genuinely feasible.
- Employees are facing hard choices with respect to balancing caring while wanting to remain and progress in the organisation.

The case for flexible work

Flexible work is now recognised as a core component of modern workforce design, referring to arrangements that adjust when, where and how work is performed so employees can meet both organisational requirements and the diverse caring, cultural and personal responsibilities that shape contemporary working lives. Flexible work goes beyond working from home or part-time work; it incorporates a range of different options such as flexible rostering, shift-swapping, job-sharing and a compressed working week.

Flexible work has become a structural feature of contemporary labour markets, driven by sustained skills shortages, rising participation constraints (including caring responsibilities, health limitations, skills mismatches, and inflexible work arrangements) and shifting employee expectations. While the Australian labour market has traditionally been characterised by high participation rates, it has also grappled with persistent skills shortages in critical occupations, intensifying competition for talent and increasing the premium on employment models that retain workers and encourage strong emotional attachment to the workplace.⁴⁵

I came back from parental leave part-time with another mum. We shared a SAP number and worked one weekend a month. Our local command leadership were supportive and, as a result of having that support, we are both still with NSWPF.

— Informal interview

National research on work preferences indicates that employees increasingly prioritise flexibility in hours, patterns and workload, with flexible full-time and hybrid arrangements now central to how workers evaluate job quality and career decisions.⁴⁶ These preferences are amplified by structural economic factors – dual-income-households are now the norm, cost-of-living pressures have escalated, and childcare costs continue to constrain labour supply, particularly for women – which act to reduce workforce participation when flexibility isn't available.

For frontline, rostered and site-based workforces – including police, military and fire services – the evidence is clear that flexibility is both feasible and consequential. Studies of Australian and New Zealand police show that flexible working arrangements mitigate key stressors, reduce health-related absenteeism and sleep disorders, and improve work-life balance, with officers reporting strong demand for roster flexibility, shift-swapping and predictable scheduling.⁴⁷

Defence research similarly identifies lack of flexibility as a significant driver of attrition, particularly for women, and highlights that modern operational demands require adaptive models of service rather than rigid patterns of availability.⁴⁸ Broader frontline industry trials, across energy, logistics, manufacturing and telecommunications, demonstrate measurable gains in engagement, productivity, safety and retention when workplaces introduce flexible rostering, job-sharing, compressed weeks and technology-enabled task redesign, alongside access to previously untapped labour pools such as carers and part-time workers. The strategic imperative for flexibility is sharpened by demographic and social trends. Parents working non-standard hours report that inflexible schedules directly limit their ability to remain in paid work.

In 2016, the NSW Government committed to making all roles in the NSW government sector flexible – including employees of NSWPF – based on the principle of 'if not, why not'. Flexible working, as noted by the NSW Public Sector Commission involves 're-thinking the way we work – when it takes place, where it takes place and how we arrange it'.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ [Labour Force, Australia, November 2024 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

⁴⁶ [Hybrid-and-Flexible-Working-Report-2025.pdf](#)

⁴⁷ Scholarios, D., Hesselgreaves, H. & Pratt, R. (2017). Unpredictable working time, well-being and health in the police service. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*. 26(16)2275-2298

⁴⁸ [Chapter 7: Principle 4: Greater flexibility will strengthen the ADF | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

⁴⁹ NSW public sector commission

The cost of inaction

Organisations that fail to normalise flexibility and the realities of caregiving across the employment life cycle face escalating risks – reduced competitiveness in attracting and retaining talent, higher turnover, increased unplanned absences and diminished workforce diversity.

While flexibility is important for job seekers across all ages, the benefits are particularly important for workers in their mid-career, aged 25–39. Multiple studies, including the Deloitte Global Gen Z and Millennial Survey, show work–life balance to be the principal reason that younger generations choose a new job.⁵⁰

For policing specifically, the consequences are acute. Without flexible models, police services risk shrinking applicant pools, accelerated mid-career attrition and reduced operational resilience as officers struggle to reconcile rigid rosters with family, health and financial pressures.

Over time, this can manifest as chronic understaffing, increased overtime expenditure, degraded wellbeing and weakened community service capability. Research on frontline workers such as nurses and police shows that shift work has negative health outcomes including burnout, fatigue, musculoskeletal disorders, obesity, higher rates of smoking, headaches, social isolation, mental distress, sleep disorders,⁵¹ poor digestive and cardiovascular health, increased caffeine and alcohol consumption,⁵² impaired mood and performance, and disrupted social relationships.⁵³

These negative health outcomes are compounded by the rigid and irregular hours of shift work, because workers have less access to exercise and good nutrition. Alcohol, smoking and caffeine are often used by shift workers to help them cope with irregular hours.

There is also evidence of ‘occupational downgrading’, where people who do not have the required flexibility seek roles with less responsibility or do not pursue leadership opportunities, perceiving that they will not be able to manage the requirements of the role. In hierarchical organisations that rely on people moving up through ranks, this is a particular concern. In a labour market where flexibility is a baseline expectation, police organisations that do not adapt will face structural disadvantages in workforce sustainability.

My daughter was going into primary school. I requested a flexible working arrangement. I was a single mum. The superintendent told my manager to say I would have to leave if I wanted flexibility. I didn't want to leave [xxx] unit. I wasn't living with my parents. I went to other PACs about transferring – for part time or flexible work – and they said, 'no don't apply'. I had to move in with my parents.

— Confidential interview

It's hard to retain women in senior leadership roles. We lost two senior women recently as they were offered the same or better [remuneration] with much more flexibility. Lack of flexibility is a huge issue for retaining women. Both these women would have gone on to be sergeants. The issue can become more challenging because other parts of the private and public sector can offer better conditions especially in relation to flexibility, and NSWPF does not have a good solution to this issue.

— Confidential interview

⁵⁰ Deloitte Global Gen Z and Millennial Survey 2025.

⁵¹ Holton, S., Rasmussen, B., Long, K., Bellizia, M., Mathieson, J. C., Crowe, S., Mill, D., Pasion, H., Rankin, C., Woodhouse, M., Douglas, M., Glanville, N., Baker, K., Fallon, K., Hoffmann, M., Sliwa, N., Heinjus, D., Fitzpatrick, L., & Gilbert, P. (2024). Developing nurse and midwife centred rostering principles using co-design: a mixed-methods study. *BMC nursing*, 23(1), 938. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-024-02522-7>

⁵² Scholarios, D., Hesselgreaves, H., & Pratt, R. (2017). Unpredictable working time, well-being and health in the police service. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(16), 2275–2298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1314314>

⁵³ Rohwer E, Velasco Garrido M, Herold R, et al, (2022), Police officers' work–life balance, job satisfaction and quality of life: longitudinal effects after changing the shift schedule, *BMJ Open* 2022, 12:e063302

Current approach and experiences

Access to flexible work

NSWPF's flexible work settings are anchored in two industrial instruments – the Crown Employees (Police Officers) Award 2020 and the Crown Employees (Administrative and Clerical Officers – NSW Police Force) Award.

For sworn officers, the Police Officers Award mandates rostered leave days within each roster cycle and prescribes shift lengths and rotations, with any flexibility beyond these provisions requiring a formal flexible working arrangement (FWA). For administrative employees, the Administrative and Clerical Officers Award provides access to flexi-time within a defined 7am–7pm bandwidth, the ability to vary start and finish times and the accrual of flex hours and flex days, but again requires an approved FWA for any arrangements that exceed these award-defined parameters.

NSWPF employees' legal rights to request flexibility are set out in the NSWPF Flexible Work Arrangements Manual. The manual aims to ensure flexible work is managed fair, structured and consistent way, balancing employee needs with operational requirements and legislative obligations. The manual requires commanders and employees to approach all requests cooperatively and transparently and provides detailed guidance on conditions and decision-making processes.

Compared to similar policies from like organisations we have reviewed, the 23-page manual contains substantial procedural detail, making it harder to navigate and 20,395 to flexible work. We also reviewed the HR factsheet that seeks to summarise the policy and includes some frequently asked questions and case studies. While this content may support awareness and decision-making, in its current form it is unlikely to be widely used or interpreted as encouraging flexible work.

The NSWPF Flexible Work Arrangements Manual provides a defined set of options for flexible work that can be negotiated through a formal FWA.⁵⁴ Employees can request preferred shifts, a temporary change of duty type, or a temporary change of work location (including hybrid or work-from-home arrangements), provided these can be delivered without compromising operational requirements and subject to agreed conditions such as trial periods, supervision needs, cost considerations and workplace presence.

NSWPF states that it also provides multiple part-time pathways – temporary part time for police officers and administrative employees, permanent part-time arrangements (with approval), and job-share options where two or more employees share the duties of a single role. All options require that operational needs are met, that arrangements are reviewed periodically and that both the employee and commander/manager share responsibility for ensuring the arrangement remains workable. The manual does not differentiate access to flexible work arrangements for sworn and unsworn employees.

⁵⁴NSWPF Policy – [Flexible Work Arrangements Manual – EXTERNAL.pdf](#)

Figure 32. Good practice: UK Metropolitan Police's leadership support for flexible work and public reporting

UK's Metropolitan Police has broadened access to flexible work through a clear suite of options and transparent reporting. The Met offers multiple flexible patterns including part-time, compressed hours, annualised hours and job-share. It publicly tracks the number of officers and staff using these arrangements, as shown in its FOI-released workforce data that specifically reports how many employees are on flexible working patterns. This sits alongside national guidance from the College of Policing, which frames flexibility as essential to a motivated, productive workforce and emphasises that flexible work supports both operational effectiveness and employee wellbeing.

Take up of flexible work

NSWPF does not currently record and report on requests for or take up of flexible or part-time work arrangements at an organisation-wide level. This data is collected at an individual business unit level, but this practice does not enable the organisation to have a holistic picture of the use of flexible working arrangements across its workforce or to analyse the difference between commands, cohorts or regions.

As such, it is not possible to know how many people currently access FWAs across the organisation. We looked at the number and proportion of people working less than 0.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) as a proxy for flexible work data and were concerned to see that take-up has declined over the last five years from 6.5 per cent in 2020 to 4.6 per cent in 2025. This equates to fewer than 450 people in an organisation of 20,395 working less than 0.8 FTE. Only 3.3 per cent of sworn officers work less than 0.8 FTE. The proportion of people working less than 0.8 FTE is well below that across the NSW public service (26.7 per cent).

Despite formal policy settings that enable flexible work, its uptake within NSWPF leadership remains extremely limited. Less than 1 per cent of leaders – sworn or unsworn – work below 0.8 FTE, with no sworn leaders and no men in unsworn leadership roles working part-time. The number of leaders working less than 0.8 FTE has also declined, from seven in 2020 to five in 2025. This pattern signals a powerful cultural message: that flexibility, whether used for caring responsibilities, health needs, cultural obligations or other legitimate reasons, is not viewed as compatible with leadership. Visible role-modelling by leaders is therefore critical. When senior staff do not themselves access or demonstrate healthy, bounded use of flexible work, it sets an organisational tone about what is acceptable and what is career-limiting, reinforcing an unwritten norm that discourages employees from using arrangements they are formally entitled to.

The 2025 People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) results show consistently lower uptake of flexible work options in NSWPF compared with the wider Communities and Justice portfolio and the most similar agency, Fire and Rescue NSW, with little change over time. We were not provided with a sworn/unsworn breakdown for FWAs, but given known patterns of higher uptake among unsworn staff, the overall low result suggests very limited access for sworn officers.

Figure 33. PMES 2025 – Use of FWAs, by type

		Difference from ...		
		2024	sector	portfolio
I do not use any flexible working arrangements	47%	▼ 1	▲ 19	▲ 22
Flexible start and finish times	35%	0	▼ 8	▼ 21
Working from home	24%	▲ 3	▼ 18	▼ 30
Working from different locations	13%	▲ 1	▼ 7	▼ 11
Flexible scheduling for rostered workers	11%	0	▲ 4	▲ 4
Working additional hours to make up for time off	11%	▲ 1	▼ 7	▼ 6
Working more hours over fewer days	8%	0	▼ 1	▼ 2
Part-time work	5%	0	▼ 8	▼ 2
Other	3%	0	0	0
Leave without pay	2%	0	▼ 7	▼ 3
Purchasing annual leave	1%	0	▼ 1	0
Job sharing	1%	0	▼ 3	▼ 1
Study leave	1%	0	▼ 4	▼ 1

Note: Difference shows percentage points.

Figure 34. Good practice: Accountability and transparency within the Australian Defence Force

The Australian Defence Force is recognised as a leader in reporting on flexible work, publishing annually the uptake of formal FWAs as well as data on perceptions and lived experience of formal and informal flexible work.⁵⁵ The Australian Defence Force compares the experience of male and female members and the top reasons for applying for flexible work. Of note, Australian Defence Force members report that informal arrangements can make FWAs feel less stable and limit continuity when command changes frequently.

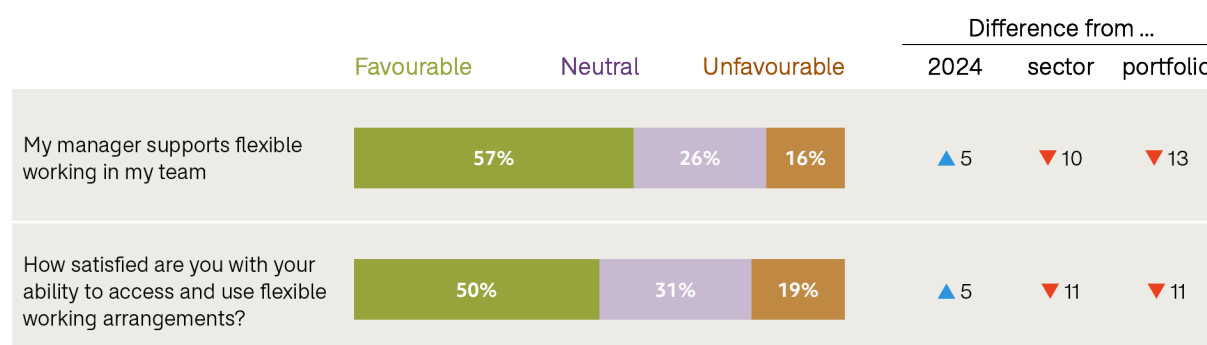
⁵⁵ Women in the ADF Report – [Women in the ADF Report 2023-24](#)

Attitudes to flexible work

NSWPF employees seek flexible work for diverse reasons including caring responsibilities, managing stress or injury, and accommodating long commutes. Access, however, depends not only on formal approval processes but also on the extent to which flexible work is culturally supported and normalised within teams and commands.

The 2025 PMES data shows improvement in favourable responses to both ‘my manager supports flexible working in my team’ (54 per cent favourable) and ‘how satisfied are you with your ability to access flexible working arrangements?’ (50 per cent favourable), yet these results remain very low and demonstrate there is a significant opportunity for NSWPF to improve access to and perceptions of FWAs.

Figure 35. PMES 2025 – Access to and use of FWAs



Note: Difference shows percentage points.

Through formal and informal interviews, we consistently heard that access to FWAs was inconsistent, with approval dependent on the views of the individual commander or decision maker. Very few people could cite leaders who role modelled flexible work practices. Where a commander had accessed flexibility themselves or was more open to different ways of working, employees within the command reported feeling better supported to balance caring responsibilities and individual wellbeing. However, the majority of the experiences we heard about highlighted that negative attitudes towards flexibility remain across NSWPF.

Interviewees described mixed experiences when consulting HR Inspectors about flexible work options. In a small number of cases, HR Inspectors provided constructive support, guidance, and connections to staff already working flexibly. More commonly, individuals reported feeling that they were perceived as difficult or disruptive, and as lacking consideration for colleagues who would be expected to absorb additional workload. We note that many Inspectors holding the HR roles have no formal training in human resources and are at times, unsure how to operationalise policies and processes.

Many officers we spoke to perceived the 12-hour shift as the default NSWPF roster and that anyone unable to work a full 12-hour shift would need an FWA. This expectation is cultural rather than contractual – NSWPF’s published guidance confirms that shift lengths range from 8 to 12 hours within a six-week roster cycle, and the industrial framework does not mandate a single 12-hour model. The persistence of the 12-hour pattern reflects local practice in many frontline commands, where it has become deeply embedded and treated as ‘the standard’. This disconnect between the award’s flexibility and on-the-ground assumptions means that officers seeking shorter or alternative shift lengths often experience unnecessary confusion, concern or stigma, despite these arrangements being fully compliant with existing rostering rules.

We heard experiences of women being told they had to choose between being a mother and a worker, and sworn officers being told that their choice to work flexibly was creating stress and pressure for their peers. There was a strong sentiment that working flexibly would be a barrier to promotion.

There is a lot of stigma about working part time. I wanted to come back as a part-time detective. I needed set shifts because of day care. My manager said 'No. You are either a detective or a mother; you can't be both'. I feel like a second-rate citizen as a part-timer.

— Informal interview

If you are caring for children or others, and want a flexible work agreement, you won't get opportunities.

— Expert interview

Because I'm part time, they won't accommodate my relieving opportunities as a supervisor. Which means that I'm not competitive and then I won't get the job.

— Confidential interview

In our workplace survey, 46 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement 'everyone has the same opportunities to promotion regardless of their family or caring commitments'. NSWPF promotion data indicates that, since 2020, most people who were part time before a promotion increased their hours after promotion, indicating an inverse relationship between part-time work and career progression in NSWPF. Given that most part-time workers within NSWPF are women, this also impacts women's career progression more than men.

We also heard from commanders and HR duty officers that they were uncertain about how to support FWAs, and there was a strong narrative that allowing one person to work in a different way would 'open the floodgates' and there would be no police on the streets. While this fear exists in many workplaces, it is often a sign that there is not a strong leadership support for flexibility. This often results in a lack of support for decision-makers evaluating FWA requests and limited understanding of how flexible work can encourage retention and engagement, rather than denying requests by default because it feels easier.

We had 20 women on flexible work agreements, now we only have five. They've all either gone off on stress leave or left the force or moved to other stations because [the HR duty officer] is so bad. And we're protecting him.

— Formal interview

Reasons for denial of flexible work requests

At present, NSWPF is not able to analyse the reasons for FWA requests being denied as the data is not captured at an agency level. It is possible that, in some cases, a formal FWA request was not made and instead an individual is basing their views on perceptions of how management 'would likely' handle such a request.

Employees who participated in the Cultural Review cited a range of reasons why FWA requests might be denied. Most commonly, we heard that the reason given for denying FWAs is to meet the first response staffing requirements, particularly for stations which are open 24/7. The First Response Agreement defines the minimum staffing level required at police area command level. These are negotiated command by command, and not at the same time. We understand that some commands renegotiated theirs at the time the Cultural Review was conducted, but others may not have negotiated this agreement with the Police Association of NSW for many years.

We heard from staff that the First Response Agreement can hinder flexibility, movement and professional development. The model of determining minimum resourcing requirements via irregular negotiation is a barrier to NSWPF's flexibility to move resources. It does not draw on analysis of demand data to flexibly match resourcing with current or forecast job demand in the local area. Other jurisdictions use modelling tools, such as Victoria's Staff Allocation Model (SAM), to calculate demand and recommend staffing allocations across the state. We note that a recent audit of the demand model in Victoria recommended changes to improve the integrity of its implementation.⁵⁶ Understanding operational demand and resourcing is beyond the scope of this review; however, poorly managed demand, stretched capacity and low flexibility in resourcing has significant impacts on people's health and wellbeing and, in turn, organisational culture.

The NSW Auditor-General's 2025 report *The mental health and wellbeing of NSW police* recommended that NSWPF 'develop and implement a responsive workforce allocation model that matches police numbers to command-level workload demands (call-out volumes and crime rates) and ensure that staff levels are regularly reviewed and revised according to changing workload levels'. Implementing this recommendation is also likely to support greater flexibility for operational police staff and, as set out in the 'Support and care' chapter of this report, decreased job pressure and stress for frontline staff.

The First Response Agreement is a ridiculous process negotiated between union and commanders. There is no consideration of budget, resources or demand.

— Informal interview

There have been examples where people get approved on a course and then at the last minute, told they can't go due to first response rostering issues.

— Informal interview

Figure 36. Good practice: Case study: Rostering technology that supports flexible work within nursing

Digital shift-management tools are increasingly being used to expand flexibility in 24/7 operational workforces. In several Australian nursing jurisdictions, staff can use mobile apps to swap shifts, split shifts or pick up additional hours, with the system automatically enforcing award and safety rules such as maximum shift length, minimum rest periods and staffing mix requirements. These platforms give employees greater control over when they work while ensuring compliance with industrial conditions and maintaining safe staffing levels. Evidence from hospital settings shows that such technology reduces roster bottlenecks, improves fill rates for hard-to-staff shifts and increases staff satisfaction by allowing real-time negotiation of hours within a controlled, rules-based environment.

⁵⁶ Victoria Auditor General's Office, (2022), *The Effectiveness of Victoria Police Staff Allocation*, <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/effectiveness-victoria-polices-staff-allocation?section=>

Recommendation

Recommendation 16. NSWPF should materially expand access to flexible work, with regional commanders held accountable for approving and enabling arrangements and the Commissioner's Executive Team monitoring participation, uptake and outcomes quarterly.

This requires NSWPF to:

- ensure leadership communication positions flexibility as an operational asset – explicitly linking flexible work to improved retention, care for employees, capability and continuity of first response coverage, rather than treating it as a constraint
- provide formal human resources training for all staff appointed to substantive or relieving HR roles ensuring those roles are supported by skills in workforce management, including flexible work assessment, performance feedback, difficult conversations, procedural fairness, and employee wellbeing
- embed flexible team leadership in all leadership development programs – equipping supervisors with practical tools to assess requests, manage performance in flexible contexts and design rosters and team workflows that maintain operational readiness
- develop pilots in frontline and shift-based environments – testing models such as split shifts, micro-flexibility and partial remote work where feasible, with systematic evaluation and dissemination of successful approaches in ways which are easy for leaders to replicate
- invest in flexible and hybrid delivery of mandatory and optional training – ensuring officers who cannot attend in-person sessions retain access to career development and promotion pathways. This includes ensuring employees returning from periods of caring-related leave have equal access to development opportunities and upskilling
- monitor employee experience of accessing flexible work.

Chapter 6.

Addressing harmful behaviours

Harmful behaviours within policing organisations matter not only because of their immediate impact on individuals, but because they shape culture, public trust, operational effectiveness, and the long-term legitimacy of the institution. In NSWPF, as in modern policing agencies globally, these behaviours rarely emerge in isolation. They are influenced by power imbalances, leadership styles, workload environments and vicarious trauma and the informal norms that govern how people speak up, seek support and treat one another.

This chapter examines the patterns of harmful behaviour identified through the review – ranging from everyday incivility and exclusion to more serious misconduct. The focus is not on attributing fault to particular individuals, but on understanding the organisational conditions that allow these behaviours to persist, escalate or go unaddressed.

We heard from many employees about unacceptable levels of workplace harm in NSWPF. Concerningly, leaders in the affected person's reporting line were identified as the most common perpetrators, causing significant and ongoing damage.

We also heard that very few people felt able to speak up about the unsafe behaviours they had experienced or witnessed. More commonly, people would avoid the perpetrator or consider leaving the organisation. Barriers to reporting included people thinking nothing would be done, a perceived lack of support and confidentiality in the process, and a fear that their career would be jeopardised.

At the same time, NSWPF has significant strengths to build on: pockets of strong leadership, robust policy settings, mature professional standards processes, and a growing commitment to psychological safety and early-intervention approaches. These strengths provide a positive foundation for meaningful cultural improvement.

Policing is such a tough sport. When you're dealing with drugs, alcohol, and out-of-control people, you end up being full on and aggressive and out-of-control yourself. The accumulation of this over many years you become quite hard. You lose those soft skills in recognising that your team has life challenges that they're dealing with.

— Confidential interview

What's working well

- NSWPF has robust policy settings for preventing and addressing individual instances of respectful workplace behaviour (RWB) misconduct
- There is a commitment to prevention and early intervention for RWB misconduct. Examples of leading practice include:
 - elevating RWB misconduct as a corporate misconduct risk and quarterly reporting⁵⁷
 - Respectful Workplace and Safe Reporting Unit (RW&SRU) education sessions and workshops
 - Effective Workplace Unit culture reviews.
- NSWPF has mature processes for responding to RWB misconduct. Examples of leading practice include:
 - the centralised triage and advice role of the Assessment and Advisory Unit and the work of the Assessment and Advisory Panel
 - the recording of matters in IAPro
 - the availability of alternative resolution pathways.
- There are a range of mechanisms to encourage reporting of misconduct and speaking up including:
 - a mandatory obligation for sworn officers to report police misconduct
 - confidentiality protections for complainants
 - the Internal Witness Support Unit
 - anonymous reporting.
- There has been a reported reduction in incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment. This is due to changes in legislation, preventive and response action, 'speak up' campaigns, high rates of sustained complaints, and disciplinary consequences.

What's not working well

- Bullying, incivility, verbal abuse and/or threats, discrimination and victimisation are likely to be occurring at unacceptable levels within NSWPF. These behaviours present a systemic risk.
- There is no comprehensive prevention strategy to reduce RWB misconduct and address the drivers of those behaviours in the workplace. An overarching approach would ensure that different parts of NSWPF work effectively together to address systemic risks and can better measure and evaluate whether controls and interventions are reducing harm.
- Leaders across the organisation do not always model respectful and inclusive behaviours. Leaders in a person's reporting line were identified as the most common perpetrators of harmful behaviours.
- There is inconsistent capability among middle managers to deal with incivility, interpersonal conflict, performance conversations and poor communication. This diminishes the ability to prevent matters from escalating to RWB misconduct.
- While complaint-handling processes have improved over the last five years, key areas of concern remain, namely:
 - lack of awareness of reporting pathways outside the chain of command
 - perceived inconsistent handling of reports and investigation outcomes
 - insufficient independence and oversight of complaints that are managed by commands
 - low satisfaction with the complaints process.
- Psychological safety to speak up remains low. There are significant barriers to reporting, fears of victimisation. and low levels of bystander action.

⁵⁷ COMPASS is the Command Performance and Assessment System. The system enables command monitoring and performance reporting across NSWPF and allows the organisation to track progress towards Corporate and State plan objectives.

Legislative and policy obligations

NSWPF is subject to a range of legislation that supports the creation of a safe, ethical, respectful and fair workplace.

NSW work health and safety legislation requires NSWPF to provide a safe workplace so far as is reasonably practicable. This includes a workplace free from physical and psychosocial risks arising from behaviour such as bullying, discrimination, harassment and related conduct. NSWPF also has a positive duty under federal discrimination legislation to take ‘reasonable and proportionate measures’ to eliminate sexual harassment, sex discrimination and related conduct. These behaviours constitute misconduct under the *Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act 2016* (NSW) and the *Police Act 1990* (NSW).

NSWPF has a suite of policies for creating a safe and respectful workplace, consisting of the NSWPF Standards of Professional Conduct, NSWPF Code of Conduct and Ethics, NSWPF Respectful Workplace Policy Statement, and the NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines. The framework defines Respectful Workplace Behaviour misconduct (RWB misconduct)⁵⁸ as bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, victimisation and/or vilification.

The figure below summarises the main legislative and policy obligations.

Figure 37. Key legislative and policy requirements and accountability mechanisms

Legislation and policy	Relevant obligations and oversight
<i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i> (NSW) <i>Work Health and Safety Regulation 2025</i> (NSW) <i>Code of Practice, Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work 2021</i>	NSWPF must: → ensure the health and safety of its workers, so far as reasonably practicable → identify reasonably foreseeable psychosocial hazards; and eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks to health and safety. The Code of Practice sets out the most common psychosocial hazards.
<i>Sex Discrimination Act 1984</i> (Cth) ⁵⁹	NSWPF must take reasonable and proportionate steps to eliminate, as far as possible, sexual harassment, sex discrimination, sex-based harassment and hostile work environments on the grounds of sex and victimisation.
<i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1977</i> (NSW) ⁶⁰	NSWPF must not unlawfully discriminate against applicants and employees on the basis of their age, carer’s responsibilities, disability, homosexuality, marital or domestic status, race, sex (including breastfeeding and pregnancy) or transgender status.

⁵⁸ *Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines*, Version 1.1, March 2025. RWB misconduct matters are defined in the guidelines as behaviour in the workplace between Members (executive and non-executive police officers, administrative employees, special constables, students, volunteers, contractors and temporary employees of the NSWPF).

⁵⁹ We note the NSWPF has obligations under other federal anti-discrimination legislation: *Age Discrimination Act 2004*, *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

⁶⁰ The *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW) also relevantly prohibits sexual harassment, vilification and victimisation. The Act is currently being reviewed by the NSW Law Reform Commission ([Anti-Discrimination Act review](#)).

Legislation and policy	Relevant obligations and oversight
<i>Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act 2016 (NSW)</i>	Enables complaints to be made to LECC about police and administrative employee misconduct.⁶¹ LECC's functions include to: → investigate serious misconduct → refer misconduct matters to the Commissioner of Police for police investigation → oversee the investigation or handling of misconduct matters referred to it.⁶² LECC oversees Tier 1 formal investigations under the Respectful Workplace Behaviour Management Model which are matters that allege criminal conduct or where significant management action is likely or appropriate if sustained.⁶³ In 2024–25, this amounted to 122 matters, or 5 per cent of the overall matters reviewed.⁶⁴
<i>Police Act 1990 (NSW)</i> <i>Industrial Relations Act 1996 (NSW)</i>	Enables complaints to be made about police and administrative employee misconduct⁶⁵ and sets out requirements for the management of those matters. Part 8A deals with complaints about the conduct of police officers, administrative employees and the NSWPF, including investigations of police misconduct. Part 9 deals with action the Commissioner may take with respect to police officer's misconduct, including reduction in rank, grade, seniority (Division 1) as well as removal of police officers in whom the Commissioner does not have confidence (Division 1B). Police officers may apply to the Industrial Relations Commission for a review of these orders (Division 1A and Division 1C). Section 211F imposes a duty on police officers to report misconduct. RWB misconduct matters may be dealt with under the formal investigative process or where appropriate, using NSWPF's Respectful Workplace Behaviour Management Model.⁶⁶
<i>Government Sector Employment Act 2013 (NSW)</i> Government Sector Employment (NSW Police Force) Rules 2017	Deals with misconduct by administrative employees, including action that may be taken on the finding of misconduct.⁶⁷
Standards of Professional Conduct and Code of Conduct and Ethics	Employees must comply with the Standards of Professional Conduct and the Code of Conduct and Ethics, which includes treating everyone with respect, courtesy and fairness. Failure to comply may result in management action.⁶⁸

⁶¹ *Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act 2016 (NSW)*, s.35.

⁶² *Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act 2016 (NSW)*, s.26. The Act defines misconduct, including conduct that constitutes a criminal offence, corrupt conduct, unlawful conduct, and a disciplinary infringement. It also defines serious misconduct, including conduct that could result in prosecution for a serious offence or lead to serious disciplinary action such as termination, demotion or reduction in remuneration, or be a pattern of conduct indicative of systemic issues or corrupt conduct (see ss 9 and 10).

⁶³ Section 14(1) of the *Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act 2016 (NSW)* allows the LECC and NSWPF to enter into written agreements concerning the manner in which misconduct matters are managed. LECC is also permitted under s 14(2) to issue guidelines reflecting those agreements and under s 33(5) to issue guidelines relating to the reporting of misconduct matters to the Commission. See [Agreement between the LECC and the Commissioner of Police pursuant to section 14 of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act – concerning alleged breaches of the NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviours policies | Law Enforcement Conduct Commission](#)

⁶⁴ Expert Interview conducted by the Cultural Review Team with the LECC on 25 July 2025.

⁶⁵ *Police Act 1990 (NSW)*, s.124.

⁶⁶ NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines, Version 1.1, March 2025, p.27. There are four tiers: Formal investigation, alternative resolution pathway, assisted direct action, direct action. These are explored further in this chapter.

⁶⁷ *Government Sector Employment Act 2013 (NSW)*, s.69(4). See also *Government Sector Employment (NSW Police Force) Rules 2017*, Part 6.

⁶⁸ See [Standards of Professional Conduct](#) and [Code of Conduct and Ethics 2014](#)

Legislation and policy	Relevant obligations and oversight
Respectful Workplace Behaviours Policy Statement	Sets out the commitment of NSWPF to provide a work environment that is safe, ethical, inclusive and productive, and the responsibilities for the senior executive, commanders and managers, and all employees. ⁶⁹ Breach of the policy statement may result in management action.
Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines	Sets out NSWPF's view of unacceptable workplace behaviours and defines 'RWB misconduct' – including bullying, discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation and vilification. Breach of the guidelines by employees may result in management action, including removal or dismissal. Details how to report alleged RWB misconduct. ⁷⁰
Psychosocial Risk Management Framework 2024	Sets out workforce initiatives focused on identifying, assessing, preventing and reducing mental ill-health and how these controls are reviewed and evaluated. Details the roles of key parties in the management of psychosocial hazards. ⁷¹

Drivers and risk factors of workplace harm

Understanding the systemic drivers and risk factors associated with workplace bullying, sexual harassment, discrimination and other psychosocial hazards at NSWPF is an important step in effectively preventing and responding to those behaviours. Drivers are systemic and structural and refer to root causes of harm; risk factors are institutionally specific risks in a workplace.⁷²

The known drivers and risk factors for bullying and incivility include unequal power relations, rigid hierarchical structures, autocratic and unsupportive leadership, poor communication and conflict management, low rates of psychological safety, and poor workplace education on behavioural standards.⁷³ Low-level behaviours in breach of workplace norms of respect, such as incivility, rudeness and lack of regard for others can also spiral into more aggressive or coercive behaviour and create a permissive environment for further incivility and unlawful conduct.⁷⁴

In relation to sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination, drivers also include power structures and hierarchies within workplaces, as well as rigid gender stereotypes, and gender inequality.⁷⁵ The drivers and risk factors for other forms of discrimination, such as racism, include workplaces that do not appreciate or support diversity as well as unfair recruitment, promotion and training policies and practices.⁷⁶

The nature of policing means that NSWPF has a high risk profile for harmful behaviours. As flagged, these risk factors are well evidenced and are known to be heightened in first responder and emergency services environments, largely due to rigid hierarchies and command-and-control structures.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ [Respectful Workplace Behaviour Policy Statement.pdf](#)

⁷⁰ See NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines, Version 1.1, March 2025.

⁷¹ See NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines, Version 1.1, March 2025.

⁷² See Australian Human Rights Commission *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*, November 2021, 79.

⁷³ Safe Work Australia, *Guide for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying*, May 2016, 11. Safe Work Australia's guidance is referenced by Safe Work NSW as a resource for employers or business. See Jordi Escartin, 'Insights into workplace bullying: psychosocial drivers and effective interventions' (2016) 9(1) *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 157–158. See also Comcare *Bullying and Risk Factor Checklist*, July 2018.

⁷⁴ Sandy Lim and Lilia M Cortina, 'Interpersonal Mistreatment in the Workplace: The Interface and Impact of General Incivility and Sexual Harassment' (2005) 90 *Journal of Applied Psychology* 483, 494. See also Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Independent Review into Workplace Equality in Ambulance Victoria (2022) Volume 1*, 299 where this research was cited and discussed.

⁷⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces* (2020), 18, 139–40.

⁷⁶ See the summary of research provided in K. Hilton et al, *Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System*, December 2022, 311–314.

