

Professional standards department (PSD) ambassadors

The introduction of standards ambassadors to improve understanding of the professional standards department (PSD) across the force.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Ethics and values Leadership, development and learning Organisation including workforce
Organisation	West Midlands Police
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Region	West Midlands
Partners	Police
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2024
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Workforce
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Aim

The introduction of standards ambassadors aims to:

- enhance the knowledge of those selected to be standards ambassadors regarding all PSD topics
- improve understanding of PSD topics across the force through the influence of the standards ambassadors
- empower staff and officers to challenge and report inappropriate behaviour

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- run regular recruitment drives to enlist standards ambassadors from across the force
- deliver six continued professional development events to standards ambassadors across the year
- increase standards ambassador's understanding of PSD topics
- raise standards ambassador's confidence in dealing with PSD issues

Description

There has been rising national interest surrounding PSD activities in recent years, particularly concerning vetting and how complaints against police officers are dealt with. West Midlands Police aims to be a national leader in PSD issues and aims to deliver proactive interventions through the creation of the first Prevention and Intervention (P&I) team. The P&I team is a subset of the PSD with a focus on engagement, learning and managing risk. They created the standards ambassadors role as part of the engagement strand of their work, aiming to increase knowledge of PSD work across the force and drive a better police culture which values standards and ethics.

The standards ambassador initiative involves a selection of officers and staff from across the force being upskilled to gain an enhanced knowledge regarding all PSD matters. Standards ambassadors were recruited through three recruitment drives in 2024. The role was advertised through the

internal newsletter News Beat, which features a popular section called on the panel which asks readers to consider how they would deal with various PSD issues that have been in the news. P&I team members also advertised the role while carrying out their regular training across the force.

Volunteers to the standards ambassador role had to get approval from their line manager and standards manager, as well as write a 400-word essay about why they wanted to be a standards ambassador. The acceptance rate was almost 100%, as only those with performance issues or who were currently under investigation were denied.

All successful applicants had a one-day induction before taking part in six CPD events across the year, giving them an enhanced level of training and knowledge in the following areas:

- duty to disclose
- business interests
- PSD complaints
- PSD investigations
- Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) referrals and role
- counter corruption unit (CCU)
- notifiable associations
- appropriate authority role
- whistle blowing
- misconduct hearings and meetings
- vetting

These CPD events were specially designed by the P&I team for the standards ambassadors. At the beginning of the programme, the standards ambassadors were asked to brainstorm in a group work session all the PSD areas they wanted more training on. The P&I team then developed a course of CPD events which covered these areas, adapting them based on feedback they got via the SharePoint area throughout the year. The first year of the programme consisted largely of introductory sessions bringing the standards ambassadors up to speed with the organisation and duties of the PSD. Sessions normally featured a guest speaker explaining their work, followed by a more interactive segment such as a live On the Panel discussion where ambassadors could discuss how they would deal with different PSD issues. The second year of the programme has shifted focus to bringing in outside speakers to discuss PSD from a national perspective.

Standards ambassadors have also been working with standards managers. These are senior leaders who are the single point of contact for PSD issues in each local area and policing department. Ambassadors have monthly meetings with standards managers to discuss local trends in standards and any opportunities for joint working.

There was no need for extra staffing for this programme to run, it is managed by the Prevention and Intervention team within daily business as part of their engagement strand of work.

A small amount of funding has been secured to purchase badges and stationery for all standards ambassadors in order to professionalise their role.

Overall impact

The standards ambassador programme is continuing into 2025. There are currently 160 ambassadors. There has been some drop off, with about 20 ambassadors leaving the role, but 30 have newly joined following a recent round of recruitment. New officers had an induction day catching them up with everything they've missed and are now set to attend the regular CPD sessions with the rest of the ambassadors. Recruitment drives will continue at the rate of two a year, one in spring and one in autumn.

Standards ambassadors cover all ranks up to inspector, there were no volunteers above that rank as those in more senior positions are already familiar with the PSD and don't require the training. Standards ambassadors offer broad coverage across the force, covering most departments.

The P&I team welcomes feedback through group work sessions and an anonymous drop box. They've received lots of emails from ambassadors and supervisors thanking them for running the intervention as it's been a valuable learning opportunity. They have also had several ambassadors speak to them about concerns, e.g. over WhatsApp groups, which ambassadors say they wouldn't have raised without the training on what behaviour is acceptable. Standards Ambassadors' confidence and knowledge about PSD issues has been boosted and they feel more comfortable seeking advice from the P&I team. The P&I team also feels that PSD work is being viewed in a more positive light as a way to safeguard officers and maintain a good working environment for everyone.

Learning

There has been a lot of interest in the standards ambassadors role, the only issue is that some areas have had fewer volunteers than others. When this occurred the P&I team approached the senior leadership of the department they wanted more volunteers from, and they collaborated to better advertise the role within the department. This targeted approach was successful and has evened out numbers. The operational policing teams were a special focus of P&I as they have the highest rates of breaching standards, so the targeted recruitment was often focused on these teams.

On the panel is one of the most popular articles in the News Beat magazine each month so was an effective way to advertise the role.

The P&I team have found that their understanding of PSD is not one held across the force, so it's been valuable to change perceptions of PSD so that officers better understand what the PSD does.

Running the standards ambassador program has been intensive work for the P&I team as it requires a lot of admin to organise all the advertising, recruitment and training. A whole team is needed rather than just one individual given the workload.

The P&I team found that standards ambassadors didn't just lack knowledge of PSD topics, they lacked the confidence to speak to people about these areas. The P&I team therefore organised training working with the force negotiation lead on helping empower the Standards Ambassadors to communicate with, challenge and advise people.

One continuing issue will be the need to keep the role fresh for the Standards Ambassadors, as they cannot just do introductions to PSD every year. The P&I team has been tackling this issue by getting outside speakers in and arranging CPD events focused on particular policing issues that have appeared in the news.

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