

Your guide to becoming a PCSO

We're looking for special qualities

How would you deal with a group of binge drinkers dancing in the street?

What would you do to win the trust of housing estate residents scared to give evidence about a violent assault?

How would you handle the kids using the shopping centre for an indoor cycle speedway?

What would you do to rebuild the confidence of an elderly couple who were burgled last week?

You can't arrest anyone. You've no handcuffs, no captor spray, no baton. All you've got is you. Your ability to get on with some of the most challenging people in some of the most difficult situations. The way you win co-operation through good-humoured persuasion. Your openness to see beneath black and white interpretations. Your understanding that the obvious solution may not be the best one. Your very presence on the streets inspiring confidence.

Do you have these qualities? If so, you may be just who we're looking for.

How does a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) fit into the police family?

As a PCSO, you will perform one of the most demanding roles in the modern UK police force. You will inspire confidence in your community by:

- helping reduce crime and anti-social behaviour;
- dealing with minor offences; and
- supporting front-line policing.

It is an essential role, which extends the range of activities the police are able to provide to our communities.

What sort of things do PCSOs do?

- go on highly visible, uniformed foot patrols;
- support Community Beat Officers and Community Action Teams in local problem-solving initiatives;
- make house visits to gather intelligence and offer public reassurance following minor crimes or anti-social behaviour;
- engage with key stakeholders in the community, such as community, religious and business leaders;
- liaise with Community Watch, Business Watch, Horse Watch, Neighbourhood Watch, Pub Watch and Farm Watch schemes;
- preserve crime scenes;
- collect CCTV evidence;
- provide low-level crime prevention and personal safety advice;
- undertake low-level missing person enquiries in line with their role of increasing visible policing;
- act as professional witnesses, attending court when needed;
- undertake environmental audits to support crime prevention;
- engage with youths;
- interact with schools;
- support the Mobile Police Station;
- support Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

You will:

- deal constantly with members of the public;
- build links with employers and business and community leaders;
- deal with nuisance offences such as street drinking or begging; and
- be given some limited powers appropriate to your role.

You will not:

- have powers of arrest;
- be able to interview or process prisoners;
- investigate serious crime; or
- carry out the more complex and high-risk tasks that police officers perform.

No day the same

Have you the right qualities to be a PCSO?

- a confident, level-headed, positive and mature manner;
- experience and willingness in dealing with difficult people and situations;
- sensitive, but thick-skinned;
- good communication skills;
- good team-working skills;
- stamina for long periods of foot patrol;
- good communication skills to deal with all types of people, some of whom may be drunk, hostile or upset;
- a confident, mature and assertive manner;
- accuracy when completing paperwork;
- an appreciation of the confidential nature of police work.

Every day you will make a difference, preventing trouble, strengthening your community. You might need to step in to mediate between a married couple arguing in the street. You could be running a meeting of angry residents worried about a redevelopment of land. You could be the first member of the police service that a troublemaker gets to know and talks to properly.

While no day is ever the same, here are two typical examples.

A day in the life of Lynn Ward

Lynn Ward is Police Community Support Officer for the Littlemoor area of Weymouth.

"It is Tuesday and I am on the late shift, which for us is 1pm until 9pm. I usually arrive at 12.30pm and log on to find out what has occurred on my patch since my last tour of duty. The grapevine in Littlemoor is amazing and I am sure to be asked things as soon as I am on the streets!

"Then it is off in the car to Littlemoor. I always do a quick mobile check of the area to make sure there is nothing needing immediate attention. I have been around the estate so much that anything new, be it vehicle, face, graffiti or even pile of rubbish, is readily apparent. Then park the car, on with the hat and off on my feet.

"The walk is slow because everyone wants to chat. But it's how I get to know what is happening in my area. It is also the only way to find out things that are causing people concern and to get to know what it is they feel is

needed to improve life 'on the moor', as it is affectionately known. Little children often love to chat to me and I get to know much more than I need. I am sure mum and dad would blush if they knew what they were telling me. They make me chuckle as I explain that maybe mum would rather they didn't tell everyone that particular bit of news!

"I always try to make sure I am at the local primary school for 3pm to make leaving school a safe time and to get to know the local children and their parents. School is clear by 3.30pm but the school football team is playing so I pop down and have a chat to the parents and give the lads a bit of support.