⁷⁷ Workplace factors that drive psychosocial hazards have been established and analysed in Comcare *Bullying and Risk Factor Checklist*, July 2018; Safe Work Australia *Model Code of Practice – Managing Psychosocial Hazards at work*, July 2022;

We acknowledge the importance of hierarchy and command-and-control structures in police settings to ensure clarity, safety and accountability in frontline service delivery and emergency contexts. However, these structures also create power imbalances that enable increased rates of unsafe and unlawful workplace behaviour, particularly when they permeate workplace cultures, systems and policy application in an organisation.⁷⁸ This link is evidenced by the over-representation of police and similar sectors – such as defence and emergency services – in workers' compensation claims related to workplace bullying and harassment.⁷⁹

Extensive research has also linked the high levels of trauma and burnout in police environments with compassion fatigue – the negative physical, emotional and psychological impact that comes from continually helping others.⁸⁰ Symptoms include a decline in the ability to feel sympathy and empathy which can manifest as anger, intolerance, irritability and embitterment. A decline in interpersonal relationships is also a common outcome.⁸¹

To eliminate workplace harm and incivility from occurring, organisations need to do more than just respond to individual behaviour through their complaints management system. NSWPF should not assume that unsafe and unlawful behaviours are a problem caused by a handful of wrongdoers. While individuals need to be held to account for harmful conduct, NSWPF should treat these behaviours as systemic issues or concerns, and prioritise a risk-based approach to its prevention efforts.

The following figure lists some of the key drivers and risk factors of workplace harm related to unsafe and unlawful workplace behaviour. The figure includes our analysis of how these drivers and risks may manifest in NSWPF, taking into account the external research as well as the results of our consultations, which we discuss in detail in this chapter.

Figure 38. Drivers and risk factors of workplace harm

Drivers and risk factors of workplace harm	How these drivers may manifest in NSWPF
Power imbalances	→ Command-and-control workplace structures → Rigid hierarchical structures, significant, formal power differentials based on rank, and universally expected deference to rank → Strong subcultures of exceptionalism attributed to specialist units → A culture of solidarity and loyalty between police and the social world → Informal power differentials, including between sworn and unsworn staff and aligned groups and outsiders → Fear and silence around reporting or making a complaint about unsafe and unlawful workplace conduct → Misuse of power

Australian Human Rights Commission *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*, November 2021; Australian Human Rights Commission *Time for Respect: Fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian Workplaces*, November 2022; Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission *Guideline for Preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment*, August 2020; H Millar, 'Police Occupational Culture and Bullying', *Handbooks of Workplace Bullying, Emotional Abuse and Harassment*, 2021; O.E Vere Taylor, R. Philpot, O. Fitton, Z Walkington, M Levine, 'Police whistleblowing: A systematic review of the likelihood (and the barriers and facilitators) of the willingness of police officers to report the misconduct of fellow officers', *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 2024; K. Hilton et al, *Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System*, December 2022

⁷⁸ JM Walker, A. Stones, 'Impact of Workplace Bullying Amongst First Responders-Systematic Review', *International Journal of Psychological Research and Reviews*, 2020; B.F Farr-Wharton, K. Shacklock, Y. Brunetto, S.T Teo, R. Farr-Wharton, 'Workplace bullying, workplace relationships and job outcomes for police officers in Australia', *Public Money & Management* (2017)

⁷⁹ Safe Work Australia *Psychological health and safety in the workplace* (February 2024).

⁸⁰ Davies, L.E, Brooks. M, Braithwaite. L, 'Compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and burnout, and their associations with anxiety and depression in UK police officers: A mixed method analysis', *Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles* (2022); ABC News *Compassion fatigue forcing police officers off the job* < <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-04-10/how-compassion-fatigue-is-forcing-police-officers-off-the-job/103692796> > (2024); Relationships Australia Queensland, *What is Compassion Fatigue*, December 2024

⁸¹ Stoewen DL. *Moving from compassion fatigue to compassion resilience* (2020)

Drivers and risk factors of workplace harm	How these drivers may manifest in NSWPF
Negative leadership styles	→ Autocratic behaviour that is strict and directive and discourages employee involvement in decision making → Favouritism and protectionism → Leadership responses (individual and institutional) which minimise, excuse and/or enable unsafe and unlawful workplace behaviour → Inconsistent role modelling of respectful and inclusive behaviour → Inconsistent leadership demonstration and practice of empathy, care and support → Inconsistent leadership development across the manager/supervisor/leader cohort → Inconsistent interpersonal skills among management and low knowledge and capability to identify and control psychosocial hazards, have challenging conversations and prevent unsafe and unlawful workplace conduct → An absence of specific leadership KPIs relating to staff safety, health and wellbeing
Poor organisational justice and a lack of accountability	→ Lack of fair processes and transparency regarding how complaint decisions and outcomes are reached → Lack of transparency and consistency in relation to merit-based decisions in promotion processes → Workplaces that protect 'high value' or 'indispensable' workers from accountability for unacceptable behaviour and other misconduct → Inconsistent access to professional development and other career progression opportunities → Environments where employees are not consistently treated with dignity and respect by leaders, managers and/or peers
Certain systems of work, job demands and low support	→ Shift work, after-hours work and high job demands → Priority given to results over worker health and safety → Low job control → Lack of resources, staff shortages and high staff turnover → Working in the community and exposure to traumatic incidents → Providing care or services to people who are distressed, confused, afraid, ill, affected by drugs or alcohol or receiving unwelcome or involuntary treatment → Working in unpredictable environments (where other people may pose a risk to workers' safety) → Isolated work in restrictive spaces, including cars or working from remote locations with limited supervision or restricted access to help and support
Gender inequality and low workforce diversity	→ Women's under-representation in the workforce and particularly in senior roles → Men primarily control decision-making → Low representation of people who are in a cultural, ethnic, religious, political, sexual preference or disability minority → An absence of workforce gender and diversity targets

Drivers and risk factors of workplace harm	How these drivers may manifest in NSWPF
Workplace cultures that tolerate disrespectful and harmful workplace behaviours	→ Acceptance of inappropriate behaviour (e.g. racially or sexually crude conversations, innuendo or offensive jokes are part of the accepted culture) → Structural and informal retaliation and victimisation for speaking up → Critical and negative interactions, particularly between managers/supervisors and staff → Interpersonal conflict and low knowledge and capability to resolve conflict early across the workforce → Exclusion or isolation of employees who do not conform to the dominant organisational culture or workplace group → Poor understanding among workplace leaders of the nature, drivers and impacts of sexual harassment

Experiences of harmful behaviours

It is difficult to attain an entirely accurate picture of the prevalence of harmful behaviour across NSWPF. The primary reason for this is that many people who experience harmful behaviour in the workplace do not report it. This is not particular to NSWPF – an abundance of research globally, including research into policing organisations, describes significant high levels of under-reporting.⁸² The reasons for not reporting can be grouped as follows:

- **Consequences:** A belief that nothing will happen, concerns about adverse career implications, fears for personal safety and other forms of retaliation. Examples of retaliation in policing include exclusion, and denial of backup.
- **Responsibility:** A belief it was not ‘my responsibility’ and that the onus of reporting should fall to others.
- **Knowledge and rules:** Lack of understanding of policy requirements and what constitutes a violation as well as uncertainty surrounding reporting mechanisms. In addition, police officers may hesitate to report if they believe the disciplinary actions are overly harsh or disproportionate, or that there is unfairness in the application of the rules of punishment.
- **Interpersonal relations:** Maintaining relations, including preserving future working relationships as well as preserving respect among peers.
- **Police culture and group relations:** The code of silence that discourages whistleblowing and a culture that fosters loyalty and solidarity among officers. Further, the tendency of officers to downplay misconduct within their own group or ranks – for example, characterising misconduct as mere jokes or misunderstandings. These factors can also extend to challenging the integrity of the reporting process and doubting the veracity of evidence presented.⁸³

We used a range of methods to understand the frequency and impact of harmful conduct in NSWPF. These included a voluntary and confidential workforce survey endorsed by NSWPF and conducted by the Social Research Centre, analysis of People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) data from 2020 to 2025, internal complaints figures, formal and informal interviews with over 500 current and former employees, and written submissions.

⁸² See for example, EY, *How can trust survive without integrity? Global Integrity Report 2024* (2024), and Taylor et al, ‘Police whistleblowing – A systematic review of the likelihood (and the barriers and facilitators) of the willingness of police officers to report the misconduct of fellow officers’, *Journal of Criminal Justice* 91 (2024) 102170.

⁸³ See generally, Taylor et al, ‘Police whistleblowing – A systematic review of the likelihood (and the barriers and facilitators) of the willingness of police officers to report the misconduct of fellow officers’, *Journal of Criminal Justice* 91 (2024) 102170. This article provides a recent review of ‘police whistleblowing’ literature to identify barriers and facilitators to officers challenging misconduct.

The picture that emerges is that unsafe and harmful behaviour – particularly bullying, discrimination, verbal abuse and/or threats, and victimisation – are likely to be occurring at unacceptable levels within NSWPF and present a risk that is systemic in nature. This means that the organisation's informal setting and cultural defaults create an environment where harmful behaviours can occur repeatedly, across units, and over time. It reflects patterns, not isolated incidents.

Importantly the formal settings of an organisation, such as policies, procedures and codes of conduct, may explicitly state that harmful behaviour is not tolerated and assign clear consequences for breaches of respectful behaviour; however, the gap between policy and practice is where the cultural picture of the organisation emerges.

I did not think it was a problem, I just thought it was lazy, whingeing cops. I did not realise how widespread and targeted the bullying was until I was in management myself.

Confidential interview

Of the 4,473 people who responded to the our workforce survey, 30 per cent responded that they had experienced bullying in the last five years. This was followed by experiences of discrimination (25 per cent), verbal abuse and/or threats (18 per cent), victimisation (15 per cent), and sexual harassment (9 per cent).

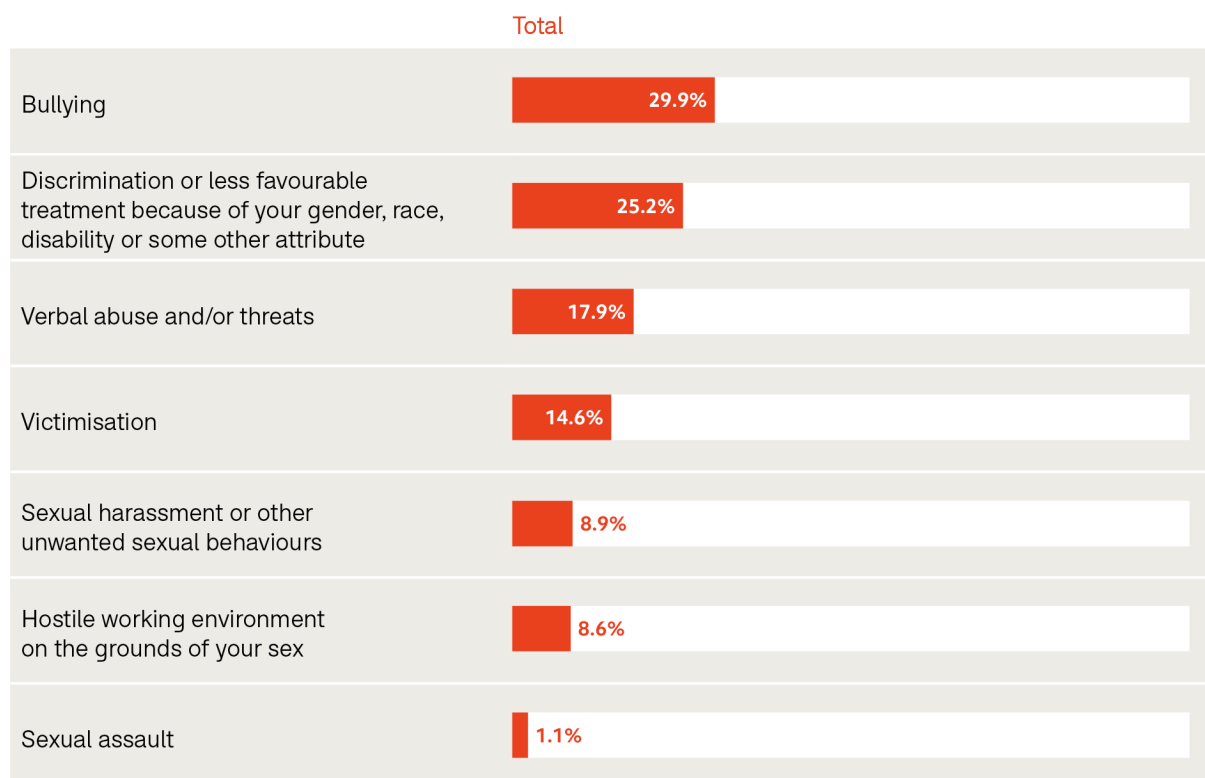
It is important to highlight that these are not substantiated reports of harm. We did not have a role in investigating individual complaints. The results reflect experiences, observations and perceptions as described by the workforce in response to an independent and confidential survey, and have been analysed and tested against other data points.

A note on methodology

Response bias is an important consideration in any voluntary survey, namely whether the findings are overstating negative behaviours due to a small number of unusually dissatisfied contributors. The key question from a methodological perspective is not the response rate itself, but whether respondents differ meaningfully from non-respondents in ways that would distort the results.

To minimise this risk, the survey data received by the Social Research Centre was weighted to match the known demographic profile of current employees. Weighting is a well-established and widely recommended approach; it helps ensure that the results represent the broader employee population. The Social Research Centre found no patterns to indicate response bias. Further there was substantial consistency between structured survey responses and open-ended comments. The Social Research Centre followed best practice in the design of the survey, which was endorsed by NSWPF, and all NSWPF members were given the opportunity to respond.

In summary, the methodological checks undertaken, combined with the consistency of the evidence across multiple question types and demographic groups, indicate that the results are credible and reflect the experiences of a broad cross section of current employees, rather than a small group of disproportionately negative respondents.

Figure 39. Cultural Review workforce survey – Experiences of unsafe workplace behaviours in the last five years (%)

Base: All respondents n=4,473.

Beyond experiencing these behaviours, many respondents also reported observing, witnessing or hearing directly from a co-worker about unsafe and unlawful behaviour over the last five years:

- 46 per cent witnessed or were directly told about bullying
- 30 per cent witnessed or were directly told about discrimination
- 24 per cent witnessed or were directly told about verbal abuse and/or threats
- 23 per cent witnessed or were directly told about sexual harassment or other unwanted sexual behaviours.

We address these behaviours in more detail below.

Bullying

Workplace bullying is repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety – such as verbal, physical and written abuse (including on social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and other chat groups).

Workforce survey results

Bullying was the most prevalent behaviour that respondents to our workforce survey said they experienced and witnessed, with 30 per cent responding that they had directly experienced bullying behaviours in the last five years.⁸⁴ This included sworn and unsworn staff, with a gender breakdown of more than 1 in 4 men and more than 1 in 3 women. The rates were higher for some marginalised groups, including people with a disability (47 per cent) and First Nations employees (37 per cent).

⁸⁴ The total response to the survey was 4,473, comprising 4,269 current employees and 204 former employees.

In addition, 18 per cent of all survey participants responded that they had experienced verbal abuse and threats from other employees within the last five years. These behaviours were more likely to be experienced by sworn employees (20 per cent, compared to 12 per cent for unsworn employees).

Nature of alleged bullying

The most frequent types of alleged bullying were being made to feel scared, small or embarrassed, not being told necessary information to do the job, being the subject of rumours and harmful comments, unfair treatment for speaking up, exclusion and denial of rewards or promotions.⁸⁵

In our workforce survey, respondents identified the main types of bullying behaviour that they had experienced in the last five years:

- being treated in a way that made them feel scared, small or embarrassed (69 per cent for all respondents)
- not being told information they needed to get their work done properly (62 per cent for all respondents)
- having rumours spread about them (56 per cent for all respondents)
- being subjected to repeated hurtful words or comments, or being made fun of (55 per cent for all respondents)
- being excluded or stopped from working with others or taking part in work (51 per cent for all respondents)
- being treated unfairly because you spoke up about alleged bullying or made a complaint (50 per cent for all respondents)
- being denied rewards or promotions (42% for all respondents).

Many of those who said they had experienced bullying in the last five years had also experienced the alleged behaviour in the last 12 months.

Alleged perpetrators

Responses to our workforce survey showed that direct managers and supervisors were primarily responsible for alleged bullying behaviour (44 per cent). Otherwise, people reported the perpetrators were their next level manager or supervisor (29 per cent), a co-worker at the same level (26 per cent) or a more senior co-worker (25 per cent).⁸⁶

Location, duration and frequency of alleged bullying

There were no significant differences across the regions related to survey participants who said they had experienced bullying in the last five years. This is important to dispel the suggestion we heard from some leaders that bullying was not taking place in their region.⁸⁷

A significant proportion of survey participants said that their most recent experience of bullying lasted for a year or longer (42 per cent). This was followed by periods of between 4 to 6 months (15 per cent), between 7 to 12 months (13 per cent), less than a month (11 per cent) and between 1 to 3 months (11 per cent).

The definition of bullying specifies that the behaviour must be repeated, and most people reported experiencing bullying across multiple occasions – 20 per cent of respondents reported experiencing bullying on five occasions, 12 per cent on three occasions, 9 per cent on two occasions, and 7 per cent on 10 occasions or more.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ A total of 871 survey participants answered the survey question about bullying behaviours experienced.

⁸⁶ A total of 871 survey participants answered the survey question about alleged perpetrators.

⁸⁷ In summary, experiences of bullying related to Metropolitan Field Operations (29 per cent), Regional Field Operations (30 per cent), Investigations and Counter Terrorism (29 per cent) and Corporate Services (29 per cent).

⁸⁸ A total of 871 survey participants answered the survey questions about the duration and frequency of bullying behaviours experienced.

What people said in interviews and written submissions

During interviews and in written submissions, some people described their perception of bullying as an established and even expected part of the workplace culture at NSWPF. Rather than being addressed or discouraged, bullying was perceived by some as actively encouraged across various levels of the organisation.

Bullying and harassment is as much a part of this organisation as wearing a uniform. Bullying is not only tolerated, it is actively encouraged and expected of all members at every level.

— Written submission

During confidential interviews, we heard about varied experiences of alleged bullying, ranging from overt intimidation and verbal abuse to more subtle forms such as exclusion and micromanagement.

The leadership team – they have this attitude. They yell. They micromanage ... If you ask them something, their attitude is that you're so stupid.

— Confidential interview

A couple of guys were picking on another constable. He was crying. I consoled him. For another cop to cry in front of another bunch of cops is a big deal. I went around the corner and blasted them, and they couldn't understand why I was blasting them. They just think it's funny.

— Confidential interview

Power imbalances were a recurring theme, with senior officers often identified as the source of bullying directed at junior staff. This included accounts of leaders 'applying heat' to staff who wanted to transfer out of their command.

We also heard another account from a civilian staff member about a sworn officer's conduct that included exclusion from team meetings, denial of flexibility, 'verbals and hissy fits'.

I'm a resilient person. But I was sitting in my car vomiting before coming to work.

— Confidential interview

We heard from some staff with diverse backgrounds who felt targeted. These concerns are explored further in the section on discrimination later in this chapter.

If I had a dollar for every time someone has called me a [racial slur], I could retire ...

— Confidential interview

The inspector made me feel uncomfortable, unwanted and, most damagingly, she made me feel different to my colleagues because I needed reasonable adjustments due to my disability ... I did not feel safe in my workplace under her management.

— Confidential interview

Some accounts described systemic bullying, where organisational processes – such as complaint handling, rostering or task allocation, and relief opportunities – were used to allegedly bully individuals, including those who had spoken out against misconduct. Retaliation for raising complaints is explored further in the section on victimisation later in this chapter.

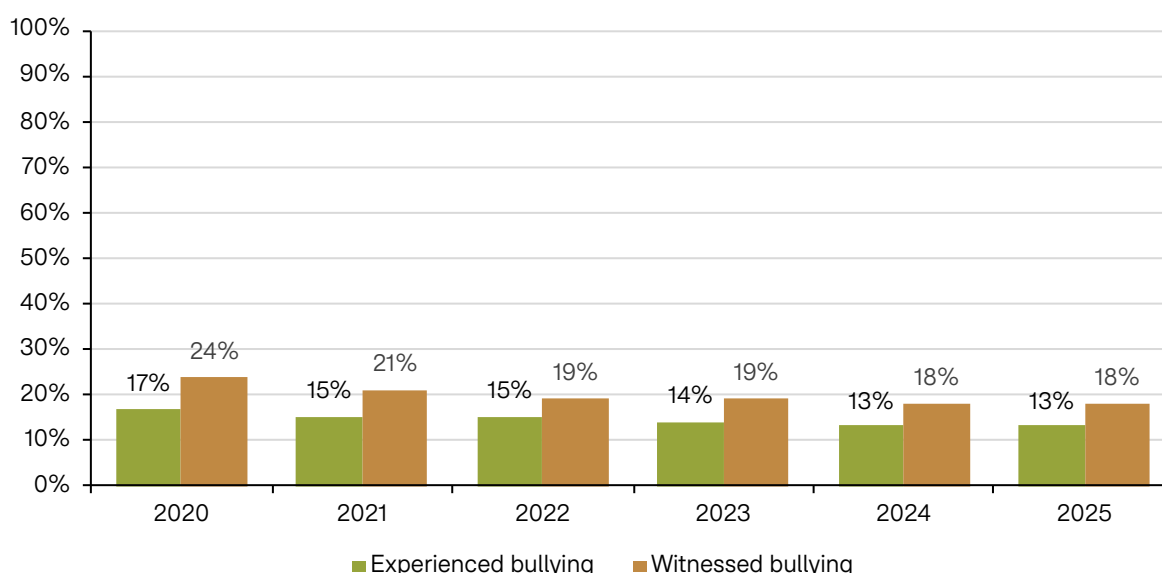
*If a supervisor doesn't like you, you are put on station duty or on the shifts no one wants to do.
If [human resources] doesn't like you, you won't be put on courses or approved for secondments.
It's an issue organisation wide.*

— Confidential interview

PMES and complaints Data

Over the last five years, PMES reports related to bullying have decreased from 17 per cent in 2020 to 13 per cent in 2025. Further, the latest 2025 PMES result for bullying does not differ significantly from the rest of the public sector or the communities and justice portfolio.

Figure 40. PMES 2020 to 2025 – Experiencing and witnessing bullying (in last 12 months)



Note: 20% response rate in 2020 (n=4,370); 33% in 2021 (n=7,507); 42% in 2022 (n=9,202); 56% in 2023 (n=11,808); 45% in 2024 (n=9,329); 42% in 2025 (n=8,446).

It is difficult to directly compare the PMES data with our workforce survey data, because the PMES is measuring experiences of bullying in the last 12 months, whereas our workforce survey is measuring experiences of bullying (and other harmful behaviours) over a period of 5 years. To the extent that the PMES data may indicate a lower level of prevalence of bullying compared to the consultation undertaken by the Cultural Review, we believe that an explanation may be a fear of speaking up about these concerns within the organisation. While this explanation is not definitive, participants may perceive a greater degree of safety when participating in an independent, confidential external survey. As indicated above, nearly half the people who said they experienced bullying in the last five years in our workforce survey also said they were treated unfairly for speaking up or making a complaint. Consistent with global research, NSWPF would not be alone when it comes to under-reporting of such kinds of behaviours.

In NSWPF's own complaints data, bullying is the top category of workplace behaviour matters reported internally. In 2025, there were 276 workplace behaviour matters, and 58 per cent of those matters were alleged bullying. Similarly, in 2024, there were 220 workplace behaviour matters, of which 50 per cent were alleged bullying. Workplace behaviour matters are most commonly raised against sergeants, senior constables and inspectors.⁸⁹

The NSWPF complaints data does not reflect the number of employees who say they are experiencing or witnessing bullying in the PMES, or in the Cultural Review survey, suggesting under-reporting. Further, a high proportion of bullying complaints are declined at NSWPF for not meeting threshold tests. For example, of all RWB misconduct matters raised:

- in 2025, 38 per cent did not meet the legal threshold tests and were declined
- in 2024, 31 per cent did not meet the legal threshold tests and were declined.

NSWPF explains this decline rate on the basis that alleged bullying was often found to be reasonable management action or workplace conflict. Of the bullying matters that do proceed to investigation, a high proportion were not sustained – for example, in 2024, 50 per cent of bullying allegations were not sustained.

It is important to consider the distinction between reasonable management action and bullying. NSWPF's Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guideline contains examples of reasonable actions relating to performance, task allocation, discipline, work directions, refusing requests and so on. When these actions or decisions are carried out in a reasonable and respectful manner, they are not bullying.⁹⁰

As noted above, in our workforce survey, participants were given the opportunity to identify types of bullying behaviours, and most behaviours identified by participants would not fall within the definition of reasonable management action. Further, in our workforce survey, 61 per cent of respondents believed their supervisors and managers understand the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying. These results were consistent among sworn and unsworn cohorts.

Conclusions on bullying

NSWPF should consider a range of possible contexts and reasons for the high perceptions of bullying within the workforce revealed through our consultations and the low number of sustained allegations of bullying through the NSWPF complaints process. These may include:

- a higher-than-usual tolerance for bullying behaviours among some people in the organisation, which is part of the risk profile discussed above in this chapter
- inconsistent role modelling among leaders, especially given the alleged perpetrators are predominantly direct managers and supervisors
- the potential for a high prevalence of workplace incivility, rudeness and conflict within teams, including other lower-level behaviours that may not meet the legal threshold of bullying
- inconsistent capability among middle managers to address lower-level behaviours, incivility, interpersonal conflict, performance conversations and poor communication (explored in the 'Trusted leadership' chapter of this report)
- barriers to speaking up, including victimisation.

⁸⁹ NSWPF internal complaints data 2020 to 2025 provided to the Cultural Review.

⁹⁰ *Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines*, Version 1.1, March 2025, p. 31

Discrimination

Discrimination is when someone is treated less favourably based on protected attributes such as race, age, sex, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Intersectional discrimination refers to the way that different aspects of a person's identity intersect with and impact one another. It highlights how the combined experience of multiple forms of discrimination is often greater than the sum of individual forms alone. Factors influencing a person's experience of discrimination may include their sex or gender identity, their sexual orientation, whether they have a disability, whether they identify as First Nations, whether they are from culturally and linguistically diverse or culturally and racially marginalised communities, and their socio-economic status.

Based on our consultations, discrimination is a significant concern for NSWPF, with sworn and unsworn staff across all regions reporting exposure to discriminatory behaviours, often over prolonged periods. Discrimination was the second most prevalent behaviour identified by participants to our workforce survey, at 25 per cent. By contrast, PMES data from 2020 to 2024 demonstrates lower levels of discrimination at NSWPF, with 9–14 per cent of participants saying they experienced discrimination each year. We note even lower reporting in the 2025 PMES results, where 6 per cent of NSWPF respondents reported experiencing discrimination in the last 12 months and 8 per cent witnessing discrimination. In terms of complaint handling, the most significant reports relating to discrimination pertain to harassment based on race and ethnicity. For example, in 2024, these matters constituted 8 per cent of workplace behaviour matters (220 matters).

In reconciling this data, we refer again to the barriers to speaking up and the heightened risks of harmful behaviours for minority cohorts. We encourage NSWPF to treat discrimination as a systemic risk to the organisation to be proactively dealt with via prevention initiatives.

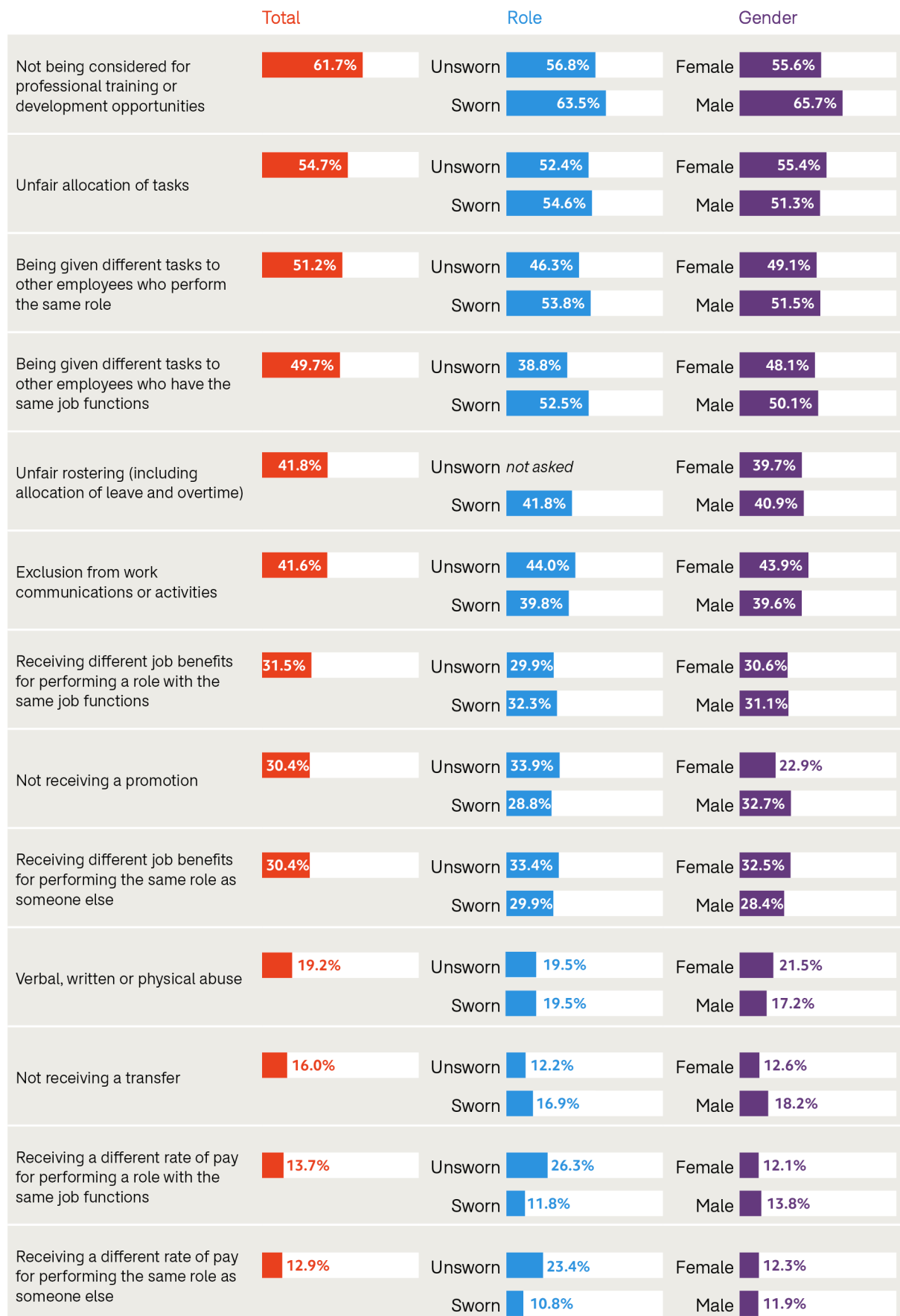
Workforce survey results

Of the 4,473 people who participated in our workforce Survey, 1 in 4 said that they had experienced discrimination in the last five years. Alleged discrimination was more likely to occur in the sworn workforce (27 per cent, compared to 18 per cent for the unsworn workforce, and the cohorts most impacted by alleged discrimination are people with a disability, LGBTQIA+ staff, First Nations workers, and employees who use a primary language other than English. Women are also significantly more likely to experience discrimination (32 per cent, compared 20 per cent for men). The alleged discriminatory behaviours were described as occurring across all NSWPF regions.

Nature of discrimination

The most common forms of discriminatory behaviours that NSWPF employees reported in the last five years included not being considered for professional training or development opportunities because of a protected attribute (62 per cent) and unfair task allocation (55 per cent). Others reported that they were given different tasks to other employees with the same job functions (50 per cent).⁹¹ Many of those who said they had experienced discrimination in the last five years had also experienced the alleged behaviour in the last 12 months.

⁹¹ A total of 543 survey participants answered the survey questions about the discriminatory behaviours experienced and the perceived reasons behind those behaviours.

Figure 41. Cultural Review workforce survey – Discriminatory behaviours experienced in the last five years (%)

Base: All respondents n=543; unsworn n=123; sworn n=377; female n=233; male n=257.

Reasons for alleged discriminatory behaviour

A person's sex was reported as the most common reason for discrimination (34 per cent). Sex discrimination was reported at higher rates by sworn staff (39 per cent, compared to 22 per cent for unsworn staff) and women (40 per cent, compared to 34 per cent for men).

Others believed they were discriminated against due to their:

- age (22 per cent)
- employment activity, including asking a question or raising a concern about entitlements or rights at work (20 per cent)
- race (20 per cent)
- responsibilities as a carer or parent (19 per cent)
- physical features, including height, weight, size, shape, facial features, hair or birthmarks (13 per cent)
- disability (8 per cent)
- gender identity (7 per cent)
- religious belief or activity (6 per cent).
- sexual orientation (5 per cent)

What people said in interviews and written submissions

Participants who participated in interview or made written submissions alleged discriminatory behaviours across a range of attribute groups. Consistent with results of our workforce survey, people described being overlooked for advancement, excluded from opportunities, or subjected to verbal abuse when raising concerns about inequitable treatment.

Sex and gender identity

Many women told us that there is still a belief in some parts of NSWPF that women are not suited to policing, and that some officers speak openly about not liking women in the force. Women also spoke about being underestimated, sidelined into roles perceived as appropriate for women, and needing to work twice as hard to achieve progression in the organisation.

At the core, there is a fundamental disrespect for women in policing. Not everyone holds this view, but it is part of our culture.

— Confidential interview

We heard examples of female managers being ostracised, undermined and bullied by all-male teams and unsupported in their roles by upper management.

I'm a tall, stoic female. But this tore strips off me, one strip at a time.

— Confidential interview

Women described being knocked back for relieving opportunities and promotion because of having children and facing difficulties because they worked part time or flexibly. We also heard stories from women about detriments and lack of opportunity and flexibility during pregnancy.

Women are leaving NSWPF at the same age and rank level where they are starting to have families. Flexibility does not work when there are some very inflexible people around.

— Confidential interview

Age

Older workers raised concerns about being overlooked for advancement and development. Staff also raised generational differences and needs as well as stereotypes and friction.

As a female officer with nearly three decades of service, I have consistently demonstrated commitment, resilience and professionalism. However, I have observed a recurring pattern where opportunities for advancement and development are more readily afforded to junior male officers and younger female colleagues. When I respectfully raised concerns regarding this disparity, I was met with hostility and verbal abuse from a senior officer.

— Written submission

Race

In relation to racism, we heard reports of jokes about accents, cultural stereotypes, racist words and a lack of cultural respect or understanding within the organisation. Employees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds spoke about feeling pressure to fit in with colleagues, sometimes at the expense of their own identity. Employees also raised concerns about barriers to promotion and feeling undervalued.

I know he doesn't like my accent and the way I speak, but he doesn't have to be rude to me.

— Confidential interview

First Nations staff described stereotypical comments about not being 'black enough', racial social media posts, lack of cultural safety, and not being supported to engage in Aboriginal networks within and outside of work. Some staff also described concerns about the way that members of First Nations communities are treated by sworn police colleagues, including derogatory remarks and offensive behaviour.

Disability

Employees with both physical and psychological disabilities spoke to us about a 'put down' culture, name-calling, humiliations and being underestimated. Employees spoke about hiding their disability as a form of survival.

When I got to work, I wouldn't allow myself to use my walking stick in the office because I knew it would make it worse.

— Confidential interview

Employees with a disability we spoke to described the difficulty of getting reasonable adjustments, including meaningful roles that suited their abilities, and a lack of job security. We also heard about stigma and harmful attitudes towards people with diagnosed mental health conditions and psychological injuries, which are captured as a disability under anti-discrimination legislation.

LGBTQIA+

LGBTQIA+ staff we spoke to raised examples of hurtful comments, hiding parts of themselves to fit in, homophobia, and stereotypes about diversity.

There can be a perception that I'm a diversity tick. That I got the job because I'm gay and a woman, rather than based on my merit.

