



**Police Service**  
of Northern Ireland

Professional Standards  
Department

# **Annual Report to the Northern Ireland Policing Board**

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# Contents

<b>Overview</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>Policing Plan Overview</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>Overview of Code of Ethics Breaches</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Discipline Branch</b>	<b>08</b>
Case Studies	08
<b>Anti-Corruption Unit</b>	<b>10</b>
Key Corruption Risks	12
Case Studies	13
Initiatives	13
Confidential Reporting	13
<b>Misconduct Meetings and Hearings</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Duty Adjustments</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Service Vetting Unit</b>	<b>18</b>
Overview	18
Vetting Decisions 2023/2024	18
Police Recruitment	19
In Service Vetting	19
Substance Misuse Testing	19
Communication	19
Social Media	19
<b>Supplementary Material</b>	<b>20</b>
Criminal Convictions of Police Officers	20
Service Confidence Procedure	21
Notifiable Memberships of Police Officers	21
Registered Business Interests	21
<b>Professional Standards Business Improvement and Development Initiatives</b>	<b>23</b>
Sexual Misconduct Review	23
Prevention First Campaign	23
Code of Ethics Learn Course	24
Service Integrity Board	24
Policy	25
Continuous Professional Development	25
Information Security	25
Random Drug Testing	25
Peer Support Wellbeing Project	25
Vetting Panels	26
Review of PSNI Recruitment Vetting Guidelines	26
Aftercare	26

## Overview

The Police Service of Northern Ireland Professional Standards Department has produced this report to meet our governance requirements regarding the reporting of Professional Standards issues.

The Department is comprised of Discipline Branch, Anti-Corruption Unit and the Service Vetting Unit. Professional Standards, within the Police Service of Northern Ireland, is evolving consistently in response to recommendations from various external reports, including:

- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – An Inspection of Vetting, Misconduct, and Misogyny in the Police Service.
- The Angiolini Inquiry into the abduction, murder and rape of Sarah Everard by an off duty officer from the Metropolitan Police Service.
- Northern Ireland Policing Board – Review of Police Service of Northern Ireland Professional Standards.
- Northern Ireland Policing Board – Review of the Human Rights of Police Officers.

Within our organisation we are also subject to recommendations internally, such as in our Violence against Women and Girls Action Plan and our Race Action Plan.

Our purpose is to build and maintain trust and confidence in the integrity of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

## Policing Plan Overview

As part of the 2023/24 Policing Plan the following baselines and impacts have been requested.

### Number of Investigations

- There were 109 new Discipline Branch investigations during 2023/24. This figure includes 'shadowed' investigations which is where PSD conduct the misconduct investigation, but the associated criminal investigation is undertaken by another Branch. This will most frequently occur when specialist officers are required to conduct an investigation e.g. a complex fraud, or where the investigation requires very limited investigative action e.g. drink driving. In these instances the criminal investigation may be conducted by specialist officers in the Economic Crime Unit or by the officer in Local Policing who detected the drunk driver.
- Anti-Corruption Unit undertook 61 new investigations during the same period.

### Number of Reported Breaches of the Code of Ethics

- 1,153 breaches of the Code of Ethics were recorded during 2023/24. For clarification, this reflects the number of incidents opened on NICHE during this time period. It is important to note that each incident opened could have multiple breaches and could involve two or more officers. PSD are currently unable to quantify the total number of breaches of the Code of Ethics due to limitations of our IT infrastructure.

### Number of Misconduct Proceedings

- A total of 27 officers have faced misconduct hearings throughout 2023/24.
- 41 officers attended misconduct meetings during 2023/24.

### Number of Investigations under the Whistleblowing Policy

- There have been no investigations under the whistleblowing policy during the reporting period.

### Has the Number of Investigations Increased or Decreased?

- The number of conduct cases has increased since 2020 as shown by the graph on page 8. Early figures for 2024 indicate that cases may have peaked and are now on the decline.

- The combined number of new investigations for Discipline and Anti-Corruption Unit has decreased by 25% on the previous 12 months from 226 to 170 new investigations. Comparison with the four year average indicates an increase of 4%.

### **Has the Number of Suspensions Increased or Decreased?**

- In 2023/24, the average number of officers suspended was 55. This was higher than the previous year when the average was 48. Suspensions are currently decreasing and the average figure for April – July 2024 is 47. The current figure (July 2024) of 43 suspended officers is the lowest since May 2022.

### **Has the Number of Repositionings Increased or Decreased?**

- In 2023/24, the average number of officers repositioned was 65. This was higher than the previous year when the average was 60. Repositionings are currently decreasing and the average figure for April – July 2024 is 57. The current figure (July 2024) of 48 repositioned officers is the lowest since June 2021.

## **Overview of Code of Ethics Breach**

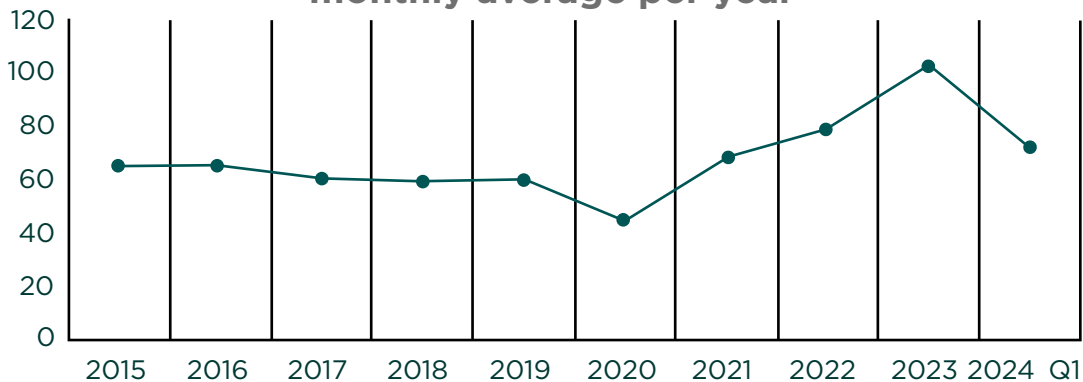
The graph reflects the monthly average of the number of incidents opened on NICHE per year from 2015 to 2024. It is important to note that each incident opened could have multiple breaches and could involve two or more officers. PSD are currently unable to quantify the total number of breaches of the Code of Ethics due to limitations of our IT infrastructure.

