

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**

IOPC Youth Panel

National Survey Report

**Final Report
October 2022**

IOPC Independent
Office for
Police Conduct



Introduction

This report has been co-produced by Leaders Unlocked and members of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) Youth Panel from across England and Wales.

The IOPC Youth Panel works alongside the Independent Office for Police Conduct to address trust and confidence in the police complaints system.

For the first time in 2022, the Youth Panel decided to undertake a national survey to examine young people's views and experiences of policing and police complaints across England and Wales.

Between May and July 2022, the survey gathered views from **1957 young people aged 13-25** across England and Wales.

The survey aimed to:

- Examine young people's **views and experiences of policing**
- Look at current **trust levels** among young people across England and Wales, and whether trust has increased or decreased over the last year
- Explore **young people's views of police complaints** and what influences these views
- Involve young people in **developing solutions** for both policing and police complaints

The survey has taken a **youth-led approach** at every stage. The Youth Panel has co-designed the online survey, analysed the survey data, and developed the key findings and solutions within this report.

The process was facilitated by social enterprise Leaders Unlocked. Leaders Unlocked exists to allow young people to have a stronger voice on the issues that affect them. For more information please see **www.leaders-unlocked.org**

About this report

This report is based on evidence gathered from **1957 young people aged 13-25** across England and Wales. Each section features key findings, key statistics and verbatim quotes from young people. The final part of the report outlines the key solutions the young leaders have identified for policing and police complaints.

This report is intended to act as an unmediated record of what young people have told us through this process. It is also intended to provide impetus for further action planning on the part of the IOPC, police forces, and related agencies.

What we did

Designing the research:

We held a design session with the wider IOPC Youth Panel to develop the key research questions to form the basis of the survey. The Panel received input and support from research professionals to ensure the survey was robust.

As a result of this process, we developed an **online survey with 21 questions**, including a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. The survey was designed to be quick and simple for young people to complete on mobile devices. *Please see Appendix 2 for a copy of the survey questions.*

Conducting the survey:

The survey was launched on May 11th and was open for 10 weeks until July 24th. Over this time period, the survey generated **1957** responses from young people aged between 13 and 25 years of age.

The survey was promoted using a variety of local, regional and national channels. We had invaluable help and support from a wide range of partners both within and outside the policing sector, who helped to distribute the survey through their social media channels and their networks of local youth and community organisations.

Developing our findings & solutions:

In late July, we held an analysis session to discuss the survey's results and decide the key findings and solutions. We worked together to identify the key findings from the research and to agree the most important solutions to put forward in this report.

Who we reached

We received **1957** survey responses from young people across England and Wales. Respondents were **13-25 years** of age and came from a diverse range of backgrounds, communities and experiences, including:

- **18%** identified as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic
- **27%** identified as LGBTQ+
- **28%** identified as having physical or hidden disabilities
- **5%** had lived experience of the criminal justice system
- **4%** had lived experience of the care system

The survey attracted more responses from younger age groups than from older age groups. 58% were 13-15 years, 29% were 16-18 years, 6% were 19-21 years, and 7% were 22-25 years.

We achieved a wide geographical coverage across different regions of England and Wales. The highest numbers of responses came from the West Midlands (16%), Staffordshire (13%), North Yorkshire (11%) and West Mercia (10%). It is worth noting that there were fewer responses from London and other major conurbations such as Manchester. *For a breakdown of response numbers by police force please see Appendix 1.*

To ensure we reached a fair sample, we took a proactive approach to reach out to young people with a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. We promoted the survey through partners in the education, community and youth sectors across the country. We also had valuable support from police forces and Police & Crime Commissioners to target those with more experience of the policing and justice systems, such as service users of Youth Offending Teams and those who volunteer with the police.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following organisations and groups who lent their support to the project:

- Derbyshire Police
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Youth Commission
- Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner
- North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
- Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner
- Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland
- Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire
- Y-Stop

A special thanks goes to the IOPC Youth Panel members who have been instrumental in co-producing the survey and this report. These include: Ahmed Ibrahim, Amania Scott-Samuels, Chidinma Ejimonye, Derwen Fay, Naqi Azizi, Mark Paul, Saeed Ali, Paris Omar.



Section 1: views of the police

Our findings

70% said they trust the police in their area, either a fair amount or a great deal

68% said they think the police in their area treat young people fairly

37% said their trust had decreased over the last year, either a lot or a bit. Only 13% said their trust had increased over the last year

Most young people said they trust the police and think the police treat them fairly.

