

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**

IOPC
Independent
Office for
Police Conduct

IOPC YOUTH PANEL

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NOVEMBER 2021



INTRODUCTION

The IOPC Youth Panel was established in 2018 to enable young people aged 16-25 to inform and influence the work of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) nationally. Since its formation, the Youth Panel has grown to become an invaluable partner to the IOPC, providing youth-centred advice and support to help the organisation to build trust and confidence in the police complaints system.

Following the publication of the first **Youth Panel report** in 2019, the IOPC decided to further develop the project over the following two years with a focus on delivering the recommendations outlined in the Panel's report. Over this period, the key objectives of the project were to:

- **Expand the membership of the Youth Panel** by recruiting a new cohort from diverse communities across England and Wales.
- Support the Youth Panel to undertake **co-production work in collaboration with key IOPC departments** such as Communications and HR, with a specific focus on delivering the 2019 recommendations.
- Enable young people to **inform and scrutinise** the work of the IOPC from a youth perspective.
- Design and deliver **peer-led engagement events** to reach diverse groups of young people across England and Wales.
- Develop further **practical recommendations** for increasing trust and confidence among young people.

The IOPC worked in partnership with Leaders Unlocked to deliver this work. Leaders Unlocked enables young people and underrepresented groups to have a stronger voice on the issues that affect their lives – in education, policing, criminal justice, health and elsewhere. We are a not-for-profit social enterprise with a deep commitment to social impact. For more information, please see www.leaders-unlocked.org

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is grounded in an evidence base of **over 125** conversations with young people across England and Wales in 2021. The findings from these conversations have been collected during **16 virtual peer-led engagement events**.

The report contains key findings in relation to five themes that have been identified by the Youth Panel. Each section features analysis of young people's responses and verbatim quotes. The report also contains the key recommendations that have been produced by the Youth Panel in dialogue with IOPC staff members.

This report is intended to act as an honest, independent record of what young people have told us through the peer engagement process. It is also intended to be a basis for further action on the part of the IOPC, the police and partners.

WHAT WE DID

RECRUITING YOUNG LEADERS:

We carried out a two-stage recruitment process - including an accessible application form and a telephone interview - to select a diverse group of young people to join the IOPC Youth Panel. We worked proactively with organisations from the education, statutory and voluntary sectors to reach young people from a diverse range of backgrounds and life experiences.

As a result of this process, we recruited **23 new Youth Panel members**. We also retained 17 existing Youth Panel members from the previous year, giving us a total of **40 active members** over this period. The diversity breakdown is below:

- 40% Male, 58% Female, 2% Non-binary
- 63% identified as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic
- 18% identified as LGBTQ+
- 33% with lived experience of criminal justice and policing

QUARTERLY YOUTH PANEL MEETINGS

Quarterly meetings brought Youth Panel members together to share progress, develop plans and produce their final recommendations. IOPC staff from a wide range of departments and levels were actively involved in these meetings, engaging with the Youth Panel and giving feedback on their ideas.

COMMUNICATIONS AND CAMPAIGNS

In 2019 we formed a sub-group of the Youth Panel to work alongside the IOPC Communications team to co-produce communications and campaigns. The Youth Panel were instrumental in delivering some important communications over this period:

- Developed the content for a **'Quick Guide to Complaints'** for young people, including a poster-style resource and a short animation.
- Produced various **blogs for the IOPC website** to share their experiences and perspectives on current themes such as Stephen Lawrence day¹.
- A group of Panel members took part in the **Scrutiny Hour podcast** to discuss their lived experiences of policing and the impact of these experiences.
- Worked with a social media agency, Twenty-Six, to co-produce a **social media campaign** to raise awareness of young people's rights and the police complaints system (this campaign is due to launch in later in 2021).

PEOPLE AND DIVERSITY

The Youth Panel were actively involved in working alongside the IOPC's People and Diversity team to support the IOPC's ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion within the organisation. This work included:

- Youth Panel members received training to sit on **IOPC recruitment panels**, and sat on interview panels for the recruitment of Trainee Investigators, Stakeholder Engagement staff and Deputy Director General, Operations.
- Youth Panel members acted as **'Reverse Mentors'** to the six members of the IOPC's Management Board. In this role, individual Panel members were matched with Management Board members to provide insights and challenge from a young person's perspective.
- In February 2021 we held a **staff webinar** entitled '60 minutes with the Youth Panel' to allow a range of IOPC staff members to hear directly from Panel members about their lived experiences and perceptions of policing.

