

Language hub – recording language capabilities of police officers and staff

The language hub is a digital channel created to record and share the language capabilities of police officers and members of staff, providing structured guidance on how these capabilities are applied across investigations, community engagement, and frontline policing.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Community engagement Intelligence and investigation Organisation including workforce
Organisation	Merseyside Police
Contact	Maciej Matusiak
Email address	1476@merseyside.police.uk
Region	North West
Partners	Police Business and commerce Education
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	February 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities Disability General public Offenders Victims Women Workforce

Aim

The Language Hub aims to improve the recording of language capabilities across Merseyside Police, to actively involve those in frontline policing to assist in building trust and breaking down barriers in Merseyside's diverse communities.

Intended outcome

- enhanced support for victims and families
- improved community confidence and perception of police services
- greater potential for evidence gathering through cultural insight
- reinforcement of the force's commitment to inclusivity and community-first policing

Description

Starting with a focus on human resources (HR) and records management, a critical gap was identified in the documentation of police officers' language skills. Merseyside Police used Oracle to record the language skills of officers and staff, which had approximately 80 skills recorded.

However, since new computer systems have been implemented in the force, officers were required to record skills on their own page. This meant that the skills were not easily shared across the force.

Recognising the potential of these skills to enhance community policing, a Microsoft Teams channel was created to record and utilise officers' multilingual abilities force-wide. To drive cultural change, webinars were developed and delivered internally and externally, raising awareness of the importance of language and cultural understanding in policing. There are vast skills within the organisation, but these cannot be utilised effectively unless others are aware of them.

Within the Language Hub channel, the general page is updated every three months with a spreadsheet. This document has a separate sheet for different languages and information on which officers and staff have relevant skills. Requests for assistance can be added on the general page. The channel also hosts a series of guidance documents for officers and staff to access, for example the College of Policing guidance for language services.

What began as a spreadsheet of 78 entries since 2019, has evolved into a comprehensive platform with 50 different languages; the Language Hub currently encompasses 527 recorded language skills across Merseyside Police.

New recruits are engaged with to ensure their language proficiencies are captured early. This data has become instrumental in shaping operational strategies, particularly in supporting senior investigating officers (SIOs) to deploy linguistically skilled officers in sensitive investigations.

Notably, Merseyside's collaboration with Pearson Edexcel has highlighted an innovative approach to language skills through national engagement with young people and career pathways. Campaigns such as "More Than Words" and "Languages and Careers" have gained national visibility, with endorsement from Merseyside Police press office.

Pearson Edexcel and the force media team were involved in broadcasting real-life policing stories, which were featured nationally as part of secondary school educational programmes, bringing authentic policing experiences into classrooms across the country.

In addition, a new role of community engagement liaison officer (CELO) has been introduced, which provides additional support to investigating officers following a critical incident or major crime involving anyone from a diverse community. During a review of a recent homicide, it was identified

that there was a gap in the number of family liaison officers (FLOs) who spoke other languages. This led to a pilot of the CELO role to improve the support offered to victims.

Overall impact

The Language Hub Microsoft Teams channel has improved the visibility of language skills across the Force, enabled faster response times, and fostered a collaborative environment where officers feel empowered to contribute their unique skills.

The Language Hub has contributed to staff inclusion, enabling officers and staff to feel valued through the practical application of their language skills in investigations, operations, mutual aid, and community relations. It has also demonstrated measurable benefits in terms of cost-efficiency and service delivery, ensuring the right people are in the right place, delivering the right service to meet the communities' diverse needs.

Norfolk Police have since adopted a Language Hub channel for their officers and staff.

Learning

The Language Hub highlights the importance of recognising and effectively utilising internal skills within a policing organisation. Key success factors include early engagement with new recruits, structured documentation of language capabilities, and meaningful cross-sector collaboration. This initiative demonstrates how digital tools can transform workforce potential into tangible community impact.

For those looking to implement a similar model, it is important to recognise that the Language Hub is more than just a digital channel, it is a platform full of opportunities. Establishing a dedicated and diverse team from the outset is essential to attract officers and staff with language skills.

Support from across the organisation is also vital. Internal communications, such as strand bulletins and targeted recognition, play a key role in raising awareness and encouraging participation. Celebrating the contributions of individuals who share their skills fosters a culture of inclusion and pride.

The channel itself is simple to set up and can grow organically with the support and engagement of those involved. With the right structure and visibility, it becomes a powerful tool for operational effectiveness, community engagement, and workforce development.

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