

'We Rise' programme – supporting underrepresented groups with career progression

Supporting individuals from underrepresented groups by addressing barriers in career progression, enabling ownership of personal development, and accessing opportunities beyond business-as-usual training.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) Leadership, development and learning Training and professional development
Organisation	Wiltshire Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Wiltshire Police
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Key details

Partners	Police Business and commerce Government department
Stage of Implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	December 2023
Completion date	September 2024
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Disability LGBT+ Race/ethnicity Women Workforce

Aim

The aim of the 'We Rise' programme is to:

- provide a supportive environment for colleagues from underrepresented groups, to enable them to openly share their experiences
- engage with staff networks to enhance courage and confidence through personal development and shared learning
- adhere to the Public Sector Equality Duty by ensuring that consideration of the needs and experiences of people is integrated into every stage of design and delivery
- align with the National Police Chiefs' Council Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion Strategy, and the College of Policing's Leadership Standards

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes for participants of 'We Rise' are:

- increased sense of self-confidence
- stronger peer and professional networks
- improved skills in navigating challenges and seizing opportunities

Description

The 'We Rise' programme provides a 10-month coordinated development pathway that combines structured learning with real-world application. The development of the programme included consultations with staff support networks, senior leaders, external provider Dream and Leap (management consultancy firm), and the learning and development (L&D) team. The programme is delivered across six modules, consisting of classroom based sessions and individual learning activities. The delivery of the modules are shared by internal contributors and external facilitators.

Structure of the programme

The structure of the programme consist of:

- 'Getting to know you' day – where delegates establish trust, rapport, and a safe learning environment. This sets the tone for openness and collaboration while sharing their initial goals and starting to network.
- Mentoring and coaching – this session develops skills in supporting delegates themselves and others through structured, reflective, and goal-oriented conversations.
- Climbing the career ladder – this session focuses on practical strategies and insights for navigating career opportunities, addressing barriers, and recognising transferable skills. Towards the latter part of the programme, a further session on presentation skills equips delegates with the confidence and techniques to communicate effectively, particularly when sharing their personal reflection presentations at graduation.
- Action learning set – interspersed throughout the programme are two sessions where delegates comes together to share experiences, reflect on progress, provide mutual support, and strengthen their professional networks.

- Community engagement projects – delegates undertake community engagement projects which are designed to strengthen ties between the organisation and local communities. This allows participants to apply their skills in real-world contexts. The projects have included partnerships with local food banks, women's refuges, and environmental initiatives.
- Internal and external attachments – internal attachments within the organisation offer delegates the chance to gain experience in different departments, broadening their understanding of organisational operations and potential career paths. External attachments with organisations such as Amazon, the Fire Service, Royal Mail, Historic England, and Nationwide Bank exposes participants to different workplace cultures and practices, enhancing adaptability and professional awareness.

Delegates are responsible for arranging their own community projects, internal attachments, and external placements, fostering independence, ownership, and project management skills.

Each component is rooted in the programme's aims of building confidence, courage, and competence while fostering peer support and practical skill building. The balance between classroom learning, attachments, and projects ensures learning is applied to real-world situations.

Staffing and costs

The following teams are responsible for the development and delivery of the programme:

- equality, diversity and inclusion team
- learning and development team
- staff support networks
- Unison and Police Federation
- line managers
- senior leadership team

Unison and the Police Federation have provided funding for certain aspect of the programme, such as visits to external organisations, refreshments, certificates, and small tokens upon completion. There are additional costs for using Dream and Leap, venue hire if the force is unable to accommodate learners on-site and facilitating graduation.

Senior leadership buy-in was required to secure release time for participants and to endorse the programme.

Overall impact

To date, two cohorts have completed the 'We Rise' programme.

During the first cohort, the programme was only available to members of staff networks. For the second cohort, the eligibility was expanded to any underrepresented members in the workforce. Feedback from delegates highlights a positive cultural shift, with more openness, collaboration, and peer support across the organisation.

Feedback from the first cohort highlighted the following themes:

- including increased confidence and self-belief
- professional growth and career progression
- embracing vulnerability and authenticity
- enhanced leadership and communication skills
- strengthened support networks and community
- improved personal resilience and wellbeing

Early feedback from the second cohort mirrors these findings, with delegates already reporting increased confidence, strengthened peer relationships, and greater clarity around their personal and professional goals.

Following the graduation, the majority of the delegates have remained connected with the programme, returning to share their experiences, mentor others, and support new cohorts.

Several delegates have progressed into new opportunities, with six moving into executive roles within their staff support networks, and approximately 65% of the first cohort applying and securing new roles.

Learning

- The implementation of the programme has benefited from organisational support, clear leadership, and the active involvement of staff support networks.
- There was a barrier in scheduling challenges, around ensuring consistent line manager engagement in releasing staff for programme activities. This has been mitigated through early communication, securing senior buy-in, and emphasising the benefits to teams.

- Organisational learning shows the value of sustained alumni engagement, embedding action learning sets and aligning with strategic priorities.
- Line managers have attended graduation events, to better understand delegates' journeys. This not only reinforces organisational value but strengthens advocacy for future cohorts.
- Due to the programme's length, some delegates have reported dips in motivation between modules. To resolve this, regular check-ins from line managers or mentors, alongside structured reflection activities, would help maintain momentum and provide ongoing developmental support.
- There is also value in exploring how these elements could be more formally aligned to professional development reviews (PDRs), ensuring that line managers are actively engaged in supporting delegates' progress.
- It is important to have the continued involvement of alumni. The majority of graduates are already sharing experiences and offering informal mentoring to new cohorts. Formalising this into a structured alumni network would strengthen peer support, provide visible role models, and help distribute the demand currently placed on staff facilitators.

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