PEER ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

In autumn 2020, Youth Panel members worked together to co-design **peer engagement workshops** to engage other young people across England and Wales in discussions about policing and police complaints. This workshop aimed to gather young people's views and experiences, as well as raising awareness of their rights with the police and how to make a complaint should they need to. Due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Youth Panel worked to adapt their plans for this workshop to be suitable for online delivery.

Over a four-month period from March to June 2021, Youth Panel members facilitated **16 virtual engagement** events across England and Wales, engaging young people in a wide variety of settings. The Youth Panel were supported by members of the IOPC's regional Stakeholder Engagement team who attended the workshops to provide an IOPC perspective and answer questions from young people.

WIDER INFLUENCING ACTIVITY

In addition to the work outlined above, the Youth Panel was also involved in a range of external influencing activities outside of the IOPC:

- In 2019, the Panel co-edited the **youth edition of 'Learning the Lessons'**, which is an IOPC publication that is distributed widely among police forces. As a part of this work, the Panel also created a 'Hints and Tips' poster for police forces to help them improve their engagement with young people in different situations, e.g. Stop & Search and police custody.
- In January 2020, the Panel presented their work at the National Police Chiefs Council (**NPCC**) **Child-Centred Policing Conference**. They acted as co-hosts, facilitated table discussions, and made a presentation to an audience of over 100 police representatives.

¹ <https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/our-podcasts-and-blogs/what-stephen-lawrence-means-me>

- In July 2020, the Panel played a leading role in the development of a youth-led national report, **Policing the Pandemic**, which examined young people's experiences of policing during the COVID-19 pandemic, and made national recommendations for police forces and partners.
- Panel members participated in a **film about their lived experiences of Stop and Search**, which was used as a part of training for police officers in London. One Panel member shared his experiences directly with police officers at their training sessions in autumn 2020.
- In September 2020 Panel members submitted written evidence to the **Home Affairs Select Committee** inquiry into the police complaints system. Subsequently, one Panel member also gave oral evidence directly to the Committee.
- Panel members have taken part in **Critical Incident Group meetings** relating to incidents in Haringey, Manchester, Romford and Cardiff. At these meetings they were able to give a youth perspective and take part in discussions with the communities.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At their final meeting in May 2021, the Youth Panel came together to analyse their findings and develop viable recommendations for change. The Youth Panel considered the information collected during the peer engagement events, and used this data to determine the key findings and recommendations to put forward in this report.

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

In June 2021, the IOPC Youth Panel presented their key findings and recommendations to key audiences, both externally and internally. The first audience was the IOPC External Stakeholder Reference Group (ESRG) and the second was the IOPC Management Board and Unitary Board. The feedback from both presentations was excellent, with stakeholders stating that they were impressed with the quality of the Youth Panel's work.

WHO WE REACHED

Between March and May 2021, the IOPC Youth Panel engaged **over 125** young people aged 11-25 years across England and Wales.

Over this period the Panel delivered a total of 16 peer engagement events. The breakdown of events by region is as follows:

- London (3)
- North West (4)
- Wales (3)
- South East (3)
- Midlands (1)
- North East (2)

These peer engagement events reached diverse groups in the community, including:

- LGBTQ+ young people
- Care-experienced young people
- Young carers
- Young adults affected by homelessness
- Schools in deprived areas
- Youth councils and advisory panels

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the support of a wide range of local partners who have allowed the Youth Panel to engage with the young people in their organisations. Thanks go to:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Action for Children | Pembrokeshire Young Carers |
| Allsorts Youth | Prism |
| ASPIRE Haringey | Scouts Cymru |
| Children's Commissioner for Wales Youth Advisory Panel | SPEAR homelessness |
| Coventry Youth Council | Stockport Youth Council |
| East Manchester Academy | Surrey Care Council |
| Fruitbowl | Trafford Youth Cabinet |
| Loud & Proud (Gosport) | Havering Care Council |

THE YOUTH PANEL'S 2019 RECOMMENDATIONS

In their 2019 report, the IOPC Youth Panel identified 17 recommendations for change in 4 key areas. Since then, the Panel has worked with the IOPC to turn these recommendations into action. Their progress is outlined below:

Communications and social media:

- The Panel co-produced a **Young Person's Guide to the Complaints System**. This was produced in the format of a poster and animation and promoted through partners and engagement events.
- The Panel worked with a communications agency to co-produce a **social media campaign** to raise awareness among young people of their rights in relation to policing and police complaints.