— Confidential interview

There's a lot of homophobia that still exists ... Every year around Mardi Gras, the same commentary rears its head about their disgust and disdain towards people participating in the march and all the rest of it. What do you do? People might not necessarily agree with it, but people don't call it out.

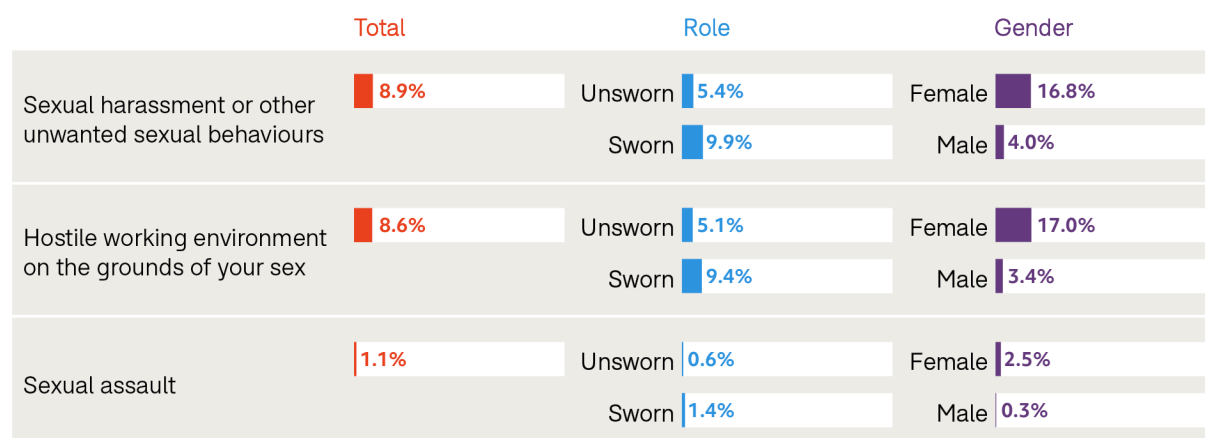
— Confidential interview

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is where a person makes an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, to another person; or engages in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to the other person, in circumstances where a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated that the other person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.

Of the 4,473 people who participated in our workforce survey, 9 per cent reported experiencing sexual harassment and a hostile working environment because of their sex in the last five years. Further, 1 per cent reported experiencing sexual assault over that period. Based on our review of a range of data, we believe these rates indicate that the prevalence of sexual harassment within NSWPF has improved over time – a positive indication of the organisation’s focus on reducing this behaviour, coupled with changes to legislation and increased community awareness of the incidence and impact of sexual harassment.

Figure 42. Cultural Review workforce survey – Experiences of unsafe or unlawful workplace behaviours (%)



Base: All respondents n=4,473; unsworn n=1,185; sworn n=3,008; female n=1,600; male n=2,436.

Sexual harassment has remained one of the four most common workplace behaviour matters reported internally to NSWPF between 2020 and 2025. Compared to other behaviours that are reported internally, a much higher proportion of sexual harassment allegations are referred to investigation and sustained. This is likely to indicate a decreasing tolerance for these behaviours within NSWPF. For example, based on internal complaints data we received:

- for the period 1 November 2020 until 1 November 2022, 66 per cent of all sexual harassment allegations were referred for investigation, compared to only 17 per cent of bullying allegations
- for the period 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024, sexual harassment accounted for the highest proportion of workplace behaviour matters referred for investigation – 71 per cent of sexual harassment allegations were referred and, of those, 70 per cent were sustained
- for the period 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025, 59 per cent of all sexual harassment allegations were referred for investigation and, of the matters finalised, 58 per cent were sustained.⁹²

⁹² NSWPF reports analysing their internal complaints data 2020 to 2025 were provided to the Review. Note that the analysis of data for 2023 was missing.

Experiences of sexual harassment reported through our workforce survey were consistent with national trends, with women and employees with diverse backgrounds and identities – including First Nations employees, LGBTQIA+ employees, and employees with a disability – more likely to report experiencing sexual harassment.⁹³ Sworn employees were also more likely than their unsworn employees to have experienced these behaviours. The response rate was also higher from younger people and former employees.

The reported prevalence of sexual harassment at NSWPF is lower than the national average and compares favourably to other large-scale surveys of workplace sexual harassment in Australia:

- The 2022 national survey of workplace sexual harassment found that a third of Australian workers (33 per cent) experienced workplace sexual harassment during the five-year period from 2017 to 2022.⁹⁴
- A 2022 survey of Ambulance Victoria employees found that 17.4 per cent of respondents had experienced sexual harassment within the organisation.⁹⁵

Lower prevalence of these behaviours is also reflected in NSWPF's PMES data from 2020 to 2025, which shows that 4–6 per cent of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment, and 3–4 per cent reported witnessing it.

The current prevalence reflects a significant reduction from a 2019 survey of NSWPF employees which found that 34 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men had experienced sexual harassment over the five-year period from 2013 to 2018.⁹⁶

Through our confidential and expert interviews, participants told us that, while sexual harassment had previously been normalised within NSWPF, prevention and accountability measures to minimise these unlawful behaviours had resulted in improvements over time. This shift was also reflected in our assessment of NSWPF's strategies and programs around respectful workplace behaviours. Some older women told us that younger police officers will more readily speak up and that, when it comes to sexual harassment, the culture is better than it used to be.

Young women won't put up with it. They'll tell people now. When I started, there was no one to tell. There are more women now. More women in the organisation makes the organisation better in lots of ways. It also makes it safer, but women need to be in influential positions.

— Confidential interview

Nonetheless, we heard a number of accounts of egregious and damaging sexual assault and sexual harassment from both current and former employees. These experiences continue to cause harm. There is further discussion of historical sexual assault matters later in this chapter.

We also heard that while sexual harassment may not be as overt as it previously was, some staff still experience sexualised jokes, innuendo and inappropriate comments about their appearance and private life. Data we received from NSWPF indicates the most common issue raised is behaviour that creates a sexually hostile work environment. The prevalence of sexual harassment and a hostile environment based on sex should also be considered alongside the experience of sex discrimination and intersectional discrimination, already detailed in this chapter. These combined behaviours persist within the organisation and are particularly damaging for women and people for diverse and under-represented cohorts within the workforce.

⁹³ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Fifth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces (2022)* –The AHRC found that non-binary people, people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, with an intersex variation or other, people with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people all experienced disproportionate rates of workplace sexual harassment in the last five years

⁹⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Fifth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces (2022)* –The AHRC found that 33% of people reported experiencing sexual harassed at work in the last five years (41% of women and 26% of men).

⁹⁵ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Independent Review into Workplace Equality in Ambulance Victoria (2022) Volume 1*, where 17.4% of survey respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment (335 out of the 1928 who responded), p.166.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Broderick & Co, *Review into the NSW Police Force Promotions System (2019)*, p.75.

Nature of sexual harassment

Survey participants who said they had experienced sexual harassment in the last five years told us the two most common behaviours were verbal forms of sexual harassment, including:

- sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made them feel offended (76 per cent)
- intrusive questions about their private life or physical appearance that made them feel offended (69 per cent).

Other common forms of alleged sexual harassment included:

- inappropriate staring or leering that made them feel intimidated (49 per cent)
- inappropriate physical contact (48 per cent)
- unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing (44 per cent).

In our interviews and written submissions, participants described sexualised jokes and sexual comments about their appearance, including using explicit text and Snapchat messages.

The harassment stills happens – happens over WhatsApp, happens in the muster room. People are part of it because they want to fit in.

— Confidential interview

We heard some stories about the targeting of probationary officers, including by field training officers who were signing off on their training and performance. Participants also described unwelcome sexual touching of varying degrees of seriousness, including instances where leaders misused their rank and position of power.

Senior men will use their rank to bring you in. One of the sergeants was like, 'We want to have you, you're keen and smart and it would be good to have a good-looking person to go into that unit'. And when I withdrew from that, that opportunity went away.

— Confidential interview

We see people engage in inappropriate banter because that's what's modelled to them by their supervisors.

— Confidential interview

I went to see a friend that had graduated from the police academy. I went out for team drinks. Her sergeants were there. One of them came up behind me and started touching me and whispered that 'You're not leaving until I have sex with you'. My friend came up and removed his hands and said 'Sorry, he gets handsy with the new girls'.

— Confidential interview

A hostile working environment based on sex

In our workforce survey, participants were asked whether they had experienced or witnessed conduct that created a hostile environment based on sex over the last five years. The most common response was criticism related to their sex or gender. Other common behaviours witnessed or experienced over that period included:

- hearing insults, derogatory comments, threats or ridicule about them or other people based on sex or gender
- seeing or hearing a colleague talking disrespectfully about sex, telling sexual jokes or making sexual innuendo
- making demeaning comments about physical attributes or topics such as pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause or genitalia size.

The results of our workforce survey are backed up by experiences shared during confidential interviews.

There is so much body shaming, harassment, comments of weight, sexiness, breasts – women just think they have to put with it. Otherwise, I would be in the boss's office every day complaining.

— Confidential interview

Sexual harassment is very cleverly disguised as banter. Either you have to laugh it off or you get ostracised by your colleagues.

— Confidential interview

Historical experiences of sexual assault

Although we did not examine historical experiences of sexual assault in detail, we became aware of a number of employees – predominantly women – who had experienced sexual assault during their employment with NSWPF. Some of these victim-survivors continue to serve today, while others have left the organisation. Their accounts highlight the enduring impact of workplace harm on wellbeing, trust and perceptions of organisational culture.

I joined the police force 30 years ago. As a probationary constable, I walked into the office of an ATO who switched the lights off, pushed me against the door, and kissed me. He asked me to reciprocate, and I didn't. I tried to placate him and didn't report it. I knew it would be career ending.

— Confidential interview

I didn't make a complaint because I was trying to move sections and didn't want to be seen as a woman who causes drama. But I told my supervisor that I didn't want to work with him anymore. He went to the inspector because there were four or five women who all wouldn't work with him, and he went to the inspector and said, 'When are you going to do something about this guy?'

— Informal interview

Other public sector organisations have recognised the importance of acknowledging historical harms and providing pathways for healing. Victoria Police, the Australian Defence Force and South Australia Police have each established restorative justice or redress schemes to respond to sexual harassment, discrimination and abuse within their ranks. These schemes are designed to provide victim-survivors with a safe, facilitated process to share their experiences directly with senior leaders, receive acknowledgement of the harm they experienced and, in some cases, access financial or nonfinancial redress.

Evaluations and reporting by the Commonwealth Ombudsman found that participants reported therapeutic benefits from being heard, while leaders gained critical insight into how organisational cultures had enabled harm.⁹⁷ Similarly, Victoria Police's restorative engagement and redress scheme has been cited as a credible model for rebuilding trust, combining restorative conferences with counselling, organisational apology and redress measures.

⁹⁷ Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2023 - [Fact-Sheet-Restorative-Engagement-September-2023-A2367155.pdf](#)

Restorative practices are increasingly used because formal complaint systems alone often fail to deliver healing or cultural change. Restorative approaches focus on acknowledgement, apology and repair. They provide victims with agency, allow organisations to confront cultural failings, and create opportunities for systemic reform. When delivered with specialist training, independent facilitation and strong safeguards, restorative engagement can be a powerful mechanism for both individual healing and organisational accountability.

While not within the terms of reference for the Cultural Review's recommendations, NSWPF could have regard to restorative engagement processes when considering how to best address historical sexual harassment and assault.

Impact of harmful behaviours

The negative impacts of unsafe and unlawful workplace behaviour on individuals and organisations are well evidenced.⁹⁸ Research links the behaviours explored in this chapter with increased mental health problems among victims, including depression and anxiety. Some research has linked workplace sexual harassment to PTSD symptoms, and workplace bullying to suicidal ideation.⁹⁹

The impacts of unsafe and harmful workplace behaviour on NSWPF employees are potentially significant. As explored in the 'Support and care' chapter of this report, NSWPF faces substantial and growing financial costs related to psychological injuries, due to harmful workplace behaviour such as bullying and harassment. Respondents to our workforce survey who said they had experienced harmful workplace behaviour reported a range of negative impacts, the most common being:

- negative impacts on mental health or stress (76 per cent)
- negative impacts on self-esteem and confidence (67 per cent).

More than half (54 per cent) experienced a negative impact on their employment, career or work.¹⁰⁰

We also heard distressing accounts from recently departed and current staff about the impact of harmful behaviour within the last five years.

A lot of my psychological trauma was due to bullying. I didn't leave the police force because of the job, I left because of the bullying. It went on and on and was relentless.

— Confidential interview

Prevention and early intervention mechanisms

While acknowledging the harm and impact that staff shared with us during the Cultural Review, we believe the NSWPF has the potential to ensure meaningful systems and cultural improvement.

NSWPF has foundations in place that it can build upon to ensure a more strategic approach to prevention and early intervention of RWB misconduct. Further, as discussed later in this chapter, there are mature complaint-handling processes in place, but there is more work to be done on leadership accountability for harmful behaviours, building trust in the internal complaints process, including by providing better and more tailored support to complainants and respondents, and supporting psychological safety to speak up.

⁹⁸ Safe Work Australia, 'Key Work Health and Safety Statistics Australia 2025' (2025); Australian Human Rights Commission, *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces* (2020); JM Walker, A. Stones, 'Impact of Workplace Bullying Amongst First Responders - Systematic Review', *International Journal of Psychological Research and Reviews*, 2020; B.F Farr-Wharton, K. Shacklock, Y. Brunetto, S.T Teo, R. Farr-Wharton, 'Workplace bullying, workplace relationships and job outcomes for police officers in Australia', *Public Money & Management* (2017)

⁹⁹ N Beck Hanson, M Louison Vang, M Beck Lichtenstein and J Pihl-Thingvad, 'Workplace Sexual Harassment Increases the Risk of PTSD Symptoms with Higher Frequency and Harassment Comin from a Colleague or Leader as Risk Factors', *Scandinavian Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, (2022); L.S Leach; L.S Too, P.J Batterham, K.M Kiely, H. Christensen, P. Butterworth, 'Workplace Bullying and Suicidal Ideation: Findings from an Australian Longitudinal Cohort Study of Mid-Aged Workers', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2020)

¹⁰⁰ A total of 1918 survey participants answered the survey questions about the impact of unsafe or harmful behaviours.

Policies, procedures and early intervention

NSWPF's suite of policies regarding a safe and respectful workplace articulate the organisation's commitment to maintaining a safe, ethical, inclusive and productive workplace in compliance with its obligations under relevant legislation. These commitments include no tolerance for unacceptable workplace behaviour and misconduct, and attracting, developing and retaining leaders who model and promote safe, ethical, inclusive and productive workplace behaviour.

The framework also acknowledges both the internal and external benefits of a respectful workplace, including a more capable, productive and adaptable workforce, improved health and wellbeing of all staff, and a more culturally aware workforce that reflects and better understands the community that it serves.¹⁰¹

NSWPF has increased its attention to prevention of and early intervention on unsafe and unlawful behaviour since 2022, when it conducted a significant review of the Respectful Workplace Behaviour (RWB) Guidelines. We acknowledge NSWPF's efforts to increase early resolution and reporting of unsafe and unlawful workplace conduct, including through structural change. The Safe Reporting Unit, which previously sat within Professional Standards Command, was moved to the Respectful Workplaces Unit, expanding the remit of the renamed Respectful Workplace and Safe Reporting Unit (RW&SRU) to encompass prevention and early intervention support and initiatives, as well as receiving reports of unacceptable behaviour and/or misconduct.

RW&SRU undertakes a range of prevention initiatives, including presentations and in-person sessions to educate participants on:

- how to identify RWB misconduct, the impact and harm it can cause and how to report it
- how to conduct professional and honest conversations about inappropriate or unacceptable conduct
- commands' positive-duty obligation to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment, and how senior leaders can create and maintain respectful workplace behaviours within commands.

RW&SRU also offers workshops to increase employees' awareness of their own 'DISC styles' and those of others. DISC profiles involve assessments that identify the primary traits of dominance (D), influence (I), steadiness (S) and conscientiousness (C), and how these behavioural traits influence workplace dynamics and culture.

RW&SRU also offers reactive services, including assistance with facilitated discussions to resolve conflict and grievances, and where allegations of RWB misconduct have been sustained, remediation sessions with the staff involved to prevent reoccurrence.

The Effective Workplace Unit within the People, Strategy and Engagement division of the People and Capability Command provides, on request, more bespoke support to commands via cultural reviews, with a view to improving leadership, culture and behaviour. These generally include a desktop review of workforce, PMES survey data and face-to-face interviews with staff. Findings are summarised and provided to commanders.

Figure 43. Good practice: Effective Workplace Unit

The Effective Workplace Unit was established to advise commands on workplace culture. The team's mandate includes conducting reviews, assessing culture through surveys, data analysis and interviews, and it includes both sworn and unsworn employees from diverse backgrounds. The team uses reports, coaching, and training to help leaders engage with issues affecting their commands, understand employee sentiment and shift workplace culture. Although the team is small in size and budget, we heard consistent positive feedback from commanders and employees in regions that have accessed support from the Effective Workplace Unit.

¹⁰¹ NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines.

More broadly, NSWPF's policy suite encourages employees to resolve conflict and grievances directly and early. This approach reflects good practice for reducing unsafe or unlawful workplace conduct from occurring by resolving interpersonal conflict before it escalates to unacceptable behaviour, and preventing the complaints process from being used for matters that do not meet the threshold of RWB misconduct. There is an emphasis on individuals taking responsibility for conflict resolution as a form of early intervention and prevention.

The NSWPF Workplace Grievance Procedure also provides employees with guidance to resolve conflict or disagreements about interpersonal, management or systems issues through self-resolution, assisted resolution, formal resolution and facilitated discussion.

Preventing misconduct and encouraging speaking up

NSWPF has also produced and shared a range of resources relating to misconduct prevention and speaking up. The Professional Standards Command has a Misconduct Prevention Library on the intranet, which includes resources relating to respectful workplace behaviours. These resources aim to prevent sexual harassment, bullying and other forms of harassment, and encourage active bystander action. The resources include:

- Police Education Training Environment (PETE) modules
- videos
- posters
- Police Monthly articles.

NSWPF provided us with an overview of presentations to the workforce conducted by the Misconduct Prevention Unit within the Professional Standards Command. Between 2020 and 2025, the unit conducted 52 presentations that had RWB components. In addition, RWB is integrated within education programs such as the Explorer, Influencer and Mastery leadership programs as well as the Professional Standards Enhancement Program. The latter program provides professional standards practitioners (professional standards duty officers, professional standards district inspector, professional standards managers and executive officers) with a greater understanding about their role in complaint management, including RWB matters.

Gap analysis and path forward

The current RWB Guidelines acknowledge the Australian Human Rights Commission's seven-standard framework for complying with the positive duty under the Sex Discrimination Act and articulate the actions NSWPF takes to meet some of the standards related to sexual harassment. This framework also provides a leading-practice approach for eliminating unsafe and unlawful workplace misconduct, including bullying and other psychosocial hazards identified by NSWPF.

Appendix B of this report includes a detailed assessment of NSWPF's relevant policies and procedures against this framework and identifies some gaps and suggestions to address them. Key gaps include (but are not limited to):

- the absence of an overarching RWB prevention and response plan that articulates actions under each of the seven standards, which senior leaders communicate to all employees and monitor regularly for effectiveness
- the absence of a monitoring and evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of NSWPF's education on expected standards of behaviour, and other prevention and response strategies
- not identifying discrimination and victimisation as psychological risks within the organisations' Psychosocial Risk Management Framework, and the absence of key contextualised drivers of RWB misconduct – for examples, see the 'Drivers and risk factors of workplace harm' section in this chapter.

Importantly, NSWPF's policies do not acknowledge or address intersectional discrimination and how it drives the disproportionate rates of harm experienced by diverse and under-represented cohorts in the NSWPF workforce.

We believe that these gaps could be addressed with a comprehensive two-year prevention strategy to reduce harmful behaviours and promote respect, safety and inclusion at NSWPF. The prevention strategy should address known hazards, including bullying, discrimination, harassment, victimisation, incivility, interpersonal conflict, barriers to speaking up and reporting, and heightened risks for marginalised cohorts. The Australian Human Rights Commission's seven-standard framework would provide a leading practice approach to draw from.

An overarching prevention strategy would help ensure that different parts of NSWPF work effectively together to address systemic risks and better measure and evaluate the impact of controls and interventions on reducing harm.

NSWPF should also update the Psychosocial Risk Management Framework to include discrimination and victimisation as significant psychosocial hazards.

Response mechanisms and pathways

NSWPF's documented process for managing RWB misconduct complaints is robust and should, theoretically, contribute to a culture where unsafe and unlawful conduct is not tolerated and dealt with in a safe and timely manner when it does occur. Employees can report unsafe and unlawful workplace behaviour via various pathways.¹⁰²

Figure 44. Summary of NSWPF complaints pathways



Staff can also contact RW&SRU for information and advice about behaviour they have experienced or witnessed to understand if it meets the definition of RWB misconduct. Under some circumstances, RW&SRU may initiate a misconduct process on behalf of an employee.

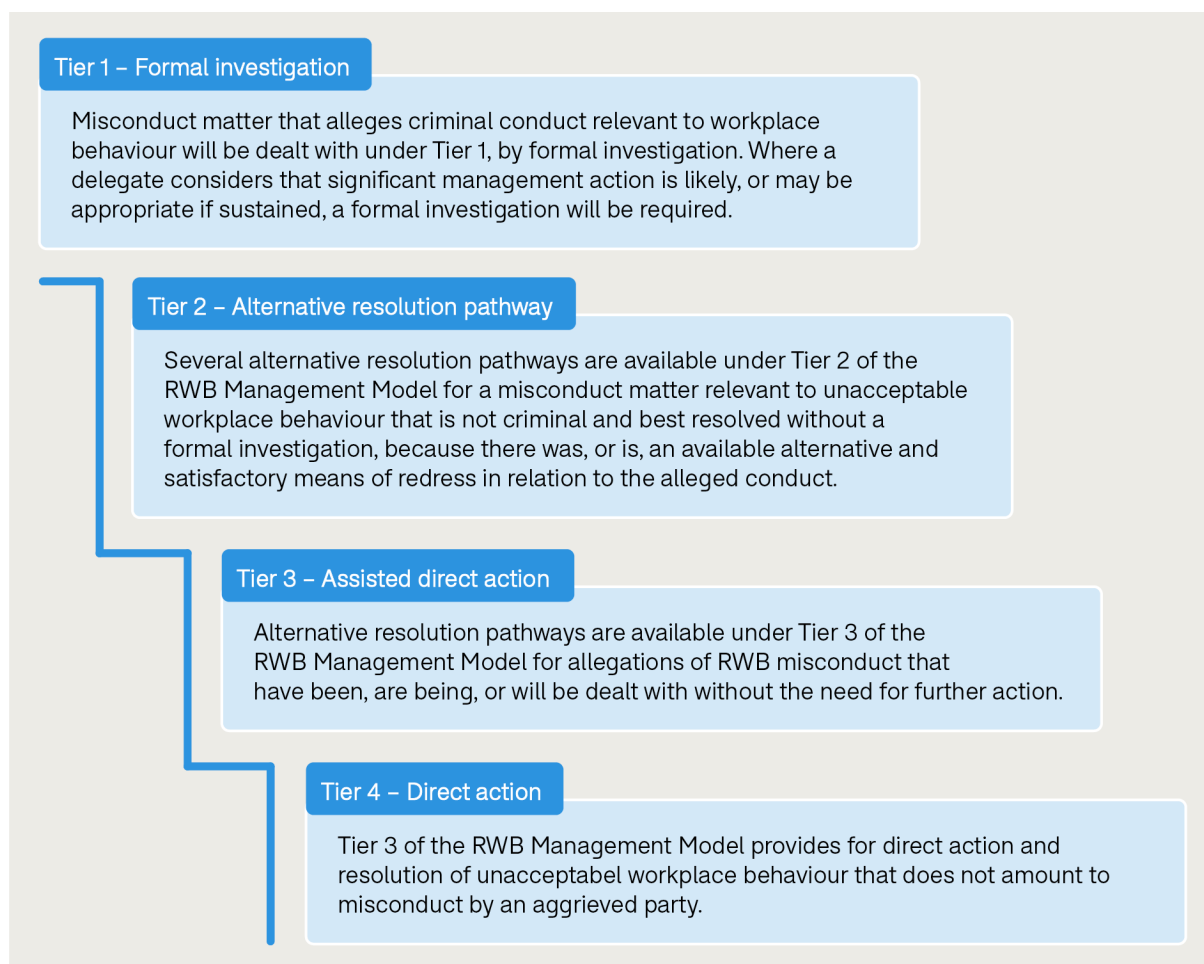
Complaints made against unsworn officers, which cannot be dealt with via informal resolution or remedial action at a local level, must be referred to the Administrative Officer Conduct Unit (AOCU) within Professional Standards Command. AOCU makes recommendations to the commander on an appropriate course of action and administers the misconduct process.

Where a complaint against a sworn officer is made to a commander, manager or supervisor, it is managed by the Complaint Management team (CMT), which consists of the commander, professional standards duty officer / district inspector, or professional standards manager and the executive officer. The professional standards duty officer / district inspector or professional standards manager will assess and triage the complaint and make a recommendation to the commander about the appropriate course of action.¹⁰³ This may be to decline it because the behaviour alleged does not meet the threshold of misconduct, or apply one of the resolution options described below.

¹⁰² NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines

¹⁰³ NSWPF Professional Standards Command Complaints Management Team (CMT) Guidelines; and NSWPF Process AAU Triage; NSWPF Professional Standards Managers Induction Guide

Figure 45. Resolution options



The commander endorses the recommendation of professional standards duty officer / district inspector or professional standards manager, and this is recorded in NSWPF's Misconduct Matters Information System (IAPro), which then triggers a mandatory referral to the Assessment and Advisory Unit (AAU) for oversight. The AAU reviews all RWB matters that have been entered into IAPro and will forward some matters to the Assessment and Advisory Panel (AAP) for recommendation to ensure organisational consistency. The AAP provides advice and guidance to commanders and delegates in relation to RWB misconduct matters. Where a commander's recommendations differ to the AAU's, the commander is required to provide comment as to why. All of these stages are recorded in IAPro.

The centralised triage process combined with recording of matters in IAPro are important safeguards to supporting the appropriate and consistent management of RWB matters in NSWPF.

Regardless of which reporting pathway a person chooses, most RWB misconduct complaints are triaged back to and managed by the command. Matters are only dealt with by Professional Standards Command when an investigation requires specialist skills or is likely to require significant resourcing.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Expert Interview

This means the commander is ultimately responsible for ensuring the appropriate resolution process is applied, and for ensuring risk management strategies and welfare supports are put in place for impacted people. CMT also allocates an investigator, where a formal investigation is appropriate (that is, Tier 1). In doing so, CMT is required to consider the investigator's skill, knowledge, capability, experience, training and any actual or perceived risks or conflicts of interest.¹⁰⁵ The relevant policies governing these processes require the commander, professional standards duty officer / district inspector or professional standards manager and investigator to identify any conflicts of interest to ensure procedural fairness.

The above process is supported by a significant suite of NSWPF policies and guidelines, and reflects core criteria for good complaint handling as defined by the Commonwealth Ombudsman, including the following eight steps:

1. Identify and log the complaint
2. Acknowledge the complaint
3. Assess and triage
4. Resolve early or investigate
5. Consider potential remedies
6. Communicate the outcome
7. Finalise or escalate
8. Feedback systemic issues.¹⁰⁶

Figure 46. Good practice: Alternative resolution pathways

NSWPF offers a range of pathways to resolve RWB matters early, proportionately and fairly, taking a leading practice approach. These pathways include:

- Command facilitated strategies
- Commander outcome direction
- Commander/manager conversation
- Commander/manager sets expectations
- Increased supervision
- Mentoring
- Professional development
- Supervisor conversation – advice and guidance
- RW&SRU facilitated strategies
- RWB training and self-awareness session
- RWB remediation session
- RWB professional conversations session
- Command solutions workshop
- Facilitated discussion.

NSWPF has a low recidivism rate when it comes to using alternative resolution pathways.

¹⁰⁵ NSWPF Professional Standards Command Complaints Management Team (CMT) Guidelines

¹⁰⁶ Commonwealth Ombudsman *Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide*

Accountability for harmful behaviours

While NSWPF has robust policies and processes for managing RWB misconduct, we heard significant concerns about how these operate in practice, particularly in ensuring accountability for harmful behaviours. Those concerns relate to inconsistent leadership role modelling and capability, as well as low trust in the internal complaints process.

If a location is losing a large amount of staff – the organisation should question that and take action. If that command is not performing and people are leaving – they should identify this. They should get people who are bullying and harassing. There’s no accountability based on numerous complaints.

— Confidential interview

Inconsistent leadership role modelling and capability

In our consultations, leaders in a person’s reporting line were identified as the most common perpetrators of unsafe behaviours.

In our workforce survey, respondents were asked to identify who had perpetrated the most recent harmful behaviour they had allegedly experienced:

- 41 per cent experienced it from one of their managers or supervisors
- 30 per cent experienced it from their next-level manager or supervisor
- 22 per cent experienced it from a co-worker, regardless of whether they were more senior or at the same level
- 15 per cent experienced it from another manager or supervisor
- only 13 per cent experienced it from a co-worker who was more junior.¹⁰⁷

In addition, participants in our workforce survey identified poor leadership accountability for unsafe behaviours and inequality as well as a lack of capability for managing incivility and resolving conflict. These are essential skills for preventing matters from escalating and ensuring team cohesion and performance. In the workforce survey:

- only 49 per cent of respondents believed that supervisors and managers were accountable for unsafe behaviours and inequality
- only 41 per cent of respondents believed that supervisors and managers had the skills to manage rudeness, incivility and poor communication in their teams
- only 37 per cent of respondents believed that supervisors and managers proactively resolve conflict between employees in their teams.¹⁰⁸

Every time a policy comes out when there’s an issue, you have to go to your manager or senior manager or superintendent. There’s no instruction about what you do when those people are causing you the issue. I don’t expect it to be perfect, I just want it to be consistent. If they don’t role model it, it’s never going to take root.

— Confidential interview

Employees we spoke to said that employees who regularly demonstrate unsafe and harmful behaviour are generally well known for it, and that leaders fail to address it – and sometimes engage in the same behaviour themselves.

I know various people leave because of one person and they don’t remove that person.

— Expert interview

¹⁰⁷ A total of 1,918 survey participants answered the survey question about the role of the person/people responsible for their most recent incident of harmful behaviour.

¹⁰⁸ A total of 4,473 survey participants responded to the questions concerning leadership capability.

In our chapter ‘Trusted leadership’, we recommend that NSWPF strengthen the accountability of senior leaders for culture and people management by embedding explicit KPIs into performance frameworks covering employee engagement, retention, diversity, and respectful workplace behaviours. We acknowledge that when it comes to respectful workplace behaviours, NSWPF has embedded a number of relevant reportable indicators, including:

- mandatory training
- complaint timeliness
- workplace injury leave
- sick leave
- misconduct prevention – corporate and local risks.¹⁰⁹

What is important is that these indicators are part of performance conversations and promotions processes. In addition, where PMES and IAPro data reveals particular commands as ‘hotspots’ for workplace behaviour matters and grievance handling, we would expect senior leaders to be held to account through performance processes to proactively address those concerns and risks, including with the expert support of Professional Standards Command (PSC), RW&SRU and the Effective Workplace Unit.

The complaint timeliness data we received demonstrated triage and investigation timeliness had gradually improved between 2020 and 2024. This is commendable.

Requisite timelines include:

- Assessment: within 7 days of the date the complaint was made
- Triage: within 21 days of the date the complaint was made
- Resolution: between 28 and 45 days for non-investigation options, or between 90 and 150 days for investigations.

In 2024, triage timeliness was 88 per cent against a corporate standard of 100 per cent, and investigation timeliness was 81 per cent against a corporate standard of 70 per cent.¹¹⁰

Further, in relation to misconduct prevention, we understand that respectful workplace behaviours were identified as a corporate risk in 2024–25. In our view, this should remain as a corporate risk for the reasons detailed in this chapter.

Low trust in the complaints process

Through our workforce survey, we heard that the most common response to harmful workplace behaviour at NSWPF was for victims to avoid the perpetrator (47 per cent), followed by thoughts of leaving the organisation (45 per cent). Only 19 per cent of people spoke to the person or people involved, and only 13 per cent made a formal report.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Misconduct Prevention Planning Guidelines, Professional Standards Command, January 2024. See also COMPASS Briefing Note, provided to the Review by the Governance, Audit and Risk Directorate.

¹¹⁰ Investigation timeliness is benchmarked against the seriousness of the allegation and complexity of the investigation.

¹¹¹ A total of 1918 survey participants answered the survey question about how they responded following their most recent incident of harmful behaviour.

Lack of awareness of reporting pathways

Of those who did make a formal report, most reported to their manager or supervisor (54 per cent), or another manager or supervisor (35 per cent) followed by reporting the matter to Professional Standards Command (20 per cent). Only 5 per cent of people made a formal report to RW&SRU. We also reviewed data on the number of contacts made to RW&SRU – 69 matters in 2023, 53 in 2024 and 17 year-to-date for 2025.¹¹²

Many people told us during consultations, including site visits, that they would not know how to report outside of their command. This could be a significant barrier, particularly if the alleged perpetrator is a manager or supervisor, as our consultations suggest. NSWPF could address this concern through increasing its existing awareness campaigns around reporting, including a focus on the different reporting pathways and the role of RW&SRU. This could be measured in part by increased contact with, and support provided by, RW&SRU.

People have low awareness of avenues to raise a complaint outside their chain of command and they have no confidence or trust in the process.

— Confidential interview

Perception of a lack of outcomes

Notwithstanding NSWPF's guiding principle to deal with RWB misconduct matters quickly, proportionately and fairly, survey respondents indicated poor outcomes after making a formal report internally. One third indicated that there was no outcome to their report/complaint (33 per cent).

During our interviews, participants also described a lack of outcomes or consequences, including the transfer of perpetrators.

Our office put in a combined complaint about him. One of the constables in the office put in a timeline of things that had happened. Respectful Workplaces came in. He was spoken to. It was quiet for a while but then it came up again. I just avoided him. I didn't want to deal with his tantrums anymore. He would yell at people. People would often say 'I've never been spoken to the way he spoke to me'. We lost two other detectives out of the office because of him. The commander watched it all happen. He's a lovely man but he allowed this to happen.

— Confidential interview

My supervisor was a bully, and he was investigated and was removed from his position in [X] and sent to another location in the city and now he's supervising in general duties. I said he should never be supervising. I and six other officers had raised flags about him, and nothing happened. The complaints were finally sustained.

— Confidential interview

The perception of a lack of outcomes may be explained in part by the way NSWPF communicates and promotes the different options for resolving RWB matters. There are a range of alternative resolution pathways for RWB matters, which we have flagged as good practice, but which are described by the police as declining to investigate a matter under ss 132(e) or 132(a) of the *Police Act 1990*. More positive communication and expectation management with the workforce about the use and benefits of different resolution options for RWB matters will assist in building trust.

¹¹² A smaller number of participants to the survey said they made a formal report, namely 252.

In addition, NSWPF should enhance its existing efforts to report on complaint outcomes by introducing regular de-identified reporting to the workforce that details the volume of complaints made, top allegation types, complaints closed, timeliness, and the number of type of resolution and disciplinary actions taken. This will create greater transparency and confidence around the way that RWB matters are managed.