The graph on the next page indicates that incidents opened were fairly constant between 2015 and 2019, followed by a significant drop in 2020 as a result of Covid and associated restrictions. Following Covid, incidents have risen sharply year on year and this trend continued into 2023 with a 30% increase on 2022. Early figures for 2024 indicate that levels have fallen back to between those recorded in 2021 and 2022.

Cases referred from the Police Ombudsman and the Police Service of Northern Ireland cases both increased in 2023. Most common articles breached in the last 12 months, accounting for 76.2% of breaches, are:

- 2.1 Professional Investigations
- 7.2 Integrity
- 1.10 Professional Duty
- 1.1 Professional Duty

### Breaches of code of ethics monthly average per year

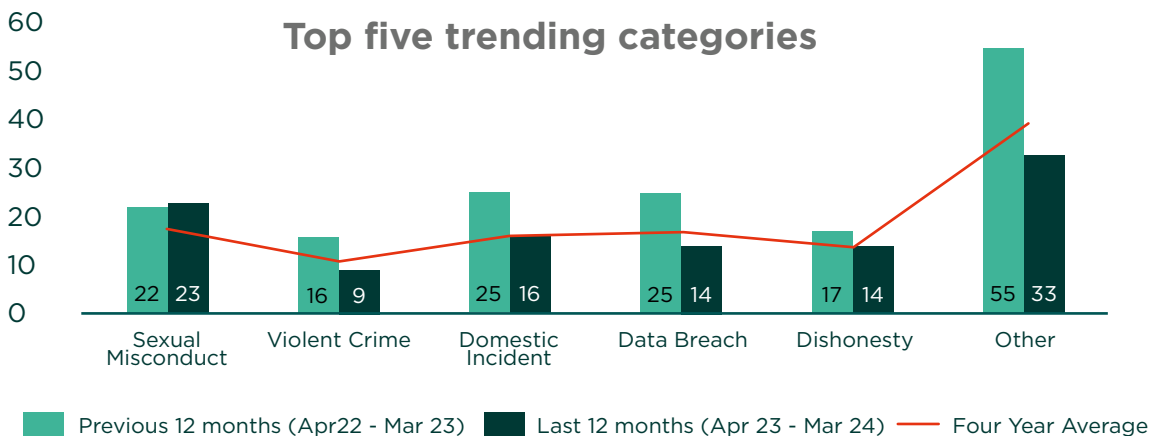


## Discipline Branch

In the last 12 months, Discipline Branch recorded 109 new investigations.

This was 32% less than the 160 new investigations in the previous 12 months and 5% lower than the four year average of 115 new investigations per year.

### Top five trending categories



- Only Sexual Misconduct recorded more investigations in the last 12 months (+1) than in the previous 12 months. Main themes relate to sending explicit images, sex on duty, Operation Roric referrals, inappropriate conduct with colleagues and Abuse of Position for a Sexual Purpose.
- All categories bar 'sexual misconduct' and 'dishonesty' were lower than the four-year average. Dishonesty was only marginally higher than the four-year average.
- Dishonesty offences relating to overtime, mileage, working hours and business interests are an emerging priority and will feature in a new communications strategy over the coming months. A number of educational and directional articles will be run through our internal intranet and magazine to raise awareness.
- There was a 44% reduction in Data breaches during 2023/24. Data Protection was the focus of the Prevention Strategy in early 2023. This involved an intranet article and data protections pop-ups when logging on the Police Service of Northern Ireland computer system.
- 'Other' covers a range of issues including driving under the influence, inappropriate conduct, discriminatory behaviour, mishandling of property.

Considering the number of new investigations by quarter indicates that investigation levels over 2023/24 FY returned to normal after high levels at the end of 2022 / beginning of 2023.

As of April 2024 PSD Discipline Unit had 83 live investigations and were 'shadowing' a further 57 investigations which were being managed by other departments / districts.

## Case Studies

### Case Study 1

In September 2020 Professional Standards commenced a misconduct investigation after serious allegations that an officer had acted unethically. The nature of these allegations led to the officer's mobile phone being seized for examination. During this examination it came to light that the officer had taken photographs of information obtained from a Police Service of Northern Ireland Common Terminal.

The officer shared information with their partner who was not a police officer or member of police staff. The information included details of confidential internal police matters, court proceedings and photographs of crime scenes and victims. The officer also made derogatory and inappropriate comments about members of the public and colleagues in messages.

- In August 2023 the case was heard in front of an ACC, accompanied by a Superintendent and independent member. Gross misconduct was proven and the officer was dismissed without notice.

In August 2023 the case was heard in front of an ACC, accompanied by a Chief Superintendent and an independent member. Gross misconduct was proven and the officer was dismissed with 28 days' notice.