Community engagement:

- The Panel has continued their engagement with young people across England and Wales, delivering **16 engagement events** with a diverse range of local organisations from the community, education and statutory sectors.
- The Panel has worked with the police in London to inform **Stop and Search training**.
- Panel members have played an active role in **Community Reference Group meetings** related to IOPC cases in Romford, Haringey, Manchester and Cardiff.

IOPC People and diversity:

- Panel members have delivered a **staff training webinar** to IOPC staff members to share their experiences and perspectives around policing and police complaints.
- Panel members have sat on **recruitment panels** for a range of IOPC staff roles including Deputy Director General, Stakeholder Engagement posts, and Trainee Investigators.

The future of the Youth Panel:

- The Youth Panel has continued to provide **youth-centred advice** to the IOPC on police and strategy. They were involved in the development of the IOPC's recommendations on Stop and Search, both in London and nationally.
- Six panel members have taken part in **'Reverse Mentoring'** with the IOPC's Management Board. Other members have been matched with a mentor from the IOPC staff to support their personal development.

KEY FINDINGS

This section presents the IOPC Youth Panel's key findings in relation to a number of key themes identified by the Panel. These are:

- Judgement and lack of understanding
- Discrimination and marginalised groups
- Excessive force and escalation
- Trust and accountability
- Views on the complaints system

The Youth Panel's findings focus on the key issues affecting young people's perceptions and levels of trust. These findings build on those outlined in the [Youth Panel's 2019 report](#), with some of the same key themes re-occurring around trust, accessibility, and the voices of marginalised groups. The Youth Panel decided these findings based on information gathered from over 125 young people at the peer engagement events.



THEME ONE: JUDGEMENT AND LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

Many young people felt that police officers did not understand their needs. They were particularly concerned about a lack of understanding of **hidden disabilities, neurodiversity** and **mental health**. Some participants specifically highlighted issues around Autism and ADHD. Young people shared a range of examples of when they had personally experienced a lack of understanding from officers. These experiences can have a lasting negative impact on their trust, sense of safety and relationships with the police.

"I've got ADHD and autism and I've had problems with my mental health... The police have restrained me and I've told them not to do that because I have an illness, and they've looked at me as if that's an excuse they always hear."

"Young people with ADHD may get anxious and upset with the police"

"I was on my last ebb, I was on a bridge and they put me in handcuffs and put me in the back of a car... I don't think that's how someone should be treated, when all I wanted was a bit of support"

"I've got special needs and oppositional defiance disorder; they definitely need more training in that"

Young people highlighted that the **police 'set the scene'** of each interaction with their demeanour. The attitude and behaviour that a police officer brings into an interaction has a direct impact on how the young person responds. The officer's demeanour changes how the interaction goes, and it can lead to unnecessary escalation and a detrimental outcome for the young person.

"If you tackle it with violence, you're going to receive violence back"

"I think it depends how the police officer approaches you at first, then that changes our perceptions of them"

We found that many young people see the police as **judgemental and too quick to act without exploring alternatives**. They commented that officers can use assumptions and stereotypes to form quick judgements about young people, without taking time to listen and understand what's going on with them. They felt there was a lack of time taken to explore alternatives that might be better for the individual, such as referring them to support services.

"Not listening to you about your situation.. [they] just think they know best when they don't"

"Doing things before thinking"

"They can be aggressive; they should be more understanding and see things from another perspective– the police should be more understanding of young people"

Overall, we found that the way young people are treated by police is still seen as **unfair and inconsistent**. Young people told us that their treatment is affected by assumptions and judgements on the basis of age, race, background, and local area among other things.

