

Key findings from police officers survey and public survey on police officers' tattoos

A) Police officers survey

- Overall 48% of officers have a tattoo and 17% have a visible tattoo when in uniform;
- Younger officers are more likely to have a tattoo and visible tattoo than older officers;
- Officers with no qualifications are more likely to have a tattoo and visible tattoo than those with a degree;
- Officers with less than 20 years' service are more likely to have a tattoo and visible tattoo than those longer in service;
- Constables and sergeants are more likely to have a tattoo and visible tattoo than inspecting ranks;
- 63% of all tattoos are on the arm, back and shoulder whereas 88% of all visible tattoos are either on the lower arm or wrist;
- 93% of officers with visible tattoos have not encountered any issues with managers, professional standards, other colleagues or public service workers, or the general public;
- On the whole officers with visible tattoos hold positive views on their employment prospects – 83% not worried about promotion prospects; 93% having no employment regrets about their tattoos; 72% never stopped them getting a role they wanted; and 83% never experienced discrimination at work;
- Among officers who chose not to get a tattoo, only 21% gave as the reason that they thought it “not professional”. Only 13% of 18-34 year olds mentioned this as a reason compared to 25% of those aged 45 and over;
- Among officers without a tattoo 55% said they felt comfortable or very comfortable working with colleagues with visible tattoos. Officers aged 18-34 were twice as comfortable working with visibly tattooed colleagues as those 45 or over;
- About two-thirds of all officers were aware of a force policy on tattoos, but 30% did not even know if there was a policy.

B) Public survey

- In terms of public confidence, the overwhelming majority of respondents said it would make no difference to their confidence in an officers' ability whether or not the officer had a visible tattoo(s) (81%);
- 58% of respondents say they would feel comfortable in dealings with a police officer with a visible tattoo(s). A figure comparable to that for other professions such as teachers (56%), doctors (56%) and paramedics (61%);
- Younger age groups are more likely to say they feel comfortable with tattooed officers: 71% of 15-34 year olds, 57% of 35-44 year olds and 63% of 45-54 year olds compared with only 49% of 55-64 year olds and 41% of 65 +;
- Furthermore, respondents with educational qualifications are also more likely to feel comfortable with tattooed officers (between 57% and 65%) than those with no formal qualifications (44%);
- The overwhelming majority of respondents agree that people with a visible tattoo(s) should be allowed to join the police service (60% agreeing vs. 13% disagreeing);
- Younger respondents (aged 15-34) are again more likely to agree to joiners having tattoo(s) (71%) than older respondents (aged 55 and over) (49%);
- Although opinion was more evenly split on the final question as to whether or not police officers should be required to cover up their tattoo(s) at all times when in uniform, only one-third felt they should cover up. Most respondents either said officers should not be required to cover up (37%) or else expressed the neutral position of neither agreeing nor disagreeing that they should cover up (28%);
- There is a noticeable generational split in responses to the question on the covering up of visible tattoos. Younger respondents (aged 15-34) are far more likely to disagree that officers should cover up their tattoo(s) (46% should not cover vs. 27% should cover) compared to those aged 55 and over (28% should not vs. 44% should). Just over a quarter of respondents in each age group also say they neither agree nor disagree to covering up;
- Non-white respondents are somewhat weaker in support of officer tattoos than white respondents: 47% feeling comfortable, 68% no difference in confidence and 47% allowing joiners with visible tattoos. However, they are more likely to prefer officers to cover up their visible tattoos when in uniform and on duty (51% compared to 32% of white respondents).