Just over two-thirds of young people said they trust the police and think the police treat them fairly. As a Panel, we felt this finding was encouraging, but that it should be contextualised in relation to the age profile of respondents. The survey attracted a higher response from younger age groups, with 58% of survey respondents being 13-15 years of age. Young people in this age group may be more likely to trust the police than those who are slightly older, as they tend to have less contact with the police. The survey also attracted responses from police volunteers who reported high trust levels as a result of their volunteering (see p.11 for more information).

Young people's trust has declined over the last year.

37% of young people said their trust in the police had declined over the last year. Young people told us that their trust had been diminished by the number of high-profile cases of police misconduct that had come to their attention via the media. The case of Sarah Everard was frequently mentioned, alongside other cases such as Child Q and Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman. Black Lives Matter and the murder of George Floyd also continue to be important to young people.

"Due to many cases such as Sarah Everard case I have lost my trust towards the police. They have been seen to be violent especially towards black people, LGBTQ+ people and minority groups."

"Media such as the Sarah Everard case and other examples of police corruption and fatal brutality. It scares me that the police have the ability to inflict pain and suffering without any consequences due to organisational/professional immunity."

"News stories have broken trust which is beyond repair. I will never trust the police and I think that is fair to say so. I think the aim is for [trust to be built with] the new generation."

Young women told us they are now scared of police interaction.

In the survey's open field boxes, female respondents vocalised their fears about the police. Some said they were afraid of being stopped or pulled over by the police, particularly following the Sarah Everard case. Others expressed concerns about misogyny and 'toxic lad culture' within the police. These serious issues are further amplified when looking at the intersectional experiences of young Black women, who are impacted by both race discrimination and misogyny.

"I think after Sarah Everard and similar cases around the UK- it made me more aware of the violence against women and girls and blatant misogyny in my area and I don't feel like it has been addressed at all by the police and had definitely changed my perception. I'm always nervous whilst driving that I'll be pulled over and I wouldn't know how to react to that."

"Personally, as a black woman, I don't view the police as positive. I feel there is a lot of institutional racism still prevalent. One of the reasons why I feel this way is because certain accidents and deaths that could have easily been avoided if police acted quicker."

"If I was stopped in my car by a police officer as a White female, I would not stop. I would be driving to the closest police station and stopping there, where I will be in full view of CCTV. It's a sad state of the world when you can't even trust being pulled over by a police car because you are scared of what might happen to you."

Young people want to see greater focus on the biggest harms affecting their lives.

In the survey's open field boxes, we asked young people to tell us about one top issue they think the police should focus on in the year ahead. The top priority issues that young people wanted the police to focus on were knife crime (205 responses), violence against women & girls (136), drugs and substances (84), and racism (84).

"Focus on the issue which is causing a greater damage to society at the minute in my opinion which is knife crime."

"Reduce the amount of violence especially when people are on nights out as I've experienced horrible things."

"Girls being sexually assaulted by not only old men but teenage boys. Please help them."

"Stopping violence towards minorities, and supporting the change that needs to happen in the system."

"To show the police as better people than what is shown on social media and to provide better advice, specifically towards the advice given to women after the murder and assault of Sarah Everard as that did nothing to help the fear many felt."

We also found from several of the comments that young people want to see the police focus more on keeping them safe from harm, and less on treating them as criminals. As the Youth Panel, we felt there may be not enough acknowledgment by police of the risk of young people being harmed and too much of a focus on the risk of young people causing harm.

"If they stopped stereotyping young people and stopped wasting time trying to lock people up for weed and focus on more pressing issues like violence and dangerous drivers."

"Them showing a bit more compassion and treating us like human beings, rather than treating us like criminals the second we do something wrong."

"Let us know the police are also there to help us not just arrest us."

There's a significant gap in terms of helping young people to feel heard.

The survey found that **65%** of young people feel their voices are not being heard by their local police forces. This finding was common across young people from a range of backgrounds, opinions and experiences. Young people told us they weren't listened to or taken seriously, either as victims or suspects. They also highlighted that there are not enough channels for them to give feedback to the police. Many people felt their age, and other protected characteristics, means they will be taken less seriously.

"Young voices are sometimes ignored, and people even get yelled at for trying to defend themselves, which is gross. It's disappointing to see the damage police officers have done to people's lives."

"The youngest of our generation might one day be the next police officers. It's important for their voices to be considered."

65% said they feel young people's voices are not being heard by their local police force (either not much or not at all)

69% said they would be quite likely or very likely to go to the police if they were a victim of crime

Policing still doesn't understand neuro-diversity and mental health well enough.

In the survey's open field boxes, numerous respondents expressed concerns about the way the police respond to mental health and neuro-diversity. We heard several examples of young people receiving rough treatment from the police during mental health crisis, as well as instances where the police have not responded appropriately to neuro-diverse conditions like autism. Some young people told us that police encounters had caused them psychological distress or harm.

