

Positive Steps mentoring network

Workshops to support staff and officers from underrepresented groups with promotion or assessment processes.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) Leadership, development and learning Training and professional development
Organisation	Metropolitan Police Service
Contact	Joynal Ahmed
Email address	joynal.ahmed3@met.police.uk
Region	London
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	July 2019
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Workforce
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Aim

- To address underrepresentation of employees from underrepresented groups and their disproportionate lack of progression within the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) – overall ensuring that the MPS is an inclusive employer.
- To inspire colleagues from underrepresented groups to recognise their talent, realise their potential and take positive steps towards achieving success in their career development.

Underrepresented groups are defined as all ethnic minority backgrounds, with a particular focus on black and Asian employees, in addition to LGBT+, female, employees with a neurodiversity and disabled employees.

Intended outcome

- Provide a platform for underrepresented colleagues to access available support for promotion processes within the MPS.
- Empower underrepresented colleagues who have considered promotion previously, but have not persevered with their development because of obstacles.
- Encourage underrepresented leaders who have remained in junior management positions to challenge themselves for further development and along the way, inspire others to do the same.
- See an increase in representation of underrepresented colleagues within management positions, inspiring others through visible leadership.
- Retain underrepresented colleagues who are leaving the organisation to seek career development opportunities elsewhere.
- Develop underrepresented colleagues through lateral development.
- Encourage and spot talented underrepresented colleagues within the organisation and develop them further.
- Demonstrate to underrepresented colleagues and the public that the MPS is an attractive place to work, where colleagues are valued, motivated and can access the relevant support to develop their career in policing.

- Show the organisation to be inclusive and reflective of the communities it serves. This will strengthen the public's trust and confidence in the police, in addition to the confidence of employees internally.

Description

Once the MPS releases the dates for promotion processes, Positive Steps advertise promotion workshops internally. Workshops are facilitated via Microsoft Teams. These are usually facilitated by four volunteer mentors who have recently been successful in a promotion process (within the last 12 months) or have assessed candidates previously.

Mentors must be at inspector rank or above and workshop facilitators vary based on availability. Many mentors and mentees are from underrepresented groups, though this is not an essential criterion as the initiative will support all employees requiring assistance.

For senior leaders (inspector rank and above), workshops are 90-minute discussions with mentors. For sergeants and lower ranks, workshops are two-hour long presentations.

Attendance numbers at workshops varies. On average, 250 employees attend sergeant workshops and between five and 30 employees attend workshops for inspector rank and above.

On average, two or three workshops are conducted per promotion process – one workshop is held for each element of the assessment process.

The workshops are informal and interactive to encourage open communication. They focus on mentors talking through:

- their experiences
- what assessors are looking for
- common mistakes
- knowledge and strategies they have learned and benefitted from

All workshops are recorded and accessible to the workforce. Copies of the presentations are also available.

If requested, mentees are assigned in a bespoke manner to a mentor who has previously taken part in Positive Steps. This provides an opportunity for candidates to network outside of the

workshops.

All mentors have completed a mentor training package covering what is expected of them, challenges and barriers they may face, and how to get the best out of people.

Mentees assigned to a mentor receive two-, four-, and six-weekly 15-minute telephone check-ins. This is to ensure everything is running smoothly.

Candidates who are not successful in their promotion process are informed of future Positive Steps workshops they can attend.

Four officers maintain Positive Steps, which includes responsibility for all administrative tasks and is in addition to their substantive role.

The initiative has full support from the force and collaboratively works with a number of departments, such as:

- communications
- human resources
- marketing
- occupational health
- MPS promotions (who design the promotion processes)
- recruitment

Monthly and quarterly meetings are held with the departments involved to discuss updates and the vision moving forwards.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the workshops

Once promotional processes are complete, Positive Steps establishes the proportion and number of mentees who received support and were successful or not. This is additionally explored according to protected characteristics.

Feedback surveys

Two surveys are conducted. Mentors and mentees are asked to complete a survey respectively once the assessment process has concluded, to understand how they felt about Positive Steps and how it assisted.

The mentors' survey covers contextual questions on:

- how long they have been a mentor
- where they work and for how long
- how they found being a mentor

The mentees' survey covers contextual questions on:

- where they work and for how long
- their mentor, including how they found their mentor, whether they had good knowledge and experience of the relevant areas, how often they met and where, and how their mentor supported them

Feedback received from mentees is shared with mentors at an aggregate level. Mentees are also asked to provide feedback about how they found the workshops they attended.

An evaluation report is produced at the conclusion of each promotion process. This provides insight into areas requiring improvement at an aggregate level. The report is used to shape the development of the intervention over time.

All aspects of the evaluation are completed by MPS departments, which are separate to Positive Steps to add a layer of objectivity.

Results

Findings from 2021 (looking at first recorded data from two promotion processes in 2020 and 2021) included the following:

- Increased reported confidence in taking the first step towards promotion and realising their potential by mentees.
- On average, 85% of employees who received support from Positive Steps were successful in their promotion process.

