

Court experience day

Working with partner agencies to provide court experience days for local secondary schools to educate students about knife crime and the criminal justice system.

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7 January 2026

Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Community engagement Violence (other)
Organisation	Cambridgeshire Constabulary
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Education Government department 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

Aim

The aims of the court experience days are to:

- educate students on the consequences of carrying a knife
- demonstrate the court process to students

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the court experience day are to:

- increase awareness around knife crime
- reduce the number of knife crime incidents
- reduce the fear around knife crime
- improve young person's knowledge of the criminal justice system
- improve engagement between community safety partners, criminal justice professionals and young people

Description

Analysis revealed that people of all ages in East Cambridgeshire were concerned about knife crime, drugs, and personal safety. Concerns were also identified about the national increase in

knife crime.

When engaging with young people, it was identified that they would benefit from learning in an interactive stimulating environment. Using Ely Magistrate Court, an interactive roleplay exercise was developed to provide a realistic experience of the court workings within the legal process and demonstrate the consequences in risk-taking behaviour.

Secondary schools nominated Year 9 students to attend and there were no restrictions on who could be selected. Consideration was given to adapting the level of information dependant on the age of the school students. In preparation for the court experience day, a session was delivered allowing students to select their roles, learn the scenario and scripts. The scenario is based on a student who forgets that there is knife in their bag, which is discovered by their teacher who calls the police, and the student is searched and arrested.

Court experience day

The experience begins with an introduction from the community safety partnership, and the criminal justice professionals. Presentations are then delivered which aim to encourage the students to have in-depth discussions around knife crime, drugs, and risk-taking behaviour. Following this, information on advice and support is given to the students on where to go and who to report if they have any concerns.

The East Cambridgeshire neighbourhood policing team deliver the first part of the roleplay which consists of the stop and search, the arrest, and the interview. Within this part, the students are encouraged to debate about the use of police powers and procedures, and the awareness of school powers around the process of stop and search. The roleplay then proceeds to the Magistrates Courtroom, for the trial to take place. This is overseen by a Crown Court Judge or Magistrate. The students take their positions in the court playing their assigned roles of:

- offenders
- solicitors
- judge
- clerk
- usher
- press officer

- witnesses
- jury

The students are supported by the relevant criminal justice professionals throughout.

The roleplay is scripted up to the point of the verdict, where students will debate the verdict. The Judge will walk them through the sentencing guidelines, intention, and harm factors. The students then decide on the appropriate sentence. The experience concludes with lunch, and time for informal discussions around careers advice with all professionals in attendance. The students are also signposted to diversionary activities and clubs that are available to young people in East Cambridgeshire.

Post court experience day

The students are asked to complete a feedback and evaluation form. Feedback from the schools is evaluated and suggestions on improvements for future events are taken on board and implemented where appropriate.

The experience has been adapted to include:

- more roleplay around stop and search
- interview and police powers
- the addition of a story covering the real-life impact of knife crime on all those involved

Further adaptations to include the victim perspective and support are being introduced for the 2024/25 school year. Content has been adapted to ensure the court experience day can be delivered to primary schools. Staff have also attended two secondary schools and held parent's information evenings covering safeguarding topics around county lines, online safety, and drug awareness.

The Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) are supporting the next school cohort and have suggest further material to add to the experience along with funding. Further material will include debt bondage and a more realistic account of county lines and child criminal exploitation.

Evaluation

An evaluation has been completed and was led by a community safety partnership.

The police community survey revealed that although it is still a high priority for the public, the number of concerns around knife crime have fallen since the start of 2023. The community safety partnership strategic assessment for 2023/2024 showed that knife crime accounted for 1.5% of total crime in East Cambridgeshire during 2022, and in 2023 this reduced to 1.1%.

ERSOU recommended changing the scenario from a forgotten scout or fishing knife to a young person carrying a knife due to county lines and exploitation. The script has now been updated to incorporate this.

The student feedback questionnaire has been revised to capture the updated scenario and script and schools will also be asked for feedback via a set questionnaire after the event.

The Cambridgeshire Constabulary safer schools' officer will be invited to attend. This will enable them to help the school's selection process.

Overall impact

- The community, including young persons, have reported feeling less concerned about knife crime and more young people are now aware of the consequences of carrying a knife.
- The serious violence project co-ordinator within Cambridgeshire Constabulary is taking an interest in attending an event to see how the experience works.
- The wider community are being made aware of young people being educated on the risks associated with knife crime, county lines and child criminal exploitation. This is communicated on various social media platforms and school communications to parents and students.

Overall student feedback

- 93% of respondents found that it was a positive and beneficial exercise. 39% of the students gained insight of a courtroom and 31% gained more knowledge from the experience.
- 27% of respondents enjoyed the interactive experience the most, followed closely with 22% enjoyed the cell visits and 21% enjoying the interaction with police and the magistrates.

Feedback from the schools has been positive, with all schools supporting the project to be repeated for the next school year cohort of year 9 students. One Secondary school reported that awareness was raised regarding knife crime and the students that attended shared their experience with others. The project was also covered in the local news.

The initial project has been funded and supported by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner Youth Fund, allowing all five secondary schools in East Cambridgeshire to access the experience days with no additional cost.

Community safety partners have attended the event days and supported the students in their roles. This has led to positive engagement between community safety partners and young people in East Cambridgeshire. Other districts have also sought out advice on replicating this project in their own areas and have attended the events to see how they works on the day.

Learning

- at the request of the local communities, the parent information evenings are now being held within their parishes
- initially, schools were choosing high achieving students to attend the experience days, schools are now being encouraged to choose a mixture of students that would benefit the most from the experience
- West Suffolk Council are looking to run the experience with schools in their area and will be attending an event to see how the experience works

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Tags

Gangs and youth violence Community engagement