"It's shocking how many officers judge young people on the basis of their age, what they wear, who they hang out with"

"If you're walking down the street and they are walking or in the car, they look at you as if you've done something wrong when you haven't, it really bugs me"

Youth Panel comment: Louise

The Youth Panel's findings suggest that, when police encounter young people, there is a lack of understanding toward an individual's needs, and there is a blanket approach. This doesn't work because it assumes that all young people are the same, forgetting about hidden disabilities, mental health, and neurodiversity, alongside the individuality of a person.

It is important for us as a panel to target this issue, as preconceived judgement and lack of understanding can lead to unnecessary outcomes for young people that can detrimentally affect their lives due to a simple misunderstanding. The police "set the scene" when engaging with young people and need to use their power appropriately, not to taunt or intimidate the young person.

I believe police training designed and delivered by young people with lived experience and a greater emphasis on person-centred practice is needed, as only when a situation is understood by all parties can the correct course of action be taken.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF POLICING

Over the course of our engagement events, we heard a range of positive views from young people about their experiences of the police. We wanted to acknowledge these positive perspectives and experiences, as well as those that were more critical, in the hope that they can be built on in the future.

Most of the positive experiences came from individuals or groups where there was regular contact and/or close proximity to the police. In some local areas, such as Gosport in Hampshire, we heard that police officers have built up friendly and familiar relationships with young people at neighbourhood level, which were of mutual value. In addition, young people who had worked with their local police forces or Police and Crime Commissioners over a period of time told us they feel the police are listening, improving and supportive of the community.

Young people who have been through adverse experiences or who have vulnerabilities such as mental health, told us about outstanding officers who supported them during times of distress. These officers made young people feel safe, understood and supported at difficult times of their lives, often going 'above and beyond' the expectations of their role.

Young people in some areas also reported positively on the engagement with police in schools, which they felt helped to improve relationships. Young people said they would like the police to engage with them more in schools about specific topics of interest and relevance.



THEME TWO: DISCRIMINATION AND MARGINALISED GROUPS

Across our peer engagement events, we found that the **male culture of policing** was seen as a key problem. This was not previously identified as such a prominent issue for young people in the original Youth Panel report. Some young women told us they felt dismissed by officers on the basis of their gender. Others talked about officers showing **insensitivity** around **domestic violence** and **sexual offences**. There were particular concerns coming through in the wake of the Sarah Everard case.

"Especially with assault crimes like the Sarah Everard case. I don't think the police are very helpful in situations like that (sexual assault), you often hear that those cases don't go to court"

"It's especially male police officers that I've had bad experiences with"

"During lockdown, me and a male friend went to the park, officers came up to us saying we weren't allowed to sit down, they were only talking to my male friend and not even looking at me. It was really weird, the fact they didn't even acknowledge a woman's presence"

We ran a number of workshops with young people from the **LGBTQ+ community**, who told us about particular concerns when engaging with the police. Transgender young people had fears and worries about the Stop and Search process, specifically whether they would have any choice of the gender of the officer searching them and whether their gender identity would be respected. We also found a general hesitance about engaging with the police and a lack of trust when reporting hate crime.

[I would want to know] "Does a trans young person have the right to choose what gender police officer searches them?"

"I think I would be too scared to go to the police for homophobia/ biphobia/ transphobia."

Speaking to young people, it was clear that **age and race** are still major issues when it comes to police treatment. This is consistent with the findings from the previous Youth Panel report. Young people in general, and those from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in particular, feel they are on the receiving end of **stigma, suspicion and unwarranted negative attention**. There is also a perception that the police workforce is still predominantly White, which has a negative impact on trust and confidence.

Youth Panel comment: Mair

I think there are a lot of problems with discrimination, not only in the police service but in today's society as a whole. This is a topic I am extremely passionate about, as I have witnessed people from different age groups, religions and races being discriminated against for who they are and I think it's disgusting.

We've found that many people from LGBTQ+ communities wouldn't feel comfortable with going to the police, as they fear they wouldn't be taken seriously. Women also feel they are treated differently - sometimes they feel they aren't taken seriously or they are dismissed by the police, and sometimes they feel uncomfortable about going to the police with issues involving sexual assault.

People from Black, Asian or Ethnic Minority groups tend to be targeted more during things like stop and searches due to assumptions and stigmas that the police may have. The way to fix these issues is for the police to be more open-minded. In a world that is constantly changing and evolving, the police need to be more open-minded and learn about different communities so that young people feel more comfortable around them, and this could be achieved through in-person and in-depth equality training.

GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES

As well as age and the degree of direct contact with police, **geographical location** also had a notable impact on the effects and experiences of policing for young people.

Those in **larger cities**, such as London and Manchester, generally reported more negative experiences of the police. In smaller towns and more rural areas, there was a sense amongst young people that their local policing was 'better than other places'. These responses indicate a general awareness and understanding of experiences of policing elsewhere. However, some young people in smaller towns and rural areas also commented that police were not visible enough to them.

Generally, in areas where there was less contact or proximity between the police and the community, there was more **reliance on news and social media** as a means of forming an opinion. This was felt to cement negative perceptions, often in a vacuum, among young people who have no real opportunity to have such ideas disproven through direct contact with police.

Outside London, we found there were fewer experiences of, and concerns about, **Stop and Search and Section 60**. Many young people were not aware of these powers prior to our workshop. Some trusted the police to use these powers effectively, and felt they must be 'looking for something important'. Others were shocked to learn that the police had these powers, and felt the public should be more informed and involved in scrutiny.

These findings highlight the inconsistencies which inevitable from force to force, and reaffirm the need for more **focused regional work** to address region-specific issues.

THEME THREE: EXCESSIVE FORCE AND ESCALATION

Across our peer engagement events, we found that many young people associate the police with **excessive force and violence**. It was striking that this was a fairly widespread perception, evident across diverse areas and communities.

"I feel especially now that young people are more likely to die at the hands of police."

"Violence – I saw a group of people getting arrested, police pushed one guy on the floor and he was hurt. Makes you feel like not getting in trouble with them, to stay out of it"

"Brutality – a lot of the times they'll overly use their powers and take it too far, when it didn't need to be taken that far"

We also found that **fear and intimidation are common emotional reactions** to the police. Again, this feeling was evident in different areas and communities, including among young people with no direct experience with the police.

"Police are anxiety inducing"

"Intimidating – we're brought up as children to find the police scary, a lot of young people find them scary for that reason"

Young people told us that the police often **escalate situations** through **overbearing and unnecessary** responses, **miscommunication**, and **misunderstanding**. For example, some mentioned the overbearing number of officers who might attend incidents, leading to fear and intimidation and humiliation on the part of the young person.

"When a situation occurs, especially with young people, a police officer might escalate the situation more if they act in a certain way"

"Sometimes they might get 12 officers to come just for one person... The person might be scared, embarrassed and intimidated, and it can also be degrading."

"I feel like I've definitely been bullied by the police, I may not have reacted well to a situation and they've used it and started to bully me"

"Where they get disrespectful for no reason whatsoever, they start getting aggressive and swearing at you – that makes people respect them a lot less and they can't be trusted"

We also found that use of force is still a concern among young people. Some specifically mentioned the use of handcuffs during searches or arrests. Others mentioned being restrained, pushed or even physically struck by officers.

"Example of a situation where I was arrested and the police were actually punching me, they were saying this was reasonable force and it definitely wasn't reasonable force, they were rough. They said I was resisting arrest and showing aggression. I actually have a video of it"

Youth Panel comment: Mark

Many young people we spoke to associate the police with excessive force and escalation. For so many young people, the police are a threat, not a safeguard. Those findings would shock if they weren't so familiar.

Young people and the police are trapped in a cycle of escalation, fear and mistrust. Officers' attempts to diffuse situations often come across to young people as aggressive. When this is met with aggression in return, the risks loom larger. In the worst cases, excessive force follows. In all cases, the seeds of mistrust and resentment are set.

The way that officers are trained to de-escalate must change, and officers' understanding of the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of young people must improve. Complaints about excessive force and escalation must be met with meaningful responses from the officers involved, not just from the management of the force for which they work. Most of all, the relationship between the police and young people must be repaired. Unless the police and young people have opportunities to interact outside the arena of confrontation and fear, then it is hard to see how that could even begin.



YOUTH PANEL FINDINGS IN CONTEXT

In March 2020, the UK went into its first nationwide lockdown lasting 6 weeks, in response to the growing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people reported the increased and excessive use of policing powers during this time.