"A walk back to the car and then back to the station for some tea and a briefing with the late shift. The sergeant has allocated me three jobs to deal with when I get back to the patch. An abandoned vehicle, a dispute between neighbours and to see some children who have been causing minor problems around the elderly residents' centre.

"By the time I have finished dealing with these it is 7pm and I am about to park up and have

another walkabout; however, I am called via the radio to attend the local shopping precinct where some youths are causing a disturbance. I arrive and know the boys quite well and, despite a little good-natured cheek, I am able to direct them to a more suitable area for their game of football, which is causing havoc in the shopping centre.

“Informing the control room of the result, I am asked to attend the other end of my beat to deal with youths who are being very noisy in the street. As I approach the area they catch sight of me and disperse in all directions. No chance to find out who they are this time but my arrival has solved the immediate problem.

“A quick check of the local ‘hot spots’ and it is back to the station to update my notebook and book off duty.”

A day in the life of Kamal Ahmed

“I’ve been here in Hackney for just over a year now. We go out with the home beat officers, attend residents’ meetings for them and take notes on any problems that may come up. We’ll then bring those back to the sergeant and see what can be done.

“The first day I went out on patrol, this kid had his foot run over and trapped behind a car wheel. That was my first serious moment – I had to call out for an ambulance and remember my training, but within a few seconds I had police officers around me, helping me out.

“You’re out on the streets as a high-visibility deterrent, and the way I see it, it’s about taking the

time to meet and mingle with people. The regular police can’t do that, because they’re too involved in responding to immediate calls. But when we’re walking the streets, we interact a lot with members of the public, and we get a lot of information. It’s an old-fashioned community thing.

“We don’t carry police utility belts or batons, but if anything should kick off and become dangerous, there’s always the orange button on your radio. In those situations, you know that within a few seconds you can have six or seven police cars behind you, which is a real feeling of security.

“Every day is a different challenge, and in my view the money is excellent. They say if you can police in Hackney you can police most probably anywhere. I was mugged in Hackney when I was at college, so I was in two minds about whether even to come here! But when all’s said, 95 per cent of the local public are nice, genuine people. It’s just your little 5 per cent of troublemakers – but then, you get that in every borough.

What’s good about being a PCSO?

- sense of achievement of creating a strong community;
 - variety – no day is ever the same;
 - diverse mix of colleagues – PCSOs come from all ages, backgrounds, cultures and communities;
 - highly visible – people get to know you, talk to you and share their concerns;
 - working outdoors – PCSOs spend 80 per cent of their time patrolling on foot;
 - good rates of pay;
 - freeing regular officers to deal with more serious crime.
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What powers do PCSOs have?

PCSOs can be given a range of environmental, transport, anti-social behaviour and security related powers. At the moment this varies from force to force but all PCSOs will be given a standard set of powers in the future.

How does the recruitment process work?

Step 1: Complete the application form enclosed

You can now apply to be a PCSO by completing the enclosed application form. This has five main sections:

1. **About you**
2. **About your employment**
3. **About your education and skills**
4. **Competency Assessment**
5. **Declaration**

It also includes an equal opportunities and a marketing form. These help us see how diverse our applicants are and how we can best spend money to recruit PCSOs.

What is a PCSO Competency Assessment?

The most important part of the application form is Section 4, the Competency Assessment. Your answers will help us work out if you are likely to have the skills and abilities to be an effective PCSO. Your answers will help us decide if we should invite you to the next stage of the assessment process at the assessment centre.

Please read all the instructions thoroughly. It is important that you think carefully about your answers. If you are unsuccessful, you will not be able to reapply for six months.

- This section of the application form asks you to provide three specific examples from your recent past experience of situations you have encountered (questions 1 to 3). **Your answers will be used to decide if you progress to the next stage of assessment.**

- We are looking for specific behaviours, which research has shown are essential to the work of a PCSO. The more of these behaviours we see, the more likely you are to be invited to the next stage of assessment. It is therefore important that your answers **describe in some detail what you said and did.** Do not generalise about what you usually do.
- You should read the questions fully and choose your examples very carefully. Each question has a number of prompts. Make sure you answer all of the prompts.
- Answer all of the questions. If you leave a question blank or tell us that you cannot think of any answer, it is very unlikely you will pass.
- In all parts of the form please write clearly and concisely. If we can't read it or understand it, we can't score it. Pay attention to your **spelling, handwriting, punctuation and grammar.** You are being assessed throughout this application form on your written skills. We also expect your examples to be focused, succinct and fluently written, as any police report or statement would need to be.
- Avoid using jargon or slang terms. Remember that this is a formal application for an important and responsible job.
- You can use examples from your work, social, domestic or educational life.
- Try to use **examples that you found difficult or challenging** to deal with. They tend to achieve better marks.

