

University of Law stop and search panel

A collaboration between the University of Law and the British Transport Police (BTP), to independently review BTP's stop and search practice.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Community engagement Diversity and inclusion Operational policing
Organisation	British Transport Police
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Region	London
Partners	Police Education
Stage of Implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	September 2021

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities

Aim

To create an independent advisory process to oversee use of police powers, and gain law-based insights from student barristers and trainee solicitors (overseen by a qualified solicitor).

Intended outcome

- to increase community engagement of seldom heard demographics, mainly young people and black and ethnically minoritised representation
- to create a connection between the police and universities

Description

Nottingham and Birmingham University of Law reached out to BTP seeking opportunities for their students. The BTP provided information on how stop and search activity is assessed by the Independent Advisory Group (IAG). The IAG is a form of community engagement, where BTP gain insight on police practice from the public. Using a similar structure to the IAGs, the University of Law and BTP set up a review process for the students.

The student stop and search reviews took place three to four times a year, working in university term time. The review panel was offered to all students at Nottingham and Birmingham University of Law, but now it is targeted to students qualifying for work experience. These students are studying for a Master's (MA), Master of Law (LLM) or a solicitors qualifying exam (SQE) practice course. The BTP review panel sessions work within the qualifying for work experience aspect of their education, where they get to put theory into practice. The sessions provide the students with the opportunity to consider some of the issues faced in criminal practice and apply their theory to real life situations.

BTP used an interactive voting platform to present reasonable grounds of police powers. The voting platform then enabled students to remotely provide feedback to the police. This process was facilitated by a pro bono solicitor who worked at the university. A pro bono solicitor provides free of charge legal advice or representation, in the public interest.

Students complete an assessment of the grounds of stop and search, using the POSH matrix:

- Painting the police picture – intel, tasking, information
- Observations – what deviations are there from the base line
- Smell – where relevant (attrition)
- Heard – stop and account line of questioning

Verbal and anonymous feedback is given to increase accessibility and ensure all students are heard. The feedback from the students is presented to officers to ensure the student reviews had an impact.

Overall impact

There is a dashboard measuring whether an object was found during stop and searches. The aggregate performance of the force increased owing to this and other initiatives which looked to open up BTP's practice:

- 100 students completed the review
- 53 students were from Black and ethnically minoritised communities
- 70% of the students were female
- 4% of students had lived experience of being stopped and searched

On average between 3% and 5% of stop search activity for a selected month was reviewed. This initiative has also improved connections between the police and the university, as well as raising the profile of police as a career by linking with the university recruitment team.

BTP monitor whether an object was found during stop and searches. Find rate because of stop and search has risen from 33% to 45%. Officers also felt more confident in applying stop and search in the correct way. As a result, stop and search volume has increased from 9639 to 12395.

This initiative was also celebrated at a police knowledge share event.

Data capture has improved and allows for improved follow up on topics that come out of the panel, such as recruitment.

The process also created a structured way to reach seldom heard groups (such as young people) and improve who was giving oversight to police practice.

Learning

- It was important that the university was independent from the police, as this gave credibility to the process of check and challenging stop search activity.
- The feedback loop was relevant at an organisational and individual level. The findings and themes emerging from the panel created a meaningful dialogue that is operationally relevant to the individual practitioner.
- Special consideration and early agreement with information security should be a priority. Therefore, redacting the written material by removing specifics of time/date and personal details is key to ensuring the stop and searched person's data rights are protected.
- Finding protected time away from operational commitments can be a challenge in involving officers. However, it is important to have a variety of operational officers to be engaged, as this helps demystify community oversight for officers and broadens the frontline insights during the discussion phase. Ensuring protected time requires sponsorship from a higher level of the organisation.
- The panel were keen to follow the journey of cases and see what happened post-search. This proved a challenge to administer, given the volume of searches and the need to ensure data privacy.
- As well as benefiting from the diversity of students, BTP also made sure that there was diversity within the police by inviting police staff associations.
- The panel invitations were managed by the university and the uptake was high. This increased further when it was confirmed that involvement in the panel would count as work experience.

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Tags

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