

# The Journey of a PCSO Student: Level 4 Diploma in Community Policing Practice

## Overview

The journey toward becoming a fully qualified Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) is now accredited through the Level 4 Diploma in Community Policing Practice, where learners develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to support community safety, build public trust, and contribute to effective local policing.



## Stage 1: Theory Input (Weeks 1–13)

The initial 12-week classroom-based theory phase provides the foundation of professional knowledge and understanding. During this stage, students engage in lectures, workshops, assignments and scenario-based learning designed to develop:

- Community engagement and problem-solving skills
- Understanding of legislation, powers, and ethical policing
- Communication and conflict resolution

## Stage 2: Shadowing Placement (Weeks 14–19)

Following the classroom phase, and a week of annual leave, students undertake a 6-week shadowing period alongside experienced PCSOs. This placement allows students to observe and participate in real-world policing activities, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Students will:

- Observe community patrols and local engagement initiatives
- Develop professional conduct and situational awareness

- Begin applying their classroom learning and ethical decision-making, to real-life contexts

## Stage 3: Work-Based Assessment IPS (Week 20 - 26)

To gain independent Patrol Status the student will work with their Mentor-Assessor over 6 weeks, to gather evidence to meet the criteria for IPS, set out by College of Policing. This includes:

- Engaging with the community, using Code of Ethics
- Handling information and intelligence
- Providing an initial response to policing incidents, in accordance with the law

## Stage 4: Work-Based Assessment FOC (Week 26 - 52)

The final stage involves a 6-month work-based assessment period, where students demonstrate competence in live operational settings. The student will be assessed against criteria set by the College of Policing AND Skills for Justice Awards, to complete a portfolio of evidence (the OCP), which will award their status as Full Occupational Competence (FOC) upon completion.

The students should also complete a Community Project in this time, to use within their final assessment, held in Week 50, at HQ.

## PCSO Volunteer Mentor-Assessors

Each student will be paired with a volunteer PCSO who serves as a mentor, role model, and assessor (The Mentor-Assessor).

Once IPS has been achieved, the student can gather evidence within their role, independently, and does not need to be doubled crewed with their mentor. However, the mentor-Assessor should:

- Support and inspire the students' ongoing development
- Provide regular feedback and coaching to support professional growth
- Assess performance against the diploma and College of Policing criteria (IPS and FOC)
- Complete relevant paperwork to evidence the students' skills and competence

This stage ends with a week of mandatory assessment back at HQ, with a team of assessors from L&D. Here the students will present their 'Community Project' back to the business for assessment. PCSO Mentor-Assessors encouraged and welcome to attend this presentation to support their student.

## PCSO Training Journey

As an incentive (and appreciation for the role), from the 'Neighbourhood Pledge Pot' we are offering:

- £300 payment per student
- 1 day introduction to mentoring training (mandatory)
- 1 day introduction to assessing training (mandatory)
- Open door to the Lead Assessor and Lead IQA in Learning & Development for support
- Opportunity to complete the Level 3 Award in Assessing Competence in the Work Environment (ACWE) – a sector recognised assessor award qualification (worth £300). This is not mandatory but encouraged to recognise and value the work achieved.

## Conclusion

By the end of this journey, the student will have successfully combined classroom learning, practical experience, and meaningful mentorship to achieve the Level 4 Diploma in Community Policing Practice. This qualification not only validates their skills and knowledge but also empowers them to serve their communities with integrity, empathy, and confidence.