

FAQS

New student officer programme

How is entry changing for new police officers?

Entry to policing and initial learning for student officers can be inconsistent across forces, with some applicants held to different standards. The College of Policing has worked with chief constables to change this and new student officers will have two ways of entering policing and learning to carry out their role:

- **Apprenticeship.** Join as a student officer, and follow an apprenticeship in policing, meaning that you earn while you learn. This route normally takes three years with both on and off-the-job learning. On successfully finishing the programme, you complete your probation and achieve a recognised and accredited degree in Professional Policing Practice from Staffordshire University.
- **Degree-holder Entry.** If you have a degree, you join and follow a work-based programme, supported by off-the-job learning. This route normally takes two years, and the learning you have undergone is recognised with a Graduate Diploma in Professional Policing Practice from Staffordshire University when you complete your probation.

Why change the process? Why do police officers need a degree?

The nature of police work has changed. Cyber-enabled crime, protecting vulnerable people, online investigation and evidence gathering are all contributing towards the increasing complexity of modern policing. The previous initial police learning programme (IPLDP) was out-of-date and required updating. For example, when the curriculum was designed in 2006 there were no iPhones, but now officers are expected to routinely include digital data in investigations. The IPLDP route and associated diploma was withdrawn at West Mercia Police on 30 April 2019. Additionally, there is a lack of consistency as not all forces accredit officers.

When the College of Policing reviewed the curriculum, it found the work being done by officers met the same standard as a degree. As policing has never had a system for recognising the expertise of officers, the College of Policing carried out a public consultation on introducing a more consistent education for policing, fit for the future, which received over 3,000 responses. 74% of officers, staff and special constables reported they would be interested in gaining externally recognised accreditation, such as a degree. The College has worked with stakeholders including forces and the Police Federation to re-assess the role of police constable. The role now was found to require skills and education of a higher level and this is a position supported by the National Police Chiefs' Council, Police Federation and Superintendents' Association.

The two routes and the learning they provide were chosen to ensure entry to the service appealed to the widest group of people, including those who preferred an apprenticeship and those who already have a degree (it is estimated that 48% of current officers are in this category).

The degree has been introduced nationally to recognise the enormously high level of skills, learning and professionalism required to become a police officer and to carry out the role. The new curriculum for the apprenticeship entry route has been designed to match the complexity of modern policing, recognising that police officers apply transferrable skills and problem solving skills to a range of complex situations, and regularly exercise personal judgement. New topics introduced to the curriculum include digital investigation, evidence based policing, problem solving, vulnerability and personal wellbeing and resilience.

I don't want to study towards a degree, can I join under the old scheme?

Unfortunately not, the old scheme closed for applications on 30 April 2019, and was replaced by the new student police officer programme.

I have already applied to be a new officer and am waiting to start training. Can I transition across so that I can get a degree?

You have applied for a specific entry route and will be managed within that route, which could result in either the IPLDP scheme or the student officer programme.

Do I have to attend university for lectures?

There may be some requirement to attend learning events and you may wish to make use of Staffordshire University facilities, but you will not have to travel out of the force area.

How often will I have to study?

The student officer programme requires a minimum of 20% off the job learning, which will be in work time. You will probably study in your own time, too.

Is the degree free or do I have to pay part of it?

This is an apprenticeship, so all tuition costs are met through West Mercia Police's apprenticeship levy funds.

What is the starting salary?

We will appoint student officers on an annual starting salary of £21,000. However, those student officers who join us through the Degree-holder Entry route will receive £22,000. Remember that West Mercia Police will also be funding your degree, meaning that you will not have to pay back a student loan.

Will I have to study for exams?

The new student officer programme does not require you to take exams, as you will achieve your degree either by completing assignment work or by demonstrating your skills on the job. However, current Sergeant and Inspector promotion processes do require examinations.

I haven't yet got my A Level or BTEC results. Can I apply based on predicted results?

You can apply, but you will need to evidence achievement of your results prior to joining West Mercia Police.

Can I still do part time work while I am studying?

You will be working as a full time officer with the requirement to undertake study, so you should seriously consider your options. Not all part time work is allowed as a police officer and you would need to submit a business interest if you wish to undertake part time work outside of your role as a police officer.

I am not academic. Will I be supported to complete coursework?

The apprenticeship is based on demonstrating your skills on the job, as well as academic achievement. You will have to complete assignment work, but you will be fully supported in this. Potential applicants without maths and English at level 2 can access local colleges to gain key skills qualifications.

How will I be expected to learn policing and the law on the job?

You will undertake some off the job learning prior to entering the workplace. Once in the workplace, you will apply and develop that learning supported by your workplace coach, colleagues and line manager.

Will I be able to arrest from day one?

You will not be sworn in and gain powers of arrest until you have successfully completed sufficient training.

Do I have to apply for a university place separately to the police application?

No, you will apply to West Mercia Police and we will work with Staffordshire University to enrol you as a student.

What is the timeline? Why won't I start until six months after I've applied?

You will apply to West Mercia Police and then go through the same tests, assessments, medical checks and vetting processes as all of our police officers have done. This is to check that you are eligible and have the right capabilities, qualities and fitness required of a serving police officer.

Can I choose which university I go to?

No, we will be working closely with Staffordshire University to deliver and award your degree.

Are you only targeting people from black and minority ethnic communities, women and young people?

No, we welcome anyone with a passion for policing and who fits our eligibility criteria to apply. However, West Mercia Police strives to be fair and representative of those it serves, and we actively encourage applications from communities who are currently under-represented in our workforce. This is not simply a matter of race, gender or age – we also encourage gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender recruits and those with learning or physical disabilities to apply.

I have a disability, can I still apply?

At West Mercia Police, we are continuing to work hard to build a more open environment where disabled people are included and valued. As Disability Confident employers, we recognise the valuable role disabled people play in our success and welcome people with physical and learning disabilities to apply.

I have a criminal record, can I still apply?

You must not have a conviction as an adult or juvenile, although some minor offences and cautions may not exclude you and will be judged on a case-by-case basis.

I have tattoos, will this stop me from applying to be a police officer?

Discreet tattoos will be considered on a case by case basis, but you must not have tattoos on your face or front of your neck. Tattoos which could cause offence to members of the public will preclude you from becoming a police officer.