


National training programme for community support officers will mirror police skills

 National training for community support officers can be completed in anything from a matter of months to a year and will crossover with police skills, according to Insp Richard Erskine, heading the training in South Wales Police.

Centrex launched the National Learning Programme for Police Community Support Officers in February, which was developed by them and has now been piloted in several forces.

The programme, which is being rolled out across forces nationally, will be based around 29 learning modules from health and safety to race and diversity and working with others in the community. The training is designed to be completed over a period of time suited to individual's ability.

'This could possibly be months or it could take up to a year, which is the maximum,' says Insp Richard Erskine, from South Wales Police, manager of the Extended Police Family Project Team for Centrex.

There will be a focus on learning within the community as well as classroom-based work.

Insp Erskine said that he believes that it will bring consistency in to the training which was not there before its introduction.

'I would suggest that the national training model is a good guide for all forces to follow, developed against a role profile, it now gives consistency.

'PCSOs are to become specialist in the community (eyes and ears of the community) and this training is aimed at integrating them. Rather than a position of authority, they will be far more approachable and deal with low-level disorder,' he says.

The Federation criticised the lack of training in the past, which originally stood at just three



CSOs training will reflect police recruits

weeks, while their powers have been increased, such as the roll-out of the 30-minute power of detention.

A survey carried out by the Federation among focus groups in eight forces around the country, published in February, found more than half of the officers surveyed believed CSOs were not adequately trained.

The new training programme will mean forces will adhere to the same standards and compe-

tencies, some of which will crossover to police officer training.

'There is no point in reinventing the wheel,' says Insp Erskine, but adds that 'It's far more community-focused [for CSOs] than investigating crime, for example, because that would not be their primary role.'

In relation to academic knowledge needed by community support officers, Insp Erskine says: 'The requirement from

PCSOs will not be as in-depth as for a police officer, however, out on the streets they will be assisted by a qualified assessor. The competencies they will have to have will be exactly the same as that of a police officer.'

Research on community support officers carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the public were confused about their role.

Insp Erskine said: 'There are concerns about PCSOs, naturally, as we are going through a cultural change.'

However, South Wales Police has even sent out information booklets to members of staff and the community to outline exactly what they can expect from community support officers.

Those who are training community support officers will be provided with guidance, case study materials, and students' notes with a checklist for forces to ensure they have included learning outcomes of their own packages.

But Insp Erskine said that in South Wales they would also look at the training of those who supervise community support officers, generally constables and sergeants, in relation to the Leadership Development Programme.

This could also include a look at the rank structure and rewarding supervisors through special priority payments.

Helen Schofield, director of learning and development at Centrex, said: 'Within three years there will be 25,000 community support officers supporting policing in England and Wales, so it is essential that they are provided with a high standard of training and assessment that is linked to training for the entire extended policing family.'