Findings from the 2022 surveys (looking at data from one sergeant to inspector promotion process) included the following:

- 75% of mentees provided positive feedback on overall satisfaction, 20% provided neutral feedback and 5% provided negative feedback.
- Mentees' reported confidence increased from 33% to 60% after engagement with Positive Steps. Those neutral about their confidence and less confident decreased from 52% to 30% and 14% to 10% respectively.
- 82% of mentees provided positive feedback about the introductory session and the assessment exercise preparation respectively, while 5% provided neutral feedback and 14% provided negative feedback respectively.
- 55% of mentees provided positive feedback about their mentor during the process, while 23% provided neutral and negative feedback respectively.
- 59% of mentees provided positive feedback about networking opportunities, 23% provided neutral feedback and 18% provided negative feedback.
- 77% of mentees provided positive feedback about access to advice and guidance, 5% provided neutral feedback and 18% provided negative feedback.

Additional findings

- Initial findings from workforce data indicate an increase in representation of employees from underrepresented groups in sergeant and inspector ranks.
- Positive anecdotal feedback has been received via email from mentees, and blogs and videos have been produced by mentees coming forwards about their positive experiences.
- Attendance at other force mentoring initiatives has decreased due to employees finding Positive Steps more helpful.
- Over 300 mentors have volunteered to be part of Positive Steps.

It has been found that mentors often learn a lot from the experience too.

Overall impact

The network was established in 2020 and was designed to deliver a service to underrepresented colleagues and manage a support gap that existed within the Met to improve success in promotion processes and lateral development. It initially started with five mentors, and now has in excess of 300, ranging from inspectors to deputy assistant commissioner (DAC) and staff equivalent.

The overall impact of the initiative has been largely positive so far. Many mentees involved in Positive Steps are from underrepresented groups and a large number of employees have been supported, providing them with a platform to access available support for promotion and progression, and empowering them to persevere with their development.

Through the involvement of more senior employees from underrepresented groups within the intervention, employees are provided with role models and visible leadership to inspire them.

Furthermore, representation of employees from underrepresented groups in sergeant and inspector ranks appears to be increasing, demonstrating this initiative's benefit in the early stages.

Over the years, the network has seen exponential growth and the latest data capture (2024) identified that the network has supported over 1500 colleagues for promotion and lateral development. Analysis reveals that colleagues supported through the network had an 85% success rate, confidence level rose by 60%, and overall there was a 76% satisfaction rate.

The team are also supporting other initiatives such as the London Police Race Action Plan, College of Policing Elevated mentoring programme and are also working with Police Now colleagues in designing a support mechanism for recruit pathways. In addition to that the team have engaged with other forces in developing a similar model to Positive Steps.

This intervention is helping to demonstrate that the MPS is an inclusive organisation and is working towards being more reflective of the communities it serves. This will assist with building internal and external trust and confidence.

MPS has been recognised as having gold standard coaching and mentoring.

Learning

Mechanisms that make the initiative successful

- Many mentors are assessors for promotion processes and cannot be both a mentor and an assessor for the same promotion campaign. This restricts the number of mentors available for each promotion process. To overcome this and assist with planning, Positive Steps is provided with a list of who is assessing at the upcoming promotion process and who is available.

- Mentors and mentees are asked to complete the surveys as soon as the assessment process has concluded, so that the feedback provided is not impacted by the promotion process results.
- Taking an interactive, humanistic, and bespoke approach is beneficial for engagement.
- It's advantageous for contact to be maintained between mentors and mentees, and for this relationship to continue after the promotion process.
- Force buy-in and support from relevant departments is important to ensure the success of the intervention.
- It's important that feedback from mentors and mentees is used to shape the intervention and workshops, and that the intervention evolves with changes in policing over time. For example, the incorporation of the additional focus on lateral development was a product of this.
- Use of the intranet and blogs to publicise positive stories saw minimal engagement, while videos saw greater engagement. This led to the increased adoption of this engagement method.
- It's important for mentees to feel confident and competent in their current role before progressing and for them to have the opportunity to see what the next step would look like. While under representation of underrepresented groups is an issue that needs addressing, it was found that as a by-product of addressing this, employees can be rushed into roles they do not feel ready for. Consequently, the intervention has evolved to consider this – to not to over promote people who may be underdeveloped, and support building confidence and competence of employees prior to progression, in addition to offering insight into next career steps through speaking with relevant ranking officers.
- Planning a communication and marketing strategy as the demand has increased significantly due to success and exposure. Additionally the force need to continue to recruit more mentors, which is currently in progress.
- Focusing on future leaders and the new generation of police officers joining by providing continued professional development opportunities post promotion.

Challenges requiring consideration

- Data sharing issues initially posed challenges with accessing information on whether mentees were successful or not to assist measuring the impact of the intervention. Though once processes were established, this facilitated access to this information and subsequent analysis of the data. Before processes were in place, mentees were emailed to ask whether they were successful or not, to which responses were not always received. The process remains laborious as this requires individual warrant numbers to be searched.

- Breaking down success rates according to protected characteristics is a challenge. There is limited access to associated information, and this therefore often requires guessing and could be more accurate.
- Being a mentor requires a time investment. They should be aware of this. Participation must be for the right reasons to prevent further damaging the confidence of employees from underrepresented groups who may have already had negative experiences surrounding promotion and progression.
- The intervention is for staff and officers, but officer promotion processes come round every year, while staff promotion processes are less frequent. As a result, while support is available for staff, only around 20 to 30 have been supported so far.
- The force are currently looking at support mechanisms for colleagues with neurodiverse conditions.

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