**Case Study 2**

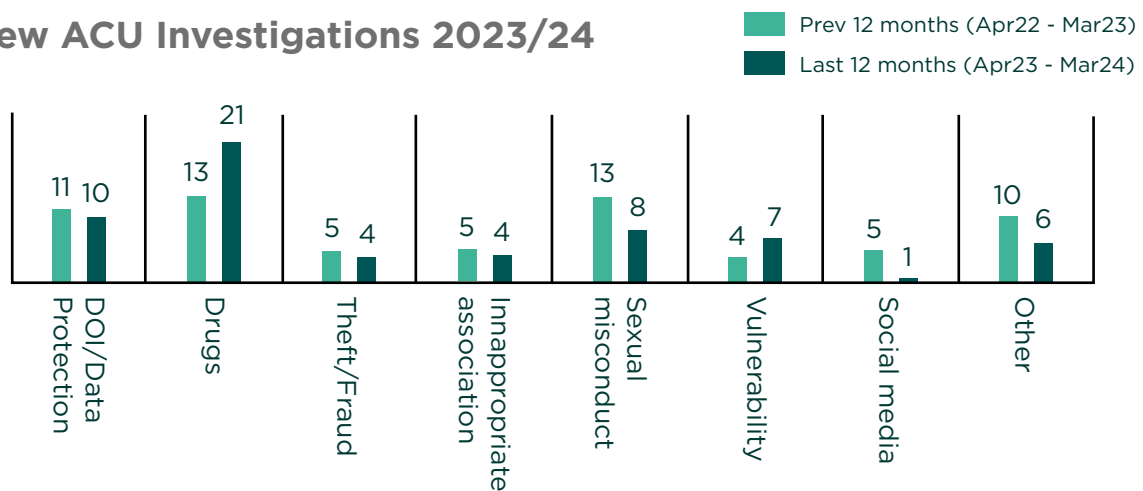
In April 2021 Professional Standards Department became aware that an officer had made sectarian comments whilst on duty to their colleagues. The comments were of a derogatory nature towards a religious group. The officer's colleagues didn't challenge them at the time but, after giving it some consideration, raised it with them and made the officer aware that they had been offended by what was said. The officer apologised for offending their colleague, although not for making the comment itself and the matter was referred to Professional Standards Department.

**Anti-Corruption Unit**

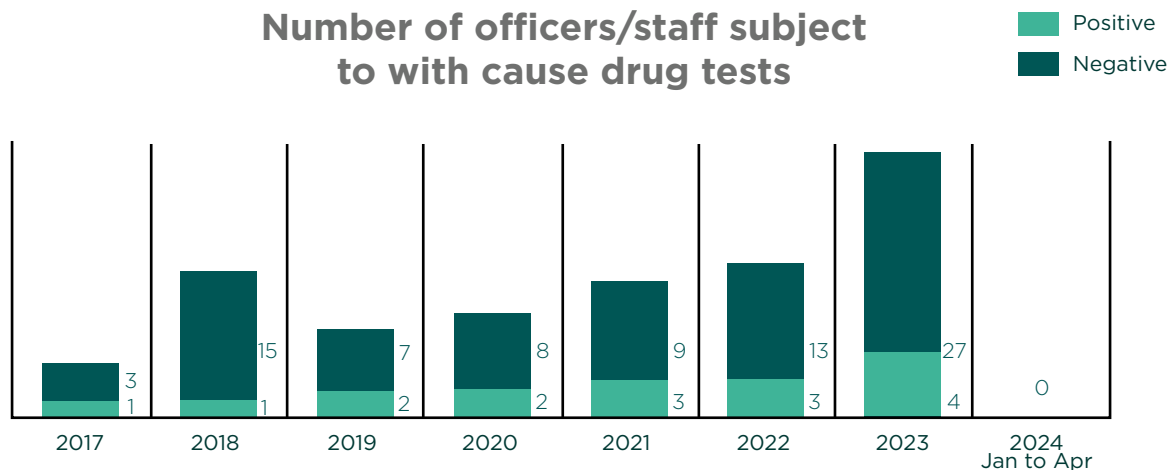
In the last 12 months, Anti-Corruption Unit recorded 61 new investigations. This was 8% less than the 66 new investigations in the previous 12 months but 27% higher than the four year average of 48 new investigations per year.

Over a third of new investigations in 2023/24 related to alleged misuse of drugs.

**New ACU Investigations 2023/24**



### Number of officers/staff subject to with cause drug tests



Allegation of this nature will often result in a ‘with cause drugs test’ (WCDT) if the required threshold is met. Figures for 2023/24 showed a marked increase in WCDT as a result of the increase in drug referrals during the early part of 2023.

The number of With Cause Drug Tests (WCDT) has been increasing since 2019, and there were a record number of WCDTs in 2023. Three officers and one member of police staff tested positive in 2023 for either cannabis, cocaine or steroids. Two of the three officers have been dismissed and the third is scheduled for a Special Case Hearing in August. The staff member has also left the organisation.

Substance Misuse was the focus of a Professional Standards’ Communication and Engagement Strategy (October to November 2023) to deliver education and awareness around substance misuse and how it translates into misconduct.

Random testing has also now resumed. 171 random tests were conducted in 2023. There were seven positives but all were consistent with declared medication.

### Case Study 3

A police officer volunteered to take part in a random drugs test conducted by Radox Testing Services. The officer provided a sample of urine which was analysed and showed a presumptive positive for cannabinoids. Further tests showed that a higher than normal measure of a THC metabolite was detected in the urine and this confirmed the use of cannabis in the days prior to the test taking place. Cannabis is a Class B Controlled Drug prohibited by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

The officer was interviewed and made a full admission to using cannabis oil and said they had used it on a handful of occasions. The officer was not prescribed cannabis oil and stated that they knew it was illegal to use it.

In October 2023 the case was heard in front of an ACC, accompanied by a Chief Superintendent and an independent member. Gross misconduct was proven and the officer was dismissed with a three month notice period.

## Key Corruption Risks

- **Sexual Misconduct:** Abuse of position for sexual purpose with vulnerable victims of crime; sexual harassment of colleagues.
- **Theft/Fraud:** Failure to work allocated hours, misusing police vehicle, claiming for overtime not worked, failure to record sick leave or annual leave, pursuing business interests or leisure activities during working hours or whilst on sick leave.
- **Unauthorised Disclosure of Information:** Familial / long standing friendships with criminals; social media vulnerabilities.
- **Drugs:** Male officers, predominantly in their 20s/30s, less than 15 years of service and linked to socialising habits thereby increasing their personal vulnerability, whilst also potentially damaging public confidence.
- **Inappropriate Association:** Familial / romantic associations with criminals; vulnerabilities can also develop through leisure and club membership.
- **Organised Crime:** Localised postings where the officer has a long standing relationship with the OCG member and roles where police officers are required to engage with community representatives with links to paramilitaries.
- **Social Media:** Expressing inappropriate views on social media and WhatsApp groups.