"I had to call the police for help, and they were not very good with me. I felt scared of them because they shouted at me and accused me of being on drugs. I have autism and I don't think they understood me."

"I've had interactions with the police on an occasion of a mental health crisis and I got told I was "playing a game" which in reality is far from it."

"The way the police deal with young people's mental health crisis isn't the greatest. They seem to treat you like a criminal and they make judgements regarding what they know about you."

"Police turned up at my house without letting my parents know a date before questioning me. I've been in therapy for 1 year now after not being able to answer the door because of the anxiety this experience caused."

Police treatment of young people remains inconsistent, and this undermines trust.

Through the survey's open field questions, we asked young people to tell us about their experiences with the police over the last 12 months. When looking at the responses, we were struck by how inconsistent their experiences were. Young people remarked upon the differing treatment they had received from different officers and from different police forces. Some also felt they were treated differently in different situations, e.g. when they went out with a group of friends they were treated with more suspicion. This inconsistency in the treatment of children and young people is undermining of trust and makes it harder for young people to be confident in what they can expect from the police force.

"Most of the officers were really nice when I was having trouble with my neighbours, but whenever I go out with my friends, I always get followed by police officers when I'm in Hastings and I get weird looks."

"I've given statements and I felt safe and that I was being listened to, but I was also on other occasions stopped as part of a group and chased when I had not done anything it was a right place wrong time."

"It's been horrible because I keep getting targeted by them and arrested. I sometimes feel harassed by some police officers because I am young and black... even though I'm mixed race, police only see me as black."

"I was the victim in a domestic situation and they were fairly helpful given that I wouldn't give many details, however I feel like they are better trained within domestic situations as they don't see race then."

There is a real value to 'everyday' positive contacts with the police.

In the survey's open field boxes, young people told us that they appreciate 'everyday' positive contacts with the police when they happen, for instance in community settings or schools. These informal and casual interactions can humanise the police and provide opportunities for engagement that are not based on police's suspicion of young people. They can build trust and mutual understanding. However, some young people also reflected that these interactions are happening less due to a lack of resources for community policing and a more detached or distant policing model.

"Positive, I met with the police officer in the YOT I went to for a few weeks, he was great, it was him who made me realise that Police have a hard time sometimes and bad press but they are approachable and do listen."

"Someone came in to speak with us at school. She was very open to new ideas on rebuilding trust and was receptive to comments - even when they were directly criticising the police and people that she works with. This made me feel like I was respected and listened to."

"Positive. I deliver an LGBTQ+ youth group and police attended to discuss hate crime. The individual was very engaging and sympathetic to young people's views."

"I haven't seen that many police around lately, and when I do its normally just sirens, or they don't talk to you. I always smile at them when I see them walk by, but hardly ever receive a smile in return. I feel as though this distances them from people a lot more."

Young people who engage with the police through cadets and school engagement tend to report positive experiences.

We heard from many young people who had positive experiences with police volunteering and police engagement in schools. Young people on the Voluntary Police Cadets (VPC) programme were hugely positive about the experience, the learning and the relationship they had built with officers. We heard from many young people who said the police engagement in their schools was beneficial, both in terms of educational inputs and the opportunity to interact with officers in a positive context. However, it should also be stated that school engagement needs to be handled carefully; it can be damaging when it comes to enforcement and searches on school premises. As a Youth Panel, we have seen this from our wider work on strip searches and discussions around Child Q.

"I've really enjoyed becoming a police cadet it's given me so many great opportunities and it's made me much more aware of the police and understand it better."

"It was honestly amazing I am a young VPC and doing this has honestly changed me for the better :)"

"A policeman came to my college to talk to us about hate crimes and it was very informative and you could tell they were very dedicated to their job. Very nice too."



Section 2: views of the complaints system

54% of young people said they would be willing to make a complaint if they had a bad experience (either fairly or very willing)

83% don't think their complaint would make a difference (either not at all or not much)

Our findings

Many young people are willing to make a complaint, but most don't think their complaint will make a difference.

The survey found that many young people are willing to complain for the greater good, with **54%** stating they would be willing to make a complaint if they had a bad experience. Young people expressed the view that it was important to make complaints in order to put it 'on record' and to inform future improvements to policing.

"It's important for complaints to be completed because without it they don't have the ability to change where they need to."

"If I ever needed to, I would most definitely make a complaint privately to the police. This isn't to drag the system down, but to allow them to improve. Constructive criticism and complaints are vital in order for a team to grow."

