

Young person independent scrutiny panel for body worn video of stop and search

Following difficulties attracting young people to independent stop and search body worn video review panels, Essex Police approached a local university to invite students to the panel.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Violence (other)
Organisation	Essex Police
HMICFRS PEEL Spotlight Report	Read HMICFRS PEEL Spotlight Report
Contact	Chief Inspector Richard Baxter
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Education
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2024

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

To break down barriers, build trust and confidence and demonstrate transparency between the police force and young people.

Intended outcome

To increase the attendance of young people at stop and search body worn video panel meetings.

Description

The body worn video and stop and search review panel has been established for over 3 years in Essex. The sessions take place in-person, every quarter. An independent chair, who also chairs the Independent Advisory Groups in Essex, runs the meeting. Within the meeting, members are given criteria to assess stop and search body worn video footage. The chair randomly selects the footage before the meeting and an operational police officer helps collate the footage at the chairs request.

The panel members are a mixture of members of the public and police officers. This is beneficial in creating an open conversation about the footage and providing rationale for police officer decisions to the panel, ensuring transparency. After the panel have watched the video, they each fill in a questionnaire around what they saw and whether they felt it was proportionate. The questionnaire was developed by a master's degree student, who gave the force permission to use and adapt it to assess stop and search proportionality.

The questions are based around a number of areas, including GOWISELYR (Grounds, Object, Warrant Card, Identity, Station, Entitlement, Legal, You are detained, Respect/Reflect/Reassure). The panel members are also given the opportunity to ask questions or concerns they may have around what they have seen from the body worn video (BWV) footage to officers during the meeting.

Members must sign a disclaimer before they attend the panel. The disclaimer is an agreement that members will not share details about specific individuals in the videos outside of the group. The disclaimer also outlines the content of the BWV footage to ensure that members go into the session fully informed on what to expect.

Young people are the most likely demographic to be stop and searched, however, the panel members were of an older demographic. The force felt it was important to have young people involved in the panel, both to inform police practice and to increase transparency between the force and young people. From discussions with the force's Information Security and Data Protection teams, it outlined that the force would not be able to engage anyone under 18 years old in the panel, therefore, university aged students were the targeted demographic.

As a result of this, a Chief Inspector approached Anglia Ruskin University and were put in contact with lecturers currently running a professional policing degree at the university. It was arranged that students could attend the panel as part of their degree, four students at a time could attend the sessions and the students rotate every quarter so that more young people get the opportunity to attend the panel. As the young people are students in a relevant field, they are engaged with the panel and committed to attending.

To further interest the students in attending the panel, the force worked with their media team to create an e-certificate, recognising their attendance and contribution.

Overall impact

- Young people have been consistently attending the panels, filling the gap felt previously by the lack of presence in their age group.
- The young people attending the panel sessions have provided valuable insights about how young people understand stop and search activity, such as how the language used by officers could be viewed by younger people.
- The young people have expressed that they have been happy to attend the panel and that their involvement makes them feel valued and respected by policing.
- The young people have also stated that they have found the sessions informative, and it has helped them understand police rationale around stop and search.

Learning

- This is a relatively cost-free example of a practice. The only real cost is the time it takes to organise the panel meetings and create the e-certificate.
- It's important to feed back to the panel where their input has been applied in practice. For example, if the panel identify police practice that is below standards, they should be updated on how their feedback has been relayed to the officers and that changes have been made. This is beneficial in making the members feel valued and listened to.
- As the young people are students in a relevant area, they have been very willing to volunteer in the panel. This was central to the recruitment of volunteers.
- The force feel that the panel work better in-person as the content of the videos can sometimes be upsetting, therefore, it's important to ensure panel members are safeguarded.
- If aiming to bring young people into the panel through their university, it's important to think about the university academic timetable when organising sessions. For example, students may not be in the area during summer or the Christmas period.

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