Perception of inconsistent complaint management

Another key concern raised during our consultation was the inconsistent handling of reports and inconsistent investigation outcomes. This included concerns about senior officers being treated more leniently than junior officers when it comes to unsafe and harmful behaviours, and that senior officers give favourable treatment to their friends. These concerns have also been raised over time with LECC and reported on by LECC.¹¹³

There's a lack of accountability for commissioned officers at inspector level and above if there's bullying or harassment or discriminatory behaviour. There's no correlation with what people below that rank get. That rank allows people to get away with it. It's a veil of secrecy for anyone above the rank of sergeant and they get away with it.

— Confidential interview

There are a number of senior officers with numerous complaints made against them, regarding allegations of bullying and harassment, however, they have been able to remain in the organisation and have damaged countless officers and civilians across numerous commands.

— Confidential interview

Some participants specifically raised a case for stronger independence or external oversight of the way NSWPF manages internal complaints, to ensure perpetrators are being held to account, conflicts of interests are better managed, and harmful behaviour is not repeated.

Complaints should be investigated by another command. [X] had to investigate a colleague – when they worked with him every day. I have investigated him, now I have to rely on him backing me up.

— Confidential interview

There should be independent HR or a regulator regarding industrial relations. We need someone that can audit commands. They shouldn't have any relationships with police.

— Confidential interview

Professional Standards Command should address perceptions and concerns about favouritism, bias and the inconsistent handling of complaints by increasing its audits and checks of RWB matters.

In relation to external oversight, we spoke with LECC, which oversees Tier 1 formal investigations under the RWB Management Model.¹¹⁴ While RWB matters can be reported directly to LECC, we were told these complaints are generally referred back to NSWPF for triage.

¹¹³ Law Enforcement Conduct Commission, Operation Harrisdale, A report under section 132 of the *Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act* (July 2024), see Part 19.

¹¹⁴ Expert interview with LECC dated 25 July 2025.

In 2024–25, LECC oversaw 122 RWB matters, accounting for 5 per cent of the overall matters it reviewed that financial year. LECC provided us with a sample of de-identified RWB case studies. There were a number of police investigations of RWB matters that were either unsustainable or resulted in minimal or no disciplinary action, where LECC recommended stronger disciplinary action and/or a systemic response to the matter. Examples of action taken by LECC included:

- a direction that an investigation take place
- a request to reconsider a decision where officers received ‘not sustained’ findings
- a request for a finding to be made against a stronger allegation to reflect the misconduct exhibited
- a request for additional training to be provided within a command
- enquiries about steps to address fears of reprisal within a command
- enquiries about managerial transfers and how to ensure conduct is not repeated
- enquiries about whether a command considered involving the Internal Witness Support Unit.¹¹⁵

We understand through our consultations and review of s. 14 guidelines that LECC does not have an oversight role when it comes to Tier 2 and Tier 3 RWB matters. A significant number of RWB matters are managed via alternative resolution pathways – for example, 28 per cent of matters were resolved in this way in 2024, and 24 per cent in 2025. To improve consistency and trust, NSWPF should consider a role for LECC in overseeing all RWB matters. This would involve more regular reviews of the management and investigation of Tier 1, 2 and 3 matters, and may necessitate increased resourcing.¹¹⁶

Low satisfaction with complaints process

In our workforce survey, 70 per cent of respondents who had reported unsafe or unlawful workplace conduct were either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the complaints process.

There was significant variation in reporters’ satisfaction with the process depending on the behaviour they were reporting – 95 per cent of employees who had reported discrimination were either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the process, compared to 74 per cent for employees who had experienced bullying, and 27 per cent for employees who had experienced sexual harassment.

Some of these concerns related to feelings of a lack of safety and support through the process.

Just under a quarter of survey participants (24 per cent) agreed that they felt safe during the formal reporting/complaints process, and only 25 per cent felt supported. This was much lower for people with a disability and LGBTQIA+ people.

No support. I had no one. Nothing was offered to me. No updates were given. I was the one seeking the updates.

— Written submission

We appreciate that Professional Standards Command provides comprehensive guidance as well as training and advice offered to complaint management teams to enable the safe, fair and skilled management of complaints. This includes Misconduct Management Training and the Professional Standards Enhancement Program. There is also the Internal Witness Support Unit for those who are registered.

¹¹⁵ See generally ss 99(3), 102 and 105 of the *Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act 2016* (NSW) relating to the oversight of police investigations.

¹¹⁶ The Review notes that LECC has also advocated for changes to its powers to improve its oversight functions, see LECC Annual Report 2024–25, at 8 and Parliamentary Committee on the Ombudsman, the LECC and the Crime Commission, 2024 review of annual and other reports of oversight agencies, Report 3/58 (October 2025), Chapter 1.

Nonetheless, given our consultations, we consider it would be beneficial to be more explicit in embedding a person-centred and trauma-informed approach to complaint management for RWB matters, including in guidance and training for complaint handlers. NSWPF recently took this approach with new domestic and family violence guidance, which spells out what a trauma-informed and victim-centric approach means in this context.¹¹⁷

There is a range of ways that NSWPF could build upon its existing prevention and response mechanisms to further embed a person-centred, trauma-informed approach for RWB matters. This could include:

- ensuring aggrieved parties have a greater sense of control and empowerment over the choice of resolution pathways, including triage decisions
- enhancing training for complaint handlers on person-centred, trauma-informed approaches to complaint handling and investigations
- broadening the availability of expert advice and support provided to commands and participants in RWB matters by Professional Standards Command, RW&SRU and the Internal Witness Support Unit.

Improving psychological safety

At the beginning of this chapter, we outlined a range of drivers and risk factors for NSWPF to consider when it comes to bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment, including power imbalances and a fear of speaking up. We also highlighted the research on under-reporting of harmful behaviours and, in particular, the barriers in policing organisations, which can include a code of loyalty and silence that discourages whistleblowing and downplays misconduct.

NSWPF is to be commended for putting place a range of mechanisms to encourage the reporting of misconduct and speaking up to prevent and address poor behaviours, including:

- a mandatory obligation for sworn officers to report police misconduct¹¹⁸
- confidentiality protections for complainants¹¹⁹
- the Internal Witness Support Unit
- anonymous reporting
- a 'Speak Up' communications campaign and resources
- online bystander training.

During consultation, we explored psychological safety in relation to NSWPF's efforts to address harmful behaviours, through PMES data, our survey, interviews and written submissions. We concluded that NSWPF's existing mechanisms and prevention efforts are making a difference, especially judging by improvements in PMES results related to grievance handling. However, there is more work to be done in relation to addressing barriers to reporting, fears of victimisation, and the likelihood of low levels of bystander action.

¹¹⁷ Domestic and Family Violence Guidelines, Version 2.0 (2025), see page 18.

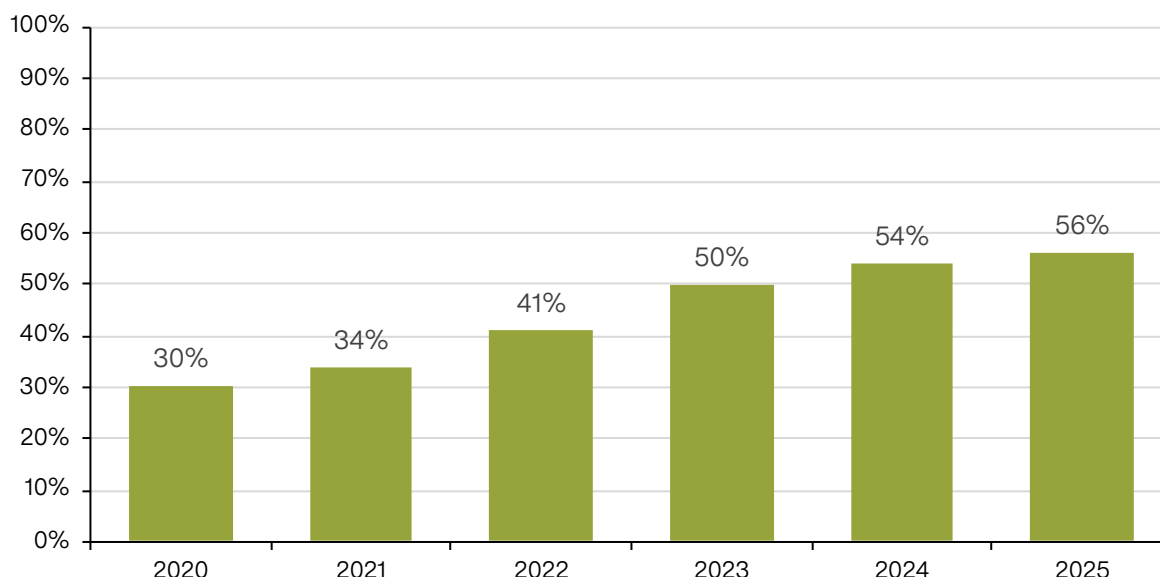
¹¹⁸ See s. 211F of the *Police Act 1990* (NSW)

¹¹⁹ See s.169A of the *Police Act 1990* (NSW)

Barriers to reporting harmful behaviours

NSWPF's PMES data on grievance handling has been steadily improving over the period 2020 to 2025, revealing increased confidence and feelings of safety when raising concerns.¹²⁰ However, the results are significantly lower than the rest of the public sector.¹²¹

Figure 47. PMES 2020 to 2025 – Grievance handling (in last 12 months)



Note: 20% response rate in 2020 (n=4,370); 33% in 2021 (n=7,507); 42% in 2022 (n=9,202); 56% in 2023 (n=11,808); 45% in 2024 (n=9,329); 42% in 2025 (n=8,446).

In our workforce survey, the key barriers to reporting unsafe and unlawful complaints included:¹²²

- people thinking reporting would not change things or nothing would be done (61 per cent)
- people lacking confidence in the process and how well victims might be supported (51 per cent).

Other barriers to reporting included concerns regarding a lack of confidentiality of the reporting/complaint process (44 per cent).

It's supposed to be confidential but in cops there is always rumour and people work out – if there were two of you at a job it's pretty clear if a complaint is raised who made the complaint. It's a challenging system. So people struggle with having to report against a colleague when they don't want to.

— Confidential interview

I don't feel confident to raise a complaint in my unit. I know complaints are discussed openly in management meetings.

— Confidential interview

¹²⁰ The PMES question to measure grievance handling has changed over time. From 2023-2025, the question was – 'If I experienced a grievance at work, I would be comfortable in raising it with my organisation.' In 2022, the question was 'If I raised a grievance in my organisation, it would be handled in a fair and objective manner.' In 2020 and 2021, the question was 'I have confidence in the ways my organisation handles grievances.' A grievance is defined in the PMES as any type of problem, concern, dispute, or complaint related to work or the work environment which cannot be resolved through usual communication.

¹²¹ The comparator is the NSW public sector as a whole, including all NSW Government employees who participated in the survey. The score for NSWPF to this question was a difference in percentage score of -8.

¹²² A total of 1,646 survey participants answered the survey question about why they did not formally report or complain about the behaviour.

Even though the complaint was anonymous, everyone said I will never make a complaint again because [Professional Standards Command] gave it straight back to him.

— Confidential interview

In the workforce survey, nearly 4 in 10 people reported genuine fears that reporting will negatively impact their career aspirations (39 per cent).

If you put in a complaint, you may as well have set alight to your career.

— Confidential interview

Those who speak up risk being targeted, denied promotions, or having workplace benefits and opportunities withdrawn. There is a very real fear of being bullied, isolated, or ostracised by colleagues and management. This culture of silence and retaliation discourages reporting and makes it extremely difficult for junior officers to feel safe or supported in coming forward.

— Written submission

People who had experienced sexual harassment reported this concern the least, which is a further indication of the positive work NSWPF has undertaken to reduce this conduct in the workplace.

Victimisation

Victimisation is subjecting someone to a detriment or threatening to subject someone to detriment because they have lodged a complaint, they intend to lodge a complaint, or they are involved in a complaint of bullying, discrimination, harassment or sexual harassment.¹²³

In our workforce survey, 15 per cent of respondents reported experiencing victimisation in the last five years. Victimisation was higher among sworn employees (15 per cent, compared to 11 per cent for unsworn employees) and women (17 per cent, compared to 12 per cent for men). Employees with diverse backgrounds and identities were also more likely to be impacted by victimisation. Victimisation was reported at similar levels across all regions.

During confidential interviews, we heard about employees who had experienced unsafe and harmful behaviours being treated as a problem or a troublemaker if they spoke up or made a complaint.

Most people know there is no point raising issues. You don't get a win. All you do is cause problems for yourself.

— Confidential interview

Participants described being targeted or punished for making a complaint, including missing out on opportunities like secondments or training, or, worse, being unfairly scrutinised for performance or subjected to retaliation, microaggressions or petty punishments. This included undesirable rosters, exclusion and excessive workloads.

They get their retribution in sneaky ways. You don't get a transfer, you get put on the bad jobs, bad rosters, no access to training.

— Confidential interview

I'd never had negative feedback in my career until I made that complaint. Then I started getting all manner of different things raised.

— Confidential interview

Other employees described being excluded by their team after making a complaint and being subject to gossip and jokes about 'dobbing' or labelled a 'snitch'. This includes women being described as 'home wreckers' if they made complaints about sexual harassment.

¹²³ Definition from the NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviour Guidelines, Version 1.1, March 2025.

Active bystander action

In our consultations, we found that many people witnessed harmful behaviours, but few took direct bystander action or made reports.

In our workforce survey, 46 per cent of respondents said they observed, witnessed or heard directly from a co-worker about unsafe and unlawful behaviour; however, only 8 per cent made a formal report.¹²⁴ A further 18 per cent took no action.

The most common bystander actions included indirect bystander action (which is not to be confused with inaction). This included:

- talking with or listening to the person who experienced the behaviour about the incident (51 per cent) – this was higher among women (57 per cent, compared to 47 per cent for men)
- having an informal conversation with their supervisor or manager (25 per cent) – this was higher among women (28 per cent, compared to 24 per cent for men).

These can be effective strategies as long as they are followed by further action from management to address the harmful behaviour or at least prevent it from reoccurring.

Close to one in five bystanders (18 per cent) indicated they spoke to the person who engaged in the conduct – this was higher among sworn staff (19 per cent, compared to 12 per cent for unsworn staff) and men (20 per cent, compared to 15 per cent for women).

The results indicate a potential low desire, confidence and/or safety among the workforce to take direct forms of bystander action – that is, to address the person engaging in the offending conduct or make a formal report.

Cultivating and normalising safe, respectful and active bystander intervention is an important early intervention strategy, particularly in environments where victims of unsafe or unlawful workplace conduct do not feel safe or confident to resolve or report it. Equipping and empowering individuals to identify and address harmful behaviour when they observe or hear about it contributes to an employer's endeavours to identify and control psychosocial hazards, which they are required to do to meet their positive-duty obligations. Although research on the effectiveness of bystander training in police environments is scarce, two evaluated programs are worthy of mention:

- The Ethical Policing is Courageous (EPIC) program, developed in New Orleans, is based on problem-based learning rather than lecture-based learning (where teaching provides answers to students) into basic law enforcement training. It encourages officers to be active bystanders, intervening when witnessing unethical behaviour. Findings suggest that officers who underwent this training were more willing to report corrupt behaviour compared to those who did not.
- The Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) program was developed in Washington DC, and trains officers on how to intervene as well as how to be the recipient of an intervention, and how to follow-up regarding the intervention, thereby creating a safe, respectful and active bystander culture.¹²⁵

We note that NSWPF has online bystander training. In considering future training, the ABLE model may be particularly useful for NSWPF, where conflict avoidance and fear of negative peer reaction for speaking up is potentially high. A necessary precursor to the success of any active bystander training is removing the fear of retaliation and adverse career impacts. This can only be achieved when leaders from the top down demonstrate and ensure that victims and bystanders will be supported rather than punished for speaking up.

If you speak against one person, everyone is against you. No one wants to speak against anyone.

— Confidential interview

¹²⁴ A total of 2,599 survey participants answered the survey question about bystander response.

¹²⁵ J.B. Raines & F. Merenda, 'Evaluating implementation of the EPIC peer bystander intervention program in basic law enforcement training (BLET)', *Police Practice and Research* 24(3), 2022.

Recent cases reveal that the fear or reticence to speak up can extend to external police misconduct. In 2025, LECC found that five NSWPF officers engaged in serious misconduct when four of them failed to report the excessive use of force and destruction of body-worn evidence by a fifth officer.¹²⁶ In this instance, the legal obligation for sworn employees to report misconduct was clearly subordinate to internal cultural factors that prevent people from speaking up.

The social mores of the peer group outweighed the values of the organisation. If the organisation's values are not supported, they are of little value in subgroups.

— Confidential interview

We believe that if the NSWPF implements the range of recommendations in this chapter, there will be increased psychological safety to speak up and a reduction in the barriers to reporting.

Recommendations

Recommendation 17. NSWPF should develop and implement a comprehensive two-year prevention strategy aimed at reducing harmful behaviours and promoting a safe, respectful and inclusive culture.

This requires NSWPF to:

- ensure a systemic, risk-based approach is taken to the strategy, informed by People and Capability Command, Professional Standards Command and Health Safety and Wellbeing Command
- address known hazards, including bullying, discrimination, harassment, victimisation, incivility, interpersonal conflict, barriers to speaking up and reporting, and heightened risks for marginalised cohorts
- consult staff in the design process
- include measurable objectives, timelines, evaluation mechanisms and accountability for outcomes.

Recommendation 18. NSWPF should identify a broader range of harmful behaviours as risks in its existing risk management frameworks and proactively manage harmful behaviours as psychosocial hazards.

This requires NSWPF to:

- continue to elevate respectful workplace behaviours as a corporate misconduct risk
- update the Psychosocial Risk Management Framework to include discrimination and victimisation as significant psychosocial hazards.

Recommendation 19. NSWPF should strengthen leadership accountability for harmful behaviours by embedding key performance indicators for respectful workplace behaviours into performance and promotion processes.

This requires NSWPF to:

- ensure that performance evaluations for senior leaders factor in People Matter Employee Survey data on negative workplace behaviours and grievance handling, as well as reportable indicators around complaint timeliness, mandatory training, workplace injury leave and misconduct prevention
- support leaders who are managing complaints to clearly communicate decisions and outcomes to all relevant parties to reinforce transparency and fairness.

¹²⁶ Law Enforcement and Conduct Commission, *Operation Bendoc* (November 2025)

Recommendation 20. NSWPF should build trust in the complaints process by enhancing its promotion of reporting pathways, resolution options and complaint outcomes for harmful workplace behaviours.

This requires NSWPF to:

- enhance awareness campaigns for reporting pathways outside the chain of command, especially the role of the Respectful Workplaces and Safe Reporting Unit
- positively promote the use and benefits of alternative resolution pathways and shift the perception that a decision to ‘decline to investigate’ a complaint may not always mean that no action has been taken – de identified examples of meaningful alternative action should be communicated to the organisation
- increase transparency in reporting outcomes to the workforce through a regular report detailing complaint numbers, most common allegation types, complaints closed, timeliness, and the number of types of resolution and disciplinary actions taken.

Recommendation 21. NSWPF should embed greater independence and oversight into the management of harmful workplace behaviour.

This requires NSWPF to:

- increased audits and checks of harmful workplace behaviour matters by Professional Standards Command to address concerns of inconsistent handling of complaints by commands
- consider the role of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission in undertaking more regular reviews of the management and investigation of Respectful Workplace Behaviour matters (Tiers 1, 2 and 3).

Recommendation 22. NSWPF should improve workforce satisfaction in the management of harmful workplace behaviour matters by further embedding person-centred, trauma-informed approaches.

This requires NSWPF to:

- explicitly update relevant guidelines to spell out what a trauma-informed and victim-centric approach means in the context of harmful workplace behaviour matters– NSWPF has recently adopted this approach in its handling of domestic and family violence¹²⁷
- enhance training for complaint handlers on person-centred, trauma-informed approaches to complaint handling and investigations which recognise intersectionality
- broaden the availability of expert advice and support provided to commands and participants in harmful workplace behaviour matters by Professional Standards Command, Respectful Workplace and Safe Reporting Unit, and the Internal Witness Support Unit.

¹²⁷ Domestic and Family Violence Guidelines, Version 2.0 (2025), see page 18.

Chapter 7.

Support and care

Police work carries inherent psychological risks. Regular exposure to critical and often distressing events and the responsibility for responding to unpredictable and often dangerous situations contribute to stress and trauma being unavoidable occupational risks for many police. These pressures are compounded by organisational stressors, making psychological health a core operational issue rather than a peripheral welfare concern.

Since 2022, NSWPF has made a significant and visible commitment to better addressing the psychological health of its workforce. Early indicators are encouraging; increased use of mental health supports, reductions in psychological injury claims and costs, a stronger emphasis on evaluating impact and examples of innovative, locally driven initiatives emerging within commands. These developments signal a growing recognition across the organisation that psychological health is fundamental to capability, retention and effective policing.

At the same time, NSWPF's approach is still maturing. Many initiatives to date have been reactive and focused primarily on external operational risks, rather than the internal psychosocial hazards generated within the organisation itself. Compounding this is the reality that stigma around help-seeking remains widespread, shaped by decades of cultural messaging that equated psychological injury with weakness or career risk.

While work is planned to address these internal drivers and shift long-standing attitudes, a systematic, organisation-wide approach has not yet been fully realised. Sustained investment, consistent leadership capability and a coordinated approach across commands will be essential to embedding prevention and ensuring that psychological health is strengthened at both the operational and organisational levels.

What is working?

- The roll-out of the five-year Pulse program is underway, which includes access to mental health clinicians, reimbursement for external psychology sessions, increased investment in physical fitness and support and career transition.
- Elevating the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Unit to a standalone command signals the importance of mental health and wellbeing.
- Awareness of the psychosocial risks inherent in police work has increased, and there is more mental health education available.
- A new Safety Reporting System was implemented in July 2025, enabling people to report psychosocial hazards.

What is not working

- Stigma associated with psychological injury remains entrenched and a barrier to injury prevention and staff retention.
- There is insufficient focus on the psychosocial risks within the workplace including work-related harassment and/or workplace bullying and work pressure.
- Mental health education is largely opt-in, online and reliant on self-reporting and self-care.
- NSWPF workplaces require more proactive initiatives and improved leadership capability to reduce injuries.

Positive impact of recent improvements

The support services are the best I've ever seen in the cops in 37 years. It's never been better for police. I have accessed [the Early Access Treatment Initiative] after I had a breakdown due to PTSD, and seeing a psychologist as part of my recovery has enabled me to change my life. That opportunity I had to access the support was critical.

— Confidential interview

NSWPF has a range of intersecting strategies and plans in place to support the health, safety and mental wellbeing of its workforce, including the *Mental Wellbeing Strategy 2020–2025* and the *Health and Safety Strategy 2021–2026*. Both strategies focus on improved resilience, prevention and response associated with physical and psychological injury, and transition for members who are medically retiring. The Health and Safety Strategy makes a clear connection between safer, more positive workplace culture and improved productivity and staff retention. The forthcoming *Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2026–2033* is expected to build on this foundation.

Since 2022, NSWPF has shown its commitment to improving the physical and psychological health of its people through notable investments, including elevating its Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW) function to a standalone command in July 2024. We heard that the long-term strategic goals of the HSW Command are to reduce the number of injuries across NSWPF, increase the organisation's safety culture and achieve better outcomes for employees when they are injured.¹²⁸

The five-year Pulse program, launched in 2023 and funded with \$79m from the NSW Government is another critical investment. The Pulse program is designed to support the psychological wellbeing of employees and their families by assisting police after traumatic workplace experiences and providing early-intervention support for police who are starting to show signs of stress.¹²⁹ Pulse program initiatives include:

- deployment of 28 mental health clinicians to support frontline police across the 57 police area commands, including police in specialist commands
- the Early Access Treatment Initiative (EATI), which provides confidential reimbursement to employees for external psychology sessions
- the Career Transition Unit, which focuses on providing employees with a dignified transition to life after they exit NSWPF through vocational guidance, support and access to resources and programs
- eWellcheck, a confidential and voluntary self-report survey tool that guides workers to appropriate support, psychological education and interventions to improve mental health literacy, and act as both a proactive preventive tool, and a pathway to early and effective treatment
- additional staffing for the Recon program, which is an in-house holistic treatment team of physiotherapists, strength and conditioning coaches, and psychologists who work together to treat, prevent and manage recovery from physical and/or psychological injuries.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Expert Interview

¹²⁹ Expert Interview Auditor General's *The mental health and wellbeing of NSW Police Performance Audit* (June 2025), and the NSW Parliament Legislative Council *Questions and Answers Paper No. 442* (February 2025).

¹³⁰ NSWPF *The Relationship between Physical and Mental Health* online training module

We also identified other aspects of the organisation's emphasis on health and safety support:

- A new Safety Reporting System was implemented in July 2025, enabling people to report psychosocial hazards, and new dashboard reporting for commanders was introduced, to enable them to better monitor the number and type of hazards being reported to identify issues specific to their commands.¹³¹
- A new Psychosocial Hazards Risk Management Framework was introduced in December 2024.
- The Project Mentis pilot in 2025 was designed to reduce stigma associated with psychosocial hazard reporting, increase reporting rates and improve understanding of psychosocial hazards in NSWPF.¹³²
- The Police Blue Ribbon Insurance (PBRI) scheme was replaced in October 2024 with the Enhanced Police Support Scheme (EPSS), which aims to:
 - streamline support for all injury management claims
 - improve support for recovery and return to work, and improve return-to-work rates
 - increase identification of psychosocial hazards and reduce the number of injuries
 - remove barriers to reporting
 - address concessional cap taxation issues
 - provide an improved safety net to support officers and their families.
 - enable injured members who can no longer work within NSWPF to retire with dignity and capacity.

The above initiatives supplement existing support services, including but not limited to:

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (provided by Converge)
- Critical Incident Support (provided by Converge)
- police chaplains
- police psychologists
- peer support officers (PSO)
- Restart – Mental Health, which is the mental health stream of a 12-week exercise program for NSWPF staff with a psychological injury, overseen by a Recon psychologist
- WellCheck program for specialist units
- the Black Dog Institute National Emergency Worker Support Service (up to 12 telehealth or face-to-face sessions with trauma-informed counsellors)
- the identification of 23 safety champions at the rank of superintendent or equivalent, whose role is to promote a positive safety culture throughout the organisation.

¹³¹ Expert Interview

¹³² Expert Interview

NSW Police Force Wellbeing Support Services

When NSWPF launched the Pulse program in July 2023, it commenced a five-year evaluation of the program. Findings were not ready during the Cultural Review, however, data collected by NSWPF between June 2023 and June 2024 indicates early, positive impact in that period, including a 74 per cent increase in access to EATI, a 48 per cent increase in formal and informal interactions with mental health clinicians, a small reduction in psychological injury claims as a percentage of overall claims (from 29.3 to 28.6 percent), and a reduction in the average cost of psychological claims (from \$59,785 to \$56,338).¹³³

These improved results, align with feedback from the NSWPF's 2025 PMES results, in which 65 per cent of people reported that there are effective resources in the organisation to support employee wellbeing. This represents an 8 per cent improvement from 2024 (57 per cent) and a 14 per cent improvement from 2023 (51 per cent).

The good thing about this is people are less afraid to talk now. We now have our mental health clinician and a few people in the station see her and aren't afraid to talk about it. Whereas even five years ago that wouldn't happen due to stigma.

— Confidential interview

Behavioural, attitudinal and cultural change takes time. It is too early to determine the extent to which the Pulse initiatives to date will achieve sustained impact, particularly in increasing the workforce's mental health literacy and embedding a culture of managing mental health and wellbeing across the organisation. However, we observed that, so far, most of NSWPF's health, safety and wellbeing initiatives have been designed to support employees after they have become injured and reliant on individuals to proactively seek help themselves.

Given the stereotypes that persist around police needing to 'tough it out' and the resultant stigma attached to help-seeking, the NSWPF mental health and wellbeing model must ensure that there is adequate emphasis on prevention as well as response.

The role of Critical Incident Support

Critical Incident Support is a 24/7 psychological first aid service for NSWPF staff who are involved in work-related potentially traumatic events or critical incidents. It is provided by Converge, an external service provider, and initiated by command-led referrals.

We acknowledge the good intention of this service and its potential role to reduce psychological harm through immediate support. However, many employees told us that they have found the service impractical, either because the practitioner they connected with did not have experience dealing with first responder trauma and/or because Critical Incident Support contacted them while they were asleep due to shift work and there was no follow up beyond an initial voicemail. We also heard that some people had not been contacted at all, and members from units that sat outside the command directly involved in a critical incident (for example, members of the Dog Squad) had not received any contact, despite requests from a commander.

On a tactical operation, a man on fire was pulled out of a van and provided psych support. Critical Incident Support said, 'When you go home, you should go for a run'.

Confidential interview

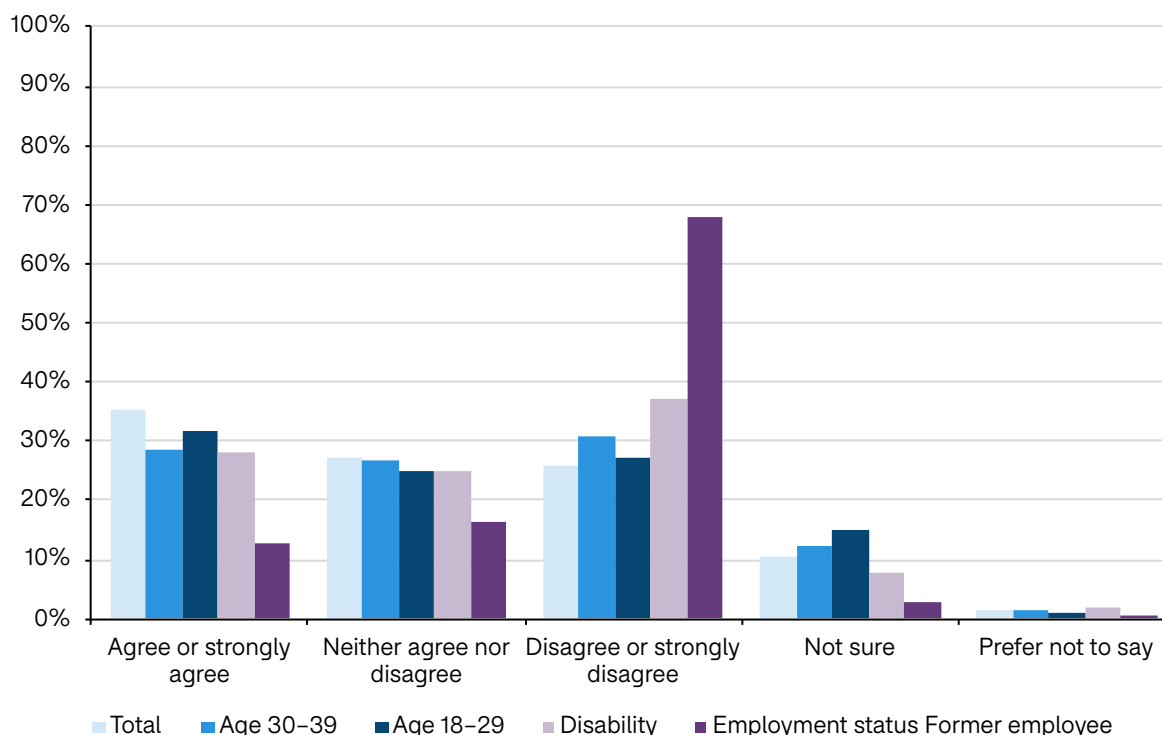
We receive poor advice. It's worse to contact them and get terrible service than not contact them at all.

— Confidential interview

¹³³ NSWPF Benefits Realisation Report Quarter 4 FY23-24 vo0.1 Pulse Program, June 2024

These sentiments align with results from our workforce survey, in which only 35 per cent of respondents reported they receive the right support from management after a critical incident at work. The results were slightly lower for employees aged 18–39, employees with a disability, and former employees.

Figure 49. Cultural Review workforce survey – ‘After a critical incident at work, I get the right support from management’ (%)



Source: Cultural Review survey.

The lower satisfaction reported by staff aged 18–39 also aligns with trends in staff resignations. Staff aged 18–39 consistently made up 60–65 per cent of all resignations between 2020 and 2024.¹³⁴ During this period, there was an increase in overall resignations, from 456 in 2020–21 to 877 in 2023–24, with the number of sworn staff resignations more than doubling in that timeframe. We do not make a direct correlation between these data points and acknowledge the range of factors that influence retention, as set out in other chapters of this report. Nevertheless, ensuring appropriate and effective support to this cohort, particularly newer recruits, must form part of a broader retention strategy. We also encourage NSWPF to consider more deeply the distinction between support and care needed for early career members, versus those who are mid or late career.

We understand that in late 2025 the HSW Command responded to poor experiences of the Critical Incident Support service by implementing a range of contractual requirements with Converge to improve the service. These include ensuring all Converge clinicians are now vetted for NSWPF and must attend cultural competency onboarding, attend specific training for NSWPF, and engage in biannual peer-sharing forums to ensure the clinicians deliver relevant and high-quality support tailored to NSWPF. HSW Command now also conducts targeted outreach to commands post-Critical Incident Support deployment and reports that it actively monitors satisfaction trends through regular feedback. We encourage the organisation to promote these improvements widely, to shift legacy perceptions about the service and encourage increased Critical Incident Support use.

¹³⁴ NSWPF exit data between 2020 and 2024 provided to the Cultural Review.

There is also an opportunity for NSWPF to build on this progress by developing in-house capability to provide Critical Incident Support. Establishing a well-resourced, clinically qualified centre of expertise dedicated to supporting staff immediately after potentially traumatic events would send a strong organisational signal that post-incident care is core to policing, not an optional add-on. Such a model could help normalise help-seeking, reduce stigma, and mitigate both immediate and long-term psychological harm. It would also support NSWPF's retention strategy by reducing the loss of experienced staff whose careers are cut short by unaddressed trauma.

In my section, we lost 160 years' service in three or four blokes in six months due to PTSD. We would have kept going with earlier intervention and more support. All that lost experience. It's not just about the staffing and resources; it's the lost mentoring and development of the younger ones.

— Confidential interview

People don't say anything because they are afraid of being told they can't come to work. For me it's the fear of unpacking it after all these years. Do you fall like a house of cards, or do you just try to keep going?

— Confidential interview

Tailored and proactive initiatives – Wellcheck and mental health clinicians

Two recent and proactive initiatives warrant attention. Of all the available wellbeing support services, the WellCheck program is the most proactive in nature. Under the WellCheck program, police psychologists conduct periodic psychological monitoring for employees in high-risk specialist units, including (but not limited to) homicide and child abuse squads. Research indicates that regular psychological health checks can reduce the impacts of long-term injury among frontline workers.¹³⁵

In 2025, NSWPF engaged Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health to independently review the WellCheck program. Among the key findings was the need to maintain mandatory participation in the program to reduce stigma associated with seeking psychological help.

This finding correlated with data indicating that staff who had been in the program for longer were more likely to see benefit, and that over half of participants reported increased knowledge of strategies to maintain good mental health and trusted rapport with their psychologist. Many participants also reported that the service could not be replaced or replicated by other wellbeing services offered within NSWPF. The benefits of building trust with a familiar and consistent police psychologist over time is consistent with our recommendation to bring Critical Incident Support in-house.

A limitation of the program, through no fault of the qualified psychologists administering it, was maintaining confidentiality when concerns about a supervisor or work area are raised or being able to provide support in response to organisational and occupational stressors. The significant impact of these factors on psychological ill health is explored later in this chapter and requires dedicated focus on leadership capability.

Phoenix Australia's review also found that demand for WellCheck had grown beyond the capacity of NSWPF psychologists to maintain quarterly interviews with participants. This reflects both the value of the program in encouraging early help-seeking and the need to expand its reach. We repeatedly heard from staff, including those in specialist units, that general duties officers and radio operators should be included in the WellCheck program, given their frequent exposure to traumatic incidents and the fact that they may not have the same experience or coping strategies as specialist officers.