"I would make complaints because I feel that without criticism there will be no improvement and from my experiences the police force needs improvement."

"I'm not naïve enough to believe that filing a complaint would make a huge difference but complaining is better than nothing and it could send a message to the officers that that behaviour is not acceptable."

However, despite this willingness, we also found a lack of confidence that there would be a solution or remedy to complaints. **Over four-fifths** of young people didn't think their complaint would make a difference (these included those who said they wouldn't be willing to make a complaint). Some felt the culture of policing and the concept of the 'police family' protected officers over the public interest. Others expressed the view that one person's complaint wouldn't change anything, but that change might be more possible if many people made similar complaints.

"I would make a complaint so it was logged in the system, but I wouldn't have much faith that anything would be done about it."

"I would want to make a complaint about the police so that my experience was on the record but I would expect nothing to be done unless my experience was one of many incidences, but even then I wouldn't expect much."

"I wouldn't make a complaint because I don't trust them. I feel like they would all stick together rather than listen to someone who is an outsider and someone who isn't part of that group."

"I think there will need to be more than myself who puts in a complaint until my own complaint would be taken seriously."

Because of their age, young people feel it's even less likely their complaints will be listened to.

There is a strong sense that children and young people's voices will be disregarded when it comes to complaints. Respondents told us that they felt their age would mean that their complaints will be 'pushed aside'. In the survey's free text boxes, we received comments from multiple girls who felt their gender, as well as their age, would mean that they wouldn't be taken seriously.

"Like I mentioned before, young voices are commonly ignored by the police. I would love to complain, but I am aware I'll be ignored."

"Kids are seen as kids by the cops, not people who have a voice and opinions. You try and complain, you get ignored or sometimes threatened with being arrested."

"I doubt they would really care what a 13-year-old girl had to say about one of their police workers."

"I'm quite scared of police and if I said something, I don't think I'd be listened to as I'm a 'naive' 14 year old girl."

At the Youth Panel, we think this finding represents a 'red flag' for child safeguarding and protection. It's almost more important that children and younger people complain, and their complaints should be highly prioritised when they do.

Young people don't believe they should have to complain directly to the police.

Young people who responded to our survey commented that they could not have faith in a complaints system that requires them to complain directly to the police. The way the system is currently set up is seen as dangerous, due to young people's fear of repercussions, as well as ineffectual. The question many young people are asking is, 'why would I make a complaint about the police, to the police?'

"Why would you go to the police if you had a negative experience with them?"

"I believe making a complaint against the police would be dangerous as it's your word against theirs, and as they're adults I believe kids won't be listened to and as they class [themselves] as a police family they would protect their own."

"How can people not be afraid to make complaints? How can ethnic minorities feel safe, or women feel that they are taken seriously? How can the police be trusted after what they did to Child Q?"

"I don't think reporting police malpractice to the police makes much sense. When you visit a doctor or a hospital- patients are even given leaflets by staff to make complaints - but with the police, you're almost made to feel like there's no higher power to turn to if you've been mistreated."

The IOPC is not visible enough to young people and the general public.

Our survey findings indicate that there is a lack of visibility of the IOPC among young people, and a lack of awareness of the IOPC's role in the complaints system. Given the number of recent high-profile cases of misconduct in the public eye, we think there is a real opportunity for the IOPC to step up and be more visible to young people and the wider public.

"Making it known that the IOPC is an organisation which is important, and telling young people about their rights in detention and custody."

74% of young people didn't know where to go to get information about how to make a complaint (either not at all or unsure)

47% of young people said they would go to a family member first for support if they had a bad experience with the police

Most young people still don't know, or aren't sure, how to find information about making a complaint.

We found there is a low level of awareness about how to make a complaint. **Almost three-quarters** of young people were unsure where to get information about making a complaint. In this vacuum of information, young people tended to have negative perceptions about what the process would involve and assumed it would be a long or difficult process.

"I wouldn't make a complaint because these processes are usually slow and very time consuming and I don't know how to make one."

"It seems difficult to make a complaint, and I wouldn't know what information to ask for."

"I would make a complaint if I felt that it was necessary, but I would have absolutely no idea how to do this. I would also be concerned about what the process would involve."

"Complaint process isn't very transparent. Don't really understand how the whole process works."

Young people would mainly go to family or friends first if they had a bad experience with the police.

Nearly half of young people said they would go to a family member first for support if they had a bad experience with the police. Many said they would talk to their parents and seek their advice about whether or how to make a complaint. Some also mentioned friends or trusted professionals such as teachers or Youth Offending Team (YOT) workers.

"I would definitely complain if there was an incident, but I would definitely get my family involved to help, so it doesn't happen to other people."