- Write in complete sentences, rather than notes or bullet points.
- **You must not add extra sheets,** write outside the space provided or write between the lines. No marks will be given for evidence outside the space provided.

Competency Assessment example answer

We have developed an example answer so that you can see what kind of answer we're looking for. This is not a perfect answer but it gives you an idea of the kind of answers we need. Note how the example given writes about "I" and gives detail about how things were done and when.

PCSOs need to be prepared to take responsibility for making difficult decisions. Think of a situation when you have had to make a difficult decision that might have upset other people, and when you have had to then tell them what you have decided.

What was the decision you had to make? *I had been invited to a close friend's wedding and asked to help with the arrangements. The wedding was arranged at quite short notice and the date conflicted with a holiday with my parents and sister. We had already booked the holiday and I had paid a large deposit on it. My friend made it clear how important it was to her for me to be at her wedding, and when I told my family they made it clear that they felt I should go on holiday with them as it had been booked for a long time and could not be rearranged at this late date. I had to decide whether to go on the holiday and upset my friend, or cancel my holiday, lose my deposit and upset my family.*

- The form also asks about your motivations to become a PCSO, your expectations of the role and what preparation you have undertaken to apply (questions 4 to 7).

The application must be all your own work. Be honest and expect to be questioned on any answers that you give.

What did you take into account when making the decision? *I took into account the fact that she was a very old and close friend who, in the past, had gone out of her way to be with me at events which had been special for me (for example birthday parties and when I got my exam results). However, my family deserved and had been looking forward to the holiday with me and had chosen the hotel and the resort to suit me. I would also lose my deposit. I considered the option of joining my parents at the holiday location a few days later than anticipated but this fell within a peak holiday season, and when I checked with the travel agent there were no flights available.*

What decision did you make? *I decided to go to the wedding and cancel the holiday.*

Tell us exactly how you went about telling the other person or people. *I told my sister first, as soon as I had made the decision, as she was likely to know how my parents would react. I then waited until my parents were both at home and had eaten their evening meal and were more relaxed. I turned the TV down and said that Jayne (my friend) had been very good to me over the years and that I really wanted to be there for her wedding. I said that I had decided to go to the wedding and cancel my place on the holiday with them. I said that I knew they would be disappointed but that we would have future holidays together whereas Jayne would only have one wedding like this.*

Step 2: Assessment Process

If your application passes the first assessment, we will invite you to our regional assessment centre to undertake the assessment centre process.

Step 3: Medical, security and references check

If you perform well at the assessment centre, you will be recommended for appointment subject to satisfactory checks on security status, medical and fitness, and references.

What are we looking for in a PCSO?

These are the key qualities we are looking for. We have included examples of these qualities working well in practice.

Effective communication

Communicates all needs, instructions and decisions clearly. Adapts the style of communication to meet the needs of the audience.

Community and customer focus

Sees things from the public's point of view and encourages others to do the same. Builds a good understanding and relationship with the community that is served.

Problem solving

Gathers information from a range of sources to understand situations, making sure it is reliable and accurate. Identifies risks and considers alternative courses of action to make good decisions.

Respect for race and diversity

Understands other people's views and takes them into account. Treats people with dignity and respect at all times, no matter what their background, status, circumstances or appearance.

Team working

Works effectively as a team member and helps build relationships within it.

Personal responsibility

Takes personal responsibility for making things happen and achieving results. Displays motivation, commitment, perseverance and conscientiousness. Acts with a high degree of integrity. Takes personal responsibility for own actions and sorting out issues or problems that arise. Is focused on achieving results to required standard and developing skills and knowledge.

Training and development

Your training and development will be a key first stage in your career as a PCSO. To reflect both PCSOs' increasing significance and the police's professionalism, we are relaunching the PCSO training programme from April 2006.