In May 2020, George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis, which sparked a global response in the form of protests and the amplification of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Young people from across the country mentioned the murder of George Floyd as a symptom of systemic racism in policing, which they felt was similarly present in the UK. During this summer, several notable Black British figures also had negative interactions with police, including Labour MP Dawn Butler and Team GB Olympian Bianca Williams.

In March 2021, Sarah Everard was reported missing and later confirmed to have been kidnapped and murdered by a police officer. This case sparked a national debate about violence against women and brought the concept of police brutality to the forefront of people's minds across the country. Many young people cited Everard's case as a source of current mistrust in policing, particularly in relation to sexual offences, and expressed a need for police to engage in honest and transparent conversations around these topics.

The policing of the vigil held for Sarah Everard was criticised for being heavy-handed and drew attention to the Policing, Sentencing, Crime and Courts bill, published at the beginning of March 2021. This 'Protest Bill' and police powers more widely are still seen by many young people as too extensive; the events of the past 18 months have reinforced existing perceptions of police officers being 'above the law'.



THEME FOUR: TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY

During our events, we found that many young people **lack confidence in police accountability**. Young people commented that police powers are too extensive and can easily be abused. Others felt there were not enough 'checks and balances' and opportunities for the public to be involved in scrutiny.

"They think they are above the law; they think they can get away with stuff"

"Lack of scrutiny – they are granted so much power by the law. Officers aren't necessarily bad, but they are granted too much power"

"Scrutiny – [There should be more] checks and balances"

We found that some young people were particularly concerned about Section 60 and questioned whether this power was necessary and being used fairly. Some participants also expressed concerns around the inconsistent and discretionary use of Body Worn Video (BWV). They felt that officers exert too much discretion in exactly when and how to use BWV at an incident.

"I've had police turning off the body cam and feeling like I'm being bullied. Once they go to a reported crime, they need to keep the camera on from the second they get there to the end."

"Having this section 60 where they don't need reasonable grounds is quite shocking and I don't know why society gave them this power"

"Concerned about how much power the police have and whether the guidelines are being followed"

Events over the last year have further **weakened trust, while at the same time increasing demand for accountability**. Young people told us that their views have been shaped and informed by George Floyd's murder in the US and the Black Lives Matter movement around the world. They also highlighted Sarah Everard's death in the UK and concerns about the policing of protests, including worries around the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

"Especially with the recent Sarah Everard case where she was killed by a serving officer"

"Police in America alone and killing civilians, and the UK we are leaning in that direction slightly"

"Sarah Everard protest – using direct methods without any warning"

Across all of our engagement events, we heard that **news and social media cement negative perceptions**. Again, this was true for young people in different local areas and from different communities. For young people who had no direct experience with the police, their perceptions were largely being formed by social media 'in a vacuum' of any real-life experience with the police.

"Things that you see on the news affects it, you don't see the good part, you only see violence etc."

"You only hear bad news every day, so you don't feel safe"

"Hearing a lot about what's happening in America and the culture the police have there targeting the BAME community, it also makes me a bit nervous for the UK, about potentially what crossover there may be."

"A lot of the news being about brutality combined with the distance of the police from the general community, I would say these are the two things that shape what I think of the police"

Youth Panel comment: Amania

Trust and accountability amongst the police, wider justice system and those in power has never been more important than it is in 2021. I think the combination of global isolation and simultaneous connection throughout the pandemic has united people in their outrage. Young people are tired of seeing injustice going unpunished and citizens being held to a higher standard than those that make the rules.

So many of the young people we engaged with spoke passionately about the need for justice, accountability and the importance of all young people being aware of their rights. I think this is vital because I believe this generation's drive to hold people in power accountable will not go unanswered and will instill peer-peer accountability alongside rights-based awareness-raising as the social norm.

The key to increasing trust and accountability amongst young people starts with being able to be honest about the problems and being unafraid to call things what they are, e.g. systemically racist. To me accountability includes taking responsibility, experiencing consequences, learning from mistakes, and then changing behaviour. We currently see reluctance on the part of the police to admit fault or apologise for misconduct. Until we see these things recognised and remedied, full accountability will not have been taken and there will be little hope for increased trust of police.





THEME FIVE: VIEWS OF THE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM

When we spoke to young people about police complaints, we found that **most young people think it's important to make a complaint** if you've been mistreated by the police. This belief was driven by a heightened appreciation of the importance of rights, justice and accountability.