"I would speak to my mum and dad and my YOT worker first and see if they think I should complain as I wouldn't want to complain if there was no reason. My YOT worker says the police will treat me fairly and I believe them."

"I would make a complaint to my parents because it's important to let people know so things can change. I wouldn't know really how to report it myself but I'm sure my parents would help me!!"

"I would rather tell my parents about it for them to make the complaint because they would know where to go and have more confidence."





Section 3: solutions for policing

This section presents the key solutions that the IOPC Youth Panel have identified from this research to increase young people's trust in policing. These solutions are based on the ideas gathered from young people through the survey, and informed by the wider work that has been done by the Youth Panel.

Reducing harm and child safety need to be prioritised when any police action is taken.

We found that young people want to see more focus on protecting them from harm, and less on the criminalisation of young people. The safeguarding and protection of children and young people should be the first priority for police when encountering them in any setting or situation. There should be a consistent message of 'safeguarding first' when it comes to children in particular, rather than enforcement or criminalisation.

"Invest more in prevention than punishment."

"Them showing a bit more compassion and treating us like human beings, rather than treating us like criminals the second we do something wrong. Everyone does stupid things."

"I think younger people need to see that police are there to help not just arrest people."

"With protecting children, I feel like police officers should get training like a social worker as well and they should join together."

Policing needs to understand and acknowledge neuro-diversity and mental health needs.

One of the concerns expressed by young people was that police still don't understand mental health and neuro-diversity well enough. Policing needs to go further to acknowledge and respond to mental health and neuro-diversity needs. This should be supported by thorough training and taken seriously as an integral part of modern policing.

"I definitely feel they should take more time learning about mental health and go on more courses to learn about it. Most teenagers and young adults suffer with mental health and usually a bad home life which is usually why they do something wrong. Rather than treat them as a bad person, get them to see that what they are doing is wrong and treat them as a human being."

"I think they should focus on getting practice about how to deal with people with mental health issues."

"Not treating people having mental breakdowns the same as criminals"

Police must understand their own role in causing trauma and psychological distress.

We found that contact with the police can cause emotional distress and/or trauma for young people. As a service, we think the police need to understand how their actions can affect young people's mental health and well-being. This means going a step beyond being 'trauma-informed'.

"I have seen too many people with mental health be manhandled by the police and causing even more trauma of said person."

"Until I get over the trauma, nothing (could improve my trust in the police.)"

The police need to show they are focused on the Protected Characteristics – including race, gender, LGBTQ+ rights.

Our survey results showed that young people want to see the police take stronger action against all forms of discrimination including racism, homophobia and misogyny. Young people want to see evidence that the police are taking discrimination seriously, investigating the issues and implementing real changes. Many feel that a 'root and branch' change to police culture and personnel is needed.

"To make changes and to actually make steps forward in women, race and LGBTQ rights and for people with disabilities."

"Admit all forms of discrimination and root this out entirely. One word, change."

"Launch an investigation into issues around racism and sexism, and remove any officers who have issues with that."

"The police force as a whole needs to be looked into quite rigorously and severely, in regards to policies, staff, overall culture (such as rape culture and racism being perpetuated within the police)."

More needs to be done to understand and embed the voices of young black women.

The survey highlighted concerns around both gender and race, and how the intersection of these factors affects young Black women in particular. As the Youth Panel, we feel that young Black women have not been included enough in previous conversations and work to improve policing. We think the distinct experiences of young Black women, including around adultification, need to be heard and understood by the police sector. This must be a crucial part of future work to address discrimination across the protected characteristics.

"I am a Black woman, so I never had much trust in the police in the first place... I reported a hate crime, and they initially lost my witness statement so I had to do it again. And then rescheduled an interview and then cancelled it once I had arrived. I was told they closed the case because it would lose in court, only to be informed post-Sarah Everard backlash that they decided to reopen it. All of this has destroyed the tiny shred of confidence I might have had in them."

There should be more focus on 'everyday' positive interactions.

There is a sense that policing has become more detached from young people and communities over time. Young people are calling for greater focus on 'everyday' positive conversations with the police, informally within communities and neighbourhoods. If done well, this will help to build positive regard and humanise both sides.

"More friendly behaviours in police. Having contact with police in situations where there isn't crime, for example PCSOs just saying hello on the streets."

"Mostly I think just talking with police officers, kindness and understanding could be reached. Not just seeing them doing their work, but also seeing the person behind the uniform."

"Community officers, being regular faces and well known and liked for having the town's best interests at heart instead of being unreliable and unresponsive."

"The police are the public and the public are the police. The police need to make stronger bonds with the younger people. I grew up being scared of the police and a child shouldn't fear the people who take care of us."

