

Language skills database

A centralised language skills database to improve the workforce’s access to language skills, support operational activity and reduce reliance on external interpreters.

First published
28 September 2026

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Investigation Diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) Productivity
Organisation	Greater Manchester Police
Contact	Abid Sardar
Email address	abid.sardar@gmp.police.uk
Region	North West
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	June 2026
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities Disability Victims Workforce
---------------------	--

Aim

The aims of the language skills database are to:

- provide a tool in non-evidential situations where language is perceived to be a barrier
- promote and utilise the workforce's language skills
- support victims and their families during investigations
- translate and review large volumes of text as part of criminal investigations
- support special operations and pre-planned events, such as international football matches

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the language skills database are to:

- improve the workforce's awareness of colleagues' language skills
- increase the number of positive outcomes by deploying officers and staff with relevant language skills to incidents
- reduce costs associated with hiring external interpreters
- improve trust and confidence in Greater Manchester Police (GMP)

Description

The GMP force area covers hundreds of different languages. The force experienced an increase in requests for officers and staff with language skills to support a range of policing activities. The ad-hoc approach became unsustainable and, in response, GMP implemented a database to identify and better utilise the language skills within its workforce.

Planning process and implementation

A detective inspector contacted the organisational learning team to determine whether a language skills database already existed. The team confirmed that, while there was no force wide database, several localised databases were being maintained by individual districts.

Additionally, the detective inspector also spoke to a number of forces which had language databases on Excel spreadsheets or in Microsoft Team's channels. The forces' feedback highlighted several issues including databases not being regularly updated and an inability to cross reference language skills.

As part of the planning process, a task and finish group was established with the purpose of including internal stakeholder's views during the development phase of the language skills database. The meetings were organised and chaired by the detective inspector and attended by the following teams and individuals:

- duty management system team
- organisational learning team
- vetting team
- interview advisor lead
- AtHoc lead
- corporate communications team
- force operation centre
- human resources (HR) systems team
- criminal justice interpreter manager

The group met approximately 10 times over several months and decided on using the BlackBerry AtHoc platform, based on its ability to update individual profiles, send targeted alters and automatically update when staff join or leave the force.

The database has replicated the languages that had been officially requested over the two years and includes the following fields:

- name
- contact details
- verbal and reading skills for additional languages

- additional skills such as public order and first aid training

While additional skills have an expiry date, unless colleagues complete the relevant refresher training, language skills do not expire.

Promoting the language skills database

Following implementation, the detective inspector worked with the internal communications team to publish three articles on the force's intranet, encouraging colleagues to update their AtHoc profiles and record their language skills. The detective inspector also met with each district's resource management unit to encourage officers and staff to access the database and promote its use.

GMP is producing a poster featuring a QR code to encourage the workforce to use the database and keep their profiles up to date. Once produced, the poster will be displayed across the force area.

Funding and senior management approval

The language skills database has been created using existing platforms and resources at no additional cost. Prior to implementing the database, approval was sought from the force's organisational learning team, the senior leadership team and force command.

Overall impact

Since implementation, GMP has no longer needed to send blanket emails to thousands of colleagues asking whether they have specific language skills. The database enables the force to plan resources more effectively for operations and incidents where particular language skills are required.

Initial feedback has been positive, with many users welcoming the database's efficiency in identifying individuals with the required language skills.

Learning

- While the language skills database continues to grow, not all colleagues have updated their language skills on the system. This may be due to workload pressures or concerns about taking on additional responsibilities. It is recommended that forces engage with their interpreter contract

manager to gain a better understanding of the languages most frequently requested and the associated costs of external interpretation services. This information may help demonstrate the value of registering language skills and encourage greater participation.

- It is recommended that forces review existing platforms and determine which best meets their organisational needs. One of the factors that influenced GMP's decision to use the AtHoc system was that staff records are automatically updated when employees join or leave the organisation, helping to ensure the database remains accurate and up to date.

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.