¹³⁵ Papazoglou, K., & Tuttle, B. M. (2018). *Fighting Police Trauma: Practical Approaches to Addressing Psychological Needs of Officers*; and Cohen, Irwin M, McCormick, Amanda V, & Rich, Bob, *Creating a Culture of Police Officer Wellness*, Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, Volume 13, Issue 2, June 2019, pp 213–229.

[General duties] need the WellChecks more than any specialist unit – the specialists know what they are going to before they arrive and can prepare. [General duties] run the gauntlet at every job.

– Confidential interview

It will take time, but we need to make things like mandatory six-monthly psych check-ins for all frontline workers, including [general duties] and Highway. They can do it.

– Confidential interview

Every police car gets serviced, but the poor bobby driving it does not get a check in.

– Confidential interview

We recommend that NSWPF seeks further investment to pilot and evaluate six-monthly compulsory WellChecks for a cohort of general duties staff and radio operators. We also recommend NSWPF increase its cohort of police psychologists to meet current demand and expanded delivery.

Mental health clinicians

There are currently 28 mental health clinician roles deployed across NSWPF, with qualifications in social work, psychology and other mental health-related fields. Each mental health clinician has coverage of multiple police area commands and a broad range of accountabilities, including on-the-ground psychological support for staff, confidential, periodic wellbeing checks with staff who engage with them, professional mental health advice and support to managers, building networks with peer support officers, helping to reduce stigma around mental illness and encouraging help-seeking behaviour. The mental health clinicians are supported by two managers and a director, and monthly peer-to-peer supervision.¹³⁶

We heard very positive sentiments from some NSWPF staff about the support they receive from mental health clinicians. This was particularly the case for staff who had made a concerted effort to establish a professional relationship with the clinicians and access them for regular wellbeing check-ins. NSWPF data also indicates that 79 per cent of interactions with mental health clinicians are for work-related purposes (rather than personal issues), which indicates they are filling a critical gap in providing ongoing support for work-related issues that the EAP has not provided (as set out below).

However, these sentiments were countered by reports from others who said they find it difficult to disclose concerns about matters as personal as their mental health to someone who is only in their station for a few hours a fortnight, and whom they may not see for many weeks due to their roster. Employees' perceptions of the mental health clinicians may also be compounded by the limitations of the role – most clinicians do not provide clinical or psychological support, but rather offer short-term, solution-focused advice, strategies, education and referrals to other internal and external services.

These reflections align with the experiences of some of the skilled mental health clinicians we engaged with, who described having to frequently travel long distances to reach each command within their remit, and then spend a significant amount of the time they do have in commands trying to earn the trust of staff.

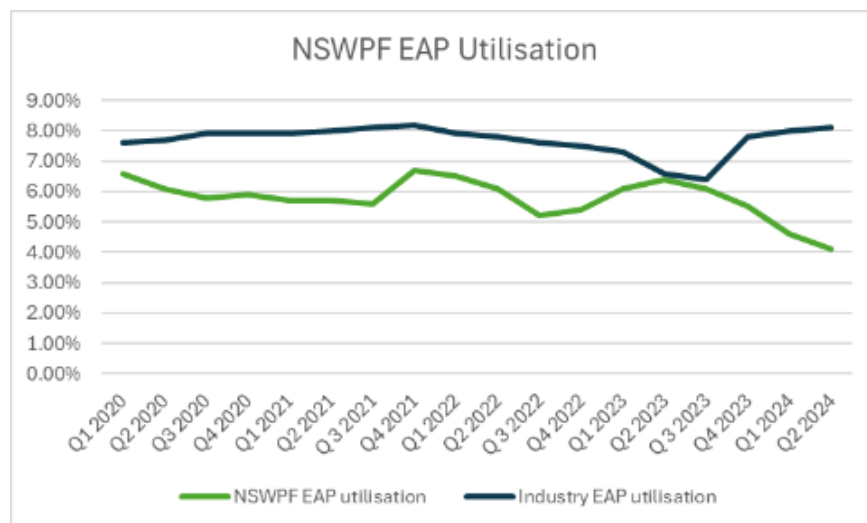
We also heard that mental health clinicians experience different levels of engagement from leaders at all levels (that is, sergeant and up), ranging from visible advocacy to indifference. This support, or lack thereof, impacts on the efficacy of the mental health clinician engagement. With more resourcing and support, there is an opportunity to make better use of the mental health clinicians, including by providing more regular and preventive mental health support to staff and providing more strategic advice to commanders on initiatives that are tailored to their workforce, location and context.

¹³⁶ NSWPF Mental Health Clinician role description.

Employee Assistance Program

For broader coverage across the organisation, NSWPF promotes the EAP, which is provided by Converge, as a personal counselling and coaching service for staff and their families. Data from January 2020 to June 2024 shows that most EAP use by NSWPF staff is for personal matters (71 per cent) rather than work-related matters (29 per cent). Converge data between January 2020 and June 2024 indicates that NSWPF utilisation rates are consistently lower than those in the government and public administration sector, despite policing work being far more stressful and traumatic in nature compared to the other workplaces in that sector.¹³⁷

Figure 50. Use of the EAP by NSWPF staff, 2020 to 2024 (%)



Source: Data sourced from Converge International quarterly EAP utilisation reports for NSWPF.

NSWPF's comparatively lower use of the EAP may reflect the range of alternative self-support services available to NSWPF staff. While some of these services have seen increased uptake, we cannot conclude that they provide adequate support for work-related psychological concerns. More importantly, when viewed alongside the strong results of the WellCheck program and the growing trust in NSWPF mental health clinicians, low EAP usage highlights the benefits of shifting away from generic, outsourced support towards more tailored, embedded psychological services.

Barriers to accessing support

During our consultations, we heard that many leaders are not properly equipped with the knowledge or skills to recognise psychosocial risks or normalise early intervention within their units or commands. This is resulting in inconsistent leadership responses, different attitudes to the importance of mental health and wellbeing, and lack of management accountability for wellbeing.

Many employees who reported distrust in available support services cited instances and perceptions of breaches of confidentiality and misuse of confidential information by leaders. We also heard isolated examples of senior leaders in some commands (inspector level and above) openly discussing the confidential status of injured workers or articulating dismissive and negative attitudes towards PTSD.

¹³⁷ Converge quarterly utilisation reports NSWPF Q1 2020 to Q2 2024 inclusive. Average use for personal reasons over the timeframe is 70.61% compared to 29.39% for work-related reasons, which is similar to the industry sector.

The inspector referred to the four guys from our office who had taken sick leave as 'dead wood'. I was told that he said, 'We've got rid of the dead wood; it's time to move forward'.

— Confidential interview

At the same time, we acknowledge the many examples of supportive and inclusive leadership that we observed, and that were reported to us by staff. We spoke to leaders who had role modelled the benefits of seeking help and recovering including by talking about their own mental health challenges with new recruits.

There's been a positive shift in the way management champion support. They tell people that services are available and are more proactive about offering support and checking in. It can feel like token or box ticking because people are cynical in the police. But I think management is slowly going in the right direction.

— Confidential interview

We've put more effort into providing support to people early and getting them support and help and get them to take leave. We maintain contact and make sure they know we want them back and we work with them on a plan to get them back.

— Confidential interview

The NSWPF Psychosocial Risk Management Framework sets out the responsibilities of leaders at every level to manage psychosocial hazards in the form of practical actions. This framework is complemented by NSWPF's 2024 resource *Managing psychosocial hazards: A practical guide for commanders* which aims to help commanders proactively manage psychosocial risks while supporting the wellbeing of their team. The guide encourages commanders to reduce stigma by maintaining confidentiality, promoting internal and external awareness campaigns such as R U OK? Day and World Suicide Prevention Day, providing a clear focus on recovery for injured workers, showing empathy and encouraging and supporting workers who access support.

Alongside its support services, NSWPF has a suite of mental health training programs, which are designed to educate staff about maintaining good mental health, the continuum of mental ill health to trauma, the signs of stress, trauma and fatigue, and mental health and suicide first aid and prevention. Many of the programs are online and opt-in, targeted towards a broad audience, and contain a strong focus on self-care, identifying symptoms in colleagues and building resilience.

Figure 51. A non-exhaustive sample of available NSWPF mental health education modules

- **Accessing support and treatment for mental health** – a 90-minute in-person session, designed to inform participants about the support services available to them, as well as the professional treatment options and how to access them.
- **Health first suicide prevention** – an in-person session that aims to provide employees with foundation skills and knowledge in suicide prevention.
- **Introduction to psychological health and safety** – mandatory training for all staff introduced in 2025 to increase awareness of psychological health and safety.
- **Managing potentially traumatic events** – an in-person session, designed to increase participants' understanding of work-related stress, with a focus on understanding and managing the impact of exposure to potentially traumatic events, developing concepts of resilience and personal self-care strategies, and understanding internal and external supports available.
- **Mental wellbeing and resilience** – a 90-minute in-person session, designed to enhance participants' general level of knowledge of psychological awareness through introduction to the mental health continuum, mechanisms of stress, self-care strategies and available support systems and how to access them.

- **Mental wellbeing targeted training program: Stress and stress management** – an in-person session designed to develop an understanding of stress from a biopsychosocial perspective, its mechanisms, signs and symptoms.
- **Psychological first aid** – an online training session designed to provide base level skills to all employees to provide psychological first aid to colleagues, identify physical and psychological responses to trauma, understand support services available and practise self-care.
- **Peer support officer training program** – a two-day, in-person session designed to enable peer support officers meet the expectations of their role.
- **Relationship between physical and mental health** – an online training session designed to improve participants' physical and mental health by understanding the link between these two aspects of their overall health and wellbeing.
- **Supportive leadership** – a 90-minute in-person session that focuses on the importance of supportive leadership in a healthy workplace, increasing psychological awareness for those in leadership roles, including identifying signs and symptoms of distress in the individual as well as in teams, utilising the mental health continuum to increase awareness at the individual and workplace levels, and common self-care strategies to support resilience and reduce stress.
- **Safety Reporting System (SRS) training** – a session designed to upskill staff in the use of the new Safety Reporting System, focusing on hazard reporting, safety observations, incident notifications and workplace inspections.
- **Your health first** – an online session designed to develop an understanding of suicide and develop skills in identifying colleagues at risk of suicide.

Notwithstanding these programs, many employees reported that awareness of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, hypervigilance and emotional regulation remain low across the organisation.

We're not good at recognising the warning signs of PTSD in this organisation. We only respond when it becomes critical. It's easy to respond to a critical incident, but complex and cumulative PTSD is harder to detect. We need to get better at this – it will be better for the next generation of police officers but most people in the organisation with over seven years will have some form of vicarious trauma. We are not proactively helping them. It's a silent epidemic.

— Confidential interview

We were informed that NSWPF intends to strengthen supportive leadership through mental health leadership programs designed to uplift capability, build mental health literacy, and increase leaders' confidence in recognising early signs of declining wellbeing. These programs are expected to form part of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Education Plan and will include mandatory training for all leaders on psychosocial hazards. We are encouraged by the intention to increase focus on leadership capability. We also welcome proposals to improve education and action to identify psychosocial risks at the sergeant level through Project Mentis.

We acknowledge that NSWPF supervisors and managers at all levels face complex challenges to demonstrating more regular and proactive support and care for staff, including staff shortages and significant work pressure themselves. While some factors are beyond the direct control of NSWPF, developing the right capability among its leaders to create a strong psychosocial safety culture and holding them accountable is not.

How stigma limits help-seeking behaviour

We heard from many employees, particularly in frontline roles, that there is persistent stigma attached to seeking help for mental ill health. Such stigma is common in police organisations and can be attributed to various factors, including:

- uncertainty and/or lack of trust that the agency will protect an individual employee's health and recovery rather than protecting the organisation from the financial, legal or reputational impact of their ill health
- fear of peer judgement for being perceived as weak or letting colleagues down
- fear of being reassigned to other duties
- fear of having a firearm – which is strongly attached to police identity – taken away
- low awareness of mental ill health symptoms
- assumptions that police should be innately stronger and more resilient than ordinary citizens in order to adequately serve and protect them.¹³⁸

These factors featured strongly among the barriers NSWPF employees, particularly in frontline roles, reported to seeking help when they experience stress, distress or any other form of mental ill health.

In our workforce survey, respondents reported low-quality experiences of safety and support from their supervisors or managers; instead, most employees reported that they rely on their peers for support:

- 49 per cent of respondents reported that supervisors/managers in their workplace model and drive a culture of safety, inclusion and respect, with lower results among staff aged 30–39 (44 per cent), staff with a disability (35 per cent) and all cohorts employed for more than three years (40–52 per cent).
- 42 per cent of respondents reported that if something goes wrong at work, they can get the help they need from management, with lower results among sworn staff (38 per cent, compared to 56 per cent for unsworn staff), younger staff (35–43 per cent for those aged under 50) and staff with a disability (31 per cent).
- 61 per cent of respondents reported they rely on their colleagues for their safety, with higher results among sworn staff (68 per cent, compared to 41 per cent for unsworn staff) and younger staff (65 per cent for those aged 18–29, and 64 per cent for those aged 30–39).

Many staff told us that help-seeking was career limiting. Sworn staff we spoke to described being – or feared being – labelled 'damaged goods', perceived as incapable of performing their job and excluded from promotions or transfers after accessing psychological support.

What I know now is that I've been battling PTSD for 20 years. I wanted to get off the tools to stop being exposed to stuff but it got harder as you went further up. I knew as soon as I put my hand up, for help my career was over.

— Confidential interview

These concerns were raised by sworn officers at all levels, including new constables, indicating how deeply entrenched these sentiments are.

There is still a lot of fear that if you raise an issue with your own wellbeing, your gun will be double padlocked. Everyone knows – because it is so visible. A gun for police is their identity.

— Confidential interview

¹³⁸ Papazoglou, Konstantinos & Milliard, Beth & Davis, Jeremy & Bellon, Sajel & Thompson, Jeff. (2021). *To tell of not to tell: systemic and organizational stigma of police officers seeking mental health support*. In Crisis, Stress and Human Resilience: An International Journal, Vol. 3, No.3, p85-103, and Papazoglou, K., & Tuttle, B. M. (2018). *Fighting Police Trauma: Practical Approaches to Addressing Psychological Needs of Officers*.

For this reason, some staff expressed a preference for being able to access external psychologists through EATI. Others spoke highly about external programs that were tailored and informed by lived experience, having been initiated and/or designed by former police officers, such as:

- the volunteer-led Emerge and See program, established by two medically retired NSWPF officers, to provide peer-led and professionally preventive education, tools, engagement and guided support for current and former NSW- and ACT-based emergency services personnel
- a tailored five-day residential program delivered by Quest for Life, which was co-designed by a former police officer.

Stigma about long-term sick leave

Recent data highlights the scale of long-term sick leave within NSWPF and the significant organisational impact it creates. The NSW Auditor-General reported that, as at February 2024, 1,261 NSWPF staff were on long-term sick leave with active workers' compensation claims for psychological injury, including 536 officers with diagnosed PTSD.¹³⁹

Over the five years from 2019 to 2024, NSWPF paid \$1.75 billion in psychological injury compensation, reflecting both the volume and severity of psychological harm experienced by staff. In 2023–24 alone, there were more than 1,200 psychological injury claims, and over half of all staff leaving the organisation did so for medical reasons, with psychological injuries the most common cause.¹⁴⁰ These figures underscore the systemic nature of psychological harm in policing and the organisational consequences of long-term absence, including the loss of experienced staff, increased workload pressures on remaining staff, and escalating financial costs.

NSWPF has taken important steps to improve the experience of employees on sick leave and to support their return to work:

- the Injury and Claims team within the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Command now provides welfare contact and claims management
- employees have access to the Recon program
- a key objective of EPSS is to improve return-to-work outcomes.

These efforts appear to be delivering genuine outcomes, with recent information provided to the Cultural Review indicating a 56.1 per cent decrease in long-term sick leave in the 12 months from January 2025.

Despite these efforts, we heard that stigma remains a significant barrier, not only to help-seeking, but also to the way employees on long-term sick leave are perceived and treated. Many staff, particularly in sworn roles, expressed a persistent belief that the long-term sick leave system is open to misuse by those seeking a payout. These attitudes mirror the broader, long-standing stigma associated with psychological injury and reinforce a culture in which seeking support is viewed with suspicion rather than legitimacy.

¹³⁹ The NSW Auditor General's *The mental health and wellbeing of NSW Police Performance Audit* (June 2025), p10

¹⁴⁰ As above

Employees returning from psychological injury described experiences of ostracism, being placed in roles they perceived as demeaning, and pressure to resume full duties prematurely. Others reported feeling targeted or pushed out during their recovery, leading to disengagement and a sense of abandonment. These experiences demonstrate how stigma continues to undermine recovery, trust and retention.

I got a visit from inspector – under the guise of a welfare check. Management often used welfare checks as a means of harassing staff.

— Confidential interview

I made a psychological and physical claim, and my police injury management got a report from an independent medical examination that said I'd never pass a physical for shooting, so I'm permanently restricted. That made me more depressed because I know what happens when you're permanently restricted – they make life hard until you quit. So the decision was made for me, and I retired ... If just one person in management cared and rang me and asked 'how can we help you get back to work around your injuries?', I may not have retired. But they don't care.

— Confidential interview

Initiatives to actively reduce stigma

During the Cultural Review, we noted two initiatives that indicate a stronger future focus on reducing stigma.

Peer support officers

Peer support officers (PSOs) are part of a voluntary network of staff who are trained to provide immediate, one-on-one assistance to colleagues and assess the need for referrals. Some employees who had experienced and recovered from psychological injury after accessing support had become PSOs specifically to encourage others to do the same.

When I needed support, I accessed support. I went to psych sessions, and it worked for me. I talk about this openly to normalise it, so people know.

— Confidential interview

If it's explained that what you are going through is understandable – that 'it's not just me, it's what happens' – it makes you feel better.

— Confidential interview

PSOs operate in conjunction with in-house psychological support services. We heard positive examples of individual stations implementing more structure for PSOs to play a larger role in early intervention and recovery, resulting in positive outcomes.

Peer support is a critical but under-utilised resource within NSWPF. While we heard that there are approximately 1,500 nominated PSOs statewide, during our site visits the PSO network was not remarked upon as a strong feature of support in many commands, even in response to specific questioning. We also did not encounter many PSOs at senior levels, or at least senior staff who identified as PSOs.

Nevertheless, isolated case studies, such as the example from Maroubra Police Station Peer Welfare Program (below), illustrate that supporting PSOs to develop more structured and tailored ways to perform their role would enable NSWPF to make better use of this network to normalise early help-seeking.

Figure 52. Innovative approach: Peer Welfare Program at Maroubra Police Station

In 2022, the Injury Prevention Panel in the Eastern Branches Police Area Command – consisting of HR, the police area manager, work health and safety coordinator and the commander – identified an opportunity to address inconsistencies and missed opportunities in providing welfare support to staff after potential traumatic events. To address this, Maroubra Police Station adopted a systemic approach and developed a local Peer Welfare Program for PSOs to provide direct support to colleagues after potential traumatic events. This can include supporting them to attend a GP for a mental health plan and then accessing the EATI.

The program now has 20 PSOs at all levels of seniority, to ensure it can provide genuine peer-to-peer support in like roles – for example, so that general duties employee can speak to a general duties PSO, or a detective can speak with a detective PSO.

Employees can volunteer to become a PSO via an expression of interest process, and peers then vote on who will become a PSO. All PSOs participate in a two-day training program with the Workforce Safety Command, including an external one-day mental health first aid course, which develops applied suicide intervention skills. A participant described this as ‘better than any other course I’ve done’. The training also ensures PSOs have a thorough understanding of the internal and external wellbeing support available to employees.

The command developed its own list of what constitutes a traumatic incident and the duty officer on shift, who oversees staff welfare for the shift, can make a referral to the Peer Welfare Program. This is not the only trigger however – anyone in the station can refer a person to the program, including colleagues. Senior leaders at the station promote the program through barbecues, keyrings, quarterly welfare newsletters, welfare initiatives, and promoting a QR code throughout the station that connects people with internal and external referral pathways.

The command keeps high-level records of contact with PSOs to track utilisation of the program, but no details regarding the conversation between a PSO and an employee are recorded. Corporate databases are updated to record the support provided by the PSO, and the program is overseen by the Injury Prevention Panel. The program is also incorporated into local standard operating procedures and includes collaboration with the command’s local mental health clinician and police chaplain.

The command conducted a survey of the program after a trial period and incorporated feedback from staff, including moving to in-person and telephone contact (rather than email). The program encourages staff to return to the workplace after a potential traumatic event which reduces psychological injury claims and improves employees’ experience of returning to work. The current coordinator of the Peer Welfare Program highlights its importance for morale, camaraderie and culture, including positive feedback via a recent survey at the command:

It was nice to feel support and for the command to be proactive in providing support to officers.

Contact was highly beneficial to me to return to work making the transition easier.

I appreciated a phone call rather than the stock standard email, it feels more personal and felt like someone was actually checking on me.

Project Mentis

In 2025, NSWPF piloted Project Mentis, a program developed in conjunction with the Behavioural Insights Unit in the NSW Department of Customer Service, which is designed to reduce stigma associated with psychosocial hazard reporting, increase reporting rates and improve understanding of psychosocial hazards in NSWPF. The pilot recognised that psychosocial hazard reporting remains low, and that line managers can play a critical role in improving this.

In the pilot, sergeants at two test sites were educated on how to identify and report psychosocial risks, and the importance of doing so. We heard that Project Mentis will be expanded to further test sites, and early evaluation results will lead to new initiatives being embedded to increase impact. These include:

- psychosocial safety champions – nominated staff of any rank or grade in the next raft of Project Mentis pilot sites, who are approachable or trusted regarding wellbeing and psychosocial risk, and will receive the same education provided to sergeants in the pilot
- tracking reports submitted by psychosocial safety champions (as a group) to assess their impact
- psychosocial hazard reporting workshop – a new workshop developed by the Psychological Risk Unit within HSW Command, designed to build capability in completing high-quality hazard reports and provide guidance on how and when to report chronic stressors such as workload, which may not be a one-off or triggering event.

The PSO network and Project Mentis pilots demonstrate that with sustained investment, support and evaluation, programs that build awareness of the benefits of early reporting of mental health concerns and help-seeking can reduce stigma across NSWPF. We encourage NSWPF to increase its attention to such programs, not only to normalise self-care among its staff through visible, peer role modelling, but to improve the sustainability and longevity of careers in NSWPF.

Addressing internal and external causes of psychological injury

As it stands, NSWPF's mental health support initiatives focus predominantly on the external causes of psychological injury. While this is essential, we observed that current approaches do not sufficiently recognise the link between vicarious trauma arising from police work and the internal behavioural issues that can emerge when trauma is unaddressed, including aggression, bullying, incivility and exclusion.

Vicarious trauma does not only manifest as individual psychological harm; it can also shape how people interact with colleagues, how they communicate under pressure, and how they respond to conflict. In policing environments, where exposure to distressing events is frequent and cumulative, unprocessed trauma can erode empathy, reduce tolerance and contribute to reactive or harmful interpersonal behaviours. These behaviours then become normalised within teams, reinforcing a culture where incivility or aggression is seen as part of the job rather than a symptom of strain.

We heard repeatedly that these internal behaviours are often treated as separate from psychological health, rather than understood as interconnected outcomes of the same pressures. This disconnect limits the effectiveness of current support systems and prevents NSWPF from addressing the organisational drivers of harm. A more mature and preventive approach would explicitly integrate the management of vicarious trauma with efforts to reduce harmful behaviours, recognising that both stem from the same operational and organisational stressors.

The four most common psychological injury categories for NSWPF, in order, are:

1. other mental stress factors¹⁴¹
2. exposure to workplace or occupational violence
3. work pressure
4. work-related harassment and/or workplace bullying.¹⁴²

The review of the WellCheck Program conducted by Phoenix Australia also revealed that a significant proportion of concerns reported to NSWPF psychologists related to workload, culture, supervision, rostering, and organisational pressures, rather than trauma symptoms.¹⁴³

When it comes to culture, the Health and Wellbeing Command won't fix the culture. It doesn't address low psychosocial safety or chronic work overload. It's all about what you can do to make you better.

— Confidential interview

These findings correlate with responses to our workforce survey, where the majority of respondents (58 per cent) reported that the greatest source of stress in their role was internal. In contrast, only 35 per cent recognised external factors as the greatest source of stress and challenge. Understandably, given the nature of their work, this experience was slightly higher for sworn staff (39 per cent, compared to 23 per cent for unsworn staff).

¹⁴¹ 'Other mental stress factors' is a broad category of psychological injury, which can include, but is not limited to job control, organisational change management, workplace relationships, organisational justice, reward and recognition, and physical environment.

¹⁴² NSW Auditor-General's Report 'The mental health and wellbeing of NSW police', p.13.

¹⁴³ Phelps, A.J., Watson, L., Sadler, N. (2025) Review of the NSWPF WellCheck Program. Draft report prepared for NSWPF. Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health: Melbourne

How harmful and unsafe workplace behaviour drives psychological injury

I've been exposed to more carnage than I care to remember. It's so debilitating and taxing. We give everything and turn up every day after horrific jobs ... We sign up for this. My biggest issue is the workplace bullying I've been subjected to. I didn't sign up for that or agree to it, and they don't pay me for it. They never adhere to their Respectful Workplace Behaviour policy.

— Confidential interview

I was fine, but when all of this bullying started happening in the last two years, that's when I started having nightmare after nightmare. I would have dreams about someone pulling a gun on me – but it wasn't the offender's face, it was the cop's. I would have to take a Valium to walk into the office.

— Confidential interview

The experience and impact of unsafe and unlawful behaviour is explored in more detail in the 'Addressing harmful behaviours' chapter in this report, but also warrants mention in relation to support and care, given work-related harassment and/or workplace bullying is the fourth most common category of psychological injury for NSWPF.

In our workforce survey, 30 per cent of respondents reported that they had directly experienced bullying. This was higher among sworn staff (31 per cent, compared to 26 per cent for unsworn staff) and women (35 per cent, compared to 26 per cent for men), as well as employees with a disability, LGBTIQA+ employees, and First Nations employees.

The most common impacts of harmful behaviour were poor mental health, stress and a reduction on self-esteem and confidence. Survey respondents also reported that indirect and direct managers were responsible for many of the incidents of harmful and inappropriate behaviour.

During site visits, we were heartened to observe many instances where leaders openly acknowledged that their role is to support their people, and this correlated with increased staff motivation and morale during site visits.

If you have a healthy relationship and trust with your boss, then I see no issue in the cops. In big stations or when your boss is based somewhere [else], you can't build that relationship. The pivot point is always leadership – if you have good ones, it will be good; but if they're bad, things will fall apart. Comes down to leadership and personality.

— Confidential interview

I chose to come here because of the commander and for promotion, because of the reviews on her and the [senior leadership team]. I came in the full knowledge that I'd be working harder. She is the best boss. She is turning staff around.

— Confidential interview

We have good bosses here. Inspectors are willing to give me time. It means I'm not afraid to call out what is not right.

— Confidential interview

Staff experience of harmful and inappropriate behaviour and its impact on their wellbeing indicates an opportunity for NSWPF to invest more heavily in supportive and inclusive leadership capability – as a work health and safety imperative, to reduce stress and psychological injury across the workforce, and to improve retention. See the 'Addressing harmful behaviours' chapter for recommendations to better prevent harmful workplace behaviours and reduce the psychological harm caused by them.

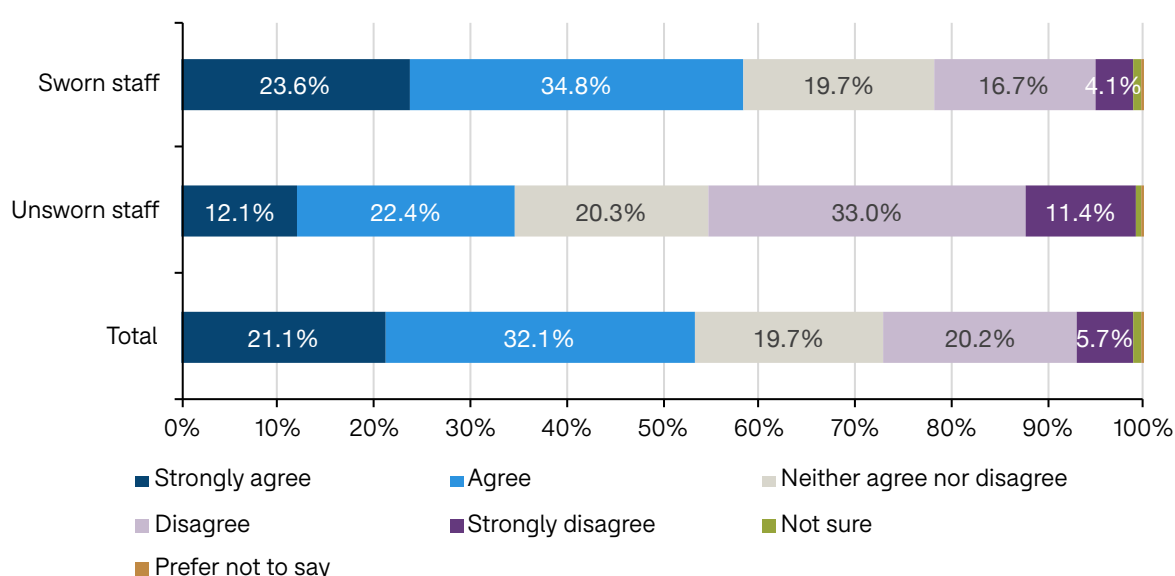
Initiatives to reduce work pressure

As set out above, work pressure is the third most common psychological injury category for NSWPF. Since the Safety Reporting System was introduced in July 2025, 38 per cent of hazards reported were psychosocial, and 43 per cent of these related to workload stress. Related to this, more than 53 per cent of respondents to our workforce survey reported that their workload negatively impacts their physical and/or mental health, and this result was again more pronounced in responses from sworn staff (58 per cent) than unsworn staff (35 per cent).

They just let people burn out. I was sinking. I was staying up until 2–3am to try to get things done.

— Confidential interview

Figure 53. Cultural Review workforce survey – ‘My workload negatively impacts my physical and/or mental health’



This experience was higher for specific cohorts, including:

- employees with a disability (67 per cent, compared to 51 per cent for those without disability)
- First Nations employees (65 per cent)
- Metropolitan and Regional Field Operations (both 60 per cent, compared to employees in Corporate Services (44 per cent) and Investigations and Counter Terrorism (42 per cent)).

As noted elsewhere, police work has become more complex and, like other police organisations globally, NSWPF is experiencing widespread understaffing, particularly in frontline roles. During consultations, we heard that this composite of factors creates a relentless workload, which contributes significantly to burnout. We also heard that understaffing compounds the existing stigma attached to psychological injury, because staff do not want to exacerbate the impact of understaffing on their colleagues.

We acknowledge NSWPF's various endeavours to address understaffing, particularly across the general duties workforce – for example, through the relief pool, which enables general duties officers to take relief work in other commands in place of annual leave. This appears to have yielded positive results for metropolitan commands, but distance and accommodation have limited the benefits for regional and remote commands. Nevertheless, tailored and innovative approaches by some regional commands have proven successful.

Figure 54. Innovative approach: Relief pool at Barrier Police District

Barrier Police District includes some of the most remote stations in NSW, including Broken Hill, Wilcannia and Tibooburra among others. Challenges such as the long distances and expensive transport option to the coast, as well as limited accommodation, makes recruitment a constant challenge.

At the time of the Cultural Review, an acting commander received endorsement to attract greater numbers of staff to fill temporary understaffing via the relief pool, by paying them for two days of travel on either side of a four-day shift, and paying for accommodation. This approach has multiple benefits beyond increasing the number of officers seeking relief shifts in Barrier District – it can demystify the nature of policing in relevant communities, potentially attracting candidates for substantive positions, as well as exposing substantive and relieving officers to different ways of working.

They do a block here on their week's leave and we pay for their accommodation. We've had 40 and we have 21 coming up. We've got about 10 for our next roster and they're coming from all over. This brings more staff and allows us to do things we're not getting to. We're doing these little things to try to attract people.

— Confidential Interview

The additional cost of the initiative (excepting the accommodation) was covered by unspent police wages. To ensure continuity, where appropriate, relieving officers maintain accountability for matters when they return to their substantive station and manage the paperwork from there. If a supervisor within Barrier District deems that the matter will require ongoing attention, it will be allocated to a substantive officer.

In parallel, we also heard concerns from some sergeants and inspectors that the relief pool was contributing to burnout among general duties staff, because they were returning to their substantive roles with excessive paperwork, and were not getting the rest and recovery they needed because they were relinquishing their annual leave in place of work. Some managers and supervisors supported their staff to manage their participation in the relief pool carefully, to prevent this from happening, but this approach came down to their individual leadership style, rather than a consistent and considered approach.

We also heard that the changing nature of police work, including increased reporting requirements, has significantly increased the workload of frontline staff. This workload is compounded by the requirement for frontline staff to use multiple systems to record matters, particularly after charges are laid, and that these systems are not well integrated, resulting in duplicated data entry (this is explored further in the 'Modern systems and enabling environment' chapter of this report). We heard of instances across several commands where relentless operational demand prevents officers from completing their paperwork during allocated shifts, prompting officers to work unpaid overtime or attend work unpaid on their days off to complete the necessary paperwork.

If you ask for a correspondence day, you'll be ridiculed for it. It's a really poor response and pushed back on very hard. Everybody else seems to be able to do it and why can't they?

— Confidential interview

During site visits, we observed innovative practices at command level, with individual leaders creating efficiencies where they could. The case studies in this chapter demonstrate the benefit of encouraging and enabling commands to develop tailored solutions that reduce work-related stress.

Figure 55. Innovative approach: Using technology for court appearances – South Coast Police District

In 2025, the South Coast District Commander introduced a change to requirements for officers to attend court.

The standard practice is for officers to attend court, sometimes for a full day, even though they are rarely required to appear. The result is that, in most cases, officers sit at court for 12 hours for no reason.

The commander and prosecutor successfully obtained endorsement from the local magistrate to allow officers to attend court by video link. Officers are notified when their matters are scheduled and are given notice if they have to provide evidence, which they can do via video. If the date falls on an officer's rostered day off, they are given equipment to attend and paid a minimum of three hours, even if they only appear for five minutes.

Not only has this innovation resulted in far more effective use of frontline officers' time, it has also eased the persistent challenge of having to adjust rosters and shifts to cover absences which, in turn, creates constant uncertainty for staff and requires detectives and people from the Crime Prevention Unit to backfill general duties staff to meet the minimum first responder presence.

The new approach has freed up significant work hours, enabling a consistent 'block' roster for general duties staff, which officers valued because it creates more consistent work-life balance. Staff also appreciated being able to remain with the same crew. Overall, the change have made staff feel more valued and, at the time of writing, a trial was underway in other locations.

Furthermore, some indicators from NSWPF PMES results indicate customised and organisation-wide initiatives may be yielding positive impacts. In 2025, fewer people reported that they feel burned out by their work (37 per cent in 2025, down from 48 per cent in 2023), and more people agreed that the amount of stress in their job is manageable (51 per cent in 2025, up from 44 per cent in 2023). It is important to acknowledge that these figures still remain lower than the Communities and Justice Portfolio average and indicate significant work-related stress.¹⁴⁴ The contrasting data relating to burnout, workload and stress across multiple surveys also reiterates the need for NSWPF to conduct more thorough evaluation of its initiatives to improve health, safety and wellbeing.

Recognition and value as ingredients of support and care

A culture of genuine support begins with recognition. Feeling valued for one's work is not a 'nice to have'; it is a core condition for psychological safety, engagement and retention. Where recognition is absent or unevenly distributed, it undermines morale and erodes confidence in the organisation's commitment to care.