Young people are asking to be educated on the police's role and what they should be able to expect.

When we asked young people to tell us what would increase their trust in the police, they told us they want to see more education on the role of the police, their powers, and what constitutes police misconduct. This would increase procedural justice for young people when coming into contact with the justice system, and help them to recognise police misconduct.

"Proper education about what the police should be doing for their community, so they can make complaints if the police stray from that role."

"Go into primary schools and educate them on the importance of police but also teach them about the powers associated with the police. Educate both the police force and the public about their rights and remind everyone that we are all people."

"Teach the Legal process of the Courts/Police/Security and about Politicians at school, and teach them who has jurisdiction over who, e.g. the IOPC holds the Police accountable/ The Home Secretary holds the PCC to account and the PCC holds the Chief Constable to account."

Any police engagement in schools should be educational, non-punitive and fully responsive.

We found that police engagement in schools can be very beneficial in terms of education and relationship building, but care needs to be taken to ensure school is always a safe space for young people. Any police engagement in schools should be educational, non-punitive and fully informed by what young people themselves want from the engagement.

"Community engagement in secondary schools, not just after a negative thing in the community has happened but regularly so that young people get to know they will be listened to and taken seriously."

I feel as though more awareness within school could significantly help with young people's development of trust. If more police talks and socialising within their younger years was developed, I feel like more trust and awareness could be reached. Showing young people how to fill out complaints and make them feel secure in doing so could be achieved through these talks as well as showing them what policing is all about."

There should be a way to give the police positive feedback or suggestions, as well as complaints.

Some young people told us that they want to have more opportunities to give the police positive feedback or suggestions, as well as complaints. They suggested that all forms of feedback should be actively promoted by the police when interacting with young people and communities.

"Include young adult/ teenage/ child voice in policing matters."

"More surveys like this."

"If I were to report a crime I should be given something at the end of my experience to feedback, praise or complain."





Section 4: solutions for police complaints

This section presents the key solutions that the IOPC Youth Panel have identified to increase young people's confidence in police complaints. These solutions are based on the ideas gathered from young people through the survey, and informed by the wider work that has been done by the Youth Panel.

More work is needed to build confidence that complaints lead to meaningful outcomes.

We found that many young people don't believe their complaints would make a difference. There is a lack of visibility of the outcomes and changes that complaints can lead to. Young people need to see good evidence and examples of when complaints have been dealt with and what the resolution was. These examples should be disseminated by police forces as well as the IOPC, and they need to be visible via the media and social media that young people use.

"Make young people feel that something will actually be done if they complain. We've been complaining for a while now, in protests and on social media, and nothing's being done."

"Tell young people that the police are interested in what we have to say and use examples of previous (successful) complaints to prove that young people's complaints will not be ignored."

"Better information on outcomes of other complaints and whether we would be listened to or not."

"Show them that their complaints have been heard and [they are] making changes."

Young people want to see more visible consequences for misconduct.

More visibility of the consequences of misconduct for officers would show young people that officers were being held accountable for their actions. Young people felt that credible consequences might include impact on pay and progression, fines paid by forces or individual officers, dismissals or prosecutions. Some also felt that more public apologies would be helpful.

"That the ones that don't do what they are meant to do (eg the one who killed Sarah Everard) get fired or arrested and dealt with."

"Use disciplinary action against police officers who behave inappropriately and have a zero tolerance policy on unprofessional behaviour."

"The police force need to begin to present themselves as willing to accept fault and responsibility, or people won't bother filing complaints."

"Make more public apologies when the complaints are justified."

Young people need a complaints system that recognises their distinct needs.

When we asked young people what would help them feel confident to make a complaint, they told us that the complaints system needs to be more accessible to children and young people, and more responsive to their specific needs. This includes having more channels for young people to complain using digital technology and social media, and having a young person-specific web platform, helpline and chat service with staff who are trained to respond to their needs.

"Have a specific phone line for teens where they can make complaints."

"Make a youth unit, or special people who help support youths who need to make a complaint."

"Easy access to information about making complaints, social media presence, QR codes to forms that have been designed by young people."

Trusted organisations should be able to help young people to complain, individually and in groups.

Young people told us they would want to have support from a trusted person or organisation, to help them feel more comfortable to make a complaint. Lots of young people suggested that their schools would be the best place for them to get support to make a complaint. Others felt that their youth workers and YOT workers would be well placed to help them.

"Having an external safe, supportive space (organisation) for young people to make their complaints, and have those complaints professionally passed on."

"Complaint facilities within schools as its one of the few places children can feel safe."