- **Business Interests:** Failing to declare secondary employment or business activity, engaging in private business interests that conflict with policing duties.

## Case Studies

### Case Study 4

Information came to light that a police officer who was performing the role of Sergeant had been behaving in an inappropriate way towards female colleagues for a period of time. It was alleged that the officer had made contact via social media with the females and that the contact was persistent and unwanted. Some of the messages were of a sexual nature and the officer also sent explicit photographs.

A number of female colleagues were spoken to and the Appropriate Authority who reviewed the material felt that the officer had a case to answer for alleged gross misconduct. In October 2023 the case was heard in front of an ACC, accompanied by a Superintendent and an independent member. Gross misconduct was proven and the officer was dismissed with 28 days' notice.

### Case Study 5

Concerns were raised regarding the legitimacy of a 'Just Giving' page set up by a police officer to fund private medical treatment. Over £1000 was raised and transferred to the bank account of the officer. The officer's phone was seized as part of the investigation into fraud offences and messages on the phone revealed further criminality.

There was a high volume of sexualized chats over a number of apps, some of which occurred whilst the officer was on duty. The officer was also found to have breached data protection by viewing females on the Police Service of Northern Ireland systems without a lawful policing purpose.

In July 2023, the officer was dismissed without notice at a Special Case Hearing. The ex-officer was then subsequently convicted at Magistrates Court for unauthorised access to computer material under the Computer Misuse Act and for unlawfully obtaining and disclosing personal data under the Data Protection Act. He was convicted of eight charges and fined.

### Initiatives

- Well established Strategic & Tactical processes which feed into the NCA National Corruption Threat Assessment.
- Substance Misuse Testing. Engagement with Student Officers, Crime Department, Local Policing Teams and Civilian Detention Officers, to raise awareness of key strategic threats and PSD policies, and to encourage proactive reporting of misconduct and criminality.
- Liaison with Partner Agencies. Participation at Regional/National Police Counter Corruption Advisory Groups.

- Monitoring of the Police Service of Northern Ireland systems and technology.
- Development of confidential reporting systems – Integrity Matters App launched on June 28th 2023 and National Anti-Corruption and Abuse Hotline launched in March 2024.

### Confidential Reporting

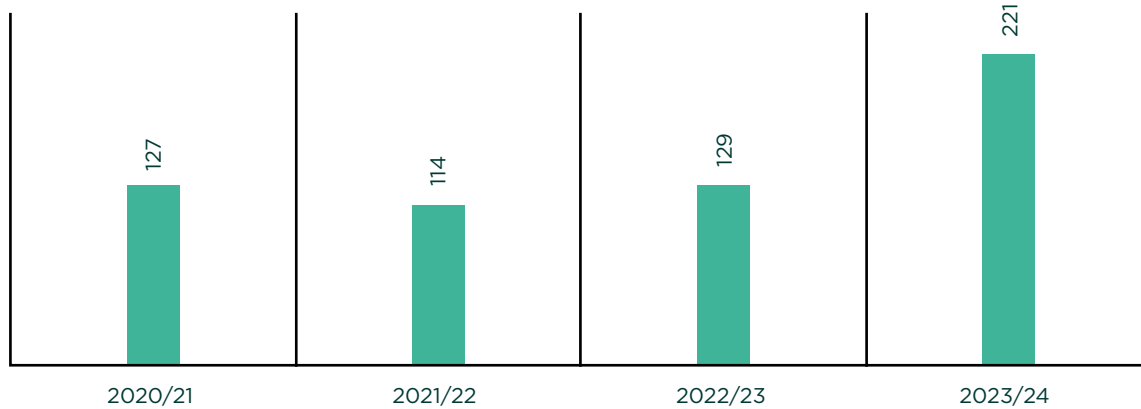
The Police Service of Northern Ireland has three separate mechanisms to facilitate the confidential reporting of corruption and wrongdoing. These are:

**Integrity Line** – this is a telephone and e-mail system operated externally by Crimestoppers and can be used by Police Service of Northern Ireland employees and members of the public.

**Integrity Matters** – this is an internal email system for use by Police Service of Northern Ireland employees. This is accessed through the Police Service of Northern Ireland Intranet. An option is also provided to speak in confidence with a member of the ACU for those who would prefer using the telephone.

On 28th June 2023, Professional Standards also launched an Integrity Matters application on computer desktops and police issued mobile phones.

### Confidential reports 2020/21 - 2023/14



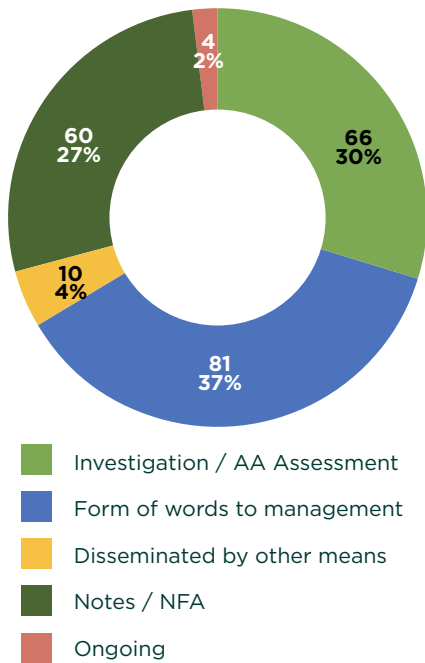
A new **national anti-corruption reporting line** was launched in March. This service is run by Crimestoppers. The Metropolitan Police began using this service in November 2022 but it has now been launched nationwide. To date, the Police Service of Northern Ireland has not received any referrals through this service.