"Yes [I would complain] as their purpose is to protect the public and uphold the law"

"If any person is mistreated it needs to be talked about, considering the powers the police have, it's very important to make sure that power is kept to be used responsibly, if mistreatment is happening it's basically a moral duty to report it"

Yet at the same time, we also found that many young people **are not confident there is a 'safe space' to make** a complaint. Young people expressed fears and worries about complaining. Their concerns included: not wanting to complain directly to the police, feeling that they wouldn't be taken seriously, and the risk of repercussions from the police or the community.

"No – wouldn't feel comfortable, just wouldn't, they won't take it seriously"

"Considering that I'm black they wouldn't deal with it in the same way"

"I probably wouldn't be capable of reporting it without my key worker or someone supportive with me, due to the negativity I've heard about the police and my extreme social anxiety"

Some young people highlighted **the lack of visibility of police officers taking responsibility** for their actions. They could see no meaningful evidence of consequences for police misconduct, which led them to believe that complaints wouldn't make a difference.

"See the officer take responsibility for their actions – not just a letter from the police force"

"In terms of complaints, setting an example that shows young people that their complaints do make a difference"

"I would prefer a face to face apology with sincerity from the officer involved"

Overall, we found that there is still **very low awareness of the IOPC** and the complaints system among young people in all areas and communities. In the process of running the events, we discovered that many young people want to learn more about how to make a complaint. They were appreciative of the opportunity to take part, and emphasised that there is a need to raise awareness of police complaints across the youth population. They also commented that this should be made clear at every stage of the justice system.

"The main problem right now might be that we didn't know about the IOPC, an organisation out there to back us up and support us"

"When I had a bad experience, at the time I didn't think to complain, I didn't know that you even could, but now I would and if it happens again I would take down their name and police number."

"Thank you so much for today, it was very interesting. I appreciate you all taking the time to listen to my views and give me really useful information about police powers and my rights"

Youth Panel comment: Saeed

The theme surrounding the complaints system is a very important one to myself and the wider Youth Panel. This is because the complaints system is a core element of the IOPC, and for many people it is the only course of action available to them after a negative interaction with the police.

After speaking to young people about their views on the complaint system, our biggest learning is that many of them did not even know of the existence of the complaints system, and if they did, they lacked belief in the purpose of the system. A lot of work is required to fix this and elevate the complaints system to become a trusted and serious avenue for change within the police. This can become possible, with hard work, determination, and collaboration from various groups – especially the police.

A powerful solution that directly involves the police is one where police officers show direct responsibility for their actions. Rather than a letter from the police force, we'd like to see officers coming forward after doing something wrong, apologising and showing a commitment to learn from the mistake. With solutions like this, I'm sure young people would begin to have more faith in the complaints system.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the IOPC Youth Panel's key recommendations in relation to three areas:

- Building confidence in the complaints system
- Future of the Youth Panel
- Building trust in policing

The Panel has developed these recommendations by drawing on ideas collected during the peer engagement events. We believe the recommendations are both practical and feasible as a result of the close partnership between the IOPC and the Youth Panel, which has also demonstrated a clear commitment to listen and act upon on the Panel's work going forward.

Recommendations for building confidence in the complaints system

1) Awareness

- Utilise young ambassadors to encourage complaints – e.g. by working with existing Youth Commissions and other youth groups
- Target trusted professionals that work with young people – e.g. youth workers & teachers
- Increase visible, positive community outreach & involvement
- Directly address young people's fears & worries about complaining, e.g. via campaigns

2) Accessibility

- Increase the accessibility of the complaints system for all – especially young & marginalised groups
- Develop innovative new solutions to increase accessibility, such as: Online chat service; Advocacy helpline; Option to complain anonymously

3) Outcomes

- Publicise investigations & outcomes more visibly and transparently
- Promote case study examples with a positive outcome, to show young people complaints can make a difference
- Highlight officers who have taken responsibility for their actions
- Review IOPC recommendations specifically related to Body Worn Video, excessive force, Section 60 – look at where these could go further

Recommendations for the future of the IOPC Youth Panel

1) Decision-making

- Have regular access to IOPC Boards to ensure we are consulted on key decisions

2) People & diversity

- Facilitate difficult conversations about race with IOPC staff (and later propose for police)
- Expand the Reverse Mentoring scheme (and later propose for police)

