

Work experience programme to engage, divert and recruit

Introducing a a week of work experience for at-risk groups of school students, to cultivate positive perceptions towards the police.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Diversion Organisational
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Community engagement Diversity and inclusion Organisation including workforce Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Education Local authority

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	July 2022
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Communities Families

Aim

- Provide early preventative diversion to vulnerable young people.
- Enhance trust in the police.
- Encourage police legitimacy.
- Combat disengagement with the police service by local young people.
- Support the force's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) aspirations by providing meaningful work experience opportunities for a diverse cross-section of young people.
- Provide a pipeline for future recruitment and workforce development.
- Establish relationships with other partners, local authorities and large employers within the context of careers and employment.
- Showcase a wider array of roles and positions in the police including scene of crime officers (SOCO) and force control room operators.

Intended outcome

- Successful prevention and diversion away from negative behaviours such as anti-social behaviour.
- Successful prevention and diversion away from missing episodes.
- Improved perception of, and sentiment towards, the police by programme attendees.
- Eventual recruitment into the police from programme attendees.

Description

Historically, work experience in Hertfordshire Constabulary was ad hoc. Prospective students needed a contact in force to act as a patron and organise work experience for them. This approach presented a barrier to entry for students not already connected with the organisation. A Chief Inspector from Prevention First (a change delivery department) and a Chief Inspector from Work Force Development proposed a formal work experience programme to run at least once a year.

The programme was run for 16 school students in 2022 and 2023, with a third scheduled for July 2024. The Superintendents for Prevention First (PF) and Work Force Development (WFD) sponsor the programme with WFD providing the budget in 2022/2023 and PF providing the budget for 2024.

Schools taking part in the work experience are selected in partnership with the county council, with places given to students who might not usually have the opportunity or inclination to attend this type of event. Schools are selected based on a balance of factors including location, socio-economic background and availability on the work experience dates. Additionally, several places are reserved for students from learning difficulty and disability (LDD) schools. Schools are briefed on canvassing students who they believed would benefit from a placement.

The work experience includes in-person immersive scenarios designed to offer students hands on experience. In previous years these have included:

- Premises searches with police dogs and Police Search Advisors (POLSA) in flats provided by the University of Hertfordshire
- Forensic examinations of a vehicle
- A mock up burglary
- Call taking in a missing person scenario
- Personal safety and personal protective equipment (PPE) training

The students also get to attend demonstrations. These have included:

- The National Police Air Service (including a helicopter take-off)
- Drones
- Method of entry (MOE) with the Operational Support Team
- Armed and Roads Policing
- Major Crime

In 2023, the work experience programme was allocated a budget of £2,700 (budget provided by Work Force Development in 2022/2023 and Prevention First in 2024). This budget was allocated to:

- Transport – £550
- Catering – £1,000
- Overtime costs – £500
- Miscellaneous delivery costs – £700.

In terms of resources required, in 2023 the work experience ran with:

- One Sergeant and one Police Constable from Prevention First for planning, coordination and delivery – this required around 10-20% of their capacity for six months and one full week for the programme itself.
- Four volunteers to act as syndicate leads (one per four students). These volunteers came from officers, police community support officers (PCSOs) and staff seconded from departments around the organisation.
- Departments delivering the scenarios and presentations provided between one and three staff for each two hour input.

Organising the work experience programme involves engaging with stakeholders. These stakeholders take responsibility for unconnected, smaller elements of the work experience such as:

- school and student selection is led by the county council's work experience coordinators.
- venue planning and risk assessments are conducted by the University of Hertfordshire.

Formal multi-partner meetings are held at the project launch and again at major milestones. Outside of these meetings, stakeholder engagement operates in an agile way through a combination of in person and video calls.

At the end of the work experience, students (with parental permission) are assigned to mentors from Hertfordshire's work force development team to assist with applications and recruitment should they wish to apply to the constabulary at the end of their school careers.

Overall impact

It is currently too early to assess whether the programme has fulfilled the objective of being a pipeline for recruitment. This is because the students from 2022 and 2023 still have several years to go before the end of their secondary schooling. However, the force can draw some inference based on survey responses from the students on the 2023 week, before and after their attendance.

Responses revealed a 11.3% improvement in the score respondents gave the police for approachability. 83% stated their perceptions of the police changed for the better and 100% said they would recommend the programme to their friends and family. 100% of students asked to be placed with a career mentor. However, it is worth noting that two-thirds of the students had selected the police as their first choice for work experience. Therefore, it is likely their perception was positive to begin with.

The programme has been publicised through local media/newspapers, the force internet and social media. Since publicising the programme, the force has received many requests from parents and students alike. Whilst this is not a definitive metric for impact and performance, it nonetheless shows there is demand in the community for this kind of provision.

The diversionary impact is best displayed by a case study of one of the LDD students from 2023. This student had a history of missing episodes and recent research has suggested the estimated cost of a missing person investigation to be £2,400 – which is more than the total cash costs from the 2023 work experience. During the programme, staff from the LDD school visited to observe the work experience. The staff noted how engaged and enthused the student was, which was out of character. After the programme, the student asked to be signposted to their local cadet group and has not had another missing episode since the work experience.

Finally, because of the programme, the constabulary has been invited to join the Hertfordshire Special Educational Needs (SEND) employment forum and the Hertfordshire Careers Hubs which are collaborative networks between some of the largest employers in the county, educational facilities, and local authority.

Individually, both weeks in 2022 and 2023 have been very well received by all parties and were considered a success. However, due to the very limited scale (16 students a year), it remains a proof of concept in scale.

Learning

In terms of recommendations for other organisations looking to adopt similar work experience programmes:

- Early planning of the strategy for growing the work experience programme is key. This early planning for growth will help the work experience programme reach its potential.
- Consideration should be given as to which departments/teams will own the programme and how it can be resourced. This planning will help achieve consensus on a long-term plan for the work experience.
- An agile approach to stakeholder engagement has worked well in Hertfordshire Constabulary. Although formal meetings may be needed at project launch and key milestones, communicating directly (preferably in person or over video calls) has enabled successful planning and relationship building.
- Clear direction should be provided for the career mentors assigned to the students for recruitment and application support. Guidance should be set around how often these mentors should contact the students. Mentors should be briefed on the regularity of contact, and those coordinating the overall programme should be accountable for ensuring this contact happens.

As for what growth of the work experience programme should look like, several options exist:

- Firstly, multiple weeks could be run over a short period in summer. This would be optimal for students as summer is the usual period for work experience. However, this approach might come at the expense of operational availability since units like Major Crime may not be able to send representatives multiple weeks in a row.
- The second option is to spread the work experience weeks throughout the year. This approach would be more operationally achievable for those providing inputs, but might be at odds with the school calendar.
- Finally, the week could be expanded to cater for a larger group of students. However, this approach might compromise the quality of the content and the immersive scenarios, making the work experience less engaging and enjoyable for the students.

Hertfordshire Constabulary believe that the first growth option would be ideal, provided that sufficient notice is given to all involved, and contingency inputs are planned that don't rely on specialist departments.

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