Valuing the role of general duties staff

We heard from many general duties staff that their work is often undervalued compared to detective and specialist roles, and there is a perception that they are not respected or acknowledged for their contributions.

Longer-term general duties staff reported that over time, the culture in the organisation had become inverted – where non-frontline roles once saw their purpose as supporting general duties staff so they could provide the best frontline service to the community, there is now an attitude among non-frontline roles that general duties is a mandatory rite of passage and one of the least valued roles in the organisation.

¹⁴⁴ Wellbeing questions in the NSW PMES were changed in 2023, so no comparison with prior years in relation to these questions is available.

We're treated as second-class citizens, and it's used as a threat: 'If you don't do X or if you misbehave you will be sent back to GDs'. No wonder why young ones want to get out ASAP.

— Confidential interview

According to NSWPF exit data, sworn staff with five years' experience or less accounted for just over half of all sworn staff resignations (52 per cent) between 2020 and 2024. While there are many factors that may contribute to this data, it is worth noting that all sworn staff must complete a minimum three-year general duties role. This exit data tells a compelling story that NSWPF should consider how to better support new general duties recruits, including through enhanced recognition of their work, and support for their health and safety, as a core retention strategy.

Recognising the work of unsworn staff

Many unsworn staff told us that they feel undervalued, disrespected, underpaid and excluded from leadership pathways, despite many having qualifications equal to or greater than sworn staff.

I speak five languages and have been working for NSWPF for three years. When I worked for the [Australian Defence Force], it was as an interpreter, intelligence analyst and cultural advisor. I was not helped to understand why I've been rejected [from becoming a sworn officer]. They said 'we will look into it' but I've heard nothing back.

— Confidential interview

Unsworn staff reported that these attitudes were cultivated from the most senior levels down, and they undermine collaboration between sworn and unsworn staff, and foster resentment. Some acknowledged the unconscious but nevertheless disrespectful ways these attitudes manifested – for example, senior leaders only recognising the achievements and efforts of sworn staff in newsletters. We also heard many reports of senior sworn officers being openly disrespectful and dismissive of unsworn staff because they 'didn't know how to use a gun', despite them being in project management or specialist units where no police training was required.

Assistant commissioners give me the impression that they look down at unsworn, regardless of the expertise and skill set they bring to the organisation. Some of them acknowledge they will listen to me, but it has to be their way. They say, 'If I don't understand your language, it's no'.

— Confidential interview

We also heard that while specialist unsworn roles – including multicultural community liaison officers (MCLOs) and Aboriginal community liaison officers (ACLOs) – could be rewarding, they were also emotionally fatiguing and frequently underutilised.

Multicultural inclusion is one of the five pillars of NSWPF's Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy; however, the MCLO network told us that MCLO roles are often misunderstood or undervalued, especially by new staff or commanders unfamiliar with the position. MCLOs also told us that in addition to the lack of role clarity, lack of resources such as a car, funding, phone or training and systems barriers limit the potential collaboration and effectiveness of their roles.

MCLOs get no training or professional development. I was trained to defend myself and I use my language and appearance to calm people.

— Informal interview

Similarly, we found that where dismissive attitudes towards ACLOs was most apparent, it correlated with poor role modelling by commanders and, at times, ignorant perceptions about First Nations communities.

As ACLOs we are not involved in the operations that are happening. We are the last people to know from policing. We hear from community what is going on, we're not told at work.

— Confidential interview

The work we do – the guys go outside their roles and get a lot of backlash from our own mob. To me it doesn't feel like they are valued.

— Confidential interview

In some cases, we heard about discriminatory practices that specifically impacted First Nations communities, indicating a need to significantly increase the support and influence of ACLOs to improve community outcomes.

They would not record [domestic violence] assaults. If crime is not recorded, there is no crime. So we look good. We were not taking the calls from Aboriginal community seriously or recording events. We're brushing off of those [domestic violence assaults]. They say, 'She's just drunk.'

— Confidential interview

Conversely, in commands where senior leaders actively acknowledged the importance of these roles and ensured frontline staff collaborated regularly with them, MCLOs and ACLOs generally felt valued and empowered to serve both NSWPF and their communities. There was also higher awareness and respect for First Nations people and diverse cultures across the command and, generally, improved engagement between the command and community.

The relationship with community is good, and the ACLOs do a great job. Our [general duties] and ACLOs work closely together. Their office is next to the muster room. Everyone knows everyone here and, if we get crime, they'll help us by making phone calls to an auntie or uncle or brother or sister to find them.

— Confidential interview

The commander knows that this is a multicultural community, she promotes the multicultural part. I don't have to explain myself in this [police area command]. Ma'am takes a lot of pride engaging with the community, so it makes my life really easy. If she were to leave, I would leave.

— Confidential interview

MCLO and ACLO roles are critical to improving community relations with NSWPF, particularly in communities with high First Nations or multicultural cohorts. We found the internal MCLO and ACLO networks produced impressive ways to support one another and remain connected.

These networks also provided excellent suggestions to increase cross-collaboration across police area commands and with MCLO and ACLO networks or similar in interstate police agencies, to develop and stretch their roles. However, resourcing across NSWPF was inconsistent.

Figure 56. Innovative practice: The Pacific Officers Law Enforcement Network (POLEN)

POLEN is an employee-led network that provides support for NSWPF Pasifika employees, works to build stronger relationships between the approximately 30 distinct Pasifika communities in NSW and NSWPF, and promotes Pasifika cultures within NSWPF.

POLEN was initiated by Detective Sergeant Tuala-Tamalelagi Ben Sega in 2022 in response to seeing young people from NSW's diverse Pasifika communities being recruited into organised crime. When Detective Sergeant Sega conducted his detective training, he was one of two Tongans in the 100-strong cohort and, at the time, the relationship between his community and NSWPF was not good.

Proud to represent his community within NSWPF, Detective Sergeant Sega began to attend community events to try to be present and restore trust. Initially POLEN emerged through word of mouth within NSWPF, but with support from Detective Superintendent Grant Taylor, commander of NSWPF's Criminal Groups Squad, Detective Sergeant Sega created terms of reference, which he drafted at his own kitchen table and conducted his own survey and membership drive. POLEN now has 80 sworn and unsworn members, and the network is governed by a chair, secretary, treasurer and member liaison officer.

A key function of POLEN is to guide challenging conversations between Pasifika communities and police. POLEN has collaborated with technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, and members conduct informal mentoring and cultural training within NSWPF. A POLEN community engagement member responds to frequent requests to speak to Pasifika communities, and POLEN members told the review they are actively breaking down barriers to encourage more young people from Pasifika communities to be interested in joining NSWPF.

POLEN receives no formal funding from NSWPF, surviving instead on individual member fees, some support from the Police Association, some communications support to promote its work, and significant volunteer hours from members. Notwithstanding this, the success of POLEN has led other Australian jurisdictions, including Queensland Police, to establish their own Pasifika employee networks.

During the Cultural Review, we were advised that NSWPF is now considering where POLEN should sit in the organisation. There is strong appetite within POLEN for it to be established as a dedicated specialist unit, due to the volume of internal and external requests for assistance the network receives and attempts to respond to in addition to normal duties. A standalone unit would also demonstrate recognition and specialist career pathways for Pasifika employees to conduct work that is critical to building necessary trust and relationships with Pasifika communities.

We have been role models for our young people. Our people need to see that you can progress.

— Detective Sergeant Tuala-Tamalelagi Ben Sega

These networks are complemented by other endeavours, such as the Aboriginal Employment Network (AEN) in each policing region, which is intended to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in cultural leadership, connection, development and mentoring. The AEN holds a conference for all First Nations employees biannually, with a conference held in Goulburn in 2025 attended by over 100 staff. While we heard positive views about the AEN and the conference, we also heard that engagement with the network could be better supported by NSWPF.

Acknowledging and supporting the unique value that First Nations staff bring to police work must begin with an understanding of Aboriginal culture that goes beyond crime statistics. We heard that much of the cultural immersion training in NSWPF has been moved from in-person to online delivery. However, some regions had maintained bespoke cultural immersion training, which staff said had significantly shifted attitudes and behaviours. This includes Barrier Region's cultural immersion training at Mutawintji National Park, which has always been a meeting place for Aboriginal people. The training is delivered in part by a member of the Aboriginal community, who talks about the history of the region and the heritage of the First Nations people.

Out here you do a day trip to Mutawintji and you do a walk and see a location of the communities that met there. It gives me goosebumps. Local discretion is important – it needs to be localised.

— Informal interview

Non-Aboriginal staff described the palpable impacts on service delivery for a population with high Aboriginal representation.

My first day out here we met the ACLOs and they took us to the support services we would have interactions with. Went around town and showed us where community is and who we would engage with. We had a full day trip regarding this, and we've done a program going out to Mutawintji National Park. Ten of us went out for a cultural day with the ACLOs. Now we can refer victims to services, and I suggest if you don't want to speak to us you can speak to the ambulance or hospital or headspace. So that first day was really beneficial to us. All of this gives us insight, and we have an understanding when we go out and do the jobs, especially if someone has passed away. Could be a week-long thing, so understanding those cultural aspects means people will be upset and it may take a certain number of days.

— Informal interview

Recommendations

Recommendation 23. NSWPF should build on its investment in mental health by prioritising proactive and preventive support and care and increasing in-house expertise and capacity.

This requires NSWPF to:

- establish an in-house Critical Incident Support unit staffed by qualified psychologists with expertise in emergency services – the unit should be resourced to respond to critical incidents across the state via a mix of remote and in-person attendance
- increase the number of mental health clinicians, to ensure they are more visible and available in commands and have active support from all commanders in progressing psychological health initiatives, as well as providing more regular and structured clinical supervision and peer support
- seek further investment to pilot and evaluate WellChecks for priority staff, including Police Link and radio operators
- significantly increase the cohort of in-house police psychologists to meet existing and future demand and ensure their workload and role is sustainable
- increase resources for the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Command so it can conduct more structured and ongoing evaluation of all mental health initiatives, including cost-benefit analyses of proactive initiatives that reduce stigma and normalise psychological support against the costs of injury and related claims.

Recommendation 24. NSWPF should continue to build leadership capability at all levels to reduce stigma and normalise early access to support as injury prevention and a retention measure.

This requires NSWPF to:

- embed comprehensive and mandatory training across all leadership programs that equips leaders with knowledge, skills and strategies in recognising, preventing and responding to psychosocial risks
- embed and evaluate mental health education across the employee life cycle to ensure a culture of prevention and early intervention is continuously strengthened
- expand Project Mentis to increase psychosocial hazard reporting, particularly in relation to organisational stressors and harmful behaviour, and implement more structured evaluation of the program to embed continuous improvement
- ensure the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Command and commanders encourage and support peer support officers across commands to trial tailored initiatives, such as the Maroubra Peer Welfare Program, with structured evaluation to monitor impact
- increase visible, senior representation among the peer support officer cohort, so that senior leaders who have recovered from psychological injury are more actively in the network and role model the benefits of early support and treatment and reduce stigma.

Recommendation 25. NSWPF should strengthen recognition and respect for general duties and unsworn employees, including Aboriginal community liaison officers and multicultural community liaison officers, as critical contributors to policing and community trust.

This requires NSWPF to:

- introduce more structured induction measures that highlight the work and value of Aboriginal community liaison officer and multicultural community liaison officer roles, including a dedicated training module at the Academy, delivered by liaison officers and consistent induction across police area commands
- establish formal consultation and collaboration mechanisms with Aboriginal community liaison officers, multicultural community liaison officers and unsworn networks to ensure their expertise is supported, resourced and profiled, and that success stories are shared across commands.

Chapter 8.

Modern systems and enabling environment

Building a more inclusive, capable and future-ready NSWPF will depend not only on leadership, behaviours and training, but on the systems and processes that shape how work is experienced every day. Systems determine how rosters are built, how work is allocated, how data informs decisions, how roles are defined, and how technology supports frontline operations. In this way, systems actively shape culture: they influence what is visible, what is rewarded and what is possible.

While NSWPF faces significant and understandable pressure to direct investment toward staffing to address critical shortages, there is also a pressing need to prioritise system upgrades that better support retention, wellbeing and operational effectiveness. Without modern, reliable and user-centred systems, even the best leadership and cultural initiatives will struggle to take hold.

The NSWPF Strategic Workforce Plan acknowledges that advances in technology and system improvements are central to the future of policing and outlines a range of priorities intended to strengthen digital capability, intelligence-led operations and workforce augmentation. While a small number of participants noted that projects were underway and had been working to address long-standing systems and technology issues, we observed there is insufficient attention on these critical systems, and low confidence in the organisation's capacity to implement new systems and manage change.

Addressing these issues is essential. There is appetite and excellent expertise in pockets of the organisation for embracing technological possibilities. These are urgent opportunities as work systems, intelligence-gathering and job design radically change. The reforms must be designed with the right capability, properly supported by leadership, well sequenced and supported by genuine engagement to rebuild confidence and ensure that system improvements deliver meaningful benefits for staff and policing.

What is working well

- The Strategic Workforce Plan articulates clear intentions and proposed outcomes for more efficient and modern systems.
- The establishment of the Transformation office to lead some of the innovation outlined in the workforce plan is an important step. Resourcing for this office should be scaled up and ongoing.
- Technological advancement such as taking statements on Mobipol have improved some day-to-day processes.
- Fair rostering systems are recognised in the *NSW Police Force Risk Management Framework* as a key mitigator against burnout and fatigue.
- There are pockets of innovation, disruptive thinking and systems expertise in the organisation.

What is not working well

- The current rostering system is clunky, resource intensive and not people centred.
- Leaders lack access to simple, real-time workforce data to inform proactive, people-centred decision-making.
- Technology systems are outdated, fragmented, and slow to implement, limiting operational efficiency and cultural reform.
- Fragmented systems limit operational efficiency and interagency coordination.

Rostering

For an organisation of the scale and complexity of NSWPF, rostering is not simply an administrative function – it is a core operational system that reflects how the organisation values predictability, fairness and wellbeing. Despite widespread recognition of the need for modern rostering systems, many policing jurisdictions remain constrained by legacy technology and entrenched cultural norms. This is particularly the case in NSWPF, with its default reliance on uniform 12-hour shifts.

NSWPF currently uses the Kronos workforce management system to manage rostering, time-keeping, leave, overtime and attendance for both sworn and unsworn staff. However, the system's processes limit the organisation's ability to respond to actual service demand and undermine efforts to embed wellbeing-focused, demand-driven rostering.

In NSWPF, rostering practices vary significantly across commands, with limited standardisation, minimal integration with other workforce systems, and frequent disruption due to vacancies and unplanned absences. Interviewee participants described rostering as a source of daily stress, citing last-minute changes, lack of transparency and limited ability to plan personal commitments.

Current practices

Rostering is managed at the command level, with most rosters built manually using spreadsheets, with up to four staff involved in maintaining and adjusting schedules. There is no use of a unified rostering platform such as Health Roster (used in NSW Health) and no publicly available documentation of a standardised rostering framework across the organisation.

Responsibility for rostering typically falls to duty officers, operations inspectors or administrative staff, depending on command size and structure. These individuals are tasked with meeting first response obligations and ensuring shift coverage, often with limited tools and the pressure of high vacancies. The absence of scalable relief staffing models means that unplanned absences frequently result in shift movement, overtime or the reallocation of work from crime prevention and specialist units.

The challenges we identified include:

- frequent roster changes due to absenteeism and vacancies
- limited predictability for staff, affecting wellbeing and planning
- lack of integration with leave, training and fatigue-management systems
- no statewide visibility or benchmarking of rostering practices.

How many organisations do you know where you publish a six-week roster and by the time you get home that day, it is out of date? NSWPF rosters aren't worth the paper they are written on.

— Confidential interview

Rostering emerged as a significant concern in our workforce survey, with many participants describing it as a mechanism for exercising discrimination and favouritism. Some staff reported that discretion in rostering was often used to advantage certain individuals – typically those with personal connections to roster managers and inspectors – while disadvantaging others. This resulted in unequal access to preferred shifts, leave and overtime opportunities.

In our workforce survey, 42 per cent of sworn respondents reported experiencing discrimination linked to unfair rostering practices over the last five years. We heard about individuals being rostered on shifts despite having formally requested leave, even when other team members were available to cover. Many participants described feeling targeted through the roster, with repeated changes to their schedules and a lack of support to manage caring responsibilities or access leave entitlements.

In the last 12 months, experiences of unfair rostering were reported at significantly higher levels in Regional NSW Field Operations (36 per cent) compared to specialist commands such as Investigations and Counter Terrorism (17 per cent). These findings highlight that rostering is not merely an administrative process but, in practice, can be used as a mechanism of control and exclusion. The perception and reality of favouritism undermine trust in management, contribute to workplace dissatisfaction, and disproportionately impact those with caring responsibilities or less access to informal networks of influence.

I witnessed bullying from current police inspectors, particularly toward those who dared to speak up about unfair rostering practices. Instead of addressing concerns professionally, some inspectors chose to intimidate and isolate staff who raised legitimate issues. Discrimination was clear – those who kept quiet were favoured, while those who challenged the system were sidelined or treated with contempt. It created a culture of fear where speaking up meant being targeted. I further witnessed bullying to those who needed to align their rosters with childcare considerations where chief inspector said, and I quote, 'I don't care'.

— Confidential interview

The NSWPF Risk Management Framework identifies rostering as a key control for mitigating fatigue and other psychosocial hazards. The framework encourages leaders to consider how roster design can best support employee wellbeing. However, evidence we gathered during the Cultural Review indicates that chronic staffing shortages routinely prevent commands from implementing these considerations in practice. As a result, rostering decisions are often driven by operational necessity rather than risk mitigation, contributing to employee stress, reduced morale and disengagement.

Reports prepared by the Effective Workplaces team – who have undertaken targeted interventions to support command-level culture – further highlight the detrimental impact of inadequate rostering systems on workforce wellbeing. In several regions, sergeants are required to crew response vehicles without any corresponding reduction in their supervisory duties, leading to unsustainable workloads.

Officers repeatedly raised the idea of introducing dedicated ‘corro days’ as a circuit breaker to help manage the cumulative pressures of frontline work. These days would provide structured time to complete essential administrative responsibilities such as preparing and reviewing court briefs, finalising paperwork, and undertaking mandatory training – tasks that currently accumulate while officers respond to call-outs.

At present, the reality of staffing shortages and the demand to meet first response requirements makes it very difficult to schedule ‘corro days’ within each roster. However, we heard that the absence of such opportunities is contributing directly to fatigue, with many general duties officers reporting that they are forced to come in on days off or fall behind on critical requirements, ultimately leading to higher rates of sick leave. While ‘corro days’ are not formally recognised, some commanders have found ways to provide them in extreme circumstances, acknowledging their value in reducing stress and supporting wellbeing. Officers consistently argued that a more systematic approach to ‘corro days’ would help break the cycle of overwork, mitigate burnout and restore a sense of fairness in rostering practices.

Importantly, staff consistently emphasised that where they feel they have some control over their roster and how they spend their time within it, they are more likely to remain engaged and to consider staying with NSWPF. By contrast, teams with greater flexibility in rostering – such as the Weapons and Tactics Training Unit in Goulburn – identified this autonomy as a positive contributor to morale, wellbeing and overall job satisfaction.

Project Adventus identified court-related processes as a significant contributor to rostering pressure for general duties officers. It found that 85 per cent of officers had been rostered for court attendance in the previous 12 months, yet nearly half were not required to give evidence. Officers consistently recommended pre-hearing witness selection to reduce unnecessary rostering demand. By identifying in advance which witnesses are genuinely required to attend, police avoid rostering large numbers of officers unnecessarily, reducing both time away from core duties and the cumulative cost of repeated court appearances. Employees also cited brief preparation as a workload issue, with many completing multiple briefs per roster cycle, often without adequate time during response shifts. In January 2025, Project AMNIS was endorsed to progress this work, overseen by a steering committee chaired by the Commander, Police Prosecutions Command. Early feedback indicates that the introduction of the court liaison officer role has already led to a measurable reduction in court-related rostering.

Work is also underway to expand flexible rostering options, including through the Kronos Replacement Project. The proposed Pro Workforce Management (PWM) solution is expected to improve rostering capability, including greater flexibility in shift lengths.

This is a positive step, but implementation timelines and consultation processes remain unclear. We note that one of the actions under the current *Strategic plan: Our future, our focus* is to facilitate flexible workforce allocation and deployment to meet demand and community need.

Comparative insights

The figure below compares public service rostering models and their respective strengths and challenges from across different Australian jurisdictions

Figure 57. Comparative rostering models across jurisdictions

Organisation	Shift model	Strengths	Challenges
New South Wales Police	12-hour shifts	Mature centralised rostering with 300+ clerks; long-standing cultural adoption (20+ years)	Significant fatigue concerns; not designed to match demand; difficult to implement flexibility
South Australia Police	Mixed-shift model (8, 9 or 10 hours)	Split workforce structure; extra teams for weekends	Limited to metropolitan areas; perceived inequity between units; not aligned to demand
Western Australia Police	Primarily 10-hour shifts	Employee wellbeing central; road policing aligned to peak visibility times	Not demand driven; no dedicated unsworn roster staff; inconsistent roster complexity
Victoria Police	8-hour shifts	Demand-focused roster planning; 21-day advance posting; large-scale enterprise system	No formal rostering policy; integration gaps with payroll; short ad hoc cycles
Australian Federal Police	Demand-based, centrally managed	Staggered starts; use of 'E shift' system ^(a) ; mix of shift lengths; demand reviewed biannually	Historical inequity requires ongoing monitoring and adjustment
Tasmania Police	Genesys workforce management system	High alignment with demand; part-time workforce reduces overtime; few flexible work agreement issues	Small scale; no consolidated allowances
Queensland Health's 13HEALTH	Rolling 8-hour shifts	Strong demand alignment; formal request processes; low FWA volume	Scale and reliance on part-time staff

(a) The AFP use an E-shift is a flexible rostering system which allows officers to swap shifts electronically.

Firefighters in services such as Fire and Rescue NSW and Queensland Fire Department typically receive rosters more than six weeks in advance. These services also experience fewer unplanned absences and less reactive shift changes, contributing to greater stability. By contrast, police officers face a broader range of unpredictable duties – including court, transport, investigations and community engagement – which makes rostering more complex and subject to change. High vacancy rates in some commands mean rosters can be rebuilt daily. Unlike fire services, NSWPF does not have scalable relief pools or floating staff to absorb shortfalls.

Data-driven decision-making

We identified a persistent gap between the workforce data available to NSWPF leaders and the data required to support proactive, people-centred decision-making. While some commands demonstrated access to operational datasets – such as staff leave balances and rostering schedules – there was limited use of data relating to wellbeing, preventive health, employee preferences or performance planning. We observed inconsistency in commanders’ and HR inspectors’ ability to respond to questions about key workforce metrics that should be routinely used to assess wellbeing and productivity. Many leaders referred to having a ‘good feel’ for what was occurring, rather than access to organisationally consistent evidence that would enable informed, transparent decisions. This is not intended as a criticism of leadership, but rather an observation that improved access to relevant data at the local level would strengthen trust, responsiveness and alignment with workforce needs.

This data gap affects decisions about relieving, mobility and workload distribution. Interview participants noted that while performance plans were completed, they were not consistently used to inform rostering or capitalise on development opportunities. Similarly, data on staff wellbeing was not integrated into rostering or support decisions, despite its relevance to fatigue management and retention.

In May 2025, it was publicly reported that NSWPF is developing a new workforce insights platform to address staff turnover and improve retention. The platform is intended to consolidate data from multiple systems, providing real-time visibility into workforce trends and enabling more informed decisions about recruitment, mobility and support. While we did not hear about this initiative during the Cultural Review, it aligns with the identified opportunity to equip leaders with simple, real-time dashboards that consolidate key workforce indicators – such as turnover, absenteeism, probationary progress, training completion and wellbeing metrics.

Although not directly transferrable, the Champions of Change Gender Equality Indicators Tool offers a useful reference point. It is a data-driven framework designed to help organisations identify and address the underlying drivers of inequality in representation, pay and workplace culture. Tools of this nature, when tailored for the organisation and relevant to its operations could support evidence-based decision-making and improve transparency across commands.

Late in the Cultural Review, we were made aware that a monthly *State of the Workforce* report on some workforce metrics is being developed. While it was not clear who receives this report or what insights and accountability comes from it, there are metrics included which could form the basis of the reporting we recommend.

Embedding data capability at the local level would also support cultural accountability. The Australian National Audit Office’s review of the Australian Defence Force’s cultural reform found that without measurable outcomes and internal assurance mechanisms, reform strategies risked becoming aspirational rather than effective, underscoring the importance of clear data and monitoring in driving genuine change. Emergency services in Queensland have begun using workforce analytics to identify hotspots of attrition and absenteeism, and training gaps – enabling targeted interventions and more responsive leadership.

Technology systems

Reliance on outdated technology

Technology systems within NSWPF are widely described as outdated, difficult to use and slow to evolve. The Strategic Workforce Plan articulates the importance of systems underpinning current and future policing yet, in practical terms, participants consistently identified basic functionality gaps, long implementation timelines and limited consultation with frontline users. These issues affect not only operational efficiency but also perceptions of professionalism, adaptability and organisational responsiveness.

The systems are so slow and nothing is integrated. I know they're working on it, but the sooner they fix this the better. IT adds to the workload too – for some jobs you have to duplicate or do things in triplicate because the programs don't speak to each other. And they crash and they're slow. I know it costs money but the return on investment in terms of productivity and less burnout would be significant.

— Expert interview

NSWPF continues to rely on the Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS), first introduced in 1994. Despite multiple reform efforts, this legacy infrastructure remains central to core policing functions. In 2013, NSWPF was allocated \$45 million to replace COPS and developed a proof of concept (NewCOPS) in 2017, but the system was not delivered. A new development process began under the Integrated Policing Operations System (IPOS) program, with a business case finalised in 2019 and a vendor selected in 2020. That contract was terminated in 2022, and NSWPF is now reportedly pursuing a multi-vendor approach. A current review by the NSW Audit Office is assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of NSWPF's planning and sourcing processes for core technology upgrades.

They've taken away the option of taking a written statement on the MobiPol. It was so good, it saved us so much time because we didn't have to do all the follow up. We could capture accurate detail and then email them a copy. If someone gave you CCTV footage it filled in the report and you just filled in the gaps. We've moved back to written statements.

— Informal interview

Why are we still printing and serving documents on defendants in person – it is very frustrating and a waste of time.

— Informal interview

The COPS database made on a 90s DOS mainframe has been used for so long that other systems rely on it and they can't get rid of it. It's so antiquated and the number of people who can program it in Australia would be single digits. So people have to manually do things because the systems don't work and we have the worst technology I've ever worked with.

— Confidential interview

Until these systems are modernised, efforts to improve data visibility, workforce planning and cultural reform will remain constrained by outdated infrastructure. Participants described frustration with the pace of change and the lack of visible progress. The absence of effective implementation and user-centred design was consistently cited as a barrier to operational improvement. These system limitations were frequently described as compounding workload pressures and diminishing the perceived value of administrative tasks, reinforcing a cultural narrative that paperwork is disconnected from 'real policing'. Participants noted that the inefficiency of current processes contributes to frustration and a sense of wasted effort, undermining both morale and recognition of employees' contributions. Without meaningful reform, these attitudes risk becoming further entrenched, constraining broader organisational change.

During the Cultural Review, staff suggested improvements to a number of systems – see the figure below.

Figure 58. Operational gaps and missed opportunities

Issue	Detail	Suggestion from NSWPF employees
Electronic sign-in	Staff must manually sign in and out with the duty sergeant, creating delays and unnecessary administrative burden.	Introduce a swipe card or biometric system (e.g., fingerprint or staff ID scan) at station entry points, linked to shift records and relieving logs.
Body-worn footage	Staff are required to manually download, burn and sometimes transcribe footage. Access to the Transcription Unit is limited and delayed.	Enable automatic upload of footage to a secure cloud system at end-of-shift, with integrated tagging and voice-to-text transcription – accessible without needing a charge number.
Navigation and deployment	Car crews rely on personal smartphones to map job locations because in-car systems lack simple geographic routing or integrated job views.	Add a user-friendly GPS routing field to the Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system dispatches and install a mapping overlay in mobile data terminal showing job locations, crew positions and optimal routes.
Performance management	End-of-year reviews are time-consuming and rely on memory, with no simple way to log feedback throughout the year.	Embed a quick-entry feedback tool in MyPerformance (e.g., voice-to-text or SMS-style input) so supervisors can log notes in real time.
Contextual job reminders	Staff responding to complex jobs (e.g., mental health or domestic violence) lack timely, relevant prompts to guide preparation.	Integrate short, scenario-specific prompts into dispatch notifications (e.g., ‘DV history at this address’ or ‘Consider MH response protocol’) to support officer readiness and safety.

These examples reflect a broader pattern: systems are not designed around the realities of frontline policing, especially in regional and remote areas. Officers expect to access systems quickly and intuitively, but instead face complex, outdated interfaces that require workarounds and manual duplication.

Fragmentation

Fragmentation across core systems – such as COPS, CAD and court documentation platforms – was a recurring theme throughout our consultations. Staff described duplicative data entry, inconsistent interfaces, and limited integration with other first responder agencies.

Staff frequently cited frustration that hearing dates for apprehended violence orders did not automatically update in the COPS system, requiring manual tracking and reminder emails to the officer in charge. When that officer was off shift or on leave, this sometimes led to missed filing deadlines or delayed court responses, raising concerns about procedural reliability and police professionalism.

Operational staff reported that completing routine tasks often required accessing multiple systems, with no single interface to consolidate relevant information or streamline workflows. These system limitations increase administrative burden and reduce time available for frontline engagement.

Interagency reviews – including those following major disasters and critical incidents – have consistently recommended shared digital platforms and interoperable systems to improve coordination and reduce duplication. Beyond emergency services, employees identified significant integration challenges with courts, corrections and health systems. These include paper-based processes, manual data transfer and limited visibility of shared case information.

We have a lot of systems in place that take up a lot of time for little impact. Half our technology doesn't talk to each other. Kronos doesn't talk to SAP so rosters have to use two different systems.

— Confidential interview

Professionalisation and accountability

Professionalisation and recognising external expertise

Participants consistently supported a more professionalised NSWPF – one that values external qualifications, draws leadership from diverse backgrounds, and embeds accountability in everyday decision-making. This includes systems that support ethical leadership, continuous learning and transparent performance management.

Professionalisation was not defined solely by rank or years of service. Participants emphasised the need to recognise and reward external expertise, including qualifications in law, psychology, public administration, and emergency management. They also highlighted the value of professional skills in areas such as human resources, workplace health and safety, and organisational development – fields that are critical to modern policing but often undervalued in operational environments. While some leaders had completed external qualifications or attended Australian Institute of Police Management (AIPM) courses, we did not observe widespread recognition of the importance of such investment or capability.

There was strong support from unsworn employees and sworn employees below the rank of inspector for appointing leaders from across the public service and other first responder agencies, particularly where they bring relevant experience in governance, reform or community engagement. This reflects broader trends in emergency services and defence, where cultural reform strategies have prioritised leadership diversity and cross-sector capability. For example, the Australian Defence Force's strategy *Pathway to change* explicitly recognised the need to broaden leadership pipelines and embed professional standards across all ranks.

Above the rank of inspector, however, attitudes such as 'blue shirts know best' and 'you can't lead what you haven't done' appeared more entrenched. This suggests that without deliberate cultural and structural shifts, NSWPF risks limiting its leadership pool and missing opportunities to embed the diverse capabilities needed to lead complex reform.

Systems accountability

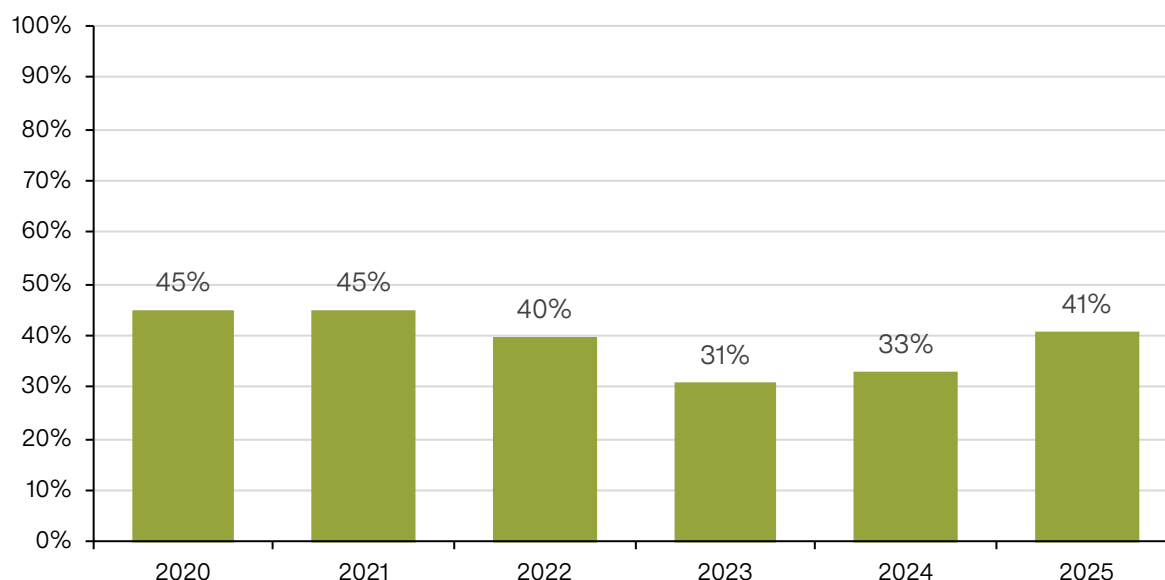
Staff we spoke to described current accountability mechanisms as fragmented and overly complex. Performance management systems were seen as procedural rather than developmental, and cultural metrics were not consistently used to inform leadership decisions. We identified significant gaps in how performance on building a safe, respectful and inclusive culture was measured, and in turn, how leaders were held accountable for behaviours, leadership practices and team culture.

Effective accountability requires systems that are clear, consistent and embedded in daily practice, not just statements of intent in planning documents. Interview participants called for greater transparency in decision-making-from the Commissioner down – and for performance expectations to be communicated and reinforced through routine supervision, not just formal reviews. This aligns with findings from other policing and defence reviews, which have emphasised that accountability must be visible, proportionate and supported by reliable data.

Confidence in change and innovation

Staff confidence in NSWPF's ability to innovate and prepare for future challenges is low, with PMES data showing that the majority of the workforce feel that NSWPF is not innovating sufficiently to meet the challenges of modern policing.

Figure 59. PMES 2020 to 2025 – 'My organisation is making improvements to meet future challenges' (% favourable)



We heard consistent feedback that communications from senior leaders and police headquarters were not effectively reaching staff in the field. At best, staff reported being overwhelmed by workload and the sheer volume of messages, leading to important information being missed.