221 confidential reports were received in 2023/24, representing an uplift of 71% on the previous year. This is due to the launch of the Integrity Matters App and the associated Communication and Engagement Strategy of Reporting Wrongdoing. Since its launch in June 2023, reporting via Integrity Matters has increased significantly from 3-4 reports per month to an average of 13 reports per month.

Main reporting themes include:

<b>Overtime Discrepancies</b>	<b>Failure to work detailed hours</b>
<b>Substance misuse</b>	<b>Disclosure of information</b>
<b>Social media posts</b>	<b>Business interests</b>
<b>Holiday / working on business interest whilst on sick leave</b>	<b>Inappropriate relationships between colleagues</b>
<b>Misuse of Police vehicle</b>	<b>No vehicle insurance</b>
<b>Data Protection Breach</b>	<b>Inappropriate comments</b>

### Confidential reporting outcomes 2023/24



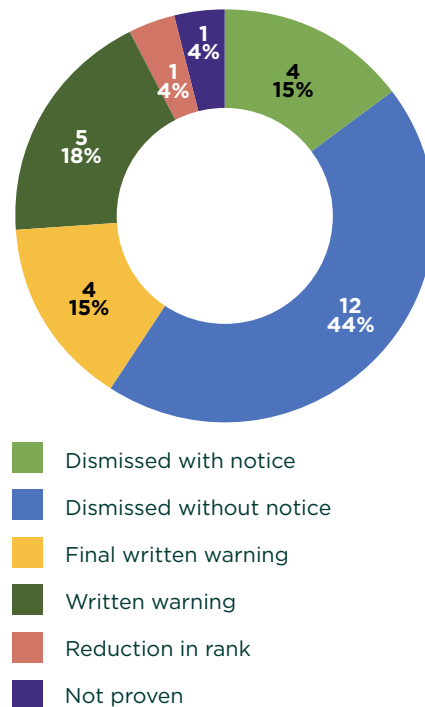
Matters referred for investigation represent 30% of reporting. These primarily involve data protection, fraud, alleged drug use, abuse of position, business interests, failure to investigate, sexual misconduct, inappropriate social media activity and other criminal activity.

Matters referred to officers' line management relate to issues such as relationships, business interests, integrity, misuse of police vehicle, failure in duty, sick leave irregularities, social media use and vulnerabilities around alcohol / off duty behaviour. Occasionally reports may be sent to partner agencies such as HMRC or the Police Ombudsman. These are recorded under 'Disseminated by Other Means'.

## Misconduct Meetings and Hearings

A total of 27 officers have faced misconduct hearings during the past 12 months, of which 59% (16) have resulted in an officer being dismissed from the service, either with or without notice. Dismissals were primarily due to drink driving, sexual misconduct and data protection. In 2022/23, 32 officers had faced a misconduct hearing with 23 officers dismissed.

### Misconduct hearing outcomes 2023/24

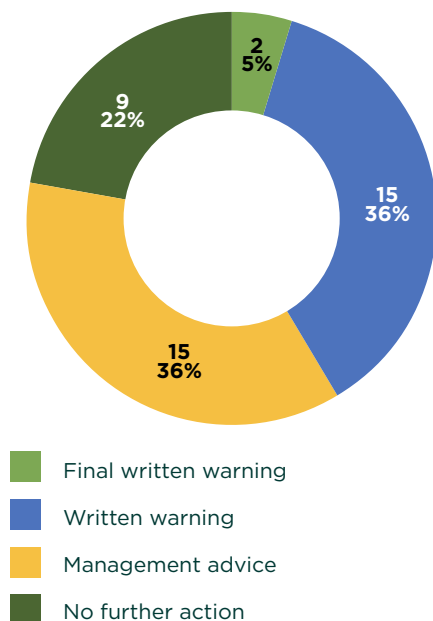


Please note that the outcome 'Noted / NFA' will still involve a level of research and development prior to final assessment.

41 officers have attended a misconduct meeting in 2023/24 FY. 41% resulted in either a written warning or a final written warning. 22% of meetings (9) resulted in no action being taken against the officer.

Breach of data protection, inappropriate comments about colleagues, inappropriate use of WhatsApp, plagiarism, failure in duty and excessive use of force are amongst the main themes presented at misconduct meetings this year.

### Misconduct meeting outcomes 2023/24



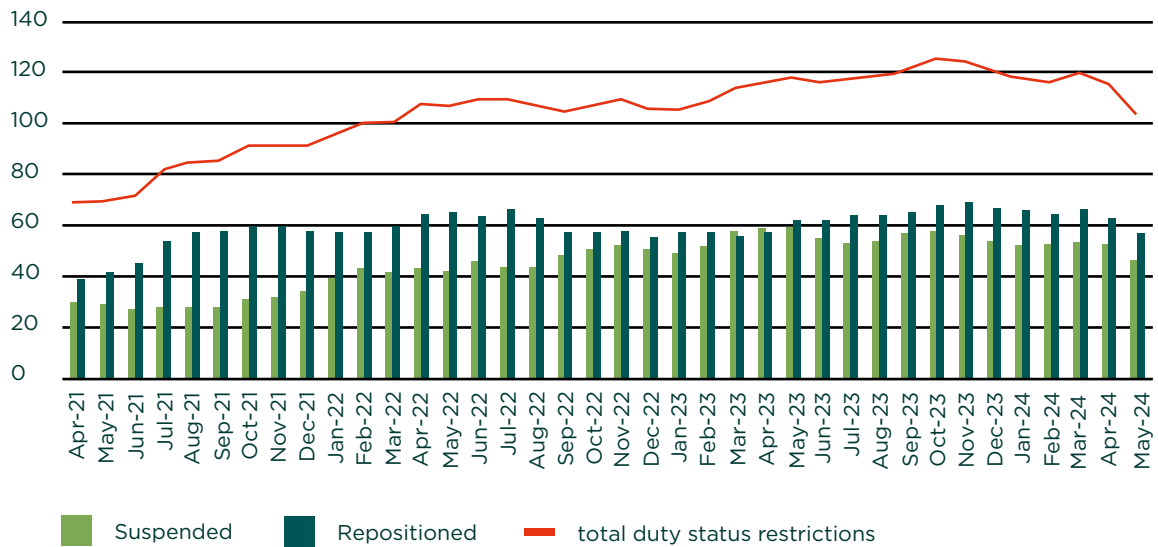
## Duty Adjustments

There are two forms of duty adjustment available for consideration when officers are under investigation: suspension or repositioning.