"My youth club should have information on how I could make a complaint and maybe the youth worker could help me make my complaint."

Young people want to be able to complain through an independent, trusted channel rather than the police force.

Young people are calling for a truly independent complaints system, where they do not have to complain directly to the police. At the moment the IOPC can't offer this to young people because all complaints must first go to the police. Unless this changes, many children and young people will stay silent due to the fear and mistrust of the current way the system is set up.

"A new organisation completely independent from the police handling complaints. It should also be made up of everyday people (e.g. those who have experienced police force) alongside qualified workers."

"An independent body not under the police force that can judge and fairly prosecute police wrongdoings just as they do to normal people."

"An online service which does not go straight to the police station which is directly affiliated with the police officer(s) in question."

"Complaints should go through an independent party, with more power than the police to ensure they are treated fairly."

The right to complain should be enshrined in mandatory practice

Young people commented that the 'right to complain' should be embedded in mandatory policing practice, just as is the case with 'the right to remain silent'. The right to complain should be reinforced in printed materials such as posters and leaflets, as well as verbally when people come into contact with the police. Young people have told us that it's important for this right to be clearly explained and reinforced, in order for it to become embedded in people's minds.

"Maybe outside stations have it mandatory to have the contact info for the IOPC. One way for transparency."

"Perhaps make sure any kind of interaction with the police (forms, talks etc.) comes with an indicator of where to complain?"

"After an arrest give people a How to Complain form and details of people who can help."

Young people and families need to be educated about police complaints.

We heard from young people that family engagement is a key aspect of helping them to complain. The IOPC and police forces should work to get relevant information to parents and families. Young people also want to see education modules within schools and colleges teaching them how to make a complaint.

"Parents knowing more."

"Encouraged by teachers/family members and knowing who and where to go to."

"Young people need to learn in schools that the IOPC exists. I didn't know the IOPC existed until 23, which is ridiculous. It needs to be taught in school and awareness made that you can make a complaint and that the police do get investigated."

"We have had officers come into school which I feel has really encouraged young people to feel they could speak to the police if needed. However, none of these sessions have focused on reporting incidents and as a result, I myself wouldn't know how to make a complaint."



Conclusion

We are enormously grateful to all of the young people across England and Wales who took the time to share their experiences and views of policing and police complaints. We also extend thanks to the dedicated young leaders from the IOPC Youth Panel who have driven the project forward, and to all the partners who supported and promoted this piece of work.

Over the coming months, we will work to ensure that these findings and recommendations are acted upon as widely as possible. We will share local findings in the areas where we have generated a significant volume of responses. At the national level, we will work with the IOPC, National Police Chiefs Council and other bodies to champion the recommendations across the policing sector. We are excited to continue working with system leaders, policy-makers and other professionals to act upon what young people have told us.

Appendix 1: breakdown of responses by region

Police force	Number of responses
Avon and Somerset	8
Bedfordshire	6
Cambridgeshire	1
Cheshire	111
Cleveland	32
Cumbria	3
Derbyshire	41
Devon and Cornwall	67
Dorset	11
Durham	2
Dyfed-Powys	3
Essex	16
Gloucestershire	14
Greater Manchester	18
Gwent	2
Hampshire	39
Hertfordshire	3
Humberside	6
Kent	14
Lancashire	61
Leicestershire	14
Lincolnshire	39
Merseyside	30
London	62
Norfolk	2
North Wales	15
North Yorkshire	216
Northamptonshire	6
Northumbria	16
Nottinghamshire	17
South Wales	13
South Yorkshire	4
Staffordshire	264
Suffolk	4
Surrey	9
Sussex	140
Thames Valley	6
Warwickshire	78
West Mercia	197
West Midlands	315
West Yorkshire	29
Wiltshire	13



Appendix 2: survey questions

This survey is a part of a youth-led project to influence policing across England and Wales. It has been designed by young people from the **Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)** Youth Panel.

Your views as a young person are really important to us and will be used to create recommendations for change. We will publish the results of the survey later in 2022.

The survey is completely anonymous and you will not be asked for your name, contact information or any information that will reveal your identity. It is managed by **Leaders Unlocked**.

The survey will take approximately 6-8 minutes to complete, depending on how much you have to say.

