

New training an opportunity for culture change in policing

Published on 9 November 2021 Written by Chief Constable Andy Marsh, CEO of the College of Policing

The current wave of recruitment provides an opportunity to jump-start the rebuilding of the public's trust

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I recently heard someone use the phrase 'if you can't trust the police then who can you trust?'. This might be a summary of the public's attitude towards the police right now, implying a concerning loss of trust.

In recent months we have seen cases where officers have been convicted of unconscionable acts, while inappropriate behaviour has been overlooked. It simply isn't enough to say that this is a case of a few 'bad apples'.

The British public is attuned to what happens in policing and does not accept this as a few isolated incidents, but rather sees a service that needs a cultural overhaul to root out misconduct.

Macho behaviour in stations and toxic comments made and brushed off as 'banter' need to end. The public will not tolerate situations where officers protect each other from wrongdoing, and professionals in policing need to feel empowered to challenge behaviour. In the past week, we have seen calls for a recalibration of police culture. If this is to be achieved, leadership is needed at every level of policing.

The College is responsible for setting standards for the police in England and Wales. Our aim is to make policing inhospitable for officers and staff who undermine the service's mission, betray our Code of Ethics or do not deserve to serve the public.

Our investment in how officers are developed needs to be rooted in the modern day. The government's police recruitment campaign is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape the future of the service. In the coming years we will have 50,000 new officers in policing, which represents almost 40% of all current officers in England and Wales.

Training for new recruits has changed dramatically in recent years. Officers now receive training at degree level. Some have questioned the change, but it is already delivering. Officers now receive **the preparation they need to meet today's demands and expectations.**

For example, there is enhanced input on ethics and integrity – and, for the first time, training in vulnerability and crime committed online or digitally – at the start of their careers. These elements are at the heart of many of the recent cases that have undermined public confidence. They sit as an addition to others designed to reduce crime, and keep our communities safe, including burglary, fraud, theft and violence.

We have asked new recruits across the country about the new training. Reassuringly, a significantly greater proportion of those asked felt prepared for – and more confident in doing – the job compared with those who undertook the old training. Not only does this mean the new training is preparing them for what they meet on the street, but also empowers them to deliver necessary cultural change.

The new training routes are increasing the representation from ethnic minority communities across the country. There has also been an increase in the number of women being recruited. There is much further to go, but these welcome trends will bring in fresh perspectives, helping to build a service that is more representative of the public it serves and instilled with the right culture.

British policing is perhaps the most scrutinised police service in the world. We are held to account locally, checked by inspectors, supervised by the government and, of course, interrogated by the media. We welcome this scrutiny because openness is an antidote to mistrust. Officers are rightly held to the highest standards because they hold a position which can deny citizens their liberty, while their daily decisions can be ones affecting life and death.

Being a police officer is hard. The hours are long and unforgiving, and the demands are rising. Technological change brings new criminal activity, while old threats remain. Policing is not just a vocation, it is a profession. The development of every officer needs to reflect this, with a permanent focus on the modern skills that the job requires and an adherence to the high standards that the public expect.

If we seize the opportunity presented by the current wave of recruitment, we will jump-start the rebuilding of the public's trust, which ultimately will be achieved through the selfless actions of officers and the relentless pursuit of criminals.

Policing must recapture the best of what it does and deliver a new culture, fit for the challenges and expectations of Britain today.

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Tags

Code of Ethics Police recruitment PEQF