Suspension from duty involves the removal of the officer from all police duties, including the surrender of their warrant card and removal of access to police premises. Due to the cost to the service of having an officer on full pay being unable to perform any police role, this is reserved for only the most serious of gross misconduct cases, and where it is not in the public interest for the officer to continue in any police role during the course of the investigation.

Repositioning takes place as an alternative to suspension and involves a temporary change in role or location pending the outcome of criminal / misconduct proceedings. The restrictions placed on a repositioned officer may include limiting or preventing contact with the public, reducing involvement in particular activities such as restricting access to evidence, information or intelligence

### Total officers suspended or repositioned



Duty status restrictions had been on an increasing trend for the last three years but have started to decrease in recent months as indicated on the chart. The current figure of 104 is

the lowest since March 2022. This represents a decrease of 0.95% on the calculated average in the table below.

	Suspensions	Repositionings	Total
<b>Currently (22.5.24)</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Range (April 21 - May 24)</b>	<b>27-59</b>	<b>39-69</b>	<b>69-126</b>
<b>Average (April 21 - May 24)</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>59.4</b>	<b>105.0</b>

Suspensions have increased more than repositionings and are currently 3.2% above average compared to repositionings which are 4.1% below average.

27 of the 47 officers currently suspended, and 20 of the 57 officers currently repositioned, are because of allegations of domestic or sexual misconduct. Drugs, driving under the influence, data breaches, discriminatory language, use of force and disorderly behaviour are also amongst the themes for suspensions and repositionings. Nine of the suspended officers are under investigation by PONI.

## Service Vetting Unit

### Overview

Everyone in policing must maintain the highest ethical and professional standards, and must act with the utmost integrity. This is crucial in ensuring that public trust and confidence in the service is maintained. It is essential that the public is confident that police vetting processes are effective in identifying those who pose a potential risk to others, or who are otherwise unsuitable for working within the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It is imperative that those working in policing are also able to maintain the trust and confidence of the Chief Constable to perform their role in delivering policing services.

Vetting is an integral part of the Police Service of Northern Ireland's framework of ethics and professional standards. Vetting forms part of a wider security regime, rather than being used in isolation. A thorough and effective vetting regime is an important component in considering an individual's suitability to work in policing.

Vetting exists to protect the integrity and reputation of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, its assets and data from persons and organisations intent on, or capable of, disrupting the integrity, security or values of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It is the aim of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, via the Service Vetting Unit (SVU), to provide an appropriate level of assurance as to the trustworthiness, integrity and reliability of all police officers, police staff and non-police personnel (NPP) working for, or on behalf, of the Service.

### Vetting Decisions 2023/2024

2340 vetting decisions were made in 2023/24. Over 96% of vetting decisions resulted in the applicant being granted clearance.

### **Police Recruitment**

Police Recruitment recommenced in 2023 and SVU continue to manage the vetting for new recruits and new police staff. The Recruit Vetting Panel has been reconstituted and NIPB has appointed a new independent member.

Due to HMICFRS recommendations, the current Recruitment Vetting guidance has been amended for the next Recruitment campaign.

### **In Service Vetting**

SVU continue to renew vetting of all officers and staff and put in suitable risk management strategy in place to manage any adverse cases. The ISV vetting process is currently being amended in line with the HMICFRS recommendations.

### **Substance Misuse Testing**

Substance testing is carried out at the pre-employment stage for all potential student officers and police staff. Intelligence led testing is also undertaken on police officers and police staff in the form of a urine test or hair test, depending on the information/intelligence. Random testing is also conducted and may be carried out on all police officers and police staff who are in safety or security critical roles.

### **Communication**

Service Vetting Unit has continued to develop communication and engagement with the other sub branches of PSD. This closer working has allowed serving officers to be investigated and disciplined due to our skills across all areas of PSD being utilised effectively.

### **Social Media**

SVU carry out overt social media checks for all potential officers and staff, as well as serving officers and staff. SVU check the content on publicly available social media to ensure that online behaviour is compatible with the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Code of Ethics. There is a requirement for all potential employees, as well as officers and staff, that they use social media responsibly and safely. They should not publish anything that could be reasonably perceived, by the public or by policing colleagues, to be discriminatory, abusive, oppressive, harassing, bullying, victimising, offensive or otherwise incompatible with policing principles. They should not have published, or offered to publish, any material that might undermine their reputation or that of the policing profession, or might run the risk of damaging public confidence in the Police Service.

The posting of information online has led to potential officers and staff failing the vetting process.

## Supplementary Material

### Criminal Convictions of Police Officers

During 2023/24 a total of 13 officers received a conviction in court or adult caution, an increase from 6 officers in 2022/23. The convictions or adult cautions were for the following offences:

- **Officers 1 to 4** - Breach of Data Protection - all received an adult caution.
- **Officer 5 to 8** - Driving with Excess Alcohol - all were disqualified from driving, with 2 also being fined.
- **Officer 9** - Rape & Sexual Assault - sentencing still pending.
- **Officer 10** - Breach of Covid Regulations - fined £500.
- **Officer 11** - Common Assault - Fined £100.
- **Officer 12** - Perverting the Course of Justice - 2 month suspended sentence.
- **Officer 13** - Misconduct in a Public Office & Computer Misuse - sentencing still pending.

