

HELPDESK SUPPORT

Police Organisation Structure in the UK

There are **43 forces in England and Wales and one in both Scotland and Northern Ireland** (Scotland used to have 8 separate forces until April of last year, when they were amalgamated into one). UK forces can be very different in size, ranging from 28000 police officers in the London Metropolitan Police to 700–800 officers in some of the smaller forces, like the Warwickshire force for example. Because of this size difference among different forces, there is no standard organisational structure as such.

However, there are commonalities across most of the forces in the UK. For example:

- All forces have **uniform operations departments**, although some forces call these “Territorial Policing” and others “District Policing” or “Divisional Policing”. They are the uniformed police on the ground.
- Most forces have a distinct and separate **Criminal Investigation Department**. Each force has detectives assigned to specific divisions or districts within it, who investigate burglaries and robberies and often domestic types of murders. Headquarters control Crime Operations (the name may vary in different forces) where specialist detectives deal with sophisticated fraud, organised crime, international cross border crime, and usually have a remit throughout the entire geographical area of the force.
- Some force have separate departments for dealing with other elements of the criminal justice system (often called **Criminal Justice Department**), although smaller forces have this function within another Department.
- All forces have some type of **internal investigation** through standards of internal affairs, complaints and discipline, and professional standards.
- Most forces have some type of **Media and Public Relations Department**. This might be referred to as “communications” and also might include aspects of outreach to the community, often referred to as “engagement”.

A typical organisational structure in most UK forces would be:

- 1) The **Chief Constable** sits at the top of the organisation. The Chief Constable is a career police officer. In the UK everyone joins the police as the lowest rank which is Constable. While there are various schemes to fast track promotion, every Chief Constable will have progressed through all ranks*¹. The Chief Constable is chosen, following a robust selection process, by the Police Authority or Police Crime Commissioner for the area. Chief Constable posts are not political appointments as happens in many countries. When a post becomes vacant, suitably qualified officers from across the UK can apply. Therefore Chief Constables from smaller forces might move to a bigger role, or often officers of Deputy Chief Constable apply for the promotion. This results in a healthy cross fertilisation of senior officers and introduces new thinking.
- 2) There is one **Deputy** (apart from Scotland where there are 3 Deputies because of the recent amalgamation of its forces explained above).

¹ * In the last year the UK Government have introduced changes which allow people to join the police at the rank of Superintendent. While this is approved in legislation and the recruitment process may have started, it has not yet reached the stage where these people have been deployed into Command positions.

The Deputy replaces the Chief Constable when the Chief Constable is absent;
The Deputy also has specific responsibilities, in particular the Department which deals with internal discipline and internal investigation (mentioned above) usually sits under the Deputy's authority.

- 3) At the next level down in the **Command Team** there are:
- **Assistant Chief Constables**
 - and **equivalent Civilian Ranks**, as some responsibilities such as Director of Human Resources and Director of Finance are undertaken by qualified civilian professionals
- 4) Most forces are then structured depending on the number of Assistant Chief Constables and civilian equivalents, as each of them oversees a **Department(s)**. Assistant Chief Constables are responsible to the Chief Constable for the effectiveness and efficiency of the Department(s) they control. For example in the Police Service of Northern Ireland, there are 5 Assistant Chief Constables:
- ACC – Operations – Urban (Greater Belfast)
 - ACC – Operations – Rural (Rest of the country)
 - ACC – Crime Operations
 - ACC – Operational Support (Specialist functions ie Armed Response/ Public Order/ Traffic Branch)
 - ACC – Criminal Justice
- and 4 Departments which are headed by suitably qualified civilians:
- Financial Services – Headed by qualified accountant
 - Human Resources – Headed by qualified Human Resources specialist
 - Legal Services – Headed by a qualified and experienced Lawyer
 - Media and PR – Headed by qualified and experienced person with background in media and journalism

Some examples of some of the bigger UK forces include:

- Greater Manchester Police
- [West Yorkshire Police](#)
- [West Midlands Police](#)
- Police of Scotland
- [London Metropolitan Police](#)
- [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#)

Each of these forces has information on its website about its overall structure and the portfolios of its Command Teams. Also please find attached to this email the organisational structure charts of several of these forces.

It is important to note that a number of functions that are sometimes conducted by the Police in other countries, are in fact conducted by civilian groups in the UK. For example:

- **passport and border control** is undertaken by other organisations in the UK, not by the police.
- While in many countries the Police has responsibility for **prisons**, this is not the case in the UK where the Prison Service is a separate entity.

Another important distinction concerns intelligence activities: While all Police services within the UK have an intelligence branch often called the **Special Branch**, this is **different from the Government Intelligence Services** (which are called MI5 and MI6). These Intelligence Services are not part of the police.