Virtual crime academy platform

Developing an online learning development platform to support the continued professional development (CPD) of officers and staff.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Digital, data and analytics Investigation Training and professional development
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	November 2021
Scale of initiative	National

Key details

Target group	Workforce

Aim

The aim is to offer a resource to all staff, as an extension of the current offering from the crime training team around learning and development within Essex Police.

Virtual crime academy (VCA)

- establish a contemporary and accessible web-based portal that meets force and practitioner requirements. The site is hosted via SharePoint and can be accessed by all staff in Essex Police to allow learners with various learning needs to contact trainers prior to college events and have adaptations made to content prior to courses
- promotion of the detective role and achievements to inspire recruitment, retention, and development, under the continuing professional development pages
- development of a VCA investigative resource library
- connecting with staff who are involved in investigation and or interested in a detective career
- provide a 'one stop shop' for essential information relating to investigation
- provide access to learning, course content and CPD

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the VCA are to:

- increase the access to materials relating to investigations
- deliver support readily available to highlight detective career pathways and support those on the journey to becoming a detective

Description

The VCA is a one stop shop supporting the development of:

- investigative skills

- knowledge
- investigations

This is a vital tool for officers and staff including detectives, police staff investigators and front-line officers investigating crime, safeguarding vulnerable people, and undertaking good quality investigations.

On the VCA there is essential news, learning and reference materials, policy and procedure, local guidance, learning the lessons, professional development, and information on the detective career pathway. It also provides an opportunity for individuals to find out more about the range of roles investigating crime within the force, as well as recognising good work and results.

The head of investigative skills progression set up the VCA with a detective constable with support from staff from the internal intranet team. This role holder chairs a regular governance board meeting. A detective constable maintains the site, arranging CPD events, developing, and monitoring content. The staff member works a 36-hour week, which is a full-time position to cover both CPD events and the maintenance of the site.

Other ongoing costs are absorbed in the Essex Police overall supply of resources to staff such as intranet hosting. The subject pages layout has different ways of accessing the material, whether via carousel or tile layout, as research showed that learners preferred to access online content on one of these two ways. This allows for improved accessibility and inclusion.

Working group

The site was initiated in response to staff surveys. A board was created and the three phases of implementation of the site was governed by a working group. The working group consisted of representatives from IT, management, operational officers, sergeants, and inspectors as well as Human Resources. The three phases of implementation involved a new page being added every six months, enabling officers to use the VCA without being overwhelmed with content. This allowed for officers to familiarise themselves with the new site prior to all content being uploaded.

The software which is used is SharePoint, and officers were trained so the pages could be created. Subject matter experts were part of the working group, and it was these officers who decided what content was appropriate, required, up to date, and relevant in line with force policy.

Accessibility

Accessibility is key there are different ways in organising the pages to cater for needs including movement, visual awareness, and use of colour. There was a budget involved and the patent of the VCA logo was also part of that, which has gone through legal and is owned by Essex Police.

CPD

CPD is also held within the pages of the VCA, including recordings of the online events which are held as a repository, allowing officers to watch them if they were unable to attend the live event. Furthermore, this can also be used for the officers yearly CPD log, which is valuable to all officers in upskilling. Those who attend courses, whether virtual or face-to-face, have access to a learner's page which has specific reference to learning needs, so that needs can be assessed prior to the course.

This site is hosted within SharePoint pages and can be accessed by Essex Police; however, this can also be accessed by Kent Police as we are a collaborative force. Likewise, we can access their SharePoint pages as our IT services are shared. The site is bespoken to Essex as forms contained within are Essex Forms, however other forces may choose to implement various aspects of the pages and tailor to their needs.

If there was to be a technical issue with the site, the 365 team within Essex Police would be the team to contact, as the site is managed by them. If there was to be a major technical issue, the IT team would be involved to address the issue.

Overall impact

The VCA is now firmly embedded within the training environment, and this would now be known as the first point of call for officers in the investigation chain if they needed some assistance within their investigations, as it is hoped that most solutions to their queries could be found within the pages.

In terms of visits to the VCA site, for a 90-day period in 2023 there are usually between 35,000-42,000 visits. In terms of measuring the impact, this is a significant hit rate.

Post-implementation review

A post-implementation review of the VCA was conducted, and the VCA was detailed in the executive summary.

Executive summary

Since its introduction in November 2021 the Virtual Crime Academy (VCA) has continued to grow and develop. The Review Team believe that the VCA is an extremely valuable site for officers and staff to improve their own knowledge and find guidance regarding certain aspects of investigations. There are several different sections available to view and during the review period two more sections have been added ('burglary and robbery' and 'investigate first') as well as other sections undergoing a redesign. The VCA has a dedicated officer from the Crime Training team who oversees the pages and is the subject matter expert (SME). Each section within the VCA has its single point of contact (SPOC) who either edits their section themselves or gets someone else to do it on their behalf (this may be the SME). Where information and guidance are hosted by other areas of Essex Police, it does not duplicate this and instead redirects the user to that location. This means that when any guidance is updated it only must be done in one place instead of multiple locations.

The intervention has enabled greater access to learning across the force, particularly within the detective field.

Learning

The VCA has been successful due to the availability of materials, including detective career pathway options, restorative justice, and interviewing materials. It acts as a 'one stop shop' for advice and CPD.

All CPD events are accessed via Teams on a specific date and time which are advertised via the VCA, these are then recorded, and a repository of these events has a bespoke page which officers and staff can access. They can then claim this as a CPD event in their learning on their accreditation log once a year. This assists the force as staff can dial in from any location across Essex, reducing travel costs.

On reflection, the challenges initially were getting buy in from across the force as a concept with the take up on launch. There were also challenges in setting up a governance process. However presently, the VCA is a well-established tool available to all staff, including senior leadership.

Several forces have been in contact regarding the platform including Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Cambridgeshire, which have all been sent information and have been showcased the site.

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Tags

CPD   Career pathways