All of the officers were dismissed without notice in the instances of Driving with Excess Alcohol.

Two of the officers who received Adult Cautions in relation to data protection are still awaiting the

outcome of misconduct proceedings, with the other two receiving a written warning and management advice. The officer found guilty of rape and sexual assault was dismissed without notice, as was the officer convicted of perverting the course of justice. The misconduct processes in relation to the remaining officers are still pending.

### Service Confidence Procedure

Service Confidence Procedures (SCP) are not a misconduct process. They are protective measures that may be put in place when the Police Service loses confidence in an officer, with a view to managing and reducing risk. When serious concerns exist about the conduct of an officer, those concerns will be addressed by instigating criminal or misconduct proceedings wherever possible, as well as a review of the officer's vetting status. SCP will only be used when this is not possible, for example where there is information which cannot be used in an investigation, or when proceedings have been concluded and yet serious concerns remain. Use of the process is focused on managing ongoing risks posed by an officer in whom the Service has lost confidence, and is not intended to be punitive. This process applies to all police officers of all ranks. The legal basis is Section 33 of the Police (NI) Act 2000. Section 33 is also used for purposes other than the Service Confidence Process.

Service Confidence Procedures currently apply to five officers, the longest has been under SCP for six years.

### Declared memberships of notifiable organisations 2024



#### Notifiable Memberships of Police Officers

There are currently 361 declared memberships of a notifiable organisation. This number has remained fairly consistent over the last few years with 359 last year and 382 the previous year.

These memberships are held by 273 individual officers, 48 of whom hold two memberships, 11 of whom hold three memberships and 6 of whom hold four memberships.

#### Conflict of Interests Service Instruction

A new Conflict of Interests Service Instruction has been approved by the Strategic Management Board and discussed by the NIPB. This Service Instruction provides direction to Police Officers and Police Staff concerning conflicts of

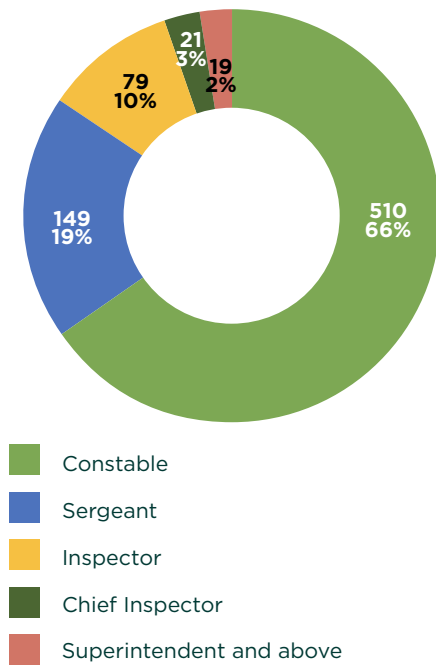
interest including notifiable memberships and providing character references and testimonials. It is intended to raise awareness and outline personal responsibility to make an appropriate declaration when a conflict becomes, or is likely to become, apparent.

A Conflicts of Interest Service Instruction is critical for maintaining confidence in any public body.

#### Registered Business Interests

There are currently 778 serving officers and 25 officers on a career break with a registered business interest.

### Authorised business interest applications by rank (8.4.24)



From 2018-2021 there were an average of 12 new business interest applications per month. This rose to 23 in 2022 and 25 in 2023. This is likely to be as a direct result of the cost of living crisis, budget cuts and issues with police pay. Almost 2/3rds of registered business interests are held by an officer of Constable rank and 10% of officers at this rank have a business interest. The likelihood of having a business interest increases with rank: 14% of Sergeants, 21% of Inspectors, 24% of Chief Inspectors and 22% of Superintendents and above have a registered business interest.

The National Police Counter Corruption Advisory Group (NPCCAG) has identified business interests as a corruption risk and have added it to their list of priorities.

Over 88% of current business interests fall into the following categories:

<b>Property Rental</b>	<b>343</b>	36.9%
<b>Sales / Retail</b>	<b>121</b>	13.0%
<b>Care / Community</b>	<b>90</b>	9.7%
<b>Health / Fitness</b>	<b>68</b>	7.3%
<b>Training / Tutoring</b>	<b>43</b>	4.6%
<b>Admin / Office</b>	<b>41</b>	4.4%
<b>Farming</b>	<b>38</b>	4.1%
<b>Arts &amp; Crafts</b>	<b>38</b>	4.1%
<b>Delivery / Driving</b>	<b>38</b>	4.1%

# Professional Standards Business Improvement And Development Initiatives

## Sexual Misconduct Review

The Deputy Chief Constable requested a review of all sexual misconduct allegations and investigations over the last ten years. A team of seconded police officers were appointed to conduct this review and are now 24 months into this review. Their remit is to identify areas for improvement and any investigative opportunities that remain outstanding. A total of 154 investigations involving 134 officers have been identified for review.

To date the team has made 169 recommendations which are being progressed through Public Protection, Professional Standards and Service Vetting Unit.

## Prevention First Campaign

A more involved and proactive approach to misconduct matters is being progressed through the Prevention First strategy. Prevention First has three priorities:

- To increase confidence in the Professional Standards Department (Discipline Branch, Anti-Corruption Unit and Service Vetting Unit).

o deliver a professional engagement plan to key external stakeholders in order to inform their understanding of the work of PSD.

- To deliver a high quality internal communications and engagement function which supports our priorities.

The Policy and Prevention team includes a dedicated trainer to facilitate initial and continuous education of our police officers and staff, and act as a link between Professional Standards and the Police Training College. Any learning gaps identified are addressed through the development of new training modules or adaptation of existing modules.

The Policy and Prevention Team examines emerging threats and risks from statistical data and recommendations, and then take steps to raise awareness and provide education around misconduct risks.