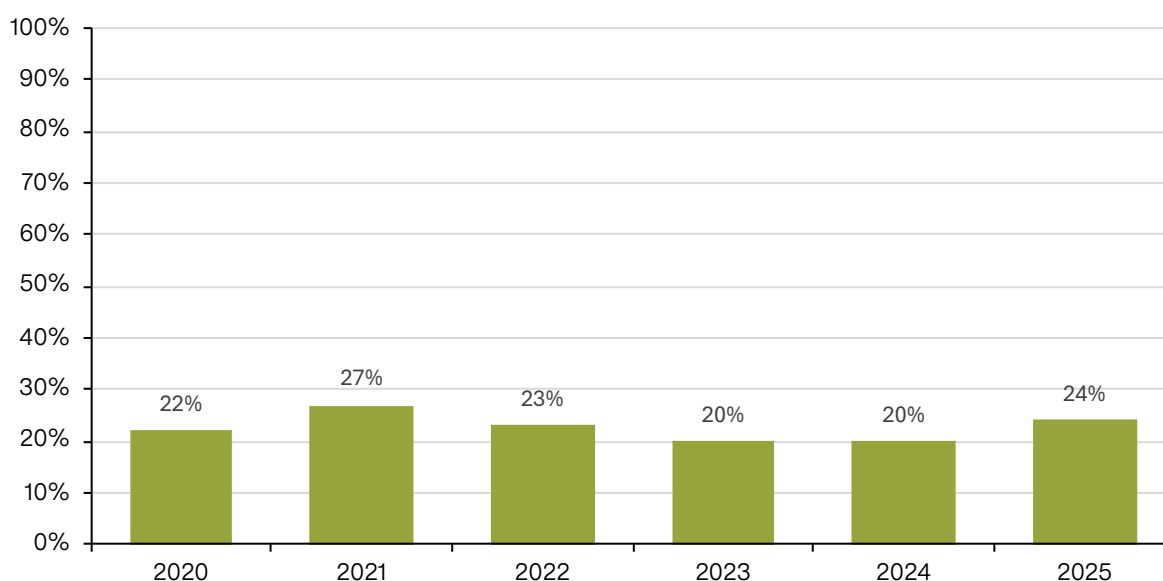
We need to stop bombarding people with new systems. The poor constables are dealing with endless new systems. Years ago we would do a DV lock up and be off the road for two hours. These days it's the whole shift. We have created so many systems and it buries them and this flows on to morale and drives a reluctance to act on DV because people need to get things done and don't want to be off the road for nine hours.

— Confidential interview

At worst, communications were perceived as lacking credibility, with some officers reportedly ridiculing official messages or undermining them by issuing counter-directions to their teams. Improving communication has therefore been a central focus for the new Commissioner, who has consistently emphasised his commitment to engaging directly with police.

While concerns about communication and change management extend beyond technology systems, survey results from 2025 indicate that only one in four employees believe change is managed well at NSWPF, highlighting the scale of the challenge.

Figure 60. PMES 2020 to 2025 – ‘Change is managed well in my organisation’ (% favourable)



Recommendations

Recommendation 26. NSWPF should urgently implement a single, statewide workforce management system that integrates rostering, leave, training, fatigue and wellbeing data, and applies demand-driven principles to align workforce allocation with service needs and risk.

This requires NSWPF to:

- procure or build a fit-for-purpose platform that replaces fragmented command-level practices and consolidates rostering, leave, training and fatigue data in one system
- embed demand-based rostering rules into the platform to allow shift swaps and better match staffing to predicted workload, risk profiles and local service demand
- provide predictable and transparent rosters, with options for varied shift lengths (for example, 8, 10 or 12 hours) and equitable access to respite arrangements, including ‘corro days’
- use system data to actively monitor fatigue, overtime reliance and inequities in access to leave and relief.

Recommendation 27. NSWPF should strengthen workforce data insights through a real-time cultural and workforce intelligence dashboard that supports evidence-based decision-making and embeds accountability across leadership.

This requires NSWPF to:

- consolidate workforce indicators such as attrition, absenteeism, probation progress, mobility, training completion and wellbeing metrics into a single, accessible dashboard
- provide commanders and HR inspectors with consistent, real-time data to guide relieving decisions, workload distribution and targeted wellbeing interventions
- link workforce and cultural metrics to leadership performance frameworks, reviews and organisational reporting to promote transparency and timely intervention
- use trends and exceptions data to support early identification of cultural, supervision, or workload risks at command and regional levels.

Recommendation 28. NSWPF, with NSW Government support, should modernise core policing systems through staged, user-centred upgrades that reduce administrative burden, support frontline effectiveness and professionalise leadership.

This requires NSWPF to:

- replace legacy systems (including COPS, CAD and court documentation processes) with modular, interoperable technology that reduces duplication, manual entry and error
- deliver immediate frontline productivity improvements such as digital sign-in, user-friendly GPS-enabled dispatch, and automated body-worn video upload and transcription
- embed frontline officer input into system design, testing and implementation to ensure usability and adoption
- establish transparent governance for technology investment decisions, with public reporting on milestones linked to operational efficiency and workforce wellbeing.

Recommendation 29. NSWPF should expand leadership pathways to recognise external qualifications, cross-sector experience and unsworn roles, and embed clear, competency-based promotion and appointment criteria.

This requires NSWPF to:

- recognise relevant external qualifications and experience from other public service, first responder, and regulatory agencies as valid pathways into leadership roles, including senior and specialist appointments.

Appendix A.

Terms of Reference

Context

In late September 2024, following public allegations of serious current and historical instances of misconduct, bullying, harassment and a 'toxic culture' within parts of the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF), Commissioner Karen Webb spoke with Kristen Hilton, former Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, in relation to conducting a cultural review (the Review) of the NSWPF with a particular focus on understanding where progress towards a safer and more equitable working environment has been made and areas that continue to demand attention and reform. A public announcement of Kristen Hilton's engagement was made on 4 October 2024.

The Review will cover the experiences of sworn and unsworn members of the NSWPF workforce, including those that have left the organisation since 2020.

The Review team will develop a rigorous evidence base to inform key recommendations aimed at improving the culture of the organisation, accountability framework and the support and care experienced by staff.

Purpose

The purpose of the independent review of NSWPF is to objectively assess the organisation's workplace culture based on a range of qualitative and quantitative data.

Where relevant, the Review will identify areas needing improvement as well as make recommendations to support a more equitable, capable, and culturally safe workplace.

Scope

The scope of the Review will focus on:

- Developing a baseline understanding of the culture of NSWPF with a focus on identifying leading practice and areas of concern relating to diverse representation, equitable recruitment, progression and promotion practices and the provision of a safe and respectful workplace.
- The effectiveness of NSWPF systems and processes designed to prevent and respond to behavioural, cultural and integrity challenges.
- Leadership commitment and capability to create and maintain safe and respectful workplaces.
- Options to drive sustained cultural change and promote ethical behaviour that is consistent with an equitable and culturally safe police force.

This Review will focus on systemic issues and will not conduct investigations into allegations pertaining to specific individuals.

The Review will exclude:

- Former employees who exited the organisation prior to 2020.
- Recommendations regarding the establishment of a restorative justice scheme.

About the Review Team

The Review is being delivered by an independent team led by Kristen Hilton, former Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner. Kristen has worked across public, private and community sectors driving transformational policy and legal change and promoting ethical leadership and is recognised as one of the country's leading equality and human rights experts.

Over the last decade Kristen had led comprehensive, multi-year reviews into human rights compliance, equality and diversity within Victoria Police, Victoria's fire services, Ambulance Victoria, the Victorian racing industry and Victoria's adult custodial corrections system. She was an expert advisor on the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and is currently part of the expert panel supporting Queensland Police Force's review into diversity and inclusion. In 2024 Kristen was appointed to monitor the implementation of recommendations of Queensland's Fire Services cultural review.

The members of the Review team share extensive experience in workplace cultural reform, equal opportunity, leadership, and diversity and inclusion.

Appendix B.

NSWPF Respectful Workplace Behaviour policies gap analysis

As set out in the ‘Addressing harmful behaviours’ chapter, the NSWPF has a framework for creating a safe and respectful workplace. The framework articulates the organisation’s commitment to its people to maintain a safe, ethical, inclusive and productive workplace in compliance with its obligations under relevant legislation. These commitments include no tolerance for unacceptable workplace behaviour and misconduct, attracting, developing and retaining leaders who model and promote safe, ethical, inclusive and productive workplace behaviour.

The framework also acknowledges both the internal and external benefits of a respectful workplace, including a more capable, productive and adaptable workforce, improved health and wellbeing of all staff, and a more culturally aware workforce that reflects and better understands the community that it serves.¹

The NSWPF has increased its attention on prevention and early intervention of workplace since 2022, when it conducted a significant review of the Respectful Workplace Behaviour (RWB) Guidelines. The current RWB Guidelines acknowledge the Australian Human Rights Commission’s framework of seven standards for complying with the positive duty under the SDA, which fall under prevention (on the right side of the wheel) and response (on the left side of the wheel).

Figure 61. The Australian Human Rights Commission’s seven standards for meeting the positive duty obligation



In its guidance material, the Australian Human Rights Commission clarifies its expectations that organisations will need to consider and apply four Guiding Principles when implementing the seven standards in order to comply with the positive duty under the SDA:²

Principle	Application
Consultation	Consulting with workers about what they need for a workplace to be and feel safe and respectful, as well as the risks and mitigation options to eliminate relevant unlawful conduct.
Gender equality	Ensuring all actions to meet the positive duty obligation under the SDA contribute to achieving gender equality, because gender inequality is an underlying cause and consequence of unsafe and unlawful conduct. Gender equality exists where people of all genders have equal rights, rewards, opportunities and resources.
Intersectionality	Embedding an intersectional approach to prevention to address the compounded experience and harm of unsafe and unlawful behaviours that some individuals are exposed to, due to their intersecting attributes, such as their sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, age and/or socio-economic background.
Person-centred and trauma-informed	Ensuring reporting, support and response processes reflect a person-centred and trauma-informed approach, which prioritises the needs, safety and preferences of impacted individuals. Taking a person-centred and trauma-informed approach minimises further harm that can be caused by internal complaint processes, and promotes repair and recovery to the greatest extent possible.

Although the Australian Human Rights Commission's framework is designed for duty holders to comply with their positive duty obligation under the SDA, it provides a leading practice approach for eliminating all forms of unsafe and unlawful workplace misconduct, including bullying and other psychosocial hazards identified by the NSWPF. Therefore, the Review has referred to this framework in making a summary assessment of the extent to which the NSWPF's workplace conduct policies, and procedures satisfy its positive duty obligations. The extent to which these organisational instruments actually prevent people from experiencing unsafe and unlawful behaviour is explored in the subsequent sections of this chapter. Recommendations to address the gaps identified below are incorporated into this report.

Leadership Standard	
Outcomes	Summary assessment of NSWPF policies and procedures
Senior leaders must understand their obligations under relevant legislation and have up-to-date knowledge about relevant unlawful conduct.	The RWB Policy and Guidelines and the NSWPF Psychosocial Risk Management Framework articulate expectations of all commanders, managers, supervisors and sergeants including, but not limited to: → upholding the RWB Guidelines and proactively encouraging managers to do so; → understanding their WHS legal duties and how to create a psychologically healthy workplace; → promoting diversity and inclusion; → leading the way by being good role models of respectful workplace behaviour and conduct; → adopting proactive strategies to prevent unacceptable workplace behaviours and identifying psychosocial risk factors that may contribute to a mentally unsafe working environment → challenging unacceptable behaviour and encouraging reporting; and → responding to allegations of RWB misconduct and prioritising the support and care of those impacted. Although it may be assumed that senior leaders are captured in the above, these instruments do not articulate any responsibilities for NSWPF's senior leaders, including Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners or the Commissioner. Therefore, it is recommended that the framework be updated to articulate the responsibilities of senior leaders to lead the organisation's work to eliminate, as far as possible, unsafe and unlawful behaviour. This includes understanding their obligations under relevant legislation and have up-to-date knowledge about relevant unlawful conduct.
Senior leaders are expected to take responsibility for developing and implementing a prevention and response plan, which is regularly monitored for effectiveness, and communicating it to all workers.	The NSWPF Health and Safety Strategy 2021-2026 articulates priorities and expected success indicators to prevent, support and respond to physical and psychological health and safety risks within the organisation. The strategy is broad in nature and does not articulate specific actions relating to RWB misconduct. A range of NSWPF policies, including the RWB Guidelines and Psychosocial Risk Management Framework articulate the organisation's responsibility to prevent and respond to RWB misconduct, psychosocial hazards, and psychological injury, and provides guidance to commanders, managers, supervisors and sergeants on their related responsibilities. There is otherwise, no overarching plan or strategic vision or document to prevent and respond to unsafe and unlawful workplace misconduct within the NSWPF. This constitutes an operational, rather than strategic approach to preventing and responding to RWB misconduct. Further analysis of the effectiveness of NSWPF's approach to prevention is provided below. These documents also provide guidance However, notwithstanding their significantly greater power and authority, NSWPF's most senior leaders do not have distinct accountabilities in any of these instruments, meaning they are attributed the same responsibilities as commanders, managers and sergeants. The absence of an overarching RWB prevention and response plan, that NSWPF's senior leaders take responsibility for, is a gap that should be rectified.

Senior leaders are expected to be visible in their commitment to safe, respectful and inclusive workplaces that value diversity and gender equality, including through individual role modelling of safe, inclusive, fair and respectful behaviour.	The NSWPF 2023 to 2027 Culture Strategy articulates clear and distinct expectations of the Commissioner's Executive Team, Executive Leaders and senior leaders to set, drive and lead the culture and values for the NSWPF. The Review was provided with Senior leader statements expressing the organisation's commitment to a safe, respectful and inclusive workplace culture. However, accountability for senior leaders to role model safe, inclusive, fair and respectful behaviour could be strengthened through additional specific KPIs. The gaps relate particularly to employee engagement, retention and diversity.
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Culture Standard	
Outcomes	Summary assessment of NSWPF policies and procedures
Organisations and businesses should foster a culture that is safe, respectful and inclusive and that values diversity and gender equality. This culture empowers workers (including leaders and managers) to report relevant unlawful conduct, minimises harm and holds people accountable for their actions.	The NSWPF 2023 to 2027 Culture Strategy constitutes a strong commitment to fostering a culture that is inclusive, respectful and fair. A key deliverable in this strategy is the responsibility of leaders to hold people accountable. This Strategy articulates a commitment to driving inclusive and respectful workplaces through the implementation of deliverables coming out of the Aboriginal Employment and Engagement Strategy (2024 to 2026), the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy (2020 – 2023) and the subsequent Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy (2024 – 2026) (among others). These strategies strive for increased representation of minority cohorts within the NSWPF workforce, including women, Aboriginal people, Culturally and linguistically diverse people, employees who identify as LGBTQI and people with a disability, however targets are not included in success measures. The RWB Guidelines also acknowledge the importance of a diverse, respectful and inclusive workforce and articulates a responsibility for all commanders and managers to encourage an environment where employees feel safe to report unlawful conduct. Critically, the RWB Guidelines identify that a speak up culture of proactive peer and bystander intervention will help prevent RWB misconduct, reduce complaints and maintain a respectful workplace culture. Notwithstanding the above endeavours, the absence of diversity and gender equality targets in workforce representation are a contributing factor to the NSWPF's slow progress on increasing the diversity of its workforce so that it better represents the community it services. As flagged above, this is a gap that should be rectified. A key initiative arising from the Culture Strategy is the development of Command level Culture Action Groups, which are explained in further detail below.

Knowledge Standard	
Outcomes	Summary assessment of NSWPF policies and procedures
Organisations and businesses develop, communicate and implement a policy regarding respectful behaviour and unlawful conduct.	The RWB Policy and Guidelines clearly define all forms of RWB misconduct and explains employees' rights (and expectations) to report and resolve RWB misconduct. In addition to expectations of commanders, managers, supervisors and sergeants (set out above) the policy articulates expectations of all staff, including, but not limited to: → refraining from all forms of misconduct, including workplace misconduct; → creating and maintaining a positive and supportive workplace free of unacceptable workplace behaviour and misconduct; → interacting with others in a professional, courteous and polite manner that does not interfere with the health and safety of others; → attempting to resolve RWB misconduct matters as early as possible; and → addressing and/or reporting RWB misconduct. A strength of the RWB Guidelines is its format of two distinct parts, which focus on: → Creating a Respectful Workplace through Prevention and Early Intervention; and → Responding to and resolving RWB misconduct when it occurs. Communications provided to the Review illustrate that the policy has been communicated to all staff and implemented.
Organisations should support workers (including leaders and managers) to engage in safe, respectful and inclusive behaviour through education on: → expected standards of behaviour, including actions and attitudes that foster equality and respect → identifying behaviours that constitute relevant unlawful conduct, and the consequences for engaging in such conduct → their rights and responsibilities in relation to safe, respectful and inclusive workplaces and working relationships. This includes their role in preventing and responding to relevant unlawful conduct.	NSWPF has a suite of online Police Education Training Environment (PETE) training modules regarding their rights and responsibilities relating to safe, respectful and inclusive behaviour, including (but not limited to) the following mandatory modules: → Respectful and Inclusive Workplaces → Code of Conduct and Ethics → LGBTQI Awareness and Inclusion. Mandatory modules are supplemented by optional workshops offered (predominantly to leaders) by the Respectful Workplaces and Safe Reporting Unit, which build knowledge and capability to conduct professional and honest conversations about respectful workplace behaviour and grievances, maintain respectful workplace behaviours in Commands, and how to conduct facilitated discussions. One such training that was spoken highly of was the in-person Populus Training. It is unclear if any of these training modules are evaluated to determine their effectiveness at preventing harmful behaviour. This is a gap that should be rectified.

Risk Management Standard	
Outcomes	Summary assessment of NSWPF policies and procedures
Organisations and businesses recognise that relevant unlawful conduct is an equality risk and a health and safety risk. They take a risk-based approach to prevention and response.	The NSWPF Psychosocial Risk Management Framework outlines the organisation's risk-based approach to managing psychosocial hazards, including bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, and meeting its legal obligation to identify psychosocial hazards and risks, and eliminate or minimise them (in other words take active steps to prevent them). Managers and Commanders are also charged with the responsibility to identify and assess risk factors for sexual harassment under the RWB Guidelines. The organisation's risk management framework does not: → identify controls to the risk of discrimination and victimisation → articulate the key, relevant drivers or risk factors within NSWPF that contribute to RWB misconduct, or tailored controls. This is a gap that should be rectified. We refer the NSWPF to our table under 'Drivers and Risk Factors of Workplace Harm' in the 'Addressing harmful behaviours' chapter.

Support Standard	
Outcomes	Summary assessment of NSWPF policies and procedures
Organisations and businesses ensure that appropriate support is available to workers (including leaders and managers) who experience or witness relevant unlawful conduct.	NSWPF provides all employees with a range of internal support options (e.g. Peer Support Officers and support persons) and external support options (such as the EAP).
Workers are informed about the available support, and can access the support, regardless of whether they report the conduct.	Support services available to all NSWPF employees are widely communicated, including through the RWB Guidelines and via posters and screen savers. Culturally safe and accessible support services for marginalised groups, including people with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and LGBTQA+ staff are promoted on the NSWPF public facing website. There is no apparent culturally safe support services available for culturally and linguistically diverse staff. This is a gap that should be rectified.

Reporting and Response Standard	
Outcomes	Summary assessment of NSWPF policies and procedures
Organisations and businesses ensure that appropriate options for reporting and responding to relevant unlawful conduct are provided and regularly communicated to workers and other impacted people.	The RWB Guidelines clearly state that all NSWPF staff can report RWB misconduct to: → a Commander, manager or supervisor; → the Professional Standards Duty Officer (PSDO), Professional Standards District Inspector (PSDI) or Professional Standards Manager (PSM) within their Command; → the Respectful Workplaces and Safe Reporting Unit → the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC); or → the Professional Standards Command (PSC) Notwithstanding the organisation's various communications to staff to inform them of the RWB Guidelines, the extent to which staff are actually aware of these reporting pathways available to them is entirely contingent on them taking active steps to review the Guidelines, indicating that the NSWPF does not take sufficient proactive measures to ensure staff are aware of all reporting and response options. This is a gap that should be rectified.
Responses to reports of relevant unlawful conduct are consistent and timely. They minimise harm to, and victimization of, people involved.	The RWB Guidelines set out the response process for all reports of RWB misconduct, including a triage process to determine the most appropriate course of resolution. Resolution can include formal or informal options and the Guidelines recognise the right of all individuals to have matters dealt with quickly, proportionately, and fairly by adhering to the principles of procedural fairness. Further exploration of reporting and response is provided under the Reporting and Response section in the 'Addressing harmful behaviours' chapter.
Consequences are consistent and proportionate.	The RWB Guidelines are silent on the various consequences for engaging in RWB Misconduct, however Commanders or delegates responsible for determining the consequences are provided with recommendations from the Assessment and Advisory Unit, and they have access to a Management Action Framework to assist their decision making in relation to consequences. The Review was not provided with evidence that consequence for RWB misconduct are determined and applied consistently across the organisation. Further analysis of perceptions of accountability for RWB misconduct across NSWPF are explored in the 'Addressing harmful behaviours' chapter.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Transparency Standard	
Outcomes	Summary assessment of NSWPF policies and procedures
Organisations and businesses collect appropriate data to understand the nature and extent of relevant unlawful conduct concerning their workforce.	NSWPF collects and assesses high-level data relating to people's experiences of unsafe and unlawful conduct via the annual People Matters Engagement Survey (PMES). The Commissioner Executive Team (CET) is also provided with reports that detail RWB misconduct complaints and outcomes. There is also misconduct prevention reporting requirements in COMPASS, including RWB matters in 2024-2025.
Organisations and businesses use the data they collect to regularly assess and improve the work culture, as well as to develop measures for preventing and responding to relevant unlawful conduct.	PMES data informs Command level initiatives on a range of topics (including but not limited to RWB misconduct) that are (theoretically) progressed via the Culture Action Groups. However, there is no overarching monitoring and evaluation process to determine if the RWB Policy and Guidelines and the Psychosocial Risk Management Framework are effective at reducing and/or eliminating unsafe and unlawful workplace conduct. This is a gap that should be rectified.
Organisations and businesses are transparent about the nature and extent of reported behaviours that could constitute relevant unlawful conduct concerning their workers and actions taken to address it.	PMES data relating to experiences of RWB misconduct is publicly available. High level complaints data is also reported in Annual Reports. Further, deidentified case studies and articles are published in the Police Monthly relating to RWB matters. The Review considers that the NSWPF could expand its transparency to the workforce in relation to RWB complaint management through more detailed quarterly or regular reporting, detailing the nature and extent of reported behaviours and actions taken to address it. This is a gap that we recommend should be rectified.

Additionally, NSWPF's framework to create safe and respectful workplaces does not acknowledge or address intersectionality, which is a gap, given the disproportionate rates of harm experienced by diverse and under-represented cohorts in the NSWPF workforce, as evidenced throughout this report.

Appendix C. Cultural Review workforce survey questions

Introduction

Thank you for giving your time to participate in this important survey to inform the Independent Cultural Review (the Review) into New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF).

The Review is being led by Kristen Hilton, former Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, and her independent team at Kristen Hilton Advisory (KHA). KHA is an independent consultancy that has been engaged by NSWPF to lead the Review.

We, the Social Research Centre, are an independent organisation who is conducting this online survey on behalf of KHA.

About the review

The Review will examine the systems, processes, attitudes and behaviours that shape employees experiences at work. In workplaces, the culture is shaped by people – it is both the written and the unwritten rules that influence the workplace's character.

Employees from across New South Wales Police Force are invited to share their experiences to help us better understand the workplace culture within NSWPF. This includes positive experiences as well as the challenges they encounter, and the opportunities they see for a fairer, safer and more respectful workplace.

About this survey

This survey is about your experiences as a current or former employee of NSWPF. Your participation in the survey will contribute to shaping any recommendations for reform.

The survey will be open from Monday 11 August to Friday 5 September.

Completing the survey

Depending on your answers, this survey may take up to 30 minutes to complete.

You will need to complete the survey in one go, please make sure you allow enough time to finish it. For your responses to be recorded, you must get to the end of the survey and click 'Next' to submit your survey responses.

While we value your opinion, the survey is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question by selecting 'Prefer not to say'. Please use the 'Next' and 'Previous' buttons on screen to navigate through the survey, do not use the back button on your browser.

The survey topics

Through the survey you will be asked about your experience of NSWPF workplace culture, including general feelings towards workplace culture, recruitment, promotion and leadership. The survey will also explore any experiences with harmful behaviours such as bullying, sexual harassment, sexual assault, discrimination and hostile working environments.

As this survey asks you to share any experiences and observations of these harmful behaviours, it may cause distress. If you need support, please contact any of the following organisations or use your support networks.

- Converge: Employee Assistance Program for current and former employees
Telephone: 1300 667 197
- 13 YARN: An Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander crisis support line
Telephone: 13 92 76
- Beyond Blue: Anxiety, depression, and suicide prevention support service
Telephone: 1300 224 636

- Lifeline: Crisis support and suicide prevention
Telephone: 13 11 14
- 1800RESPECT: National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service
Telephone: 1800 737 732

Please click 'next' to view the privacy statement and consent.

Privacy Statement

Whilst highly encouraged, your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary.

Please read this Privacy Statement to understand how your responses will be handled if you participate in the survey, and to confirm your consent to participate on that basis.

This survey has been designed in a way that maintains your privacy. NSWPF will not know who chooses to participate. The Social Research Centre will de-identify and combine your answers with the answers of others for analysis. No individual level survey data will be provided to NSWPF, and small groups (numbering under 30) will not be included in any reporting. The Social Research Centre will delete any identifying information held as soon as practicable after the completion of the survey.

Please be aware that once the survey closes, your survey data will be permanently de-identified, meaning that it will no longer be possible for the researchers to identify or withdraw your survey responses from other responses. If you do withdraw from the study, your survey responses will not be included in the final datafile or report. If you commence the survey and then decide not to take part, the answers to survey items answered to that point will be recorded, but not used in any reporting. If you wish to have this data deleted, please contact the Social Research Centre.

<IF ENTERED VIA CURRENT EMPLOYEE SURVEY LINK> NSW Police Force have provided the Social Research Centre with a distribution list of email addresses for current employees. Individual email addresses are not identifiable within this list. The Social Research Centre will only use this distribution list for the purpose of contacting you for the survey.

The responses you provide will be analysed by the Social Research Centre and KHA for the purpose of helping NSWPF create a more equitable, capable and culturally safe workplace. This will always be done in a way that maintains confidentiality and your privacy.

Your privacy is strictly protected by law. Your responses are kept safe in line with the Australian Privacy Principles and the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth). The Social Research Centre's full Privacy Policy is available here and our collection statement is located here <LINK: <https://srcentre.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/NSWPF-Workforce-Survey-collection-statement.pdf>>.

If you have any questions about your privacy, please contact KHA on info@nswpolicereview.com.au or the Social Research Centre on nswpolicesurvey@srcentre.com.au.

Consent

The survey has been reviewed and approved by the Bellberry Ethics Committee (Ethics Number: 2025-03-493). The Ethics Approval process requires you to be provided with a Participant Information Sheet.

The Participant Information Sheet gives you more information about the Review and how your data will be used and managed. Please take the time to read the Participant Information Sheet by clicking <here> [LINK: https://srcentre.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Participant_Information_Sheet_Final_Formatted.pdf].

Please confirm whether or not you consent to contributing to the Independent Cultural Review into New South Wales Police Force by participating in this survey.

Yes, I consent to participating

No, I do not want to participate [TERM 2]

Footer

[Privacy](#) [Info](#) [Email](#)

*Links:

Privacy link: <https://srcentre.com.au/research-participants/privacy>
 Online info page: [Independent Cultural Review into New South Wales Police Force](#)
 SRC email: nswpolicesurvey@srcentre.com.au

If you have any technical issues, please email the Social Research Centre at nswpolicesurvey@srcentre.com.au or call us on 1800 023 040. For further information about the review, including how the information will be used, please contact KHA by email at info@nswpoliceireview.com.au.

If you would like to talk to someone about any issues covered by this survey, you can contact these free support and information services:

- Converge: Employee Assistance Program for current and former employees (Telephone: 1300 667 197)
- 13 YARN: An Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander crisis support line (Telephone: 13 92 76)
- Beyond Blue: Anxiety, depression, and suicide prevention support service (Telephone: 1300 224 636)
- Lifeline: Crisis support and suicide prevention (Telephone: 13 11 14)
- 1800RESPECT: National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service (Telephone: 1800 737 732)

Screening and demographic questions

AGE How old were you at your last birthday?

1. 18-29
2. 30-39
3. 40-49
4. 50-59
5. 60 or over

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

Q1 Are you currently working for NSWPF?

1. Yes
2. No - I left between 2020-2022
3. No - I left between 2023-2025
4. No - I left before 2020 [TERM 1]

98. Not sure [TERM 1]
99. Prefer not to say [TERM 1]

ROLE Which of the following best describes your [IF Q1=1, current, IF Q1=2 OR 3, former] role and grade / rank at NSWPF?

1. Administrative Officer – Clerk General Scale
2. Administrative Officer – Clerk 1-2 grade
3. Administrative Officer – Clerk 3-4 grade
4. Administrative Officer – Clerk 5-6 grade
5. Administrative Officer – Clerk 7-8 grade
6. Administrative Officer – Clerk 9-10 grade
7. Administrative Officer – Clerk 11-12 grade
8. Director or above
9. Police Officer – Probationary Constable
10. Police Officer – Constable
11. Police Officer – Senior Constable
12. Police Officer – Sergeant
13. Police Officer – Senior Sergeant
14. Police Officer – Inspector
15. Police Officer – Chief Inspector
16. Police Officer – Superintendent
17. Police Officer – Chief Superintendent
18. Police Officer – Assistant Commissioner
19. Police Officer – Other (please specify)
20. Administrative Officer – Other (please specify)

- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

*(ROLE=9-19, POLICE OFFICER)

GRAD In what year did you graduate from NSWPF academy?

- 1. 2022-2025
- 2. 2021 or earlier

- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

*(ROLE=1-8, 20 ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE)

ADMIN_R In what year were you recruited into your current role with NSWPF?

- 1. 2022-2025
- 2. 2021 or earlier

- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

A. Cultural Overview

To start with, we are interested in your experiences of what it [IF Q1=1, is, IF Q1=2 OR 3, was] like to work for NSWPF.

Q2 Which of the following best describes the workplace culture at NSWPF?

Culture can contribute to a positive and meaningful experience, or it can reinforce work practices and behaviours that don't meet standards and values. Poor culture can result in individual and organisational harm and weaken trust.

- 1. The workplace culture is always inclusive, fair and respectful
- 2. The workplace culture is mostly inclusive, fair and respectful
- 3. The workplace culture is sometimes inclusive, fair and respectful
- 4. The workplace culture is not usually inclusive, fair and respectful
- 5. The workplace culture is never inclusive, fair and respectful

- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

B. Policing climate and culture

Q3 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about working for NSWPF?

Note: Leadership is key in setting direction, executing strategy, shaping culture and capability, inspiring purpose, and delivering results. The term 'management' refers to the group of senior managers in your organisation, not an individual manager.

- a) I feel safe in my workplace
- b) I get satisfaction from my job
- c) I feel proud and safe wearing my uniform out in the community [*ONLY SHOW IF ROLE=9-19, POLICE OFFICER]
- d) I feel motivated to do my job
- e) I feel respected by my colleagues
- f) I feel respected and valued by management
- g) I feel that if something goes wrong at work, I get the help I need from management
- h) After a critical incident at work, I get the right support from management
- i) I feel that NSWPF understands and supports the environment I work in
- j) I rely on my colleagues for my safety

- k) The greatest source of stress and challenge in my role is external (such as demands of the job, public expectation, the nature of policing)
- l) The greatest source of stress and challenge for me in my role is internal (such as workplace culture, relationships with peers, relationship with supervisor)
- m) I can manage my workload effectively
- n) My workload negatively impacts my physical and/or mental health

[RESPONSE FRAME]
[ROTATE BASED ON S_ORDER VARIABLE]

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree

- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

C. Recruitment and promotion processes

RECRUITMENT

*(GRAD=1 OR ADMIN_R=1, GRADUATED OR RECRUITED INTO ROLE BETWEEN 2022-2025)

REC_INTRO This next section will ask you questions about your recent experiences of being recruited and trained to work at NSWPF.

*(GRAD=1 OR ADMIN_R=1, GRADUATED OR RECRUITED INTO ROLE BETWEEN 2022-2025)

Q4 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the recruitment and assessment process?

- a) The recruitment process was fair and free from bias
- b) Men have the same opportunities to succeed in the recruitment process as others
- c) Women have the same opportunities to succeed in the recruitment process as others
- d) People from culturally diverse backgrounds have the same opportunities to succeed in the recruitment process as others
- e) The physical assessment reflected the actual demands of the job [*ONLY SHOW IF ROLE=9-19, POLICE OFFICER]
- f) The psychological assessment reflected the actual demands of the job [*ONLY SHOW IF ROLE=9-19, POLICE OFFICER]
- g) I was provided with support and adequate information throughout the recruitment process
- h) My case manager made me feel valued and respected as a candidate

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree

- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

ACADEMY

*(GRAD=1, LEFT THE ACADEMY FROM 2022-2025)

Q5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- a) I felt connected to NSWPF during the online component of recruit training
- b) I felt a sense of belonging at the Academy
- c) My time as a recruit (online and in person) prepared me for the realities of the job I am being asked to do
- d) I was exposed to leaders and instructors who inspired me during my time at the Academy
- e) I felt adequately prepared—psychologically, physically, and professionally—when transitioning to probation
- f) I would recommend the recruit training experience to future applicants

[RESPONSE FRAME]
[ROTATE BASED ON S_ORDER VARIABLE]

- 1. Strongly agree

2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
-
98. Not sure
 99. Prefer not to say

PROMOTION

PROM_INTRO This section asks you about your experiences of promotion and career progression within NSWPF.

Q7 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- a) I understand the current promotion process
- b) I believe the current promotion process is fair and equitable for all employees
- c) NSWPF appoints the best person to the role for promotions

[RESPONSE FRAME]
[ROTATE BASED ON S_ORDER VARIABLE]

1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
-
98. Not sure
 99. Prefer not to say

Q7A Have you applied for a promotion in NSWPF in the last five years?

1. Yes
 2. No
-
98. Not sure
 99. Prefer not to say

*(Q7A=1, APPLIED FOR A PROMOTION IN LAST 5 YEARS)

Q7B To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your most recent application for a promotion?

- a) The assessment of my (IF ROLE=9-19, POLICE OFFICER SHOW: sworn focused) skills and (IF ROLE=9-19, POLICE OFFICER SHOW: sworn focused) knowledge to determine my suitability for the promotion rank/grade was accurate
- b) The feedback I received during the promotions process was useful in guiding areas requiring further development/attention

[RESPONSE FRAME]
[ROTATE BASED ON S_ORDER VARIABLE]

1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
-
98. Not sure
 99. Prefer not to say

Q8 What is the highest rank or role you would like to achieve?

[IF ROLE=1-8,20, ADMIN - DISPLAY 2, IF ROLE=9-19, POLICE - DISPLAY 1]. [IF ROLE=98 NOT SURE OR 99 PREFER NOT TO SAY - DISPLAY 1 AND 2]

1. Drop down list of Police employees – Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner, Superintendent, Chief Inspector, Inspector, Senior Sergeant, Sergeant, Senior Constable, Constable, Probationary Constable, Other

2. Drop down list of Admin employees - Administrative Officer – Clerk General Scale, Administrative Officer – Clerk 1-2 grade, Administrative Officer – Clerk 3-4 grade, Administrative Officer – Clerk 5-6 grade, Administrative Officer – Clerk 7-8 grade, Administrative Officer – Clerk 9-10 grade, Administrative Officer – Clerk 11-12 grade, Senior Executive Service, Director or above, Other
3. Do not want to achieve a higher rank or role
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q8=1, 2, 98 or 99, ALL EXCEPT THOSE WHO DO NOT WANT A HIGHER RANK)

Q8a How likely do you think it is that you will be able to achieve your desired progress to a higher rank or grade in NSWPF?

[RESPONSE FRAME]

[ROTATE BASED ON S_ORDER VARIABLE]

1. Very likely
2. Somewhat likely
3. Neither likely nor unlikely
4. Somewhat unlikely
5. Very unlikely

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q8=1, 2, 98 or 99, ALL EXCEPT THOSE WHO DO NOT WANT A HIGHER RANK)

Q8b How likely is it that you will achieve a promotion to a higher rank or grade in the next five years?

