

Female leadership development programme

A leadership programme created by Humberside police looking to increase overall female representation in senior leadership positions.

First published
20 May 2025

Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Diversity and inclusion Ethics and values Leadership, development and learning Organisation including workforce
Organisation	Humberside Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Humberside Police
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Region	North East
Partners	Police

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	March 2022
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Women Workforce

Aim

The female development programme aims to:

- address commitments made by the United Nations' HeForShe movement for gender equality
- support higher female representation at the ranks of sergeant and inspector
- support the number of talented female officers progressing through the organisation into senior leadership positions
- support, develop and empower talented female officers to achieve professional success in their respective fields

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the programme are to:

- increase the number of female officers applying for promotion
- increase the number of female officers being successful for promotion
- reduce the Humberside police gender and rank gap
- increase the number of female officers in specialist units within the organisation

- empower and increase the confidence of female leaders across the organisation
- increase the number of support networks internally and externally, to promote peer support and mentoring between female officers across the organisation and the Humberside area

Description

The female development programme was created following a lack of representation at the substantive sergeant and inspector ranks. Focus groups and surveys were conducted as part of the ongoing HeForShe work with female officers to understand why underrepresentation exists and what officers believe is necessary to encourage increased representation.

The force also worked closely with the women's staff network and wider diversity, equality and inclusion characteristic working group to gather consultation and feedback for the programme proposal. This was developed internally by the force's talent development team as part of the lead, engage, aspire and develop (LEAD) Humberside leadership framework.

A proposal of the programme structure was created with the support and sponsorship of the force's women's integrated network. The proposal included:

- a briefing paper to chief officers which outlined why there was a requirement for a female development programme
- a proposed programme structure with in-depth explanations of each module proposed
- suggested application process
- financial implications
- benefits of the programme
- consultation exercises

Application process

An online application containing an expression of interest form was created to ensure fairness and consistency. All female officers are eligible to apply for the constable, sergeant or inspector course providing they are at the relevant rank. Individuals are asked to provide their PDR or nine-box grid and answer the following four questions:

- why do you want to join the programme?
- what are your medium and long-term career aspirations?

- what have you done over the last two years to support your professional development?
- how would the programme benefit you?

Responses are assessed against a one to three ranking scale, with three being the highest, using evidence-based criteria. The talent and development team review the applications used a moderation exercise to ensure a fair and balanced approach

Line management permission is not essential for applying but the force advises that engagement does take place between the applicant and line manager.

The top-scoring candidates are awarded places on the different courses. Candidates who are unsuccessful in making the shortlist can:

- have a one-to-one with the talent development team to review their application and make any improvements should they wish to reapply
- keep up to date with any future courses
- be signposted to any other continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities

Female development programme

Line managers of candidates are briefed on the programme about the following:

- programme guide and structure
- duration of programme, including a breakdown of individual modules
- line manager responsibilities for supporting the candidate

Humberside Police delivers two cohorts per year, with each consisting of approximately 10 to 15 females and there is no cost to the applicant. Cohorts rotate between three different substantive rank groups dependent on identified need from force's data, including:

- constable cohorts (substantive constables aspiring to sergeant rank)
- sergeant cohorts (substantive sergeants aspiring to inspector rank)
- inspector cohorts (substantive inspectors aspiring to chief inspector rank)

Participants on the female development programme are offered the opportunity to work through six bespoke modules:

- networking and engagement
- women in leadership
- promotion support
- skills development
- networking and confidence
- team building

Each module takes place approximately every two months for the duration of the programme. Two of six modules are delivered externally by Trans2 Performance and Hull army reserves.

This is an intensive programme lasting around 12 months. Officers can complete any unfinished modules at the next available cohort.

The programme is open to police officers only, however police staff are welcome to attend modules one and three.

There is also a launch event and close event with the chief constable.

Overall impact

- 90% of candidates were successful at sergeant and inspector promotion boards between 2022 and 2024.
- Since 2023 the number of females working in specialist departments has increased by 64%. This is due to the support, mentorship and sponsorship of the women in specialisms group for the programme.
- The programme has led to a support network of female talent across Humberside. At the most recent networking event, candidates and over fifty female leaders from a range of public and private sector organisations came together to share their experiences, discuss their challenges, and celebrate their successes. Humberside Police have been invited as an external partner to the networking events which have been inspired by the programme.
- Candidates complete a feedback survey following their time on the programme, with many expressing an increase in self-confidence.
- Previous candidates promote the programme through force internal networks and intranet and continue to attend networking sessions as alumni of the programme.

Learning

Since the launch in 2022, the force has achieved representation from a female police staff leadership perspective and as a result are only offering the programme to police officers. Continuous review of data is therefore important to ensure appropriate delivery of the programme from a positive action perspective.

Cohorts are limited to 10 to 15 spaces to ensure candidates get the most from the programme, and to manage the high number of applicants. This helps manage funding for externally delivered modules.

Alternative development opportunities ensure:

- police staff still have available CPD opportunities; mentoring, 360 feedback and leadership CPD
- unsuccessful candidates have developmental opportunities available to them between applying for different cohorts
- working with the women's integrated network to look at running internal sessions CPD sessions available to all women from across the force

Explicitly advertising that the programme is not just for promotion but also for building confidence and career progression.

Whilst application rates for sergeant and inspector boards have increased, work is continuing to understand why this is not yet proportionate and representative of the wider female population at Humberside.

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