Your training will start with a national induction run by PCSOs and other police officers. After this, your force will train you using a

structured, modular programme. This programme will be assessed against recognised National Occupational Standards (NOS).

The programme will use a 'blended learning' environment. This means that a mix of methods – such as practical demonstrations, computer-based simulations and presentations – are used to help you get the most from your training.

Serving your community is a fundamental part of being a PCSO. Therefore, one of the most important parts of your training will be to develop the key skills that make up 'community engagement'.

Each police force tailors their training programmes to reflect local needs. Your chosen police force will give you a detailed programme once your application to be a PCSO has been successful.

Frequently asked questions

What is a PCSO's role?

As a PCSO, you have three main responsibilities:

1. To reduce crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour by being highly visible within your community. Your presence will deter many offences and anti-social behaviour.
2. To deal with minor offences using the powers designated by your force's Chief Constable. This early intervention often deters people from committing offences. It also stops minor problems getting worse.
3. To support front-line policing – you will carry out duties such as house-to-house enquiries, crime scene guards or providing crime prevention advice.

What is the difference between a PCSO and a police officer?

PCSOs do not have powers of arrest, cannot interview or process prisoners, cannot investigate crime and do not carry out the more complex and high-risk tasks that police officers perform.

Am I eligible to apply?

There is no minimum age to become a PCSO but you must be able to demonstrate all the competencies that are required of a PCSO throughout the assessment process. The contractual retirement age for all police staff is 60.

Do I have to be a British citizen?

You can be of any nationality to apply, provided you have permanent right to remain without restriction in the UK if you are from a non-EEA (European Economic Area) country.

Security checks will be carried out on applicants to ensure they are of good character.

How fit do I have to be?

Most forces do not require applicants to take a fitness test. But you will need to fill in a medical history questionnaire and undergo eyesight tests. PCSOs need to be fit enough to perform quite long foot patrols.

Is it OK if I have a tattoo or body piercing?

Your appearance should show that you are aware of the impression you make on other people, avoiding favouritism and offence at all times. We judge every case on its merits, but you should be aware that some tattoos (whether visible or not) and facial piercing might be unacceptable. Tattoos are unacceptable if they are rude, crude, racist, sexist, sectarian, homophobic, violent or intimidating.

What qualifications do I need?

You don't need formal educational qualifications to become a PCSO. However, your English should be reasonably good.

What if I have previous convictions?

Previous convictions or cautions will not necessarily stop you from being appointed as it will depend on the nature and the circumstances of the offence, although failure to disclose convictions or cautions will result in the application being terminated. Any convictions for speeding, drink-drive offences or Fixed Penalties must be declared.

How much is the salary?

See the enclosed terms and conditions for details.

What hours will I work?

See the enclosed terms and conditions for details.

Will I get a uniform?

Yes.

What equipment will I use?

You will have a radio, a mobile phone and in most forces, a protective vest. As PCSOs are not used to carry out potentially confrontational duties, you won't use handcuffs, batons or captor sprays (apart from the British Transport Police who issue their PCSOs with handcuffs).

Will I patrol in cars?

No. You will spend over 80 per cent of your time on foot or cycle patrol. You can only build links with the public by being accessible and familiar to them.

Some people call this policing on the cheap, is it?

No, you are an extra resource there to complement and support regular officers.

Will I have to work alone?

You will work with police officers and other police staff as part of the Neighbourhood Policing Team. You will also have opportunities to work with Special Constables and other warden schemes. Whatever you do, you will be supervised by a police sergeant who will monitor your daily tasks.

Will I have the power of arrest?

No. Police Officers and not PCSOs have a power of arrest. You may be given the power to detain someone for up to 30 minutes, pending the arrival of a police officer, in certain circumstances. However this is not a power of arrest.

So will I really make a difference?

Yes. You will be a highly visible, reassuring presence, helping to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour to make your community a better place to live. Not everyone has the right qualities to be a PCSO. But if you do, you'll see the difference you make in people's faces every day.

Next steps

Now you've read more about being a PCSO, if you feel you have the qualities we're looking for to make a difference to communities across the UK, why not apply?

If you have any further questions, please contact us on 0845 600 0925 or visit www.policecouldyou.co.uk