[RESPONSE FRAME]

[ROTATE BASED ON S_ORDER VARIABLE]

1. Very likely
2. Somewhat likely
3. Neither likely nor unlikely
4. Somewhat unlikely
5. Very unlikely

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q8a=4 OR 5, UNLIKELY TO ACHIEVE DESIRED PROGRESS TO HIGHER RANKS IN NSWPF)

Q8c Why do you think it is not very likely that you will achieve your desired progress to higher ranks or grades?

Please do not include names or any other identifying or confidential information about yourself, others or NSWPF operational information in your response. For example, “male crime manager at XXX PAC who was there in 2024 is identifiable.

1. [VERBATIM TEXT BOX]

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(ALL)

Q9 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about progression and promotion within NSWPF?

- a) There is a strong focus on rote learning instead of work performance (rote learning is memorising information through repetition, without fully understanding its meaning)
- b) Sufficient time is allocated during work hours to study for the necessary exams
- c) Cliques/ ‘in-groups’ influence progression and promotion within NSWPF
- d) Everyone has the same opportunities for promotion regardless of their family or caring commitments
- e) Relocation requirements limit access to promotion opportunities
- f) The current promotions system is geared towards detectives [*ONLY SHOW IF ROLE=9-18, POLICE OFFICER]
- g) Access to Acting opportunities is equal across all ranks and grades in NSWPF

- h) Everyone has the same opportunities for promotion regardless of gender
 - i) Everyone has the same opportunities for promotion regardless of race or ethnicity
 - j) There is a lack of female role models at senior levels
-
- 1. Strongly agree
 - 2. Agree
 - 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 - 4. Disagree
 - 5. Strongly disagree
-
- 98. Not sure
 - 99. Prefer not to say

D. Leadership capability

LEAD_INTRO This next section will ask you questions about your experiences of the Supervisors / Managers at NSWPF.

Q10 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- a) I have access to appropriate supervision and support from Supervisors / Managers in my workplace
 - b) I feel respected by Supervisors / Managers in my workplace
 - c) Supervisors / Managers in my workplace model and drive a culture of safety, inclusion and respect
 - d) Supervisors / Managers are accountable for unsafe behaviours and workplace inequality
 - e) NSWPF values and rewards Supervisors / Managers who have strong people management skills
 - f) There is a safe process for employees to provide feedback to Supervisors / Managers on their management and supervision
 - g) I trust the Supervisors / Managers in my workplace
 - h) Supervisors / Managers proactively resolve conflict between employees in their teams
 - i) Supervisors / Managers have the skills to manage rudeness, incivility, or poor communication in their teams
-
- 1. Strongly agree
 - 2. Agree
 - 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 - 4. Disagree
 - 5. Strongly disagree
-
- 98. Not sure
 - 99. Prefer not to say

Q11 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about giving and receiving feedback in NSWPF?

[RANDOMISE STATEMENTS]
(STATEMENTS)

- a) I receive timely, actionable feedback on a regular basis from my Supervisor / Manager.
 - b) I am comfortable and encouraged to give feedback to my peers.
 - c) I am comfortable and encouraged to give feedback to my Supervisor / Manager.
 - d) My Supervisor / Manager understands the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying.
 - e) I receive regular feedback around how my behaviour contributes to the team or organisation.
-
- 1. Strongly agree
 - 2. Agree
 - 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 - 4. Disagree
 - 5. Strongly disagree
-
- 98. Not sure
 - 99. Prefer not to say

E. Unlawful and unsafe workplace behaviour and reporting

UNSAFE_INTRO The following questions in this section seek to understand issues within the workplace that relate to unwelcome behaviours by NSWPF employees towards other employees.

The unwelcome behaviours that the Cultural Review is looking at include unwanted sexual behaviours (including sexual harassment and sexual assault), discrimination, bullying, racism and other unsafe and unlawful workplace behaviours.

When answering these questions, please remember that your responses are completely confidential. If there is a particular question you would prefer not to answer you can select “Prefer not to say” to move on to the next question.

Please do not include names or any other identifying information about yourself or others in any written responses, for example “male crime manager at XXX PAC who was there in 2024” is identifiable.

This Review will not investigate individual cases of bullying, harassment or other misconduct.

<IF Q1=1, CURRENTLY WORKING FOR NSWPF, DISPLAY> If you wish to find out more information about making a report internally to NSWPF, the Safe Reporting Unit provides a confidential service, and you can speak with an advisor for assistance. Please remember your obligation as an employee to report misconduct.

Q12 Have you directly experienced any of the following behaviours in the last 5 years (between 2020-2025) while working at NSWPF?

Workplace bullying is repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety - such as verbal, physical and written abuse (including on social media).

Sexual harassment is where a person makes an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, to another person; or the person engages in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to the other person, in circumstances where a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated that the other person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.

- a) Bullying
 - b) Sexual assault
 - c) Sexual harassment or other unwanted sexual behaviours
 - d) Hostile working environment on the grounds of your sex
 - e) Discrimination or less favourable treatment because of your gender, race, disability, or some other attribute
 - f) Verbal abuse and/or threats
 - g) Victimisation
-
- 1. Yes
 - 2. No
-
- 98. Not sure
 - 99. Prefer not to say

*(Q12 ANY a-g=1, ANSWERED CODE 1, YES TO ONE OR MORE BEHAVIOUR)

*(PROGRAMMER NOTE: IF ONLY ONE BEHAVIOUR =1 (YES) IN Q12, AUTOFILL Q13 WITH THIS BEHAVIOUR AND HIDE QUESTION FROM RESPONDENT)

Q13 Which of the following behaviours did you experience most recently?

- 1. Bullying

2. Sexual assault
3. Sexual harassment or other unwanted sexual behaviours
4. Hostile working environment on the grounds of your sex
5. Discrimination or less favourable treatment because of your gender, race, disability, or some other attribute
6. Verbal abuse and/or threats
7. Victimisation
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

BULLYING DETAIL

Q14 In the last 5 years (between 2020-2025), have you experienced any of the following types of behaviour while working at NSWPF?

- a) Treating you in a way that made you feel scared, small, or embarrassed
- b) Not telling you information you need to get your work done properly
- c) Repeated hurtful words or comments, or making fun of your work or you as a person
- d) Excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in work
- e) Spreading rumours about you
- f) Being treated unfairly because you spoke up about alleged bullying or made a complaint
- g) Spoken or written abuse, including via email, messaging service (such as WhatsApp, Signal, SMS message) or social media
- h) Denied rewards or promotions
- i) Threatening or attacking you
- j) Being made to do humiliating or inappropriate things in order to be accepted
- k) Pushing, shoving, tripping or grabbing you
- l) Hazing or initiation rituals
- m) Any other form of bullying
1. Yes
2. No
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

Q14_Oth Please describe the other form of bullying behaviour you have experienced.

1. <TEXT BOX>
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

Q15 Did any of these bullying behaviours happen in the last 12 months (2024 – now) while working at NSWPF?

Please select all that apply [DISPLAY ONLY IF Q14=1 FOR 2 OR MORE STATEMENTS]

1. Treating you in a way that made you feel scared, small, or embarrassed
2. Not telling you information you need to get your work done properly
3. Repeated hurtful words or comments, or making fun of your work or you as a person
4. Excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in work
5. Spreading rumours about you
6. Being treated unfairly because you spoke up about alleged bullying or made a complaint
7. Spoken or written abuse, including via email, messaging service (such as WhatsApp, Signal, SMS message) or social media
8. Denying rewards or promotions
9. Threatening or attacking you
10. Being made to do humiliating or inappropriate things in order to be accepted
11. Pushing, shoving, tripping or grabbing you
12. Hazing or initiation rituals
13. Any other form of bullying [IF Q14_m=1, DISPLAY OTHER SPECIFY FROM Q14_Oth] [FIXED POSITION]

- 14. Not applicable, was not working at NSWPF between 2024 and now *(EXCLUSIVE)
- 97. None of these behaviours occurred in the last 12 months *(EXCLUSIVE)
- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

SEXUAL HARASSMENT DETAIL

Q16 In the last 5 years (between 2020-2025), have you experienced any of the following types of sexual harassment while working at NSWPF?

- a) Unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing
- b) Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated
- c) Sexual gestures, indecent exposure or inappropriate display of the body
- d) Repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out on dates
- e) Intrusive questions about your private life or physical appearance that made you feel offended
- f) Inappropriate physical contact
- g) Being followed, watched or someone loitering nearby
- h) Requests or pressure for sex or other sexual acts
- i) Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended
- j) Sexually explicit pictures, posters or gifts that made you feel offended
- k) Indecent phone calls, including someone leaving a sexually explicit message on voicemail or an answering machine
- l) Sexually explicit comments made in emails, SMS messages or on social media or via other digital or online communication channels
- m) Repeated or inappropriate advances on email, social networking websites or internet chat rooms
- n) Sharing or threatening to share intimate images or film of you without your consent
- o) Any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that occurred online or via some form of technology

[RESPONSE FRAME]

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

Q17 Did any of these sexual harassment behaviours happen in the last 12 months (2024 – now) at NSWPF?

Please select all that apply [DISPLAY ONLY IF Q16=1 FOR 2 OR MORE STATEMENTS]

- 1. Unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing
- 2. Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated
- 3. Sexual gestures, indecent exposure or inappropriate display of the body
- 4. Repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out on dates
- 5. Intrusive questions about your private life or physical appearance that made you feel offended
- 6. Inappropriate physical contact
- 7. Being followed, watched or someone loitering nearby
- 8. Requests or pressure for sex or other sexual acts
- 9. Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended
- 10. Sexually explicit pictures, posters or gifts that made you feel offended
- 11. Indecent phone calls, including someone leaving a sexually explicit message on voicemail or an answering machine
- 12. Sexually explicit comments made in emails, SMS messages or on social media or via other digital or online communication channels
- 13. Repeated or inappropriate advances on email, social networking websites or internet chat rooms
- 14. Sharing or threatening to share intimate images or film of you without your consent
- 15. Any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that occurred online or via some form of technology [FIXED POSITION]
- 16. Not applicable, was not working at NSWPF between 2024 and now *(EXCLUSIVE)
- 97. None of these behaviours occurred in the last 12 months *(EXCLUSIVE)
- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

DISCRIMINATION DETAIL

*(EXP_DISCRIM=1, YES)

- Q18 Which of the following behaviours have you experienced in the last 5 years (between 2020-2025) that you believe were because of a personal characteristic such as your sex, gender identity, race, disability, sexual orientation, age etc.?
- a) Not receiving a promotion
 - b) Not receiving a transfer
 - c) Not being considered for professional training or development opportunities
 - d) Receiving a different rate of pay for performing the same role as someone else
 - e) Receiving a different rate of pay for performing a role with the same job functions (for example, two employees who have different job titles but do similar work or the same work)
 - f) Receiving different job benefits for performing the same role as someone else
 - g) Receiving different job benefits for performing a role with the same job functions
 - h) Being given different tasks to other employees who perform the same role
 - i) Being given different tasks to other employees who have the same job functions
 - j) Unfair allocation of tasks
 - k) Unfair rostering (including allocation of leave and overtime) [*ONLY SHOW IF ROLE=9-19, POLICE OFFICER]
 - l) Exclusion from work communications or activities
 - m) Verbal, written or physical abuse
- 1. Yes
 - 2. No
 - 98. Not sure
 - 99. Prefer not to say

*(Q18 ANY a-m=1, EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION)

- Q19 Did any of these discrimination behaviours happen in the last 12 months (2024 – now) at NSWPF?
- Please select all that apply. [DISPLAY ONLY IF Q18=1 FOR 2 OR MORE STATEMENTS]
- 1. Not receiving a promotion
 - 2. Not receiving a transfer
 - 3. Not being considered for professional training or development opportunities
 - 4. Receiving a different rate of pay for performing the same role as someone else
 - 5. Receiving a different rate of pay for performing a role with the same job functions (for example, two employees who have different job titles but do similar work or the same work)
 - 6. Receiving different job benefits for performing the same role as someone else
 - 7. Receiving different job benefits for performing a role with the same job functions
 - 8. Being given different tasks to other employees who perform the same role
 - 9. Being given different tasks to other employees who have the same job functions
 - 10. Unfair allocation of tasks
 - 11. Unfair rostering (including allocation of leave and overtime) [*ONLY SHOW IF ROLE=9-19, POLICE OFFICER]
 - 12. Exclusion from work communications or activities
 - 13. Verbal, written or physical abuse
 - 14. Not applicable, was not working at NSWPF between 2024 and now *(EXCLUSIVE)
 - 97. None of these behaviours occurred in the last 12 months *(EXCLUSIVE)
 - 98. Not sure
 - 99. Prefer not to say

*(EXP_DISCRIM=1, YES)

- Q20 In relation to your most recent experience of discrimination, what do you think were the main reasons for the discrimination?
- Please select all that apply.
- 1. My age
 - 2. My responsibilities as a carer or parent
 - 3. My disability (including physical, intellectual or psychological disability)
 - 4. My sex
 - 5. My intersex status
 - 6. My gender identity
 - 7. My sexual orientation
 - 8. My race

9. My religious belief or activity
10. My employment activity (including asking a question or raising a concern about my entitlements or rights at work)
11. My marital status
12. My pregnancy or breastfeeding
13. My lawful sexual activity (including choosing or not choosing to take part in any form of sexual activity)
14. My physical features (including my height, weight, size, shape, facial features, hair or birthmarks)
15. My political belief or activity
16. My association with someone else with an attribute listed above [KEEP POSITION]
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

SEXUAL ASSAULT DETAIL

Q21 In the last 5 years (between 2020-2025), have you experienced any of the following types of sexual assault by a colleague while working at NSWPF?

- a) Stalking such as repeatedly being followed or watched by someone
- b) Unwanted touching such as pinching, patting, embracing, rubbing, groping, flicking, kissing, fondling, being touched on the breasts, bum or legs, etc
- c) Obscene gestures such as simulating masturbation in front of a person
- d) Being watched doing intimate things without permission
- e) Pressuring for dates or demand for sex that turn into threats or not taking no for an answer
- f) Indecent exposure such as someone showing private parts of their body or 'flashing' their genitals
- g) Taking a photo without permission, forcing someone to be on video, or making someone watch a pornographic movie
- h) Actual or attempted rape
1. Yes
2. No
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q21 ANY a-h=1, EXPERIENCED SEXUAL ASSAULT)

Q22 Did any of these sexual assault behaviours happen in the last 12 months (2024 – now) at NSWPF?

Please select all that apply. [DISPLAY ONLY IF Q21=1 FOR 2 OR MORE STATEMENTS]

1. Stalking such as repeatedly being followed or watched by someone
2. Unwanted touching such as pinching, patting, embracing, rubbing, groping, flicking, kissing, fondling, being touched on the breasts, bum or legs, etc
3. Obscene gestures such as simulating masturbation in front of a person
4. Being watched doing intimate things without permission
5. Pressuring for dates or demand for sex that turn into threats or not taking no for an answer
6. Indecent exposure such as someone showing private parts of their body or 'flashing' their genitals
7. Taking a photo without permission, forcing someone to be on video, or making someone watch a pornographic movie
8. Actual or attempted rape [FIXED POSITION]
9. Not applicable, was not working at NSWPF between 2024 and now *(EXCLUSIVE)
97. None of these behaviours occurred in the last 12 months *(EXCLUSIVE)
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

HOSTILE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Q23 In the past 5 years (between 2020 – 2025), while working at NSWPF, have you experienced or witnessed conduct in your workplace that created a hostile environment based on sex (such as being treated unfairly, demeaned, or intimidated because of your sex or gender)?

- a) Seeing or hearing a colleague talking disrespectfully about sex, telling sexual jokes or making sexual innuendo

- b) Hearing insults, derogatory comments, threats, or ridicule about you or other people based on sex or gender
- c) Criticism related to your sex or gender (such as women are too emotional, too soft, aren't able to handle the physical requirements of the job, need to look after kids and stay at home, shouldn't be working at NSWPF, don't belong here, men should always work full time and not take care of kids)
- d) Exclusion from team activities because of your sex or gender (such as only the 'boys' socialise)
- e) Withholding of information necessary to do your job because of your sex or gender
- f) Display or circulation of obscene, sexist, pornographic or sexual photos, materials, posters or gifts
- g) Making demeaning comments about physical attributes or topics such as pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause or genitalia size
- h) Another behaviour

[RESPONSE FRAME]

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

*(Q23_h=1, SELECTED OTHER TYPE OF HOSTILE BEHAVIOUR)

Q23_Oth Please describe the other form of hostile behaviour you have experienced.

- 1. <TEXT BOX>
- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

*(Q23 ANY A-H=1, EXPERIENCED HOSTILITY)

Q24 Did any of these behaviours happen in the last 12 months (2024 – now) at NSWPF?

Please select all that apply. [DISPLAY ONLY IF Q23=1 FOR 2 OR MORE STATEMENTS]

- 1.
- 2. Seeing or hearing a colleague talking disrespectfully about sex, telling sexual jokes or making sexual innuendo
- 3. Hearing insults, derogatory comments, threats, or ridicule about you or other people based on sex or gender
- 4. Criticism related to your sex or gender (such as you or women in general are too emotional, too soft, aren't able to handle the physical requirements of the job, need to look after kids and stay at home, shouldn't be working at NSWPF, don't belong here)
- 5. Exclusion from team activities because of your sex or gender (such as only the 'boys' socialise)
- 6. Withholding of information necessary to do your job because of your sex or gender
- 7. Display or circulation of obscene, sexist, pornographic or sexual photos, materials, posters or gifts
- 8. Making demeaning comments about physical attributes or topics such as pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause or genitalia size
- 96. Another behaviour [IF Q23_h=1, DISPLAY OTHER SPECIFY FROM Q23_Oth] [FIXED POSITION]
- 8. Not applicable, was not working at NSWPF between 2024 and now *(EXCLUSIVE)
- 97. None of these behaviours occurred in the last 12 months *(EXCLUSIVE)
- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

FREQUENCY OF BEHAVIOURS

The following questions will ask you about your most recent experience of [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13] while working for NSWPF.

Please remember not to disclose information that might identify an alleged offender.

Q25 Thinking about ALL of the occasions when you have experienced [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13] in a NSWPF workplace, what would be the TOTAL number of times you have had these

experiences over the last five years (2020-2025)? If you are not sure please estimate the total number of occasions.

1. Once
2. 2 occasions
3. 3 occasions
4. 4 occasions
5. 5 occasions
6. More than 5 occasions (please specify)

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

Q26 For approximately how long did the [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13] go on for? If you are not sure, please provide your best estimate.

1. Less than 1 month
2. 1 to 3 months
3. 4 to 6 months
4. 7 to 12 months
5. A year or longer

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

PERSON / PEOPLE ENGAGING IN THE BEHAVIOUR

Q27 Was there more than one person directly involved in your most recent experience of [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13]?

1. Yes – more than one person involved
2. No – just one person involved

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

Q30 How many people were directly involved in the most recent incident of [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13]? If not sure please make your best estimate.

1. [NUMERIC TEXT BOX] (MAX RESPONSE=30)

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

Q29 What **was** **were** the genders of the **person** **people** responsible for the behaviour?

Please select all that apply.

1. Female
2. Male
3. Another gender

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(EXP_BEHAVIOUR=1)

Q28 What **was** **were** the roles of the **person** **people** responsible for the most recent incident of [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13]?

Please select all that apply

1. One of my Manager/s or Supervisor/s
2. One of my next level Manager/s or Supervisor/s such as Crime Manager, Duty Officer, Commander, Police Area Manager, District Area Manager, Region Commander for senior people
3. Another Manager or Supervisor

4. Another next level Manager/s or Supervisor/s such as Crime Manager, Duty Officer, Commander, Police Area Manager, District Area Manager, Director/Group Director
5. A co-worker who was more senior
6. A co-worker at the same level as me
7. A co-worker at a lower level than me
8. Another employee that I do not regularly work with
96. Someone else (Please specify)
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

LOCATION OF UNSAFE BEHAVIOUR

Q32 Where did your most recent experience of [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13] happen?

1. In a social area for employees – such as a break or lunchroom
2. At a work social event – such as after-work drinks or a function
3. At a workstation/where I work
4. In a meeting – such as a one-on-one meeting or a meeting with a group of people
5. In a work-provided facility – such as a bathroom or change room
6. In the field, including in a work vehicle
7. At training
96. Somewhere else (please specify)
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

Q33. Did the behaviour happen in person or online?

Please select all that apply

1. In person
2. Online
3. By phone
4. A combination of these things [EXCLUSIVE]
96. Other (please specify)
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES

CONSEQ_INTRO The next section asks questions about any consequences you may have experienced due to the [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13] you experienced while working at NSWPF.

This section may be distressing, if there are any questions you don't want to answer, please select 'Prefer not to say'. If these questions cause you any distress, please remember that you can contact Converge via Telephone on 1300 667 197.

*(EXP_BEHAVIOUR=1)

Q37 Thinking about your most recent experience of [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13], did you experience any of the following personal consequences?

Please select all that apply

1. It impacted on my employment, career or work
2. It had negative financial consequences for me
3. It impacted negatively on my relationships with my partner, children, friends or family
4. It impacted negatively on my self-esteem and confidence
5. It impacted negatively on my physical health and general wellbeing
6. It impacted negatively on my mental health or caused me stress
7. There were some other consequences for me (please specify)
8. There were no personal consequences for me
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

REPORTING THE BEHAVIOUR

Q34 How did you respond to your most recent experience of [INSERT BEHAVIOUR FROM Q13]?

Please select all that apply

1. I spoke to the person/people involved
2. I tried to avoid the person/people involved
3. I kept a record of the behaviour
4. I discussed the behaviour with someone at NSWPF
5. I formally reported/complained about the behaviour
6. I accessed a support service, including counselling or EAP
7. I accessed legal advice
8. I requested a transfer to avoid further contact with the person/people involved
9. I thought about leaving NSWPF
10. I informally reported/complained about the behaviour
96. Other (please specify)

11. I did nothing

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q34≠5, DID NOT FORMALLY REPORT THE BEHAVIOUR)

Q35 Can you tell us why you did not make a formal report/complaint about your experience?

Please select all that apply

1. I wasn't aware of how the reporting/complaints process worked or who to report/complain to
2. My co-workers advised me not to make a report/complaint
3. I thought I would not be believed
4. I was embarrassed
5. I thought I would be blamed
6. I thought I would get fired
7. I was afraid for my career aspirations
8. I wasn't confident in the process and how well I might be supported
9. I thought the reporting/complaints process would be difficult
10. I thought it would not change things or that nothing would be done
11. Lack of confidentiality of the reporting/complaint process
12. I feared negative consequences for the person or people who engaged in the conduct
13. I tried to make a report/complaint, but the process was too difficult
14. I didn't think it was serious enough (please specify why)
96. Other (please specify)

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q34=5, FORMALLY REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR)

REPORT Did you make a formal report/complaint internally or externally from NSWPF?

Please select all that apply

1. Internally, a person or group within NSWPF
2. Externally, a person or organisation external to NSWPF

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(REPORT=1, FORMALLY REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR INTERNALLY)

Q36 Who did you make a formal report/complaint to internally within NSWPF?

Please select all that apply

1. My Manager or Supervisor
2. Another Manager or Supervisor [SHOW IF ROLE=9-19, POLICE OFFICER: or Senior Officer]
3. The Assistant Commissioner responsible for my area
4. The Deputy Commissioner
5. The Commissioner
6. Human Resources Manager (HRM)
7. Professional Standards Command

- 8. My Health and Safety Representative
- 9. Health Safety and Wellbeing Command
- 10. NSWPF Safe Reporting Service
- 96. Other (please specify)
- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

*(REPORT=2, FORMALLY REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR EXTERNALLY)
 Q36a Who did you make a formal report/complaint to external to NSWPF?
 Please select all that apply

- 1. A union or employee representative
- 2. A lawyer or legal service
- 3. Australian Human Rights Commission
- 4. Fair Work Ombudsman
- 5. SafeWork NSW
- 6. Industrial Relations Commission of NSW
- 7. Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC)
- 8. Anti discrimination New South Wales (ADNSW)
- 96. Other (please specify)
- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

*(REPORT=1, REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR INTERNALLY)
 Q39 How long did it take for you to get an outcome after you made the internal formal report/complaint?

- 1. Same day or next working day
- 2. Less than 1 month
- 3. 1 to 3 months
- 4. 4 to 6 months
- 5. 7 to 12 months
- 6. More than 12 months
- 7. My complaint is still being progressed
- 97. There was no outcome to my report/complaint
- 98. Not sure
- 99. Prefer not to say

*(REPORT=1, REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR INTERNALLY)
 Q40 Did any of the following things happen to you after you made an internal formal report/complaint?
 Please select all that apply

- 1. NSWPF apologised for failing to prevent the conduct
- 2. The conduct stopped
- 3. I received positive feedback for making the report/complaint
- 4. I received additional support
- 5. I was supported to take leave
- 6. My shifts were changed on my request
- 7. My shifts were changed without consulting me
- 8. My employment was terminated
- 9. I was made redundant
- 10. I was transferred
- 11. I resigned
- 12. I was demoted
- 13. I was disciplined
- 14. I was denied workplace opportunities, such as training or promotion
- 15. I was ostracised, victimised, or ignored by colleagues
- 16. I was labelled a troublemaker
- 17. My trust in NSWPF increased
- 18. I was assured that my job was secure

96. There were some other consequences for me (Please specify)

19. There were no consequences for me

98. Not sure

99. Prefer not to say

*(REPORT=1, REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR INTERNALLY)

Q41 Did any of the following things happen to the [IF Q27=2, person / IF Q27=1, people] who engaged in the conduct as a result of you making an internal formal report/complaint?

Please select all that apply

1. They were disciplined
2. They were formally warned
3. They were informally spoken to
4. They were transferred
5. They had their shifts changed
6. Their employment was terminated
7. They took leave
8. They resigned
9. They apologised
10. They were moved into an acting role
96. There were some other consequences (please specify)

11. There were no consequences [EXCLUSIVE]

98. Not sure

99. Prefer not to say

*(REPORT=1, REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR INTERNALLY)

Q42 How satisfied did you feel with the formal reporting/complaints process?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied

98. Not sure

99. Prefer not to say

*(REPORT=1, REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR INTERNALLY)

Q43 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?

- a) I felt safe during the formal reporting/complaints process
- b) I felt supported during the formal reporting/complaints process

[ROTATE RESPONSES 1-5 BASED ON S_ORDER VARIABLE]

[RESPONSES]

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

98. Not sure

99. Prefer not to say

*(REPORT=1, REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR INTERNALLY)

Q44 If you had another experience of unwelcome behaviour at NSWPF, how likely would you be to make another formal report/complaint?

1. Very likely
2. Somewhat likely
3. Neither likely nor unlikely
4. Somewhat unlikely
5. Very unlikely

98. Not sure

99. Prefer not to say

*(REPORT=1, REPORTED THE BEHAVIOUR INTERNALLY)

Q45 In the future, how likely would you be to make a formal report/complaint about the following type of workplace conduct:

- a) Bullying
- b) Sexual assault
- c) Sexual harassment or other unwanted sexual behaviours
- d) Hostile working environment on the grounds of sex
- e) Discrimination
- f) Victimisation

[ROTATE RESPONSES 1-5 BASED ON S_ORDER VARIABLE]

[RESPONSES]

- 1. Very likely
- 2. Somewhat likely
- 3. Neither likely nor unlikely
- 4. Somewhat unlikely
- 5. Very unlikely

98. Not sure

99. Prefer not to say

Q46 If you were considering making a formal report/complaint about workplace conduct in future, who would you feel most comfortable to approach?

Please select all that apply

- 1. My Manager or Supervisor
- 2. Another Manager or Supervisor [SHOW IF ROLE=9-18, POLICE OFFICER: or Senior Officer]
- 3. The Assistant Commissioner responsible for my area
- 4. The Deputy Commissioner
- 5. The Commissioner
- 6. A senior manager or Executive within NSWPF
- 7. Human Resources Manager (HRM)
- 8. Professional Standards Command
- 9. My Health and Safety Representative
- 10. Health Safety and Wellbeing Command
- 11. NSWPF Safe Reporting Service
- 12. An external organisation (for example Police Association of New South Wales (PANSW), Public Service Association (PSA), Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC), SafeWork NSW, Australian Human Rights Commission)
- 96. Other person or organisation (please specify)

98. Not sure

99. Prefer not to say

SRAU_OUT How confident are you that making a formal report/complaint within NSWPF about workplace conduct would lead to a fair outcome?

- 1. Very confident
- 2. Somewhat confident
- 3. Neither confident nor unconfident
- 4. Not confident
- 5. Not at all confident

98. Not sure

99. Prefer not to say

SRAU Have you heard of NSWPF Safe Reporting and Advisory Unit (SRAU)?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

F. Witnessing unlawful or unsafe behaviour

WITNESS_INTRO

The following questions in this section seek to understand issues that you may not have experienced directly but have witnessed or were told about from other employees.

The unwelcome behaviours that the Cultural Review is looking at include unwanted sexual behaviours, discrimination, bullying, racism and other unsafe and unlawful workplace behaviours.

As a reminder, please do not include names or any other identifying information about yourself or others in any written responses, for example "male crime manager at XXX PAC who was there in 2024" is identifiable.

Q47 In the past five years (2020-2025), while working at NSWPF, did you observe, witness or hear directly from a co-worker, about any of the following behaviours?

- a) Sexual assault
- b) Sexual harassment or other unwanted sexual behaviours
- c) Discrimination or less favourable treatment because of gender, race, disability, or some other attribute
- d) Bullying
- e) Verbal abuse and/or threats
- f) Hostile work environment on the grounds of sex
- g) Other unwelcome behaviours

[RESPONSE FRAME]

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q47_g=1, SELECTED OTHER TYPE OF BEHAVIOUR)

Q47_Oth Please describe the other form of unwelcome behaviour you have observed, witnessed or heard about.

1. <TEXT BOX>

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q47 ANY a-g=1, WITNESSED AT LEAST ONE BEHAVIOUR)

Q48 Thinking about the most recent behaviour you observed, witnessed, or were told about, did you respond or take action in any way?

Please select all that apply

- 1. I spoke to the person/s who engaged in the conduct
- 2. I made a formal report/complaint
- 3. I had an informal conversation with my Supervisor / Manager
- 4. I talked with or listened to the person who experienced the behaviour about the incident
- 96. I took other action (please specify)

5. I didn't take any action

98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q48=1-4, AND/OR 96, TOOK ACTION)

Q49 Did any of the following things happen because you took action about the conduct you observed, witnessed or were told about?

Please select all that apply

1. I received positive feedback for making the complaint
2. I was disciplined
3. I was transferred or changed shifts
4. I resigned
5. I was dismissed from my job or was medically retired
6. The conduct stopped
7. I was demoted
8. I was ostracised, victimised, or ignored by colleagues
96. There were some other outcomes for me (please specify)
10. There were no outcomes for me
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(Q48=5, DID NOT TAKE ACTION)

Q50 Why didn't you take any action after witnessing the unwelcome behaviour?

Please select all that apply

1. I didn't want to make things worse for the person who experienced the unwelcome behaviour
2. I was worried about the negative impact that taking action might have on me, such as my career or safety
3. I didn't think it was serious enough to intervene
4. I didn't think it was my responsibility
5. I knew that other people were supporting and assisting the person
6. I didn't know what to do
7. The person who experienced the conduct asked me not to take any action
96. Any other reasons (please specify)
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

G. Future state

FUTURE_INTRO The following question invites your suggestions on how the culture of NSWPF workforce can be improved.

Q51 What would you like to see change to improve the culture of NSWPF workplace?

Culture can contribute to a positive and meaningful experience, or it can reinforce work practices and behaviours that don't meet standards and values. Poor culture can result in individual and organisational harm and weaken trust.

1. [VERBATIM TEXT BOX]
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

H. About you

DEMO_INTRO The following questions ask some demographic questions so that the Review can analyse the data to identify trends and patterns.

REGION What region [IF Q1=1, do, IF Q1=2 OR 3, did] you work in?

1. Capability Performance & Youth Command
2. Central Metropolitan Region
3. Corporate Internal Audit
4. Counter Terrorism & Special Tactics Command
5. Emergency Management
6. Finance and Business Services
7. Forensic Evidence and Technical Services
8. Health Safety and Wellbeing Command
9. Infrastructure and Assets Command
10. Legislation and Policy Branch
11. Ministerial and Executive Services

12. North West Metropolitan Region
13. South West Metropolitan Region
14. Northern Region
15. Southern Region
16. Western Region
17. Office of the Commissioner
18. Office of the General Counsel
19. People and Capability Command
20. Police Prosecutions and Licensing Enforcement
21. Police Protocol and Awards Unit
22. Police Transport and Public Safety
23. Professional Standards Command
24. Public Affairs
25. State Crime Command
26. State Intelligence Command
27. Strategy Policy and Ministerial Services
28. Technology and Communication Services Command
29. Traffic and Highway Patrol Command
30. Transformation Office
96. Other (please specify)
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

TENURE How long [IF Q1=1, have, IF Q1=2 OR 3, did] you [IF Q1=1, worked, IF Q1=2 OR 3, work] with NSWPF?

1. Less than 1 year
2. 1-3 years
3. 4-6 years
4. 7-10 years
5. 11-15 years
6. More than 15 years
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

GENDER What is your gender or gender identity?

1. Female
2. Male
3. Transgender or gender diverse
4. Non-binary
96. I use a different term (Please specify)
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

ATSI Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?

1. Yes – Aboriginal
2. Yes – Torres Strait Islander
3. Yes – both
4. No
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

LOTE Do you use a language other than English at home?

1. Yes
2. No
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

*(LOTE=1, LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH)

LANG What language do you usually use at home?

	1.	<PREDICTIVE TEXT INPUT USING LANGUAGE LOOK-UP LIST>
	98.	Not sure
	99.	Prefer not to say
SEXID		How do you describe your sexual orientation?
	1.	Heterosexual or straight
	2.	Gay
	3.	Lesbian
	4.	Bisexual
	5.	Asexual
	6.	Pansexual
	7.	Queer
	8.	I use a different term (please specify)
	98.	Not sure
	99.	Prefer not to say
DIS		Do you currently have a disability, health condition or injury that has lasted, or is likely to last, 6 months or more which restricts your everyday activities?
	1.	Yes
	2.	No
	98.	Not sure
	99.	Prefer not to say

Close

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. Your contribution is valued and will inform the Review's findings and recommendations.

Thinking of and recalling experiences of harmful behaviours can be distressing. If your involvement in the survey has caused you any distress or concern, we encourage you to seek support. Free and confidential support is available through:

Converge: Employee Assistance Program for current and former employees

Telephone: 1300 667 197

13 YARN

Telephone: 13 92 76

Beyond Blue: Anxiety, depression, and suicide prevention support service

Telephone: 1300 224 636

Lifeline: Crisis support and suicide prevention

Telephone: 13 11 14

1800RESPECT

National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service

Telephone: 1800 737 732

If you have any questions about the survey or the Review you can send them to info@nswpoliceview.com.au. You can find out about the Review's final report through its website <https://www.nswpoliceview.com.au/>.

Please click 'next' to submit your survey responses.

SUBMIT Thank you for your time. Your answers have been submitted. You can now close the browser.

Terms

*(Q1=4, LEFT NSWPF BEFORE 2020)

TERM1 Thank you for your interest but the survey is only open to current employees and former employees who departed NSWPF between 2020 and 2025.

If you would like to know more about the Review you can find further information by clicking [here](#).

*(CONSENT=2, DOES NOT CONSENT TO SURVEY)

TERM2 Thank you for your interest in the survey. If you would like to know more about the Review you can find further information by clicking [here](#).