

Police Digital Academy – a digitally competent workforce

The Police Digital Academy (PDA) provides short, sharp, subject matter expert-led inputs which assist officers in identifying and undertaking digital lines of enquiry. The PDA has the ability to create new content quickly based on emerging trends and threats.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Digital, data and analytics Investigation Leadership, development and learning
Organisation	Cumbria Constabulary
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Cumbria Constabulary
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Region	North West
Partners	Police

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	February 2024
Scale of initiative	Regional
Target group	Workforce

Aim

The PDA aims to equip front line officers with the skills and knowledge to effectively identify and pursue common digital lines of enquiry across all offence types.

Intended outcome

Front line officers have the necessary skills and confidence to identify and progress digital lines of enquiry across all offence types.

The intended outcomes are as follows:

- improve digital investigation skills
- increase officer confidence in digital investigation skills
- time-efficient and accessible training
- enhanced knowledge of emerging digital threats

Description

The PDA is a collaborative initiative designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and investigative capabilities of police officers and staff in digital lines of enquiry. Digital lines of enquiry refer to investigative methods that leverage digital data, devices, or online platforms to gather evidence and develop leads during investigations.

Partnership

The PDA operates as a partnership among five North West police forces - Cumbria, Cheshire, Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside - to deliver targeted, high-quality sessions facilitated by subject matter experts. These sessions focus on providing concise, practical, and relevant insights to support officers to navigate the complexities of modern investigations.

The PDA was established in response to the rapid development and widespread adoption of digital technologies in everyday life, recognising the growing importance of equipping police officers and staff with the skills to navigate this evolving landscape effectively.

Sessions

The PDA intends to provide sessions that are no longer than 30-minutes, are easily accessible via virtual and online platforms using technologies such as Microsoft Teams, thus requiring minimal abstraction of officers from their day-to-day duties and developing new content at pace based on emerging trends and threats in the technological space. Current content for the digital training has included sessions on digital prevention and safeguarding.

There are a number of costs in time for officers taking part in the sessions, development of the material provides short, sharp inputs, delivered by a subject matter expert, on a range of topics designed to help officers identify and progress common digital lines of enquiry. The PDA launched in February 2024 across the five North West forces and saw 3066 attendees across the 30 sessions delivered during the five week launch period. The key advantages are the minimal abstraction required and the ability of the academy to create and deliver new content quickly based on emerging trends and threats.

Evaluation

Following each training session, participants were invited to complete an online feedback survey to assess aspects such as the delivery and implementation of sessions, the length and pace, and outcomes such as knowledge and understanding. There was an overall completion rate of around 7.2%.

Feedback around the length and pace of the inputs was very positive and all modules showed an increase in knowledge, including a 57% increase for Digital Prevention and Safeguarding. The

newly established PDA governance boards will be looking at more formal evaluation of the scheme.

Overall impact

- During the PDA's soft-launch in February 2024, over a five-week period, 30 sessions at six sessions a week were delivered across the five forces. This equated to over 3,000 individual training inputs to police officers and staff, with an abstraction of under five hours of SME time for each of the five partner forces. The academy will continue to create and deliver further inputs based on emerging trends and threats in policing, creating a digitally competent workforce.
- Cumbria Constabulary introduced several initiatives in quick succession, namely the PDA, digital toolkit, and expansion of the digital Investigation Team. It is therefore difficult to attribute a positive impact or outcome rate, to any one of these initiatives.
- Moving forward a bespoke plan is required to measure impact and outcomes for each module. These may include an increased number of applications for a particular platform, dip sampling or qualitative reviews and a positive outcome rate for particular crime types.

Learning

There were a number of lessons learned during the soft launch which have led to refinements prior to phase two roll out.

- Ensuring a pre-registration stage to gather additional user metrics such as rank, role, department etc. Direct sign in to sessions via teams gave us only a name and email address (and sometimes just a name is signed in as a guest)
- Hold a standardisation event for presenters for each module. This ensures subject matter experts from across different forces all have the requisite level of knowledge to deliver and answer questions
- It is also important to consider how audience participation can be encouraged to make the most of the sessions being presented live by an SME. This may involve the inclusion of a Slido type question set where questions can be graded by popularity

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Tags

Digital intelligence and investigation