3) Engagement with young people

- Reach out to as many young people as possible – especially marginalised groups & those in contact with the Criminal Justice System
- Re-engagement – revisit the same youth groups and build more of a relationship
- Create new workshop content – e.g. video testimonials, expanded Guide to Complaints, a pack to take away, peer training on how to handle police interactions, more information on rights
- Involve police officers in our engagement events
- Design an annual national survey – to capture young people's priorities, tracking changes yearly

4) Digital engagement

- Use social media to raise awareness of the IOPC and the complaints system – e.g. produce YouTube videos and Live debates on hot topics

Recommendations for building trust in policing

1) Police structure & ways of working

- Diversify the police – support people of colour and women to join
- Create a culture that supports diverse officers to stay and progress
- Use personality & psychometric tests during recruitment to spot discriminatory & violent tendencies
- Strive to ensure domestic violence calls are responded to with at least one female officer

2) Police engagement with young people

- Increase engagement with young people on the topics that matter most to them (e.g. Black Lives Matter, hate crime, Sarah Everard)
- Inform young people that they can complain on the Stop & Search receipts (or a separate card)
- Increase transparency and scrutiny – more checks and balances on police powers, more opportunities for young people to input

3) Police training

- Increase officers' knowledge of the communities they are policing
- Develop and co-deliver training with local young people with lived experience
- Raise specific awareness of: Autism, ADHD, neurodiversity, LGBTQ+, mental health & trauma
- Take a visibly different approach to young people, in comparison to adults

CONCLUSION AND TAKING IT FORWARD

Over the last three years the IOPC Youth Panel has made a real difference to the work of the IOPC and to the policing sector more widely. We are extremely grateful to all the Youth Panel members who have given so much of their personal time and energy to the project over this time. We would also like to thank all the various internal and external stakeholders who have been involved in making this piece of work a success.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IOPC Youth Panel has managed to engage a truly diverse cross section of the youth population across England and Wales. Through their virtual workshops, they have heard from groups of young people whose views are often overlooked, and they have equipped participants with vital information about their rights.

In June, Youth Panel members made final presentations to the IOPC's Unitary Board and Management Board, and to the IOPC's External Stakeholder Reference Group. The feedback from both presentations was hugely positive, and has demonstrated a real appetite for the project to continue in the longer term.

Moving forward, the Youth Panel will be further developed as a means for young people to influence both the IOPC's work and the wider policing sector. The Youth Panel looks forward to continuing its engagement with young people across the country and to working alongside the IOPC and external stakeholders to deliver the important recommendations in this report.



TESTIMONIALS

Michael Lockwood, Director General, IOPC

"The Youth Panel are central to all our work and continue to influence policing for the better. I am particularly grateful for the many events that the Panel have taken part in to speak about their work and improve awareness of both our organisation and the wider police complaints system; including importantly, sitting on several community reference groups for some of our most high profile cases.

One of their biggest achievements this year was producing the young person's guide to the police complaints system, and helping improve understanding of the complaints system for young people. This continues to be really well received by our many stakeholders at both local and national level. The Panel have also advised and constructively challenged us in our important work on racial discrimination and helped improve confidence in us from young people and those from BAME communities. I am very excited about what is to come, as the Panel continues to share their innovative and exciting ideas for the future. Thank you once again for your continued support and advice. I really look forward to listening to your feedback and working together as we explore the recommendations resulting from your engagement work this year"

Kathie Cashell, Director, Strategy and Impact, IOPC

"The Youth Panel has had another successful year and remain central to the IOPC's work. Their advice on how we can better engage with young people to ensure they understand their rights and can access the police complaints system has significantly improved our work in this area. However, their influence is now much wider than this we have welcomed their advice on learning recommendations to improve policing, community engagement on some of our highest profile cases and the recruitment of new IOPC colleagues.

I would like to thank all the panel members for their hard work and sage advice this year. I am always struck by how motivated and committed they are and their recommendations are always pragmatic while challenging us to do better. I am looking forward to working them in the coming year to further improve the work of the IOPC so that young people can have confidence in the police complaints system."

CONTACT US

@leadersunlocked

info@leaders-unlocked.org

www.leaders-unlocked.org

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