Section 1: About you

- 1. What is your age?** (Drop down from 13 – 25 years) *required
- 2. Where do you live?** (Drop down list of police regions in England and Wales)*required
- 3. What is your current occupation?** (Select the option that best represents your main occupation)
 - School **65.76%**
 - Alternative education **1.02%**
 - College/ 6th Form **17.45%**
 - University **3.28%**
 - Full-time work **6.5%**
 - Part-time work **2.2%**
 - Volunteering **0.82%**
 - Unemployed but looking for work **0.97%**
 - Caring/parental responsibilities **0.10%**
 - Self-employed **0.51%**
 - Not in work/education due to long-term illness or disability **0.61%**
 - Other (please specify) **0.77%**

Section 2: Your views of the police

- 4. How much do you trust the police in your area?**
 - Not at all **8.58%**
 - Not much **20.91%**
 - A fair amount **53.44%**
 - A great deal **17.06%**
- 5. To what extent do you think the police in your area treat young people fairly?**
 - Not at all **9.08%**
 - Not much **23.16%**
 - A fair amount **52.81%**
 - A great deal **14.96%**
- 6. How likely would you be to go to the police if you were victim of a crime?**
 - Very likely **32.22%**
 - Quite likely **36.84%**
 - Not very likely **21.69%**
 - Not at all likely **9.25%**
- 7. How much do you feel young people's voices are being heard by your local police force?**
 - Not at all **20.64%**
 - Not much **44.01%**
 - A fair amount **30.34%**
 - A great deal **5.01%**
- 8. Over the last year, would you say your trust in the police has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?**
 - Decreased a lot **14.29%**
 - Decreased a bit **22.51%**
 - Stayed about the same **49.95%**
 - Increased a bit **9.10%**
 - Increased a lot **4.16%**
- 9. Please use this box to tell us a bit more about your perceptions of the police, and what influences your perceptions.** *Tip: we'd like to know the reasons why you feel the way you do, and what influences your perceptions of the police. (Open field)*

Section 3: Your views of police complaints

- 10. If you had a bad experience with the police, who would you go to first for support?**
(Pick one option)
- Friend **15.29%**
 - Family member **47.37%**
 - Teacher **3.3%**
 - Youth worker **1.08%**
 - Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) **5.36%**
 - Police **5.05%**
 - Social worker **0.72%**
 - I wouldn't go to anyone **7.98%**
 - Not sure **11.53%**
 - Other (please specify) **2.32%**
- 11. If you had a bad experience with the police, how willing would you be to make a complaint?**
- Not at all willing **10.72%**
 - Not very willing **22.99%**
 - Fairly willing **33.76%**
 - Very willing **20.40%**
 - Not sure/ depends **12.12%**
- 12. Would you know where to go to get information about how to make a complaint?**
- Yes **26.08%**
 - No **48.73%**
 - Unsure **25.19%**
- 13. How much of a difference do you think your complaint would make, if at all?**
- Not at all **35.73%**
 - Not much **46.80%**
 - A fair amount **15.70%**
 - A lot **1.77%**
- 14. Please use this box to tell us a bit more about your views on police complaints and what influences your views.** *Tip: we'd like to know a bit more about why you would/ would not make a complaint, and what influences your views. (Open field)*

Section 4: Your solutions

- 15. What is one top issue you think the police should be focusing on this year?**
(Open field)
- 16. What could be done to help young people to make complaints about the police?**
(Open field)
- 17. What could be done to improve your trust in the police?**
(Open field)

Section 5: Your experiences

- 18. What experiences have you ever had with police?**
(Tick all that apply)
- Reporting a crime **24.23%**
 - Giving a statement **21.54%**
 - Engaging with police in school **36.33%**
 - Volunteering with police **10.30%**
 - Arrest **4.75%**
 - Stop and search **7.5%**
 - Stop and account (being stopped and asked questions) **15.05%**
 - No experiences **34.37%**
 - Other **13.78%**
- 19. How many experiences have you had with the police in the last 12 months?**
- None **56.33%**
 - 1 **18.69%**
 - 2-3 **14.84%**
 - 4-6 **3.04%**
 - 6-8 **1.44%**
 - 8-10 **0.85%**
 - More than 10 **4.81%**
- 20. How would you describe your experiences with police in the last 12 months?**

Section 6: Diversity

21. We'd like to find out how experiences might be different for different groups. Please tick any that you feel apply to you

- Black, Asian and/or Ethnic Minority **18.16%**
- Physical disabilities **5.29%**
- Hidden disabilities **22.85%**
- Currently or previously in receipt of Free School Meals **9.71%**
- LGBTQ+ **26.61%**
- Personal experience of mental health issues **28.95%**
- Experience of homelessness or being at risk of homelessness **4.85%**
- Experience of the care system **4.25%**
- Being a young carer **6.82%**
- Experience of the criminal justice system **4.80%**
- None of the above **31.46%**
- Prefer not to say **9.87%**

Further information

For information about how to make a complaint, please see <https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/research-and-learning/our-youth-panel/police-complaints-quick-guide-young-people>

Contact us

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