This is done in line with Professional Standards' Communication and Engagement Strategy. This Strategy sets out quarterly focuses to mitigate emerging risks. For 2023/24 the quarterly focuses were:

### April to June 2023 - Social Media

Officers misusing social media is an obvious threat. A number of publications and educational initiatives were run throughout this period around the pitfalls of inappropriate social media usage and the consequences.

**July to September 2023 –  
Reporting Wrongdoing**

This quarter aimed to promote the reporting of any wrongdoing, be it to the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, or through any of our internal reporting mechanisms, including our new Integrity Matters app on desktop Terminals and police issued Samsung mobile devices.

The new app allows for two way reporting, so an officer/staff member may report a concern confidentially and anonymously, but Professional Standards are still able to contact the anonymous reporter for further details or clarification on any point. The app was launched on June 28th and to date the usage rate has been excellent.

**October to December 2023 –  
Substance Misuse**

In reaction to the rise in substance misuse misconduct detections, the last focus for 2023 was around the issue of substance misuse. This was delivered in collaboration with Randox laboratories who run all of the drugs tests for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

**January to March 2024 –  
Conflict of Interests**

A communications plan has been developed to accompany the imminent launch of the new Conflicts of Interest Service Instruction. This will include a POINT article, a new section on PSD intranet pages, input onto operational briefing pages, an email to all districts departments

outlining the changes and what they need to do, a desktop background, adaptations to the integrity health check within the PDR and a message on the E-services launch page.

**Code of Ethics  
Learn Course**

Professional Standards have developed a new E-learning package covering the Code of Ethics. This was launched on 11 March 2024.

The Code of Ethics package has appeared on everyone’s dashboard on Learn. It provides an explanation of each article and is designed to be interactive with case studies and key learning throughout. The course will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and is required to be completed once every three years. This course has also been shared with the Police Ombudsman.

**Service Integrity Board**

The Police Service of Northern Ireland has established an Integrity Board in response to a recommendation from HMICFRS. The Board’s purpose is to provide scrutiny to the ethical health of the organisation and consider early intervention measures in an effort to prevent corrupt behaviour.

## Policy

Three new Service Instructions have recently been issued within the Police Service of Northern Ireland:

- Maintaining Professional Boundaries
- Whistleblowing
- Service Confidence Procedure

A number of other Service Instructions will be issued / reissued over the coming months following consultation.

## Continuous Professional Development

PSD has an internal CPD programme and host regular events to which all staff are encouraged to attend. This includes internal and external speakers covering a range of subjects. Planned initiatives include the delivery of Investigative training in regards to sexual offences and enhanced interview skills.

## Information Security

Upon each sign-on to the Police Service of Northern Ireland computer systems, users are presented with a warning screen, stipulating the organisation / user responsibilities regarding system access and use, data protection, unauthorised software and expectations of user privacy. The conditions contained in the warning, need to be agreed by the user, before access to the computer

system access and use, data protection, unauthorised software and expectations of user privacy. The conditions contained in the warning, need to be agreed by the user, before access to the computer system can progress. All officers and staff are also mandated every 24 months to complete 'Information Security and Government Security Classifications' online training as part of their continuous personal development. The Anti-Corruption Unit routinely audit and monitor Police Service of Northern Ireland systems to minimise the threat of unauthorised access and disclosure of information. Further, the ACU D/ Superintendent is a member of the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Network Defence Security Group, which meets on a quarterly basis to manage and mitigate potential threats.

## Random Drug Testing

Random drug testing is conducted as a deterrent to police officers misusing controlled substances. 171 random drug tests were conducted during 2023/24. Whilst seven tests yielded positive results, they were all consistent with disclosed use of medication. Plans are now in place for the 2024/25 random drug testing schedule and a communications piece will also be published to reinforce the impact of a positive substance misuse test.

## Peer Support Wellbeing Project

Members of PSD offer referral to the peer support team, at regular intervals i.e. when serving a Reg 16, when serving charges, or at a time of any significant change.

### **Vetting Panels**

Under the Police (Recruitment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2001 and Police Service of Northern Ireland (Recruitment of Police Support Staff) Regulations 2002, the Chief Constable has appointed a Recruitment Vetting Panel whose function is to decide, on his behalf and subject to his direction and control, the suitability of any candidate for appointment as a student officer or permanent police staff member. All applicants have the right to have the decision reviewed by an Independent Assessor (appointed by the Department of Justice). The final decision lies with the Chief Constable in respect of appointment to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

In practical terms this decision rests with the Head of Professional Standards Department, acting on behalf of the Chief Constable.

### **Review of the Police Service of Northern Ireland Recruitment Vetting Guidelines**

The Police Service of Northern Ireland have separate and distinct legislation in respect of Police Recruitment and we want to continue to ensure that this, along with our processes and procedures, adhere to College of Policing Vetting Code of Practice.

Given the continued scrutiny of all Forces in respect of vetting, the Police Service of Northern Ireland have reviewed their current guidance and this is going through Police Service of Northern Ireland governance at present. These changes are more robust and reflect recommendations set out in the recent HMICFRS report. These guidelines will ensure that the Police Service of Northern Ireland recruitment guidance remains fit for purpose and that the same standards and expectations are considered throughout the lifetime of an individual career.

### **Aftercare**

Vetting is based on a snapshot in time. Since an individual's circumstances can change, it is important that their suitability to maintain their security clearance is assessed. As part of the HMICFRS recommendations, there is an onus on Service Vetting to develop a comprehensive aftercare regime which will allow such assessments to be made. This will be dependent on additional resourcing. A Resource Allocation Model (RAM) bid has been submitted and SVU is awaiting a decision. All individuals are subject to the vetting process and must report any changes in their personal circumstances. In addition to making disclosures after vetting clearance, all officers and staff will be subject to an annual review during the lifetime of the clearance.

